

Oral History Center
The Bancroft Library

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EDITH KRAMER

Edith Kramer: A Leader of the Pacific Film Archive and Film Curation

Interviews conducted by
Kathy Geritz, Martin Meeker, and Garbiñe Ortega
in 2014

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All of the former and current directors/senior film curators of PFA (except for Lynda Myles). From left to right: Susan Oxtoby, Sheldon Renan, Peter Selz (former director of BAM/PFA), **Edith Kramer**, Tom Luddy. Photo courtesy of Susan Oxtoby, 2015.

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[End of Interview]

Interview 1: January 16, 2014

01-00:00:05

Geritz: It's January 16, 2014, and it's Edith Kramer and me, Kathy Geritz, in the small screening room [at Pacific Film Archive, PFA]. Could you just say the same thing, Edith, or could you just say you agree to be tape-recorded?

01-00:00:22

Kramer: I agree to be recorded today. It's Thursday, January 16, 2014.

01-00:00:33

Geritz: Perfect. So, first I thought we'd do some questions just about your background briefly. How did you first get involved with film and then how did you first get involved with curating?

01-00:00:52

Kramer: I first got involved with film as a child [growing up in White Plains, New York], because my father took home movies, and he used to show them, after they were finished, to the children. It was a kind of ritual on the evening, weekend evenings. He'd put a sheet up in the dining room and we'd all sit around the dining table and watch his home movies. But it was a program, because it wasn't just his most recent home movie of the time, or previous ones, but he would rent one- and two-reelers, and at that time they were silent films. We had [Charlie] Chaplin and [Buster] Keaton, and especially Charley Chase, he was very fond of Charley Chase, as was Bill Everson. We would watch them, he had his own projector. The great thing for the kids was that after we watched them, because the projector had variable speeds and you rewound the film by just going backwards, I mean you could do that without hurting the film, we showed every film backwards, because we were intrigued by the sort of Méliès kind of trick it created, of seeing things jump around and go back into place. That made us laugh.

So I grew up with this very early, I was aware of the specialness of movies at home, and like my father and his father, I loved to go to the downtown theaters. I was allowed, at a very early age, to go downtown, walk downtown by myself and go to whatever was playing wherever. There were no restrictions on what I could see, but there weren't any ratings in those days and no one ever stopped me from going into a so-called adult—what we would call today, an adult film. And so I saw— there were—one, two, three— there were four theaters downtown and I would see every film that came to every theater and if I could, if I went early enough, I would sit through it again, until I had to make sure I was home by dinner. I'd start at noon and go through the double bill, the newsreels, the cartoons. It was a full package, you know, in those days.

So I had this obsession with watching movies. That was the most entertaining thing I could do as a child. And then you grow up and you put that aside as something like, well, that's entertainment, that's not something you create a career out of. It didn't occur to me. So I went into other fields eventually.

Fast forward, [I've graduated from the University of Michigan and] I'm in graduate school at Harvard, in the Art History Department, and the Brattle Theater, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, is in its full glory as a repertory theater. It was the first repertory theater that I had visited. I knew about the Museum of Modern Art, I had gone there to see some films when I was in New York, but I had never had access to a theater that was almost exclusively repertory, although it was also the same people who started Janus [Films], so they were showing contemporary European films. You got the French New Wave and the Swedish, the early [Ingrid] Bergman, and the Italian films from [Robert] Rossellini and [Vittorio] De Sica, so on and so forth. So you had those as modern cinema, which we only saw after World War II, and that opened up a whole new world of cinema to me. But at the same time they were doing repertory, so we're looking at Humphrey Bogart, endless Humphrey Bogart series, you know? We're looking at film noir, and so it was a whole other way of looking at cinema, and it was programmed, it was clearly programmed. It wasn't like here's the new film of the week.

There were at least two other graduate students who joined me, and we spent every evening we could at the Brattle, seeing and re-seeing films. We always went to the five o'clock or five-thirty show, so that we got out of class, we went to the movies, we came home and we could do our homework for the next day. One of those fellow students was Henry Geldzahler, later to become a curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where he was a great supporter and promoter of Andy Warhol, and even before then, as a young graduate student, he was talking about Warhol.

So, we just, you know, our conversations outside of class were always about movies. We were so obsessed and so gung-ho at it, we said well, it's ridiculous; we're all studying art history at this prestigious school, getting graduate degrees, we're going to go out and teach or work in museums, et cetera. And this—we're specialized. All of us are interested in contemporary art within art history. We should be talking about film in class, they should be teaching cinema. And so the three of us—maybe there was a fourth, but I can't remember now. It's possible there were four of us—we went to see the dean as a group and say, "We think that the Fogg—" We called it the Fogg because art history was taught in the Fogg Art Museum. So everybody, "You studied at the Fogg," you know. That was synonymous with saying you were studying art history.

So we all went to the dean and said, "We think that film history should be included." I always remember, because whoever the dean was then, I don't remember the name, it's better I don't remember the name, he turned to us and

said, “But my dear, that’s manual.” [laughter] So that was, you know, a kind of classic way of academe looking at film. Film was a craft at best, it did not belong in the fine arts, even though these were people studying contemporary art, but you know, painting, sculpture, architecture, fine, but there was no place for a craft.

So, we continued to talk cinema. Henry was the first one to depart and land the job at the Met. I didn’t complete my PhD. I decided, after the masters [MA degree], that I didn’t really envision myself as being an art history scholar. I wanted to go out and get a job. I ended up having various jobs teaching art history, and one of those jobs took me to the University of Oregon, in Eugene. That would have been in 1962. So, I landed at this large state university and I was teaching the basic courses in art history. We used to say “From cave painting to Jackson Pollock.” Big classes, but then because you have to, when you’re low man on the totem pole, you have to teach a lot of courses. So, you had to, every semester you had to teach intermediate courses, and then you had to have some senior, advanced seminars, and you were kind of assigned the fields; whatever the senior people didn’t want to teach. I might be teaching architecture, history of architecture, I might be teaching Byzantine painting. It was all over, didn’t necessarily stay with my particular interest in contemporary.

So, even with that full load, I decided to approach my dean and ask if I could teach a course on cinema, and he said, “As long as you don’t use it to replace any of these other courses, because we’re going to assign you the maximum number of courses, depending on what we need, and you’re the person who’s going to have to teach them. We don’t care if you want to add a course.” So I just started teaching a course on film history. I’d never taught the subject before and it had to be based on what I’d seen and what I was going to see. That was really it, the key, because I think it’s what curators do. You want to see something so you program it, and in a sense, if you want to teach this, you’ve got to see it and seeing it with the students is part of that early experience. You’re not in a position to say, “I’ve seen all this.” Some of it you have. So that’s—that was my foot in the door, and that became an enormously popular class. We even attempted to make a film. That was a mess but it was an interesting process. It was how interested the students were. Talk about being in the right place at the right time, because so many things were happening.

Bruce Baillie and [Ernest] “Chick” Callenbach visited during this period and brought a selection of films. There was Bruce Conner’s, *A Movie*. Bruce Baillie brought his *Castro Street*. There was Robert Nelson’s, *Oh Dem Watermelons*. I think there were other films, but those three films, I remember were on that program, and when I saw those and realized what was going on—I already knew about Jonas Mekas and the Film-Makers’ Cooperative, because I actually rented *Flaming Creatures*, and it had to be sent secretly in

those days, from New York, and I had to have a closed screening for the students, and have a guard at the door so we wouldn't be discovered.

Eugene, Oregon, was a very conservative community in those days, not what you know of Eugene now, or even by the seventies. In the sixties Eugene was unbelievably conservative. If someone tried to open a coffeehouse, it was not allowed by the city council or mayor. That was considered, you know, bad things could happen.

01-00:13:38
Geritz:

Beatnik.

01-00:13:40
Kramer:

I was called a beatnik because I wore a black turtleneck sweater and wore jeans. Teachers did not dress that way. So, there were a lot of things. It was a very interesting period because Eugene was about to go through a change. It was all imported from California, because I became involved in a student protest against the administration and the free speech movement. Everything that happened in Berkeley was being imported by students. I was there from 1962 through '66. So in that, shall we say fertile period, crazy, I got the go-ahead to create a course, and it took off and there were more courses. And so I was very busy inventing, for myself and for my students, courses in film history. I had no credentials. The only way I knew to teach it was to teach it the way you teach an art history course. The films are looked at and analyzed in the same way that you look at paintings or sculpture. So my approach was totally—it wasn't theoretical, it was totally historical.

I read what books were out. Some of them were helpful, but most of them were not that helpful. I mean, I realize there were early texts, but there weren't contemporary texts that went beyond a certain point. I was grateful for the early texts, but the early texts just made me want to see films they kept talking about, that I couldn't see. I just remember every book talking about Chaplin's, *A Woman of Paris*, and there's no way we could see it, there was no print. And there were others. So again, you had this, the more you read, then the more you thought, there are these films I can't see, where are these? You know, you just kept making lists of films you wanted to see.

Then, I gave up the teaching and wanted to take a break and came down to San Francisco, not knowing what I was going to do. To keep myself busy, while I looked for a job, I enrolled at the Art Institute, in Robert Nelson's class on filmmaking, basic filmmaking—I don't know what he called it, but it was for beginners—and in a still photography course, because I was interested in, just for my own amusement, taking still photographs. I did not enroll in the class to become a filmmaker, that was not my intent. I simply thought if I studied something about filmmaking, if I learned the process, it will inform my judgment of films. It will be an important thing on how to analyze and critique films, you need to know how they're made.

When I enrolled in the course, I was older than the other students, and I told Bob, “Don’t worry, I have no talent. I don’t intend to be a filmmaker. I really want to understand the process.” But we had to make films and I was terrorized by the fact that I actually had to produce films, but did it. It taught me how difficult it is to make a film, because I remember the show and tell. I had tried to make this film in this park in San Francisco, of people interacting in a park. I went every day and I shot footage and I shot footage, and I went every day, and then it came to trying to edit it and it was just awful, I knew it was awful. I could not figure out how to edit this thing and that was so important to me, to understand the difficulty of creating a film, how important editing was after shooting, or at least having the editing in your mind before you go to shoot. I had no script, so I didn’t know what I was doing. I was trying to be *cinéma vérité* but without any understanding of how you do this.

So I had this horrible, horrible film and I was completely frustrated at my attempts to edit it and I thought, I’ll do one more day of shooting. Maybe I’ll find a scene that will pull it together, maybe I’ll find something. I mean, naively I thought, I just have to shoot some more footage. It was just the opposite. I didn’t need to shoot more footage, I needed to take stuff out.

Anyway, I went, shot the film, sent it to be processed, and it came back, somehow I had shot over previously shot film, and I ended up with this reel of superimposition. It was the most bizarre thing, because the superimposition worked. I had inadvertently created an avant-garde film. [laughs] And it was like, I didn’t do this, the camera did this. It’s my error but it worked, it was this one reel. So I went into the class with this long thing that I had pieced together, and with this short thing which the camera had done for me. I said, “I have two films here. One, I made, and it’s horrible and I’d just as soon not show it to you. I can tell you right away, what’s bad about it, it doesn’t work. and I have this other thing that actually works quite nicely but it’s not me, it was an accident.” And so Bob said, “You have to show the long one. If we show the long one, we can look at the short one.”

So, the poor class had to sit through this long film and I’m just horrified, you know, that I’m sharing this. And then I showed the short one and everybody agreed, the short one was a good film. [laughs] I’ll always remember that. And then, remember Anne Severson, remember Anne Severson?

01-00:20:42
Geritz:

Oh, sure.

01-00:20:43
Kramer:

Well, she was teaching at the Art Institute then, and she saw the short one and wanted to show it in the program, and I said, “You can’t show that.” She said, “No, it’s wonderful, we’re going to show it.” I said, “But it’s not me.” She said, “Yes, it’s yours.”

Anyway, so, during that time in the class, Canyon Cinema Cooperative had already begun, the Co-op [Canyon Cinema Cooperative] had an office south of Market, Verona Street? Was that where? You must have it in your history.

01-00:21:17

Geritz: We have it, but I don't recall that street.

01-00:21:19

Kramer: The street doesn't exist any longer, it's south of Market, it's all housing, but there was this—of course then, south of Market was really like the Bowery in New York, you know, it was really bad. There was a house on, I think Verona Street, that Earl Bodien and his wife lived in, Mary Ann. Mary Ann? Earl and Mary Ann Bodien. That was the first official office, I think, of the Co-op, and both of them, I think had jobs in it. They were taking turns trying to rent films, and the films were in their apartment. One room in the apartment was devoted to the Co-op.

Bob Nelson knew I was looking for a job during this time and said, "Would you like to volunteer some afternoons, to help out at the Co-op?" First he said, "Can you type and can you do books, bookkeeping?" I said, "I can type accurately but slowly, but yeah, I can type." I said, "And actually, I know basic bookkeeping," because I had, in my checkered education, I had taken a course in accounting, so I knew basic, nothing fancy, but I could do books. It's basically what we all do with our checkbook, you know, debit/credit.

So, I would go over there a couple afternoons. I can't remember how often, but I would go a couple of afternoons, and I'd record the rentals and any income coming in, and I'd keep the records and so on and so forth. Gradually, then I took phone orders, then I typed letters, confirmations et cetera, all the rules. I finally just sort of started doing more and more, and then Earl and May Ann announced that they were going back to the Midwest. They were leaving and the Canyon board asked if I could keep doing this and fill in, and I think by the summer of '67, they had figured out that they should hire me. So, I sort of slipped into that job.

While running Canyon, and by running, I mean managing the Co-op, we moved to a church, 756 Union Street, a little church that was defunct. And Intersection for the Arts had the main floor and there was a basement, and the board members built an office in the basement, with shelves for the films. I had a desk back there and so I was running the rental business out of that, and I kept thinking about the empty church upstairs. It had pews, altar, all the things. It was just like everything was there, the furniture, and I kept thinking, what a perfect place to show films.

I remember talking to Loren Sears, and I'm trying to think who else. Maybe Lenny Lipton and Larry Jordan, Bob Nelson. I'm thinking, you know, why don't we show films? The issue was partially that the rules of the Co-op were

that we couldn't promote one person's films over another's, so how would we curate programs and be observing those rules? So I said, "Well, we'll just show everything in the Co-op, on a cycle." But I thought, you know, you can't have all fifteen-minute films. On the shelves, they were shelved by size of can. You had the 100-foot reels and you had the 400-foot reels and you had the 600 and 800 and 1,200. So, I would mix them up. I would pull something from the 100-foot, and I'd pull something from the 400-foot, so I had different lengths, and I'd shuffle them around, and that was my objective programming. [laughter] So there was no sense of, I like this film better and therefore— and then we'll just go through everything that's on the shelves.

We were also aided by the fact that there were so many filmmakers traveling, that actually they needed a place to show. Everybody was coming out to the West Coast, because of all the hype around flower children, hippies, be-ins. It was just an endless stream of New Yorkers, people from Chicago, even coming from L.A, hitting the Bay Area—you know, have film, will travel, and they would always come into the Co-op. I'm sure the same thing was happening at the New York Filmmakers' Cooperative, everybody going there. It was sort of like a place you land, and now what? Here, I'm a filmmaker, I have films, what do I do now? It meant putting them up, it meant figuring out ways they could survive, so on and so forth. We became this kind of... It was like in World War II, you had the USO [United Service Organizations]. I felt like we were the USO for filmmakers at the Co-op. [laughs] So, this way we could always, spontaneously, because we didn't have to worry about deadlines, we had a mimeograph program that came out maybe a week ahead or something like that, but we were perfectly flexible. We could say such and such a filmmaker in town, we'll have the show.

01-00:27:50

Geritz:

Were they on a set day? Was it a set day?

01-00:27:53

Kramer:

You know, I'm trying to think. Some of the details I've forgotten. I remember, when they were doing the book on Canyon interviews, they went through the records and they found things that I didn't remember. I think in the beginning it might have been a set day, and then because we did well, I mean audiences came. That was the brilliant thing about everything you did. It could be crappy or it could be good, but people came. I mean truly, it was not a very selective audience. There was such an eagerness to go to anything alternative; film, poetry. People just came, and it was a very mixed audience.

Also, I mean we've talked about this and you've experienced this and how it changes. Filmmakers came to support filmmakers. You didn't have to like each other. It was a given that the local filmmakers came to support. So, it was, I guess a kind of camaraderie that existed, that this was part of the sort of self-help. It belonged to that notion of you start your own thing, you have a

co-op; the whole cooperative spirit. It wasn't always cooperative, in truth, but there was that.

So, we had other filmmakers in the audience and we had people of all ages. It wasn't just hippies. There were people my age at the time, and they were just people interested in what was going on in the arts, what changes, anything, perhaps anti-establishment. There were the anti-war people—I mean so many different issues. There was this so-called sexual revolution. The films were addressing, consciously or unconsciously, so many issues of the day, and that fed into audience interest. So, we expanded and ultimately, we moved the screenings to the San Francisco Art Institute, and we had a bigger theater.

I left the Co-op, others came in, kept up the tradition. Where did I go? Then I went—after leaving the Co-op, I landed a job at SFMOMA [San Francisco Museum of Modern Art]. They had an on-again, off-again film series that was curated out of the education department, but what it was, was a committee of board members interested in film, the education staff. It was Bob White, and somebody else, I think, who worked in his department. Basically, they would get together and decide to show a film. It was not very regular and it was always a committee effort. I'm guessing, I don't remember that clearly now, but I know it was Bob White who called me and said would I consider doing this job, taking it out of the education department. I'd be a designated person part-time, at the museum, to just do an ongoing series. And when I went for the interview, there were members of this committee, and I told them what I knew and what I didn't know, what I envision. I referred to their history and the Art of Cinema film series, and I said, you know, it would be nice to kind of follow in that tradition and it could be a designated time, day. I wanted to do the kind of history of cinema. I said I would not—just because I've been involved in the avant-garde, this is an opportunity to do film history, not just the avant-garde. I would include the avant-garde but it would be film history.

Also, they had 35mm projectors, and the theater space itself was not designed as a theater. It was a horrendous space. It was their sculpture rotunda. It was marble walls and floors, so there was absolutely no sound insulation. I mean, it was the hardest, bounciest, most reverberating space you could imagine. It was murder on a sound film, and yet they had two 35mm projectors. Did they have two 16mm projectors? I can't remember whether they had two 16 or one 16, but up in this booth that was way up under the dome, you had to go up a metal, spiral staircase, way up to this thing. So, it was keystoneing, you know, a very strange angle. There was a big screen. I was intrigued by the 35. I thought, if I can show—I want to program 35mm, I want to be able to do feature films.

It was a new challenge for me. I got the job and they the committee asked if they could be involved in the selection and I said, "If I get the job, no." I said, "With all due respect, if I do this, I'm going to do it by myself. If you don't like it fine, but it's going to be a single curatorship." I think I wanted the

chance to use my own views, not to be objective in the way we had to do it at Canyon, but I wanted to test and learn. I wanted to learn how to curate that kind of thing. So, in a sense that—I mean, because of that, and because of my experience with the avant-garde, that's why Sheldon [Renan] and Tom [Luddy] ultimately invited me to come to the Archive. First, they wanted somebody to do the avant-garde, and especially because they had this grant to buy films and they needed somebody. Tom was interested in the avant-garde, but he was very busy with New German Cinema and [Jean-Luc] Godard. He was doing this incredibly diverse program that was film history, but it was also focusing on all these visiting filmmakers, and he wasn't just using Wheeler and Dwinelle Hall.

And ultimately, the theater here, at this building [Berkeley Art Museum], of course that was being erected when I first met him, but he was doing shows all over the city. If you look at those early programs, unbelievably ambitious. Amazing. So, he needed help, he just had to have an assistant, but he also did need somebody to take over the avant-garde. So that's how I—but in between, I left the museum [SFMoma] after two, three years, I can't remember, two and a half years, and I got an offer to teach film history at UC Davis. Again, a temporary job, because I was replacing somebody on sabbatical. They stayed away longer than anticipated, so I had almost two years there, and then I came to the Archive.

There was some teaching here and there, in between, because to earn some money, I sometimes taught art history or film history at UC Extension in San Francisco. I can't remember how many courses, but occasionally I got a chance to do that. So I had some students there. I was honing my teaching, honing the programming, by the time I got here.

01-00:37:14

Geritz: Liz Keim was one of your students.

01-00:37:17

Kramer: Yes, at Davis.

01-00:37:18

Geritz: Yes. She always talks about that.

01-00:37:20

Kramer: Isn't that amazing?

01-00:36:21

Geritz: Yeah, yeah.

01-00:37:23

Kramer: There were other students who went on into the film world and for a while, I kept track of them. Did you ever meet Robert Hanrahan? He was in the Bay Area.

01-00:37:34

Geritz:

I didn't.

01-00:37:36

Kramer:

Rick Prelinger knows him, but he went back—he's from the South originally, but he was doing some stuff. Some students ended up in L.A. I remember one went in—there was a producing program at, I think USC. I can't remember if it was UCLA or USC, taught this sort of advanced program. One woman went there, I lost track of her. Somebody else went there and one guy I kept up with for a while, who went back east and was doing film and then stopped doing film, went into something else. It was amazing class, I mean they were very, very talented, bright. For me, in my brief teaching career of film, as opposed to art history, the Davis class was the most remarkable class. I don't know if it was because they were so hungry up there, for something that was different. And they had no films to see in that town then. I don't know what's there now, but there was, I think like one theater. It was as bad as Eugene, Oregon, I mean that's what Davis was like. It was sort of like the first time I hit Eugene, Oregon; conservative, essentially a farming town. Obviously a great university, but without the community around that supported in terms of outside extracurricular activities that were meaningful.

But in the art department at Davis, you had Mike Henderson teaching there, so there were people doing film, but they were very separate from the film history. Film was in the English literature department, I think. Scriptwriting, screenwriting, that's the entrée, yeah. Film was in literature. You never knew where to put film in colleges, because when it started—I mean, in Eugene I was lucky, it went into art history, but at different universities, if you look around to see where film showed up, lots of different departments. Wherever there were faculty who were interested, and they put it into their department, that's all they could do. So it could be art history, it could be literature, it could be history.

01-00:40:27

Geritz:

Languages.

01-00:40:28

Kramer:

Languages. It was all over the places. If you look at Berkeley, they had Bertrand [Augst], in Comp Lit [comparative literature] and French. You had [William] Nestruck, English Lit.

01-00:40:42

Geritz:

Gavriel Moses.

01-00:40:42

Kramer:

So, what do you do, you don't have a film department. It's the individuals who are interested, and wherever they happened to be, that's where it begins. So it starts really, in a sense, interdisciplinary.

01-00:40:59

Geritz: That's true.

01-00:41:00

Kramer: Which is nice. I wonder. People now can go to film school and do all of this just in a film department, and I always wonder if it was richer doing it the other way, because you could bring these other disciplines to it, but I don't know.

01-00:41:25

Geritz: Looking back, what aspects of your education or early jobs do you think best prepared you to be a curator? If you have anything to add to what you've said.

01-00:41:41

Kramer: Well, obviously, the teaching, that's a way of learning and a way of getting to see films. But I had a very checkered educational background. It can make people laugh, at the things I attempted, or investigated briefly, but I actually think that, in many ways, I've used things from all of that.

I was once in hotel management. Now, it doesn't have anything to do with film, but it was public service. I had to work with a staff, a large staff, who knew more than I did about what they were doing, but I was brought in because I was the educated person, brought in to work with the staff in a hotel, and direct them. I learned that they would teach me the things that they actually did, but it was how do you manage the department. So I thought well, these things are useful for any job. I learned things there in terms of dealing with people.

I had some office experience, just working in an office. Office skills, you have to have office skills. There's paperwork. Obviously, I could have improved my—[laughs]. I mean, I should have learned filing. Filing for me was, you know, you file it, but it's not what other people could necessarily access. At that time, it was like personal filing. You weren't thinking, somebody else has to be able to use these files. I didn't appreciate or understand the value of secretarial or administrative assistant help until very late, after I'd already made a mess. So, that I was under-educated, under-trained, in terms of that kind of thing, of how you delegate and get people to—don't be embarrassed to ask people to do this kind of work, because it will free you up and it will make things accessible. That was a very bad part of my work, I mean I regret that.

But I did have at least some jobs that helped me, I think, in dealing with people, dealing with the public, public service. The hotel work, it was public service. How to deal with audiences that complain, you know? Or how to prevent them from complaining and things like that. So, how to deal with management above you. You learn things. You make mistakes but you do learn through these other jobs, always, you're an employee and there's an administration over you. How do you get them to do what you want them to

do, or not? How do you present your case? How do you win them over, and especially—well, SFMOMA, the administration changed several times while I was there, went through a strike. So, that was an education—labor things. I was questioned which side I was on. Was I management or was I labor? I didn't hire anybody but I was considered—the administration considered me management, but I didn't in fact manage anybody, and the staff considered me staff. So, I had to make a choice. I went with the union and I was punished for it, by the union, even though they won.

01-00:46:32
Geritz:

Wow. Hmm.

01-00:46:36
Kramer:

When the union won, it was an agreement between the union and management that I would be demoted. That was the payoff, because I had crossed the line.

01-00:46:51
Geritz:

Oh, so it was a deal between the union and the management.

01-00:46:53
Kramer:

It was a deal.

01-00:46:56
Geritz:

I see.

01-00:46:56
Kramer:

So it was an interesting lesson. It's like, you know, if you cross the line, you're going to be punished, and the union will go along with it. They won't fight for you. So, these things are reality, I mean they become very interesting experiences. You keep them in mind when you have to deal with strikes and labor institutions, like okay, how do you maneuver when you're sympathetic to the staff, but you in fact are legitimately, by the rules, management.

01-00:47:39
Geritz:

Did you draw on any of your education and early jobs, in terms of how you approached putting together programs?

01-00:47:50
Kramer:

I think the art history was always there. The discipline of art history probably stayed with me. I don't think I ever shook that off in terms of a curatorial approach. So I think that was like the skeleton for me, but I think that Canyon liberated me. You know? That you can have any kind of idea and as long as you give it a structure, that all kinds of things can influence you. It strikes me that the sixties, that sort of breaking away from constraints and being able to think anything is possible, I think that was a liberation for me. You have the discipline on the one hand, it's a good structure to begin with, but you can come in with any idea from the world around you, from whatever is out there, that's going on, and you can find a way to tie it to film, or if you were painting or whatever. So I think that was essential.

I think I went back to my childhood experiences with the home movies. That was very important. I think that whole thing with the home movies and what that meant to me became important. The importance of those early films, it's what made me want to go back to silent film. When I came to work at the Archive, although I was supposed to emphasize primarily, avant-garde, the first thing that I asked Tom if I could venture into was silent film, because I wanted to go back to that early period that was my childhood. I had a particular desire to go back to that.

01-00:49:59

Geritz:

Interesting. Did you look to anyone as models, in terms of the field of curating, and did you have mentors or teachers?

01-00:50:10

Kramer:

Unfortunately, I didn't have. I didn't know. There were people out there but I didn't know them. I think maybe when I was at SFMOMA, I started learning about Langlois. No, I had learned about Langlois when I was still at Canyon, because Sheldon Renan came to town, I think in my last year or so at Canyon. No. I think he came, yeah, when I was still at Canyon. Yes, because I remember, he wanted to become a member of Canyon. He had written that book on the avant-garde.

01-00:50:55

Geritz:

On underground cinema. Mm-hmm.

01-00:50:57

Kramer:

Independent films. The Canyon board wouldn't let him become a member because he hadn't put a film into the Co-op. There was this whole—I remember this argument. No, he didn't have a film in the Co-op, therefore he could not be a member. That was my first encounter with him and I learned about Langlois through him. Then, when I was at SFMOMA, Sheldon came to me with the idea of SFMOMA becoming a home for what was to be the PFA [Pacific Film Archive], because—and he claimed Langlois was going to bring his collection. This is when Langlois was in deep trouble. I knew, being a very practical person and I knew my administration, I said, "Sheldon, it will never happen." But he wanted me to introduce him to whoever was director then, and I did, but they were not interested. I mean, they were rather like the Harvard dean, who said, "But my dear, it's manual," doesn't belong in a fine arts museum. I mean, they ignored their own history. It actually would have been a very good place, when you think of it, historically.

01-00:52:17

Geritz:

Absolutely.

01-00:52:20

Kramer:

And then given how that museum expanded, got a new building, I mean all the things that happened later. It would have been a great idea, San Francisco as a home. An opportunity missed, really missed. But at any rate, that didn't work out.

So I knew about Langlois. Then, I think it was, it might have been in the very early years of being here at PFA. It could have been when I was at SFMOMA, but at some point I became aware of Jacques Ledoux. You know how I might have heard about Jacques Ledoux? Filmmakers who were coming here from Europe, their works were being bought by Jacques Ledoux. He was the one who was buying avant-garde filmmakers' works for the Royal Film Archives of Belgium. He had an amazing collection and he was systematically doing this. He was involved in Documenta.

01-00:53:44

Geritz: Was he? I know there was the film festival.

01-00:53:47

Kramer: So he was buying major works. It's worth looking at, what his collection is there, because it's impressive. And because Tom was subscribing to all these programs, I got to read—you know how the mail used to come in, with everybody's programs. There was nothing online, but you took home all these programs to read, and I started studying Ledoux's programs and I was intrigued. I loved Ledoux's programming, because he had a theater designated for silent films only, and he had the avant-garde, and I would devour his programs. They were an education for me. So, he was a mentor, he was absolutely a mentor. I eventually met him, but it was years later, many, many years later. He was still at the archive.

Adrienne Mancina had managed to suggest that I be a jury member at Locarno International Film Festival and so I went off to Locarno. It was August, I can't remember what year, and I found a message at my hotel room message thing.

01-00:55:30

Geritz: Box, mm-hmm.

01-00:55:31

Kramer: Saying Jacques Ledoux would like to take me to dinner. I went to dinner with Jacques Ledoux and Hubert Bals and I was stunned that they would invite me to dinner, but also because they knew the archive. They had been reading our programs and it was the first time I really understood that the archive had a reputation outside of Berkeley. I wasn't aware at all that people knew who we were and it was, "You're kidding? You read our program?" Obviously, it was from Tom, but they thought our programming was extraordinary. It never dawned on me that anybody knew about us outside of the Bay Area.

01-00:56:33

Geritz: That's wonderful.

01-00:56:35

Kramer: So that was very nice, to meet Jacques.

[pause in recording]

01-00:56:42

Geritz: Okay, that takes off the pause.

01-00:56:46

Kramer: So, you had asked me about mentors or people, that was the last question, something about influences.

01-00:56:52

Geritz: Mm-hmm. If you had models in terms of curating—mentors or teachers.

01-00:56:56

Kramer: So, Jacques Ledoux. As I was working here, the people I was most interested in, not so much in meeting, but I got more interested in the archival part of it. I realized I didn't know anything about behind the scenes, the taking care of a collection. It was having to write to people to get films, and the person I was first most interested in was Eileen Bowser. I had made contact with Eileen before Adrienne, because I really was trying to figure out that. I wasn't going back there [to New York] frequently enough, but when I did go, I always would meet with her and I would ask questions and things like that. So in some ways, she had an influence in terms of my first understanding of the archive. It wasn't that much but—

There was another person on MoMA's staff, Margareta. She was in charge of the children's series. I think Akermark. A wonderful woman. Adrienne didn't talk about her? Because that's how I met Adrienne, through Margareta. She's not alive any longer, but for years she ran—and I was very interested in her children's programming. They had a really good children's series in the early days. Does MoMA still do children's stuff?

01-00:59:08

Geritz: I don't think so.

01-00:59:09

Kramer: I don't know. I haven't looked at a MoMA program in so long. I have no idea what they do, but they had a really active—

01-00:59:14

Geritz: I don't notice them.

01-00:59:19

Kramer: It was at the time too, when even this museum had children coming, we had education programs with classes of little kids coming in. I don't mean just the PFA.

01-00:59:30

Geritz: The whole place.

01-00:59:31

Kramer: And then, we had the children's program. I remember she was very influential in terms of how you dealt with a family program, which was very nice. She

was very warm and wanted to share things. She introduced me to Adrienne, I think, I'm pretty sure that was it.

Who else? Bill Everson. I brought Bill Everson out when I was at SFMOMA, and asked Tom if he wanted to make use of him, but I was the one who invited Bill to SFMOMA. I didn't really know him but I had heard about him. Somebody must have said to me, why don't you invite Bill, and of course then, I was completely a fan, a big fan of Everson. He had an enormous programming impact on me because of his knowledge, but also his area in all of these obscure films. That was really important to me, as important as anybody, because I was dealing with major works, not the minor works. I was trying to see all the major works that existed, and then suddenly, I was thrown into this whole other thing of the less than major works, but you might say the meat and potatoes of film, as opposed to the dessert.

Suddenly I realized wait a minute, you can't teach film history without the meat and potatoes, that's more important, and the wonders of the meat and potatoes. That's really what I grew up on, going to the theater in my youth. I wasn't necessarily seeing great works. I was seeing whatever was made by Hollywood, and if you start thinking about that in terms of international cinema, so Everson is a huge influence.

There were people from the art history world that had a lasting impact on me. They had an interest in cinema. There was [Ernst] Gombrich, because I had a semester under Gombrich in graduate school and he talked about cinema, and his way of thinking was an influence. And [Erwin] Panofsky. Panofsky's approach to analyzing, it's art history, it's iconography, it's not at all contemporary theory. It's a very classic but very brilliant way. He had an enormous impact on me. [Note: He was also one of my professors in grad school, and he also was considering cinema.]

So, two art history people, always that in the back of my mind, but Everson, for opening up the real ordinary world of cinema. Ledoux, certainly for his way of programming in an archive setting, and Tom had an impact on me. His ability to, shall we say, I want to say multitask, but his ability to sort of be everywhere at once, to maintain focus, but in such a large area. How do you work all those balls. And observing him and working for him, I did pick up a lot of those skills. A kind of multitasking of programming, that you keep multiple series going in your head, and juggling and how you put them into position. It was really like juggling lots of balls at the same time. Tom was an amazing force to watch and I learned a lot from that.

01-01:03:59
Geritz:

Do you remember when you first heard the word "curator" applied to the kind of work you did with film, and do you see any difference between the term curator and programmer?

01-01:04:10

Kramer:

I don't think I know the first time I heard the word curator. It probably was in the art museum context, not in the film context. Obviously, working in an art museum, when I was a graduate—okay. When I was in graduate school, art history was in the Fogg Art Museum, and there were curators. I had a job prior to going to graduate school, as a docent in a museum, the Yale Art Gallery. It was the new Louis Kahn Building, I got to work in that. I was the assistant docent, which meant I gave art history lectures based on the works in the museum, so I met the curators, who were also Yale art history faculty. That was my first direct contact with museum curators, and I always associated them with the fine arts, art museums.

When I got the job at SFMOMA, I didn't remember what they called me. There was that oral history that was done for SFMOMA and the young man said, "What were you called, what was your title?" And I said, "I have no idea, I can't remember." He looked it up and he said, "You were a film curator." I said, "I don't remember that they called me that," because I was part-time. I didn't recall having a title. So if he had said film programmer, I would have accepted that. I just really did not remember that they had put curator there. So, they called me a film curator, and when I came here, we were not curators. What were we, museum scientists?

Geritz:

Museum scientists.

Kramer:

Or something or a number, and then the numbers, because the university had no way to classify the people working in the archive. The people in the museum could be curators. They might also be museum scientists, but we were like either lab—I think we were lab assistants before we became museum scientists, we started out as lab assistants. It was strange, you would have thought that Peter Selz would have somehow figured out something for Sheldon and Tom. Internally, they were referred to as curators, I think.

01-01:06:58

Geritz:

They were payroll titles, the museum scientists and all.

01-01:07:01

Kramer:

Yeah. But the payroll titles did not—and I remember, when it came time to kind of— What do you call it, when you move from one category to another?

01-01:07:14

Geritz:

Re-class.

01-01:07:14

Kramer:

Re-class. And you had to write up this whole thing, and it was like trying to figure out what payroll title you fit into. We started protesting that there had to be something that was curator, and they didn't have anything, except I think in the science museums, or something like that. Ultimately, they worked through that, but it took years to figure that out. So for a long time, I think, you know, I kind of accepted that we weren't curators, we were never going to be called

curators in this university. And I learned that colleagues around the world, in different museums and archives, weren't necessarily curators, I mean there were all kinds. It was not a guarantee that you were called a curator. Paolo's book came out, on the whole thing of curatorship, and Paolo [Cherchi Usai] was so interested in this concept of curator versus a programmer. I said what's the big deal? Because I think when I was coming up through the systems and doing the different jobs, we didn't really worry about what we were called, unless it was an issue of equal pay, but we accepted it was not going to be equal pay. We assumed we would never—I mean, the assumption was we would never be treated the same way.

01-01:08:43

Geritz: As a museum curator?

01-01:08:44

Kramer: Yeah. That it was just like now. If there was a film department in a museum, it was a stepchild. Even MoMA, which was prestigious and as early—I don't know if you asked this of Adrienne, but they were considered a stepchild. Did she agree to that?

01-01:09:04

Geritz: Yeah.

01-01:09:05

Kramer: I don't know a single museum with a film program, department, or archive where it wasn't a stepchild, a kind of Johnny-come-lately situation with a certain arrogance and suspicion on the part of the fine arts and thinking okay, we're doing this, but this is not serious. In fact, I know at SFMOMA, the idea was somehow that film programs in a museum setting would be like having a café or a bookstore. They were income-generating. After all, the movies made money for Hollywood. Movies shown in a museum would bring the public in. The same thing, you know, we do now with L@TE shows or whatever. Happenings, all the other so-called more contemporary events, with parties and stuff that go on in a museum—well, the film program was supposed to serve that and of course those of us who got our foot in the door, weren't going to dissuade them of this, because we wanted both feet in the door. We thought it was a good place to have a film program. We thought this was appropriate. So, it's partly our fault of accepting to go in the door, because we really thought that would both protect us and that would legitimize us. It was very strange then, to be in there, and realize that you were still illegitimate. Then, the battle was how to prove to your administration that you were as legitimate as the painting department or something like that, and that took forever. Forever. And some would say even to this day, it's never as legitimate.

Eastman House. It's a museum of photography for goodness sakes. So, is cinema such a far cry? But, the cinema department, as prestigious as it is, never as equal as photography. It's Eastman Kodak, for Chrissake, you know,

who makes the film and the equipment. And I think [it is] this stepchild, also in Europe, probably in every country, Asia and everything, where, you know, because we're not really—Okay, La Cinémathèque Française was an institution dedicated to cinema, it was not part of another museum. Europe finally had—you know, like Belgium and Germany, finally had separate institutions that were film archives, they could do exhibitions. Some film archives did not do exhibition, but they were government sponsored institutions that were dedicated to film, but they were separate from their art museums. So again, what is a film archive versus an art museum, or a bibliothèque, you know, it's separate things.

The Brits. The British Film Institute, separate. So, we didn't have that government notion. We had the Library of Congress, with a motion picture department, but we did not have a national film archive or national policy. So there's always that stepchild thing.

So somehow, there was the curator title, and then you move into the museum world and should you have the curator title or not. Part of it's linked to payroll equality. If you get the curator title, at least you might be in the same pay scale. So it's an issue of parity, and I think more than what the title meant, you wanted parity. We don't care what you call us, but pay us on an equal basis. So, fighting for that.

Now it's this issue between programmer and curator. Strictly speaking, in the archive world, curator is more than programming, because it means taking care of a collection, and the assumption is you have a collection. So, you could be a programmer, but you don't need to have a collection. Museums can have programmers and not have collections of film, certainly. It's a bit of a mess now, as to what you get called, but I think we would accept, probably now, that curatorship means a much larger territory. You're collecting, therefore you're taking care of the collection, you're interpreting the collection, and so on and so forth. That's what museum curators do, I mean fine arts curators do.

01-01:15:05

Geritz:

You were a curator or a programmer, or whatever you would call it, for many years. What kept you in the field and position?

01-01:15:14

Kramer:

I never looked up. [laughs] No, I think it's true. You're so busy. You are so—I want to say overworked, but that sounds like a complaint. It's not a complaint, but you are overworked, I mean literally, in terms of hours. But you get so, I think obsessed, you're in the present and the future simultaneously. There's so much. For everything you do, you want to do something else and more. The possibilities are endless. Before you know it, you're expanding. Some part of you says you shouldn't be expanding so much, because then you have to raise money, and they're always telling you

there's less money. So the endless budgetary issues. You know you're not going to make money. Can you rob Peter to pay Paul? Can you keep checks and balances so that nobody pulls the rug from underneath you totally. I think I just never had a moment to look up and step back and say, what the heck am I doing? Do I really want to keep doing this? I was enjoying it, I was challenged by it, I was thoroughly into it, and I didn't know how to stop.

Finally, after a lot of years go by you realize, well maybe you should stop, because I obviously can't stay here forever. You're old, you should make way for younger people. And also, are there that many new worlds to conquer? In other words, maybe it's not as much of a challenge. You could keep going and it would be fun, but maybe it's not such a challenge any more, been there, done that. I think it's just an awareness of time, by God, you could just drop dead at your desk like some people do and you would never have done other things. It's a sense of time running out and maybe there are other things you could do, or not, but you're not ever going to try. The sense of maybe becoming too narrow. You only read film magazines and they've become boring? You go home with *Variety* and the *New York Times*, and a whole bunch of magazines that Nancy Goldman hands you, and you don't have time to read everything, so you skim it and then you're exhausted and you go to sleep and you think, that's all I'm reading? So then you realize, you're only reading—and it gets more and more insular and you think, there's other things to read. Where's the literature? [laughter] And frankly, so much of the writing is so bad. Really. The field has progressed to the point where we have too many writers, too many books, and a lot of them are seriously badly written and of no importance whatsoever.

I got a little bit concerned about the whole theoretical approach. It had moved so far from people looking at films. I got really estranged from that and I thought, I should go take a class and I should catch up with this, but the people who I was meeting seemed not to be looking at films. They seemed to be having theories and they were only concerned with the films that fit the theory, and they've moved away from watching films. I got really upset by this. I thought, I don't belong. I really felt that the field had progressed beyond where I wanted to be in many ways. I thought, the field is somebody else's now and I don't fit it very well. I'm old-fashioned and I'm not part of that.

01-01:20:15

Geritz:

I have some questions that are more around your ideas or philosophies about curating. What did you see or do you see, as the role of film programming, and did the way you see it change over time?

01-01:20:39

Kramer:

I'm sure it evolved in some ways, but I don't think—basically, I don't think it changed that much. Maybe that was the problem, you see, because I saw everything else changing and I didn't fit the new programmers. They were very smart and everything, but I think I'm very old fashioned. I just took on

more, but it didn't mean I drastically changed. I think I had a philosophy of programming that remained very much the same. I wrote it down somewhere, because I had to give a talk. It was at Pordenone Silent Film Festival, when they did that—what's that award they give? Don't tell Paolo I forgot.

01-01:21:40

Geritz: We'll slip it in. I don't remember.

01-01:21:45

Kramer: They give two or three different awards. Oh, the Jonathan Dennis award, named after him. After he died, they created the Jonathan Dennis award. It doesn't have to be for a curator or programmer, but anyway, I got the Jonathan Dennis Award. So, I had asked Paolo, what am I—I have to give a talk, a 45-minute talk. I said, "What do you want me to talk about?" He says, "Anything." So, I really didn't know what to say and I thought about it and I thought about it, and you know me, I don't like to write things out. So I jotted down some notes and I thought, I'm talking to my peers, what can I possibly say that would interest them.

I remember starting out by saying that I didn't think I had anything to say to them, because they all did what I did and many of them were models to me, that I had learned from, admired. So I didn't think I had anything I could possibly say to them that they wouldn't already know, and I didn't want to bore them. So I made a joke in the beginning by telling them one of the bad things that happened to me as a programmer. I thought I would open this with a terrible thing that happened to me as a programmer, you know one of those public embarrassments, of which I have had many.

Were you here when I invited Slavko Vorkapich's collaborator to come?

01-01:23:36

Geritz: Mm-hmm.

01-01:23:37

Kramer: David Shepherd had suggested that—his name was John. What was it, John? [John Hoffman] I can't remember his last name now, but he lived in L.A., he was an elderly man, probably in his eighties, at least in his eighties. He had his own collection of all of the stuff that he and Vorkapich did on special effects. David Shepherd had said, "That could be a wonderful lecture, I mean it's history, and people don't invite him and he's fantastic." So I thought, what a great idea. So I called him and he was eager to come up. David said he can do a whole presentation with clips, so on and so forth. So, he arrives, I pick him up at the airport, bring him to the archive, he's staying at the Durant Hotel. We have a full house and he comes over, I seat him in the front row, like we always sat our guests, you know it's in this theater. I'm at the podium and I make an introduction, give a little thing about him, and then I said, please join me in welcoming John so and so.

He's sitting there and I said, "Come up," and he stands up and he looks around and he comes up to the front and he turns to me and he looks at me with this horrible look on his face and looks at the audience and says, "Where am I? Why did you take me away? Who brought me here. I want to go home."

01-01:25:09

Geritz:

Oh, no.

01-01:25:10

Kramer:

And the audience is looking at me like you horrible person, "What have you done?" He lost it completely. He didn't know where he was. So I took him back to the hotel and we put him on the plane. I said, "David, he's senile." He said, "Well, yes, he has some moments." Moments?

01-01:25:40

Geritz:

Moments. [laughter] Seven-thirty p.m.

01-01:25:45

Kramer:

At Berkeley. So, my opening was, so I feel a little bit like I did then. What am I doing here? What am I doing here? I want to go home. That's the way I feel right now. So, everybody laughed. So then I said, "Okay, I'm going to share with you, my philosophy of film programming, since I think that's essentially why I'm here." And I said, "You may or may not agree but here it is." I have it written down, in case you're interested, and it's on tape too, I think.

Anyway, I think of it as a journey. I'm going to take the audience on a journey, and a film series is part of that journey. It has its peaks and valleys, and it has its tangents, and little roads you take off to the side, but ultimately, it's a journey and all the different films are pieces that make this journey complete. You have to have a beginning, and a kind of middle, and an end, and you have to think about that in arranging the films, how they relate to each other, but you always have to keep thinking of this journey that you're taking people on, and you want the journey to be fulfilling and memorable at the end. But also, you're inviting people to take the journey, so there is the invitation. You have to think of it sort of like you're inviting people to dinner and you're serving them something you've worked very hard at and that you hope they will taste and enjoy fully, and at the end, they will want to go on another journey with you, or repeat that journey maybe some time. So it was something to this effect, and I think from the very beginning, the first time, even when I was teaching, that was a sense I had. I am telling a story, that film programming is, in itself, a narration, and I'm the storyteller, and you make the journey to tell the story, so every program is your story. I like being a storyteller, that's what it was to me, and that was there from the very beginning and I never changed that.

01-01:29:03

Geritz:

How much was your view, that view you just described, influenced by the region in which you worked, or do you think you would have seen it differently if you had worked in any other city or region?

01-01:29:18

Kramer:

No, I think it would have been anyplace. I didn't intend to end up here. I just came for a visit. [laughter] It's true. I didn't know what I was going to do after Oregon. I just really needed sun. If you live in a rainy state where you get at best, three months of sunshine, I needed the sun. I'm not a big sun person, but I just needed sunlight and I needed urban, I needed to be in an urban context. Now some people would say this is not—I'm in San Francisco, but compared to Eugene at that time, San Francisco was the big city. Ideally, I would have liked to have been able to go back to New York. For a long, long time, I thought, I'm going to get back, somebody's going to offer me a job, there's going to be a job offer. Only once in my entire career was there ever a job offer in New York. That happened while I was at Canyon, and it was the head of Grove Press who called me. What was his name? Barney Rosset— Anyway, he called me. Jonas Mekas had told him to call me. He needed somebody to run the Grove Press film distribution, and I was in the midst of Canyon and I said, "Oh, my God, a job in New York. You have no idea how long I have wanted somebody to offer me a job in New York." Because I had tried. I said, "But I'm in the midst of Canyon, I can't leave them now." You know? I mean, I felt I could not possibly leave, and so I didn't go. That was the only time I ever was offered a job in New York. I went several times there, to try to get a job, but I couldn't get a job. So, I never intended to stay here and one thing led to another, but it was always like maybe some day, because I wanted to be in New York. Finally, I just accepted, I'll never be in New York.

And maybe, you know, related to that question, maybe if I had been in New York, I wouldn't have been able to program the way I've programmed here. It has occurred to me that nobody would have accepted my idea of programming. It would not have been, say compatible with MoMA. I was criticized a great deal by colleagues, MoMA. I used to tease Adrienne, because I didn't do completist shows. I said, well first of all, I don't have the budget, and I'm not traveling to Italy to see all the films and I don't have the reputation of MoMA to say I want this, I want every single work. It was unrealistic financially, but also there was no time to do anything like that. And later, when you were able to do more complete series, because they were touring series, I was very happy to have them, but at the beginning no. You have to be selective, and that's part of the storytelling, it's very essential to the storytelling. You don't have the luxury of just saying, I'm going to do everything, and let the audience come up with the story. It's very different. So, you were forced, by circumstances, to create interesting programs that are highly selective, and you may make incorrect, foolish selections, that may happen. But, you have to tell the story with what you've got, whether it's ten

films or twenty films, or five films. So there are short stories and there are medium-length stories and there are epics. Again, your beginning, middle and end, that's the Gestalt.

So, yeah, probably if I had been in New York, I might not have been able to tell the same stories. It might have crimped my style. So maybe I'm lucky that I ended up here and stayed here, because I could do what I wanted in many ways. There really wasn't anybody upstairs saying this is our idea of how you should program, right? I mean, that's never been the case. They can say you don't have the funding for it or they could say, we want you to do a program that goes with this exhibition. Fine, we can figure that one out. And you wish it went the other way, why don't you do an exhibition to go with ours. But really, you have a lot of—I suspect we've had more freedom than our colleagues at other institutions. I really suspect that. Maybe there are others like us, but I kind of think that freedom, we take for granted, and it kind of defined who we were.

So, yeah, I think it's possible, if I'd been in another place, I wouldn't have been able to do it the way I wanted to do it. Ultimately, I shaped it because I could do it that way.

01-01:34:59

Geritz:

Do you see it as creative work, educational work, or would you characterize it other ways?

01-01:35:05

Kramer:

I think it's creative and educational. I always thought it was educational, the whole function, I think probably because I come out of a teaching background and for me it's always about teaching, and the journey, the narrative, is always about teaching. It's a fun way of teaching, because you don't have to prepare a lecture every day and you don't have to grade your audience, right? But you do grade your audience—I mean the fact is we do grade our audiences. We look to see how they respond and whether they get it, and we're disappointed if they don't get it, and we think, we'll have to do it again, we'll have to figure another way to comment on that. It's our failure, but really, I've always graded the audience on did their knowledge—did their perception improve? Were they more open to things, were they more critical? I used to get so upset when somebody would come up to me and say how much they loved this particular film, and I thought, that's the weakest film in the series. [laughs] They should have been—I remember yelling at somebody, saying, "You should have been more critical of that film. Don't tell me you love that film. It had lots of problems with it, didn't you see that?" You know. But you want them to become very sophisticated viewers, so that they demand more, and when you have a guest and they ask dumb questions you think, oh God, did they get nothing? Why are they asking these dumb questions. And then you're so happy when they ask good questions, when they show that they have eyes and ears.

Yeah, but it is a kind of teaching, that you don't have to sit up all night marking papers and dealing with that and giving grades. I think very much that it's educational, but it should be creative because education should be creative. Education should be fun. People have said—one time, I was in some museum meeting and it was fundraising. I don't know if it was one of our endless branding kind of thing, and nobody wanted to use the word education and I said, "Why has education got such a bad name?" I mean, why must we think that education is boring? What's wrong with the schools, right? If students think education is boring, starting from first grade up, of course we're going to have a problem. Education should always be creative. The best teachers we have when we're going to school, are the creative ones, whether we recognized it then or not, but they're the ones who inspire us to go on. So, to be a good curator, programmer, you have to be creative.

01-01:38:04

Geritz:

What was the range of types of films you programmed at PFA?

01-01:38:11

Kramer:

Pardon me?

01-01:38:12

Geritz:

What was the range of types of films you programmed at PFA, and then how would you briefly characterize your program if you were talking to a non-film person?

01-01:38:26

Kramer:

Range, okay. Well, I've done all kinds of genres. I think I've covered all the genres. I've done auteur, I mean individual directors or editors, writers, cinematographers. I've done actors, actresses. So I've done people, the people program, programs built around an individual's work. I've done themes. I've done historical, you know, we'll go from here to there, periods. Nationalities. I think I've covered... I think I've probably done it all in terms of what the groupings, the general groupings under which people put films. The most interesting for me were always thematic, because there's where I always feel you can be more creative in telling the story. You can play, and I think there should be play, lots of play in that. I don't think there's an area I didn't sort of dip my feet in, but I was very partial to the thematic ones, given a choice.

I always thought retrospectives were a bore, I mean not the films themselves but the concept was oh my God, we're just going to do so and so, and how to make that creative was always a big challenge. What order can I put these in, or how can we—remember, because we always had several programs going at once. How can this relate to what somebody else is doing, that cross referencing of programs, so that even if you are doing all the films of Godard, do they have any connection to somebody else's series, which has nothing to do, as such, with Godard. Is there some way of combining or can you do a double bill with something else. I love double bills, only because of that way

of comparison, but that's a very art historical trick of the compare and contrast.

01-01:41:08

Geritz: And contrast, mm-hmm.

01-01:41:09

Kramer: Right? That is so art historical, and you can do that trick with almost any aspect of a film. It can be content, it can be form, it can be genre, it can be performance. You can play that game and that's fun. In fact, if you did Exquisite Corpse with films, I am sure you would come up with something. Right? People would find something. You could do that kind of thing, kind of dadaist experiment. So, I like anything that will offer that kind of play, and with a month's schedule, with multiple series going, it was always fun to do that cross referencing. But, the one thing you always know, I have to remember, that's all on paper. The audience member doesn't necessarily read that. It's an ideal audience and that ideal audience is you. You're the one seeing it. How do you get anybody in the audience to ever see that? That's tricky, and you know it will only happen with a few people who have to go to more films than you could ever expect anybody to go to. It's the people in the back row who were there all the time and will watch anything. It's the homeless, it's the people MoMA hates in there. It's the regulars who are there night and day, you know, rain or shine, and they see it all, but most of your audience can't possibly do that. So, it's a fictitious audience that you're programming for. It's the ideal audience and ultimately it's you who are seeing all these things.

01-01:43:24

Geritz: Yeah.

01-01:43:25

Kramer: That's a bit of a dilemma but that's what happens. So how to go from the paper to reality. In fact, when Garbiñe [Ortega] asked me, I said, "If you look at the paper of when we're all having our curatorial meetings and mapping it out, it's an ideal situation. It is not reality." Reality is when you're there in the theater, and who's there? They're there or they're not there, and are they going to—and you're trying to urge them to go to this and to that, but they're not necessarily going to do what you say. They have lives.

01-01:44:03

Geritz: Surprising.

01-01:44:05

Kramer: They dare to have lives that don't include you. [laughs] How could they possibly do that? So, there's that issue, but every now and then they get it, you get somebody who puts the pieces together, especially in the double bills.

01-01:44:28

Geritz: Yeah, yeah. And speaking of that, the kind of relational, what role did the short have in your programming?

01-01:44:37

Kramer: I always wanted to be able to do shorts. I wished I had—I always thought that that was a weakness. I would have liked to have always had a short with a feature, always, but not necessarily matching, because I thought, it's an opportunity to introduce people to shorts they wouldn't otherwise see. You could obviously do shorts to match and we've done that. That's a no-brainer. If there's a short film that really goes with this, do it, but the shorts that don't go with it, just because there's a time slot there and you could do it, it's a way of forcing films down people's throat that they wouldn't have seen.

Now of course, you always remember the time I did that series. What was that series?

01-01:45:27

Geritz: Primal Screen, with the shorts.

01-01:45:28

Kramer: Primal Screen, yes. I put the shorts in that. I had so much fun doing that, and then the screaming, was it Dennis Jakob in the audience?

01-01:45:35

Geritz: It was Dennis Jakob.

Kramer:

Who screamed, "Never again," or something.

Geritz:

Never again. He stood up, "Never again!" For Phil Solomon. [Note: the Dennis Jakob episode was during another series with shorts and features, "John Alton: Painting with Light."]

01-01:45:44

Kramer: Which was wonderful. I mean, I did get a rise out of them. [laughs] But it wasn't that that dissuaded me from doing it again. I don't know why, why was it problematic? Show times, running times, what was it? There were endless problems. There were cost problems, it was everything. It's not easy to do, because you have to pay for the short, and we would have to pay for the feature with a percentage. It was so complicated.

01-01:46:19

Geritz: And if it's on the first show, it makes the second show too late.

01-01:45:23

Kramer: Yeah, it was like, "God, why is this so difficult to do?" The logistics of it were messy, expensive and messy. Ideally, when I was growing up, you had newsreels and shorts and look, people go to the theater, for Chrissakes, they

sit through forty-five minutes of trailers and coming attractions. That's outrageous, I mean they've gone beyond the pale. And people don't complain and you're paying money for that. It's disgusting.

I went to a theater the other day, to see a real film [That's my expression for a current or mainstream release—] in the theater, and I couldn't believe how long it was before the film came on. I was ready to go home by the time the film came on. We only were doing like ten, fifteen minutes of films ahead of time [of the feature], you know?

01-01:47:21

Geritz: Yeah.

01-01:47:22

Kramer: I still think we should do shorts. I still think we should do it, with the feature.

01-01:47:25

Geritz: I think so too.

01-01:47:26

Kramer: But there has to be some way financially, to make it feasible.

01-01:47:34

Geritz: On the single nights. In those days we didn't have nights that were just one film, but now we have certain nights where there isn't a double bill.

01-01:47:43

Kramer: Okay, yeah, you could do it, but you still have to figure out, you're taking the flat rate for the short, off of the—I mean how does it work out with the distributors?

01-01:47:57

Geritz: That's the quandary.

01-01:48:01

Kramer: Because we're not doing flat rate on the features. When it was non-theatrical, when we were non-theatrical, it was a flat rate, it was easier to do it.

01-01:48:17

Geritz: Can you say where your ideas for series and programs come from?

01-01:48:23

Kramer: Yeah, in a way, I mean they come from everywhere. I'll read an article in the *New York Times* and suddenly, *oh*. I read a magazine article, I'll have a conversation with somebody, and you know how you riff with friends or something, over something that's going on, and suddenly, because I'm riffing on something and I'm going into this relative absurdity, I think *oh*, that's an idea for a series. And it comes from viewing. You're watching films so much and you notice things in films that are beyond content, beyond form. You just

sort of notice things that reappear, fetishes or motifs, or aspects of film history.

You might do something like children, the image of children. We had a curator who did an image of children in painting. Well, that's an obvious thing, an image of children, and how does that change, and is it different in different countries. What role do children play in films historically.

Food. We like good food, we talk about food. Why is it that all the film people we know like to eat well? They're either good cooks or they're always talking about this restaurant. They have this thing about food and then there's all this food and eating in films, why are there these eating scenes. We'd better do a series on food and cinema, you know?

Fashion and cinema, that's so obvious, it's so important, but what's the relationship between the fashion industry and the film? That's more interesting. Who's influencing whom, and when did it start and did it change, did the dynamics change? And when do fashion people actually get involved, they get paid to be involved, as opposed to strictly the wardrobe department. That was fascinating to me, how much we are influenced by what people are wearing in films, or how films steal from what people are wearing. Which comes first and when? Who is influencing whom? So that was obvious.

The Primal Screen, of course, that was, I think, my only attempt to do something really, really very personal, and it failed. I mean, it was a nice group of films, but people didn't under—even colleagues didn't understand. They thought I was trying to show my favorite films. Obviously, I liked these films, but I was trying to explain something else, and it was so particular to that theater—the original PFA theater. It really had to do with—so there was an idea that came out of the very ritual of projection. It would be different in the other theater—the current theater on Bancroft Avenue. It was so peculiar to this theater. That curtain, that damn noisy curtain that had to be pulled, that we could never quiet, and the fact that the booth was not soundproof, and so we heard the motors. We heard everything in the booth. So all of that had become part of that theater experience, and I loved it. You complained about it but it was also, that belonged to the personality of that screen. Brakhage was so much about the noise, I mean the notion of screenings in which the projector was just in the room. You didn't have a booth and we all go back, you know, to screenings without a good theater. When I started programming, there was no theater, decent theater. You had a storefront, you had a church, you had a room. You didn't have risers, you had uncomfortable seats, you had all kinds of noise. So you kind of grew up with film programmers having less than ideal places to screen their films, as opposed to the commercial theaters, which were presumably ideal. Of course they varied, but in the real movies, you presumably went into—

I'm not going to say movie palace, but into a place that was outfitted specifically for that. And here you were, trying to do your series in jerry-rigged facilities, doing the best you can and nothing was ideal. But you got accommodated to that and your audience got accommodated, and the experience you had with them this way, that was part of it. So, Canyon, Cinematheque had different screening venues, and it was all a part of it. And the PFA theater, I had an emotional attachment to that theater. [It was why I joined PFA staff in the beginning—to show films in that theater, on that screen.] So Primal Screen introduced that theater, as well as films that were supposed to be examples of this feeling I had in a movie theater, where I was programming films.

I knew it was a disaster when Mark McElhatten, whose programming I admire so much, said to me, “Oh, I love that series of your favorite films.” I said, “Mark, that wasn't what it was.”

01-01:54:15
Geritz:

He of all people would have gotten it, I think, if he was here. Once you had an idea, what was your general approach to putting together a series? Like research. You've already talked about exhaustive versus selective, actually viewing versus reading about work.

01-01:54:32
Kramer:

You do have to do research. You think of all the films that might go into the series. You ask people, what do you think, you ask your colleagues sometimes, sometimes not. You make lists, and of course you have more films than you could possibly put in. You make all these lists and then you look up, are they available and in what shape are they available. Are they showable if available? How much is it going to cost, you estimate budget, and then it comes down to the reality of how much space can you take up in the calendar with this series. If it's a summer series it might be longer. The timing and so on and so forth.

So then comes the hard part of throwing out, you know, oh, do I really have to throw this one out. I'll throw this one out, no I need this. A kind of Gestalt takes place. I don't know exactly why, it's hard to explain, but it does. Some shape comes up but then there's always the final selection, which is really difficult, because the shape is larger than the space you have. It could be larger by five films, by two films, by ten films, but then comes the elimination, and the elimination might ultimately end up, you take out something you really, in the beginning, thought you absolutely had to have, because you make a better combination with this. And that's really tricky, where you're taking out something that you thought was like the cornerstone of it. You started there and you built around it and in the end, you take that out and it's like if you had an arch and you took out the keystone, it would fall down. But no, because you found that there are two films, if put in, will relate to the other films in a stronger way than that cornerstone and you'll be okay,

but it's very tricky, very tricky. That's the hardest part, at the very end, getting it down to exactly the right number of slots. Or, a film is too long, so if you use it, you knock out two films. So when do you do that?

01-01:57:08

Geritz: Would you describe that process as analytical or intuitive, or some combination?

01-01:57:14

Kramer: I think a combination. It has to be analytical, but at the same time, you get a gut feeling. You go home and sleep on it. You worry it and worry it and worry it, until your brain is just fried, and then you have to step away. I always used to say, I worried it until I can't think what to do. Sleep on it. Wake up the next morning and it's clear. That always happened to me, or maybe two mornings later, but there was a moment of light.

01-01:57:52

Geritz: Did you find that your process varied if you were working on a thematic series versus an auteur or say a national, or was it in general the same?

01-01:58:06

Kramer: It should be the same, but the thematic is more challenging. That's why I would get bored with auteur. Not necessarily with the films, but the programming of it was a little boring for me. If it was a big enough series, I could play a lot more. I remember an example. Do you remember the [Luchino] Visconti series, the big Visconti we did in the summer?

01-01:58:30

Geritz: With the Wheeler Auditorium.

01-01:58:33

Kramer: I wasn't a true enthusiast of Visconti. Over the years, Tom started a big Visconti series while he [Visconti] was still alive. He was supposed to come, he didn't show up at Wheeler. I didn't go to all of them but I was thinking overdone, overdone. There were certain films I loved, but then the others I thought, that's not my sensibility. So when, I think it was James Quandt with MoMA, I can't remember, but anyway, said they were going to tour this and did I want to join. And I thought, that's a lot of film. I really don't give a damn about Visconti, you know, but it's Italian, audiences will come. It's summer, it's a perfect series for summer, so I guess I'm going to do this. But the thing is, we're doing the series because of the way other people, before you or after you, depending on how close, you have to base your order on incoming films and outgoing films. The easiest way would be just to copy somebody else's order, but I never wanted to just do that blindly. So I had to really think about the films and review them, and so on and so forth, and think of an angle that would please me actually. Then I started seeing relationships that I thought I could—you know, things in the films I thought I could emphasize and that were themes that ran throughout, regardless of what I thought were the highs and the lows. Something about his gaze and the way

he looked at men, and women too, but also, you know? So I mixed up the chronology a bit. I thought it was smart to start with some—well, often with series, I did the same with those. You start with something that's well-known.

01-02:00:35

Geritz: Known, mm-hmm.

01-02:00:36

Kramer: So you get the audience in, and then you can repeat that film later on, where it might fit better in terms of everything else. You wanted to end with something that maybe is strong.

01-02:00:50

Geritz: Memorable.

01-02:00:51

Kramer: Because there is a fall-off, I mean people get exhausted, so how are you going to keep them. So, I actually gained an enormous appreciation of Visconti through the struggle to organize the films. It was hard work because I wasn't a big enthusiast, wasn't excited by all the films, and I thought the work I did in organizing that gave me a whole new view on Visconti. In the end, I was very happy with having had to do that. It was not boring for me.

01-02:01:35

Geritz: That's very interesting.

01-02:01:37

Kramer: That big [Yasujirō] Ozu series was not boring for me. That, I worked very hard on. It was largely chronological, but there was such a development that I could see in Ozu, from the silent, into the sound, but keeping certain things always there. And so the Ozu family was the audience and that was fantastic for me. It challenged the fact that I was forced to put it in a time period that was not ideal. It was the end of the semester. We had to go up to past when school closed, it was November, December, not ideal.

01-02:02:31

Geritz: That's right, into December, that's right.

01-02:02:33

Kramer: We had Thanksgiving, we had school ending, people going into finals, you know, that whole horrible period you have to program, and the museum, when did the museum close? I remember thinking this is a disaster, I mean there's not going to be any audience. But sustaining the audience in that, and partially that was having to be at each screening and say something that brought people to the next film. So, that was very hard work in the theater, addressing the audience. That was a commitment I had to make, not to miss a single film.

01-02:03:17

Geritz:

There became almost a family of the audience for that series. It was incredible.

01-02:03:22

Kramer:

I turned to the audience and I said, "You are the Ozu family."

01-02:03:25

Geritz:

Oh, that's what you just said, yeah, yeah, but it's true.

01-02:03:29

Kramer:

And they became proud of that. It was like the first time we ever showed *Berlin Alexanderplatz*. People wanted to have a T-shirt, "I saw the whole *Berlin Alexanderplatz*," and did you see it? You know, in one chapter, one episode [at a time]? or did you see it in the marathon? Which way? And the people who wanted to be part of the marathon, that's an audience participation thing, the notion of marathons.

01-02:04:00

Geritz:

I think this is a good place to stop.

Interview 2: January 23, 2014

02-00:00:02

Geritz:

It's Edith Kramer and Kathy Geritz, in the small screening room on Thursday— We think it's the twenty-fourth [twenty-third?], 2014. Okay, so we'll just start up where we left off. We had been talking about your approach to putting together series, and I had asked if it varied, whether it was national, artist based or thematic. And then, we pretty much finished that, so I want to move to a new question.

Were there some kinds of series or programs that particularly gladdened your heart or made you proud to work on?

02-00:00:46

Kramer:

That I worked on.

02-00:00:48

Geritz:

Yeah, that you worked on.

02-00:00:50

Kramer:

Hmm, that's a good question. I think I was always gladdened when a series actually came to pass, you know when it's finally happening, and if it's going well, that always made me very happy, and then I'm on to the next. And of course you're on to the next before that, because it's nonstop. You put a calendar to bed but as we all know, we're immediately on to the next calendar and so you're endlessly creating, working on a future series as you're dealing with the present. So for me the reward or what gladdened my heart was being in the moment of a series taking place and having the experience with the audience that it's working. Of course if it's not working you're miserable, but if it's working that's your high. And that could be any series, so I don't think there was any other way of experiencing that. It wasn't the series per se, it was it actually happening and seeing how the audience responded.

02-00:02:24

Geritz:

I can remember shows, particularly a shorts program, where I wish I could go up into the booth and change the order. [laughs]

02-00:02:33

Kramer:

Oh, yes. Yes, when it's happening you suddenly, oh I shouldn't have done that, you know? Or this is not really working. The proof is in the pudding and no matter what you have on paper, and how expert—I mean, you do become expert at envisioning something. The more and more you do it, you are able, even with the paper, to figure out how this will look. That's just accumulated experience and skill in it, but still finally, it's when it happens. And there are other circumstances that can come to bear. I mean it could be you did all this work and nobody showed up for whatever reason, and therefore, you know, it doesn't work if nobody's there to appreciate it. We certainly had those kind of experiences. But yeah, that's it for me, that moment when you're in the theater

and you know what the audience is thinking, and if they're getting it the way you wanted them to get it, and anything beyond that, then it's terrific.

02-00:03:59

Geritz: How important for you was festival going, previewing, written criticism, discussions with colleagues, in relationship to putting together a program?

02-00:04:08

Kramer: Good question, I think, because in our circumstances, as you well remember, of all our colleagues, compared to most of our colleagues, we did very little traveling. Festivals might have been important, but the fact is, we hardly ever got to them. So we could not depend on going to festivals or even traveling, to create series. I used to joke and say I'm a desktop curator. No, not desktop.

02-00:04:42

Geritz: Armchair?

02-00:04:43

Kramer: Armchair curator. Desktop is computer language. Armchair curator because you had to do a lot of reading and yes, you talked to colleagues who went traveling to festivals, you know, what were their impressions, what really struck them. Only when VHS became available, did you have the luxury of really previewing. In earlier days, you could maybe preview a 16mm if a filmmaker sent it to you, but you had to pay for the shipping in and out, and of course you had to be very careful because they're sending their print, maybe they don't have other prints. Not that we wouldn't be careful, but it's a responsibility which is very different than VHS and DVDs. So in the early years, previewing was very limited and here, you're not really traveling, you're not really getting much opportunity to preview, so you are very dependent on printed information, whether it comes from *Variety*, *New York Times*, whatever film magazines you feel are worth reading. And you can't read them all because there's a proliferation, so you are skimming a lot of them, and there are international publications in different languages. I think you develop a kind of antennae to figure out, by different writers, what's worth investigating. It seems strange that that would work, but somehow I think you are able to see through the writing as to what is really valuable. It's not the story, you almost avoid reviews that tell you mainly a story, it's how they're writing about the cinema.

And then you have your favorite writers. If somebody is writing on the avant-garde, you look to certain writers who are really penetrating, and you learn to trust their eye or their mind, and you think okay, that's something I want to take a look at or that's something I want to know about, and then you do your research. But the actual times when you can go to a festival or even go to a colleague's venue to see what they're doing, is so infrequent, that it barely informs the amount of programming that we did here. It's strange but we were very much armchair programmers, until maybe later on, and then you had to take turns to see who would go here and who would go there, and bring that

in. So that's true about getting ideas and about selecting films. It's not what I'd recommend to most places, but I do believe, I mean from that experience, I think experience can teach you ways in which to do this. I don't know, when you're teaching your film curatorship course, do you talk about that, that it's possible to evaluate and select and do things without? I don't know how you would teach that.

02-00:08:27

Geritz: I don't know that I have. I do talk about finding the people who you trust.

02-00:08:35

Kramer: Right.

02-00:08:35

Geritz: Their take, their sensibility, that you know how to interpret what they say.

02-00:08:40

Kramer: Exactly.

02-00:08:41

Geritz: Finding those people. I talk a lot about—well, actually, I think it was something you taught me, to really not be private with what you're working on, to talk with a lot of people, so you get feedback, hear other people's ideas, get that bouncing around. So that would be other programmers. But since the modern moment is so dominated by too much to preview, I haven't really thought about how to teach that idea.

02-00:09:16

Kramer: It's complicated because it's an accumulation of experience and of testing your own abilities against what is possible. But yes, talking to colleagues, that's a very good point, kind of running your ideas by people and seeing if it strikes them as interesting and getting their feedback, especially when you have a thematic series. It's very good to talk that out with other people because they might suddenly get ideas and take you in a direction you hadn't thought about. And by colleagues, it's your own colleagues at the archive or it's people at other institutions, and you seek out, in terms of the other institutions, you seek out people whose programming you trust. There's people you don't bother to ask, because you don't think much of the programming, but the people whose programming you admire or who are writing well, you run ideas by them. And of course we use other people's ideas anyway, all the programming ideas are not our own. We use guest curators, even if they're not formally guest curators, we tap into the good minds around us in the field at all times, and selecting those is very important. Learning who is really writing well and who has seen enough. There were certain critics that were favorites of mine at different times, and certainly they were getting to places that I couldn't get to.

- 02-00:11:12
Geritz: That reminds me that in a way, what criticism and colleagues do now, is help cut through what you try to look at, because—
- 02-00:11:21
Kramer: There's too much.
- 02-00:11:22
Geritz: There's too much, I mean the amount of stuff out there. I felt like at a certain point you could feel you were not on top of it, but you know?
- 02-00:11:32
Kramer: No, I agree. I agree, absolutely.
- 02-00:11:34
Geritz: Kind of on the edges of being on top of it.
- 02-00:11:37
Kramer: Before the digital stuff, I felt you could pretty well know what was going on that was worthy, around the world, I mean globally. You knew if something was happening in China or Taiwan or Hong Kong or Iran, or something like that. You could be there right at the beginning, because something would be mentioned in *Cahiers du Cinema* or *Positif*, or something would be mentioned— I'm trying to think, what are the other— Oh, *DOX*, I remember when *DOX*—I mean, I was so refreshed when I discovered this magazine, *DOX*. I don't even remember how I came across it. A copy came to me all of a sudden, we didn't have a subscription at the time, and I'm suddenly going, these people are really writing well, and they're seeing things we don't know anything about.
- 02-00:12:35
Geritz: Yeah, yeah. I think that the editor came.
- 02-00:12:38
Kramer: Does that still exist, *DOX*?
- 02-00:12:39
Geritz: Yeah, it does, but not quite as—
- 02-00:12:42
Kramer: Things have their period.
- 02-00:12:43
Geritz: Yeah, mm-hmm.
- 02-00:12:44
Kramer: It's like there was a time when the *Village Voice* was a bible. It was Hoberman writing, a few other people, Elliott Stein, but then the *Village Voice* changed and you no longer went to it. There was a time when there were certain *Variety* writers that you really read, and the others you didn't bother about, because you could trust some. And you had to read each magazine

understanding its own attitude and approach. *Variety* is oriented towards the industry, so they have a language and they're talking about will this film work in a commercial theater. That isn't so important to you, but you can tell by what certain writers are saying, that it's still worthy, even if it wouldn't work in a commercial theater. It isn't going to make big money but it's something you want to see.

02-00:13:45

Geritz: They had all that funny language about even that it would only be a festival film.

02-00:13:49

Kramer: Right. [laughter]

02-00:13:50

Geritz: I can't remember it anymore, but all those short hands.

02-00:13:53

Kramer: Oh, yes, *Variety*-ese, I've forgotten most of it, but it would be great. You learned that language and how it applied to your interests.

02-00:14:05

Geritz: How important were film tours and what role did they have in your overall schedule?

02-00:14:12

Kramer: They were very important. Film tours meant saving money. It meant being able to do rather complicated and big shows that would have been beyond your budget, whether it's the cost of the film fees, rentals, whatever fees, licensing fees, shipping, even just the organization, logistics. Touring for us began modestly, with certain colleagues, just a few colleagues, and then everybody sort of got into the act, because there were a lot more institutions showing a lot more films, and they immediately knew that they could not mount things without sharing. For us, the touring was especially for big series. If you were doing an auteur retrospective and it was a foreign auteur, I mean you didn't have to tour an American director. Some people did, but that wasn't—we could do John Ford on our own, we didn't need a tour of John Ford obviously. But you want to do [Luchino] Visconti, you need the Italian government, you need archives, and you need some partners, and they'd better be partners that have a good budget. You even have to discriminate between partners, because if they are small partners and they can only take—if you've got a fifteen film series and a small partner says, well I can only do four, they're not really, unfortunately, contributing, and they're actually kind of making it awkward and difficult to manage the tour, and that could be a problem. Sometimes, we could do it, allow a little sidebar, but sometimes it meant not being able to work with very good colleagues, because their schedule simply could not accommodate a big series, and you needed people to be able to put in equal amounts of money and time, and to be able to work

well with the shipping and coordination. So that took a certain level for each colleague, institution, to be able to do this.

But, yeah, the tours often—you know, it was robbing Peter to pay Paul. Very often, those big touring series paid for a lot of other things, or they balanced out the things that would never bring in a lot of money. So I've always been very grateful to tour partners who enabled us to do things we would never have been able to do on our own.

02-00:17:17

Geritz:

Did your approach to using tours change over time, and did you attempt to make them your own or put a mark on them?

02-00:17:27

Kramer:

It was difficult for me not to try to make them my own if the shipping schedule allowed, because if you were too tight, you couldn't hold on to a print. But if possible, I always found myself wanting to reorder things, not because I didn't like what other people did, but it just, I had this necessity to look at each group of films and say, this is the order I think would work best here. We talked about that earlier, for example starting a series, you need to get people in, so you might start with some film that has more recognition for the audience. It's not necessarily your favorite film, but the recognition gets people in, and then you can—and it's out of chronological order or it's out of any other kind of order, because it just simply has to jumpstart. If a series is very long, audience attention can flag, I mean it's exhausting for them to persevere, so you have to make sure there's something somewhere in the middle to bump it up again, and end with a bang if possible, not a whimper.

Ideas come to your mind, especially with the autism. What is it that strikes you about this director's work? What hits you and how do you want to order it? I think everybody pretty much wants to, even unconsciously, put their own stamp on it. Yeah, I suppose there's some people who just say oh, well, I'll just show it in whatever order it comes to me, but it doesn't make much sense to just rely on the shipping plan. So, yeah, you wanted to put your own stamp. We had our own writers to do original notes. I mean yes we quoted, but we could, given any opportunity to preview, to look at things, then our writers, particularly Judy Bloch, was eager to put out original writing, and I think that always distinguished our auteur things. Also, we could write more at that time. We had more words that we could put into our calendar. Poor MoMA had these tiny little blurbs, or Film Society of Lincoln Center, my goodness, they didn't get much space for a blurb.

02-00:20:21

Geritz:

Mentioning Judy reminds me, like I think it was when we did an [Michelangelo] Antonioni series, which of course we had done before but were doing again, and she said watching him at that particular moment, suddenly what really hit her was the women, how they were depicted. And so

in her notes, she took that tack, and the idea of like, well what strikes you at a particular time when you're re-looking at a director you've looked at before.

02-00:20:50

Kramer:

Absolutely, absolutely, because you change, the times change, and you see things or you point out things that you might not have before. We were talking earlier, how my opinion on Visconti changed, because I saw him with very different eyes than I did the first time we did a retrospective. That has happened with repeated, you know, here we go back again, to a director that we've visited before. That's the beauty of re-seeing things, really, I mean most of the major auteur directors we've done more than once over the time Tom [Luddy] did them. Of course, some of them were still alive and kept making films. How many [Federico] Fellinis did we do, how many Antonionis did we do, and how many [Jean-Luc] Godards did we do, and the different ways we did Godard, for goodness sakes. So, maybe there's an infinite way of doing these. How many [Robert] Bressons did we do. Some were more spectacular than others, I mean some just hit it.

I think it was when I was away, I mean when I left in '81, I remember I was eager to get the calendars. I was in Europe and I was missing, I was very curious, and I remember being very impressed by this big Ford series that you guys did, when Lynda Myles was directing it, and I think it was Mike Goodwin who did—and you had the chuck wagon, and I was thinking oh, that must have been extraordinary. How many times—but that sounded like the best Ford series ever.

02-00:23:00

Geritz:

Yeah, that was great, the meals outside, yeah, yeah.

02-00:23:03

Kramer:

That sounded like it must have been the best of all. You could tell, reading the notes, that that was a great Ford series. There was just like an energy into it, and it jumped off the page as such, you know you knew. Did I answer all of that?

02-00:23:32

Geritz:

Yeah, absolutely. Do you see yourself as a gatekeeper, and how does one relate, how do you relate to this responsibility?

02-00:23:44

Kramer:

What's a gatekeeper?

02-00:23:45

Geritz:

There's people who call curators gatekeepers, meaning that you have to get through them to have a public. So it's mostly working filmmakers who would say that, as opposed to obviously—

02-00:24:04

Kramer:

Dead people.

02-00:24:04

Geritz:

Yeah, but ones who don't have distributors, so working artists tend to use that terminology.

02-00:24:12

Kramer:

I never thought about that. I think that's post-me. That must be a term coming into use after my retirement, or later. I don't know that I ever thought about that. What do you think?

02-00:24:29

Geritz:

I can understand why film artists would think that, that you send out your work all over and do you get screenings or don't you get screenings. In the digital era, as a curator, it's impossible to see everything that is sent you. So you are using, or I am using, sorting techniques, and one sorting technique is have I seen that person's name jump off of someone else's schedule. Especially if I've never heard of them, I might be like oh, God, okay, I did get a DVD from that person. It pulls it up to the top. Locally, I try to see anything locally that's sent of course, because you have a huge responsibility, but the rest of the world, it's very hard. I think we talked about in the days even before you left, that something changed at a certain point, when digital was more available.

02-00:25:30

Kramer:

Well, we were overwhelmed right away.

02-00:25:33

Geritz:

Yeah, and that people who were still making their very first works and maybe weren't ready for a screening, still sent their work to you.

02-00:25:40

Kramer:

I think it even started before, with video, I think even in the VHS age. As soon as, shall we say the democratization of filmmaking, it's like everybody who had a video camera, analog video, and then later, digital video, was an instant filmmaker. The inexpensiveness of the medium, we were besieged, and fortunately I left before it became a flood. I knew it was going to become a flood. So, I was able to escape this, but I did see it coming and I knew it was going to be a problem. And now, for Chrissakes, it's on the Internet. You're supposed to look at things on the Internet, instead of even getting a DVD. So, it's impossible. It's like everybody would need their colleagues and recommendations, and who's seen this. How would you possibly get through this? You hear about festivals where they screen how many hundred, thousands, or something like that. It's absurd. So there's no selectivity operating before they come to you. There's nothing that pre-weeds, pre-selects. It's just dumped on you.

I remember way, way, way back in the early years of my career, I remember the concept of don't send unsolicited previews. Let us solicit, because we didn't want unsolicited, because we had so many things that we were asking for. It was a conflict. So now it's totally unsolicited and that is an

impossibility. You might very well be missing something really important, and the only way you could deal with that is you hope another colleague gets it.

Now, another way of looking, maybe, from the way you described a gatekeeper, I'm not sure if it would apply, another interpretation of it, I did think that it was our responsibility, once we saw a filmmaker's work that we believed in, to spread the word. Now, is that another aspect? So, I always felt that you have to tell your colleagues, by the way, take a look at this. I just thought that was our responsibility, to help the filmmaker get other audiences. If we believed in it, then we could at least influence others and that would help the filmmaker get more screenings.

I remember traveling to Europe at some point, to some—I don't know if it was a conference or what it was, and talking with colleagues over there and realizing that they didn't know anything about Bay Area avant-garde filmmakers, or they didn't know anything about this current group of filmmakers we were really interested in, or younger filmmakers, and you know, writing out lists of things that they should get, and seeing the fruit of that, that eventually filmmakers being invited to Rotterdam or getting a show in Paris, or something like that. Now those curators or those festivals, are very aggressive on their own. They don't necessarily need us to do that because they—But there was a time when they knew what was happening in Europe, but they didn't really know what was happening here. Or even Asia, getting our films to Asia, as well as their coming here. So I think if that's a sense of gatekeeper, I think we always tried to do that. That was a responsibility.

02-00:30:19
Geritz:

This leads me to ask, did you see your work primarily in relation to a local audience, or a national or international one, or all?

02-00:30:35
Kramer:

I think I start with the local, only because that's my audience. The programming itself, you know, which includes the show time, the day of the week, the length of the program, I mean all those things which you know are such an important part of putting together a program. I had to think about who's coming, where they're coming from, when are they going to come, how are they going to come, what will they sit through when, and so on, so forth. And you still had your own limits. If only we could have done more matinees, I always thought that would have been really great.

So I think I start with the local in terms of—but I see the local as simply a part of a larger thing. I always believed that if it worked locally, it should work nationally, but obviously, in my discussions with colleagues, I always remember having discussions with curators like James Quandt in Toronto or Jytte [Jensen] and Adrienne [Mancia] and Larry [Kardish] in New York, at MoMA, and a few other major institutions or colleagues and them saying no,

no, we couldn't do that or that way. And I'm thinking, why not? But everybody has their own needs around their local audience. So I became aware that people have to adjust to, well, their institution, when their institution allows you to show a film. It's just a simple logistic like that, when do you get access to the theater? And it may not be very advantageous, I mean institutions that couldn't have night shows. Eastman House, for example, could not run shows seven days a week, not even five days a week, at a certain time. I can't remember what they're doing now, but they couldn't be open after eight o'clock. The whole thing changes in your programming if you can't do—or trying to convince people that you could do a five o'clock show, and people say no, you cannot do a five o'clock show.

So, yeah, I think you start with the local, but you think it should work everywhere, the concept at least, but how the logistics of it would change.

02-00:33:20

Geritz:

What kind of balance did you try to have in your programming within a calendar, and then say within a year.

02-00:33:29

Kramer:

I always, when I looked at a calendar, I wanted to see that there were many different types of series, as well as of course we had one-off events, you always have those, but that there was variety. Don't do two comedy series in the same calendar or try not to do two auteurs, unless you're doing a comparison with them. Maybe if you have one big thematic show that's enough, you know, there can be small things. So, yeah, I always thought you've got to have balance. I don't know where this came from. It was intuitive for me from the very—even before I came to the archive, when doing smaller series I thought, you've got to have variety, you've got to have balance; otherwise it's maybe boring for the curator. We get bored if we are put into doing the same thing. We mustn't get bored. If we get bored it will show, I'm convinced of that. So, we have to entertain ourselves and keep ourselves interested, but you sort of project that on what the audience might experience.

And it's different strokes for different folks. People come up to me still today and they say things like, well I'm not going to go to those movies because they're too violent, I don't like violence in movies. This always puzzles me, I mean my God, the history of cinema, how could you avoid violence? What do you mean, violence. Or, I only like romantic comedies. There really are people out there who will only go to see certain kinds of movies, until you train them or get them to—you know, move them forcibly into something else. So yeah, I firmly believe in variety and balance.

02-00:35:40

Geritz:

You know with festivals, which so many of our colleagues work at, they have so many programs within a short period. You worked year in and year out. What are some of the benefits and disadvantages of this?

02-00:35:53

Kramer: Of working—of not?

02-00:35:55

Geritz: Of not doing the festival model, of the having a year.

02-00:36:00

Kramer: Sometimes we envy them, because it's one time a year and then they have a pause. I mean, they don't have to immediately gear up and do the next thing. They have time to work on a festival. Of course at the end, they're all in a panic and everything is crunch time, right, because it all—and it's exhausting during it. I used to envy that they had the luxury of traveling, planning, the long-term planning, and I'd think that's wonderful, that's such a breeze, my God, I mean there's one big deadline and that's it, not endless deadlines. We get exhausted by the endless deadline mentality, it never stops, never stops. So in that sense—

On the other hand, there's something about festivals that for me... how do I say this? There are good, bad, better festivals, I mean it depends what kind of festival it is, but the average, the typical international film festival, I find less educational; I find the sustained programming over the year and the way in which we design it really develops a more sophisticated audience. I think you actually do educate your viewership to be a sophisticated viewer, and in the wham, bam, thank you ma'am kind of festival, it's a mix of some really good films, some films which somehow get in and you wonder why they're in. Maybe because you need to please that distributor, maybe because you have to have X number of slots because you've paid for this theater and you've got to run the films from morning until night, you've paid for it. It's all these factors. Why does a festival need 125 films? Why does another festival need 300 films? I mean why, what's the reasoning behind this? Why is there a four-day festival and why is there a two-week festival? The smaller the festival, the more chance it's going to have a higher level of consistency, and I think the more the audience will learn, because they'll talk to each other, it will be more intimate. They'll have more chance to meet the filmmakers, if that's valuable. It's not always valuable, as we know. I think there's a kind of focus and I think in the bigger festivals, people are just crazed, you know, running from show to show and at the end it's like, you ask them what did you see? I don't know, I have to look at my notes because one film goes into the next.

The few festivals I became devoted to attending when I could, are Bologna and Pordenone, not only because they dealt with early cinema, and it was like going back to school for me, but they allowed a real focus and engagement. Engagement with your colleagues, engagement with the film, discussions and reflections, and you could handle it. The fact is now, many of them have gotten too big, there's too much, but in the early days there was less. Bologna now has umpteen theaters. It used to be we were all in one theater. Oh, and Pesaro, I used to go to Pesaro, with Peter Scarlet. One theater, everybody in

one theater and it was extraordinary, with a focus on say one country, all the cinema of one country. What a way to learn, put everybody together in the same theater. I loved that kind of situation, it's a real learning. For me, most festivals are just huge marketplaces, and I don't get a curatorial sense. I don't get a sense of an intellect shaping this. There might be a great film and there might be a terrible film next to it, so that I don't get it.

02-00:41:25

Geritz:

I want to talk a little about your approach to audience, which we've touched on already. How do you think you build an audience?

02-00:41:36

Kramer:

I think you have to build their trust, first of all. You have to try to give them an experience that makes them want to return for another experience. So, communicating to them not only what film they're going to see, but having a relationship with them. I think having a presence there with the audience, so that they can talk to you and they can express their opinion and they know that you're listening. How to create a kind of warmth and make them feel that they're special. I think that's very important. Peter Scarlet used to describe coming to the films where I was curating; he said it was sort of like she invited you into her living room and served you dinner, you know? And that was really the way I felt. The theater was my home and I was inviting—yes, they had to pay of course, but... [laughs] but if I'd had my way they could have all come free. I would never want to turn anyone away who couldn't afford it. We certainly had our share of freeloaders, but it was just welcoming them, talking to them afterwards, getting their feedback. Even if they weren't forthcoming, asking them, what did you think of this? Did you like that? Oh, you should try this one, being sympathetic to what their needs were and so on. So I always believed that the audience are your friends and your guests, and you should behave like a good host.

02-00:43:56

Geritz:

In some ways it's also difficult to talk of an audience, because you had many audiences. What approach did you have to programming for the variety of audiences that attended PFA?

02-00:43:15

Kramer:

Sometimes it has to do with the logistics. For example, if you think maybe—I mean, it's a practical thing. If you think it's a senior citizen audience, you better not program too late, I mean that's a factor, time wise. They don't like to go out late. If you think it's a family film, program accordingly. Some audiences don't want children in the theater with them. I understand. So you've got to allot a time when parents can come with children and there are other parents with children and they can tolerate each other. Family oriented films.

Young people, say a college age audience, they're more likely to go out late at night, or they're more likely to go out on weekends, because they're studying

during the week. Or maybe, remember when we tried the five-thirty free shows and things like that?

02-00:45:28

Geritz: Free screenings, yeah.

02-00:45:32

Kramer: That was a semi-success. It wasn't totally—sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't, but trying to figure out what would work for a college schedule, that's unique to us. If we were in an urban environment it would be very different. When I was programming at SFMOMA, my audience had a very different schedule. They came at different times than here. When I was going to the Brattle Theater as a graduate student, we all liked five-thirty shows during the week. We were all students and five-thirty was our time, because then we had to work at night to do our schoolwork. Weekends for everybody, right?

When I first moved to the Bay Area, going out to the Surf Theater... I can't remember. I had a favorite time for going there and I can't remember what it was, but I remember a lot of us would always go at the same time. It was quite a trip getting out there with the public transportation, so maybe we went to earlier shows, matinees.

Yeah, so I think again, trying to figure out the different kind of audiences you might be getting, the variety, and keeping them in mind on the logistics, but you can't serve everyone equally all the time, that's just an impossibility. It's part too, of the variety of programming, of thinking well, the young, so-called hip audience might be particularly interested in this series, and your marketing might skew it towards them, not that you don't want the other audience, but you have a feeling you'll get them.

I remember the first time we did [Hayao] Miyazaki, the very, very first time. We tapped into this young audience, who were totally hip to Japanese comics.

02-00:48:04

Geritz: And anime, yeah.

02-00:48:05

Kramer: Right, anime. It wasn't so much Miyazaki. It was that it was from the comic people, translated to film, and we got this audience that we hadn't had before. I mean that audience didn't show up for our other Japanese programs. That was very calculated outreach and it worked. Later, all sorts of other people came to Miyazaki, because the films were being released and it became family programming, so on and so forth. So, I do remember series that had very specific targets in terms of demographics.

Of course, if you're doing a national series, you look for the Italian Americans or you look for the Georgians or you look for—I mean that, you know. But

that's kind of after the fact, when you know that this is—you know, that's another—

Okay, when you happen to live in a very multicultural area, you take advantage of that. If you were in some other area, you might not have that constituency. New York has it, we have it, L.A. has it, Chicago has it, but other places, you might not be able to tap into that. Today most cities do of course, but earlier, you might not have that possibility.

I remember when Tom did Joris Ivens' *How Yukong Moved the Mountains*; it was at a time when there was no communication with China. The only Chinese films we saw were from Taiwan or Hong Kong. And also the feeling in San Francisco among the Chinese American community, was very anti-PRC, because the population was mostly people who had come before the Cultural Revolution, or rejected it and left. To show a PRC film here could mean protests. So Tom, turning it around and finding a way to reach out to the Chinese American community in San Francisco, took Ivens and his film to a Chinatown theater and subtitled this 768 minute film with slides. We didn't have soft titling, electronic titling then, and while Mandarin could be read, it was not spoken by the local community. Because there was a curiosity to see the films, but there was also this political situation. So what Tom was doing, with this example and screenings at PFA, led to eventually building a younger audience for new Chinese cinema. It wasn't just Taiwan or Hong Kong, he was also screening PRC films.

Geritz: Interesting.

02-00:51:20

Kramer:

The first time we did Vietnamese cinema, showing films made by the Vietnamese, during the war, I mean UCLA tried to do it and they had riots. We were frightened that because there was a very conservative community in Fremont and that they would come up here, we had to alert the police and everything. But because we're Berkeley, we got away with it and the young people came, the more radical leftists, and that was something we could build on here too. We had a more radicalized, leftist community, that would come for—we certainly took advantage of, in terms of social documentaries, progressive ideas in cinema, all that political. We did a lot of that.

02-00:52:15

Geritz:

Yeah, absolutely.

02-00:52:17

Kramer:

We had an audience here that other people didn't have. It's just like when the museum did the Mapplethorpe exhibition, we could get away with that, right? We could do well with that, perfect for Berkeley, and we could do the same thing with film series here.

02-00:52:40

Geritz:

You mentioning the museum, did you see museum goers as an audience, a portion of the audience?

02-00:52:49

Kramer:

Unfortunately, I saw it the other way. I always saw our audience as people who would go to the museum, and I thought that many of the museum goers were not at all interested in film. There were occasionally crossovers, there were some, because people became members. There came a point where you couldn't distinguish PFA membership from museum. In the beginning, we had a PFA membership, so then it was very clear, these are our members. But when they got rid of a separate membership for PFA and it was all one membership, you knew, because of the discounts available, that part of the museum members were your PFA audience, and part of them were not. So yes, there were many, many gallery people who had absolutely no interest—that was true in terms of museum curatorial staff and a museum administration, and the board. So you always had a kind of smaller representation interested in film, but gradually, I think it improved. It's always going to be, I think a little lopsided, but there became more crossing over, and sometimes it was because the director crossed over. We had directors who became interested in cinema in their own way, and they liked to bring people and so they came.

We had so many directors. [laughs] I mean, so many administrations, but I think, you know, we certainly, as true to most museums that have film programs, were sort of the stepchild, not the primary thing. I think at some point, I just said okay, that's the way the cookie crumbles and you do the best you can with that.

02-00:55:00

Geritz:

How do you balance showing work you haven't screened, not meaning that you haven't previewed, but haven't shown in a program before, with introducing or re-introducing works to new audiences, and how important was it that you be interested in the series?

02-00:55:17

Kramer:

Wait a minute, start that one over.

02-00:55:19

Geritz:

Okay. How do you balance showing work you haven't—let me actually look at this [my notes]. I think it was supposed to be how do you balance showing works that haven't shown before at the PFA, with showing works that have been shown before but you're re-introducing.

02-00:55:45

Kramer:

Okay, yeah, yeah. Well, that's maybe just part of the usual, sort of fits into the overall concept of variety and balance. It's exciting to introduce new works to your audience. I'm not interested in premieres. The concept, I mean we use the language. I always hated using the language, premiere. We could be the

last people to show this film. The important thing is, we believe this film should be shown to our audience, that's the whole thing, and I just hate the concept of it has to be a premiere. I find that so offensive actually. What difference does it make. If it's a work that you haven't shown and you believe in it, you want to show it whenever you can, whenever it works out, that it's available to you, that you can fit it into the schedule. Sometimes you want to show work and you just can't do it immediately, you have to wait. That's just the way things are.

So, I think it's just nice to be able to revisit works of course, because your audience is changing, that's another thing. Our audience, except for the regulars of a certain generation, who live here and will grow old here, you hope, but because we're attached to the university, the audience keeps changing and you have to keep soliciting potential new audience members from young people coming in. You're re-showing, very often, as much for them, because they've missed that history, as well as for the comfort of people who know it and want to see it again. But introducing new films when you can, it's living history. It's always nice to have that in any calendar that you're introducing, new works.

02-00:58:00

Geritz:

Now that I look at it, I think also an element that was in the question, that it was worded badly, was also about the idea of new audiences, where the work is new to them, but it's not new to you...

02-00:58:19

Kramer:

Yeah, well that's the thing with the students. Part of me would say oh God, do we have to do another—pick a director. Do we have to do another Fellini series. I'd be bored but here we were, here was another Fellini series coming down the turnpike, and I'd be bored and I have to remember no, no, no, realize there are all these people here who, not only have they not seen a Fellini film, they may not have heard of him now. Every year, you realize the gap between what you know and what the incoming student knows. It's scary, that gap widens and widens and widens. You can't even use the same terms because they don't know what you're talking about.

I remember teaching at UC Davis and mentioning World War II, and suddenly realized I had an audience who didn't know anything about World War II. They had no idea what I was talking about. Now you could be talking to students and they wouldn't know Vietnam and certainly wouldn't know the Korean War, they wouldn't know what Vietnam is. So, what does our constituency arrive with, what is their history? One has to think about their history, so you're saying what do they need to know about film history. Even our faculty have a need to know.

I would be really surprised, when I went to Pordenone sometimes, because our faculty started going, which was wonderful, and realizing they were seeing

films that every curator here would have known, for the first time. I witnessed our entire faculty seeing *Italian Straw Hat* for the first time, in Pordenone. That shocked me. How is it that our film faculty wouldn't have come across this on their own, not just that we had shown them, but that in their own education. Because, there's a different canon for different generations, and what one learns about cinema changes with each generation. There are films that are taught and there are films that are not taught. Of course every teacher varies it, but films fall out of fashion that were once canonical, and other films replace them. You can be really surprised and if you have younger colleagues, you will be amazed at what they haven't seen. They're doing your work but they're younger, another generation, and even though they have all this access, but what leads them to the access. Just because you have all these DVDs, what takes somebody to all this? That's interesting.

I was having a discussion with one of our former UC Berkeley students, who worked at PFA, went to everything she could, you know, as an usher, she saw all things. Went to graduate school in film. I met with her and she's asking me some questions and I said, well you've seen this and you've seen that. Never heard of them and I'm thinking oh, this is a lesson, because what I had assumed, in her education at Berkeley, education at Columbia, working at PFA, that she had naturally seen certain, what I thought of as canonical works. She had never heard of them, had never heard of the director.

02-01:02:36
Geritz:

Oh, interesting.

02-01:02:37
Kramer:

It's very enlightening. You cannot assume that. And then I started thinking, okay why? Is it because our education in film is too focused, is too narrowly focused, there is no real serious history first? Global history now, because so much is available to us? You go right into critical studies, theory and everything like that, and then you focused in one area, so you don't really get that full—nothing is full, but you don't really get the kind of history that I assumed people would have.

And then you might say the fashions change. Remember we used to always do these things, new Hungarian cinema, new this, I mean that notion, because we would get these national series. What do you think, how many people would recognize the Hungarian directors we grew up on?

02-01:04:02
Geritz:

Yeah, it's a good question. Even like right now, [Martin] Scorsese's doing a Polish series, and I was asking people, I was like oh my God, there's great films in here, and they were like who are these people?

02-01:04:15
Kramer:

Who are these people, exactly.

02-01:04:17

Geritz:

It was like those new Hungarian or just a few years ago, the new Romanian. You just wait five years and people won't recognize these names.

02-01:04:27

Kramer:

No, absolutely. It's quite enlightening to realize that. There is, I think, a falloff in history, in just being able to get the history, and it won't be everything, but I feel there is a real falloff, and it runs counter to the notion of access. We have enormous access but maybe too much, so why go to this area, it needs a great deal of marketing. It needs the archives and the cinemathèques to do it.

02-01:05:19

Geritz:

That's a really good point and it actually makes me wonder then, what does canon mean in this time? If you think of canon as sort of the culturally understood meaningful films of a particular period, of the history, well if they're actually not being taught and not being seen, they are canon for only certain people.

02-01:05:46

Kramer:

Right. Well of course, this has been Paolo's obsession, doing this canon series at Pordenone, and most of the films are ones that would have been in our education in film history. But every now and then he comes up with some and I say oh, what is that? He said well, I mean it was like the film I recommended Susan bring here and went to the silent film festival I think, went to Telluride, *Rotaie*. So that was the most famous silent film in Italy. We didn't know about it. That was canonical. If you were an Italian and you were studying film history, that was a film that would have been as important as any great American silent film, end of the silent period.

If we went to India, I mean what was canonical there, it would be a whole different list of films. Or China, or something like that. So you have national canons and our so called canon is largely western education. It doesn't take into consideration the east, I mean it's a very western education, western European education, and we're clearly influenced by our European film scholars, who educated American scholars in many ways. So it's kind of narrow, but even so, within the west, there's a lot of films. It's quite interesting, what people—how that evolves and what is known and not known.

So, anyway, back to the question.

02-01:07:48

Geritz:

Actually, I just had a little addendum question. Did you think of Film 50 as addressing that, or did it have a different notion for you?

02-01:07:57

Kramer:

I wanted it to. My first thought about Film 50 was being able to more formally teach film history to non-film majors. Of course the assumption was, in a way, that the film majors would get the education they needed. Incorrect

assumption, but nevertheless, they are majoring in film, that's the business of their teachers and them, and they should be coming to the archive if they really are serious students. So, I very much wanted, you might say, to democratize film history, and that it not be something only for people who were going to go into the profession, anymore than—well, it was really based on my own education, in which I took courses in music appreciation in college. I had no musical talent, I had no interest in being a musician. I took it as an elective and it was one of the most fun courses I took and I loved it, and it enhanced my listening pleasure and it enlarged my knowledge of music, and it was all to the good for me. I mean it just made my listening more meaningful and it gave me more things to listen to, and it was kind of—it was in no way complete, but it was a kind of building block for me.

I went into art history but there were people who elected art history just as a humanities course. We used to tease these students because the lights went out and you had slides and they all went to sleep, you know? At Harvard graduate school, as graduate students we had to be the TAs and do the lecturing actually, for the big, basic art history course, from cave painting to Jackson Pollock. We called it “Darkness at Noon” because the class was at noon and everybody was hungry and sleepy, and we knew when the lights went out and the slides were up, there was probably a hundred people asleep. Anyway, that was the course, but a lot of people elected it just as humanities.

Obviously, each school has its own ways of what you can take in your freshman, sophomore or junior year, you know, when can you take the most electives. You have all these required courses and probably more now, I imagine, than ever before. So I envisioned that this would be an elective, and I thought this will be seductive because what student— Oh God, I get to take—I get to get three credits, or whatever it is. Is it three credits or four credits? Three credits, and all I have to do is watch movies. And I thought, if I were an engineering student and I was working really hard, or accounting major or whatever, math major, and all the homework and heavy duty classes I have, just to be able to get credit and sit back on it. Get them in the door. All we have to do is get them in the door, then we start educating them. I saw this as calculated, this is a section to get a new audience, audience building. But also, our mission is to teach, and that's—this is a big university. We're not here just to teach people majoring in film, we're here to teach everybody. So that was my concept for why I wanted to do Film 50.

I also liked the idea that you could have certain principles of teaching and you could change the films every year. I loved that idea, so in a sense you're not learning one canon, you're learning things about the world and cinema, and every year you can have different films, but you could still be learning how to look at films. So I also thought it was an empowerment. I knew that because we were going to allow members, I knew we were going to get the senior citizens and I knew they were going to underwrite it in many ways. That was calculated. But I thought, Americans especially, who are retired or have any

kind of means and freedom of time love to go back to school, that I already knew. I knew that from teaching in UC Extension, that our adult population, as it has leisure time, they love taking courses. And I thought just apply that here and it's a public university. We have a duty to the citizenry, they're our taxpayers, so we must offer things to—it's a state university, we must offer things to the population, the general population, non-enrolled students. I believe that and I knew that I could count on the older audience eager to take a class. They're more motivated than the young people. The young people are in there for other reasons, get their credit, something that's not too difficult, they think, not going to have to work, it will be fun. The older audience is serious about wanting to educate themselves. It's something they couldn't do when they were younger and going to school. So I thought that's—that's the way I conceived it.

02-01:13:48

Geritz:

That's interesting. Going back to audience in general. Do you feel the audience for genre-based auteur based and thematic series changes over time? In other words, is there an audience for each of those types?

02-01:14:10

Kramer:

I think thematic is the most difficult, in the sense that the theme you choose might be irrelevant to the audience, I mean you have to convince them it might. But on the other hand, if you choose a theme that's political or very current issues— Didn't you do a series on torture?

02-01:14:39

Geritz:

Yes. It just packs them in, doesn't it, with a title like that?

02-01:14:44

Kramer:

Right. That is a very—right? That's not exactly a winning title, but did you get a good audience?

02-01:14:52

Geritz:

Actually, it was not excellent but it was good, surprisingly.

02-01:14:56

Kramer:

But it's a political issue. It's not that people want to see torture, but this would be an area where people are actively concerned about this subject and they might be motivated to get confirmation of their views or have a discussion. With political films, we are aware that the audience goes for affirmation very often. In other words, you don't really get much of a discussion going in terms of pro and con, because the audience comes as already sort of preconditioned to agree with the theme. So, given that sort of liberal, the left audience we have in Berkeley, often you get annoyed. They show up for anything that's political, whether the film is any good or not, and you see this at the festival. You see documentaries which are not really very well made, but the cause is just, and so everybody is applauding madly, it's a wonderful film. It's a lousy film, it's talking heads, it's simplistic, it's not analytical, it's just affirming,

and that annoys me to no end. It's not cinema, but that's, you know, it's so much of so-called TV documentary stuff.

So I think that the auteur series, when they're sort of distinguished names, has a continuing audience. Did you get a copy of Gary Meyer's email this morning?

02-01:17:06

Geritz:

Not yet. What was it on? I feel like I just read something from him.

02-01:17:11

Kramer:

Gary Meyer sent us an email.

02-01:17:13

Geritz:

It was a blog.

02-01:17:14

Kramer:

Which is somebody's blog or Twitter.

02-01:17:17

Geritz:

About the line at Satyajit Ray. Yes.

02-01:17:18

Kramer:

Right. And I thought, that's very sweet, but we know that they'll come for Satyajit Ray again and again and again and again. Now, it was nice to know that there were some twenty or thirty year-olds and not just senior citizens there. That is an example of an auteur you can go back to over and over again, and you will pick up new people because finally, this name comes into their consciousness. It may not come into it when they're teens, but eventually, by the time they're in college, they will have picked up this name somehow, without taking a film course, I think. But there would have been a time when it would have been—well, there was a time when it would be very difficult to get anybody to go to a Japanese film or an Indian film, because they weren't thinking about these countries. So, I think certain—it's again, the whole argument with, is there a place for the cinemathèque or the archive kind of screening in a digital age. Yes and no. Maybe fewer such institutions can survive and sustain themselves, but I think there is—I mean, they can get these on DVD, right? Criterion. They can see these films at home. Why did they come out to the theater? Something different about seeing it on the big screen with others, because you can easily get all of the stuff on DVD. So, something is at work there that is partial to the theater experience.

02-01:19:25

Geritz:

It seems, I'm not sure, I would like to hear what you have to think, that it hooks in more with the auteur than with genre.

02-01:19:34

Kramer:

Genre is tricky, I think. Okay, what is the most popular genre in American cinema?

02-01:19:41

Geritz: Noir.

02-01:19:42

Kramer:

Yes. I mean, I'm film noired up to here, we've run out of things to call noir and we start expanding anything that's dark, you know. Also, it effaces other genres before noir; is noir a genre? We used to do gangster film, but if you tried to do gangster, it's got to be noir. It's a fashionable word. The fact is, there's really good films to look at, but it's this broad use of the word and it will always work, it seems, because these films look good on the big screen. As Everson used to say, dark films are hard to read on television. You know? They really do need—they need the bright lights, the projection. Even if you're doing digital, they need that. They work best that way and they work great with an audience.

I know you're going to do a comedy series now. Have you started it already?

02-01:20:57

Geritz:

It just started, this last weekend.

02-01:20:58

Kramer:

Did it get an audience?

02-01:21:00

Geritz:

Steve said it's medium, like half of what's—the Ray is selling out and the comedy is a hundred, so half the audience.

02-01:21:11

Kramer:

We used to have very good experience with good comedies, whether you were doing Keaton, just Keaton, or a mixture. If we were doing screwball comedy or slapstick comedy, I mean people want to be able to laugh, the enormous release of laughter. So, as a genre, that's probably bankable, that people will come back. Different generations will laugh at—I will never be able to laugh at *Animal House*, it's just, I'm sorry. There may be a time when the archive is showing *Animal House*, I don't know. I can't laugh at it, it's not funny to me. But maybe it's a classic, I don't know, if it's contemporary comedy. I don't know.

02-01:22:06

Geritz:

I think it is. Of a certain kind of comedy, of having multiple comics improvising in a film together. It's not one comedian, it's a whole—it's what do you call that, an ensemble.

02-01:22:26

Kramer:

And there were previous ensembles, I mean earlier ensembles, and it's wonderful when it's choreographed and picks up a kind of shared idiocy that takes over. Yeah, so I think that's a good genre. The western goes in and out of fashion. The western is peculiar. I remember when it was in fashion, I remember when you could not get anybody to come to a western. Then I remember there was a revival and we did one western series and people came.

John Ford sort of stands alone, I mean he's obviously largely the western, but he's all sort of by himself. But then you get Anthony Mann, now he's noir but he's also western, so people like Anthony Mann, that's auteur, but you can also mix it with genre, or you can do a comparison. I remember doing a comparison of [Budd] Boetticher and Mann once. That's a long time ago, but people liked the comparison.

So, some genres go in and out, absolutely, and some probably will always find an audience. Screwball comedy, I think has probably sustained a very good audience, from what I see of the frequency with which these films are shown. There's certain stars you can bring back, I think. People know who Cary Grant is, people know who Robert Mitchum is. You can do more contemporary stars, obviously. Not that I'm terribly interested, but you could do [Robert] De Niro, I mean you could do somebody with a long career and see how that evolves. So, yeah, I think some come back, but there may be periods when they drop out of fashion and others when they come back in.

02-01:24:55

Geritz:

You spoke about relating to your audience, Peter Scarlet's observation about the living room. It's clear you were at shows. What role did introducing programs have for you?

02-01:25:11

Kramer:

I didn't introduce everything, but I thought introducing was an important factor to establish the initial contact, to set up the series. You kind of judged which films you ought to introduce, based on how you saw the audience. If I thought it was a tricky series, I'd introduce more. If I thought we were on a roll and it was taking care of itself and it was self-evident, I wouldn't want to disturb the audience. If it was a long series, don't abandon them for too long, get in there and pick it up, especially referring them—you know that they can't go to everything if you've got a big series, that you know. You'd like them to but you know. So, it helps them select, you know, if you say try and check out this film. If you can't see everything, try to come to this one, this will be memorable. Not that the others aren't important but, you know, figure out your schedule so that you can do that, kind of helping them navigate. Partially, it's helping them navigate, partially it's just to be friendly. It's like telling them to sit down, take off their coats, you're going to have a nice meal, and welcoming them. Mostly it's welcoming. Try to keep it short. Long introductions are not good, even if you think you have a lot to say, because they came to see the film and as soon as they start looking at their papers, get out of the way.

I know there are people who never introduce their films, and then I've been to other venues where different people introduce but all the introductions are much too long. They're very serious introductions, and I think that's fine, but it's for a classroom, not for the public. So, distinguishing what is a classroom

situation and what is general public. It's a fine line. So I've seen all different styles.

02-01:27:39

Geritz:

You mentioned you see people pulling out the program guide and that's time to move on. Did you use the program guide at all, as a way to communicate with an audience? Did you write introductions or film notes?

02-01:27:53

Kramer:

I'm a terrible writer. I always want somebody else to write for me, that's why we got Judy. In the beginning, when I went to work for Tom, he was a genius at cutting and pasting, and so I learned how to cut and paste just like him. And then it's only a few words, you know you do the transition, and it's like my God, I can cut and paste—in those days, I could cut and paste like Tom. I thought, this is amazing. And I had to edit Tom, so I often had to do the transitions, because he goes so fast with his cutting and pasting sometimes. It got a little—

02-01:28:29

Geritz:

Surreal.

02-01:28:30

Kramer:

Woops, wait a minute we've got—or I just had to cut the word count. We had this unreadable small print anyway, but you could really stuff a lot of words in there. So, by having to edit the newsletter for Tom and see how he cut and paste, and see where he essentially used a lot of quotes from other people rather than his own opinion, but then throw it in. So I kind of figured out, I can do this, and the several months in which I was on my own and there was nobody here. He had left and nobody had given me any assistance, so I was on my own and I was doing all the programming, and I was putting out the calendar and everything, then I realized I was going absolutely insane. I did three months of that, three different calendars on my own. I was multitasking like mad to do this, and so I learned how to do that. But I never trusted my own writing. I think I'm a very dull writer. I kind of have this sort of journalistic approach. So that's why I brought in Judy, because I need somebody who would listen to my concept and be able to interpret that and write both original notes, as well as of course using appropriate reviews or quotations. So I knew what I wanted a note to be; not hyperbole, not too much content, minimal content, don't tell the ending. Critical, but critical that was not too positive.

This is what I admired with Everson. I loved his introductions in which he'd start by telling you all the things that were wrong with the film. But, there's this worthy moment. I belong more to that school that there's always stuff you can pick apart in most cases, but don't pretend that this is a masterpiece, especially when you've got all those films on the calendar. You're going to write every one is a masterpiece? This is what I object to in festival programs. You read a festival program and it's like come on, this is ridiculous. This is

the best film of the year, this is the most extraordinary film of the year, this is... whatever. So, there's certain guidelines I wanted for the way a note should be written, but I never trusted my own writing. Very few times did I write the introductions, and then Judy would edit them certainly.

02-01:31:44

Geritz:

How did you feel about being a public figure?

02-01:31:49

Kramer:

I was not aware of being a public figure until way late. I didn't think of it. I thought this is really small potatoes, you know. I mean that's not a public figure, just being in a theater. I think I became aware I was a public figure once, when I went to Europe and people knew who I was by name. That astounded me, because I didn't sign things on the calendar. I didn't put my name anywhere. So I didn't know how I had become known. I'm not sure how I did become known. I don't know if other colleagues mentioned me or what. I have absolutely no idea. I was in my own little world, I had no idea that I was a public figure. I thought I was small town, small thing going on here, very local. The fact that eventually people recognize you on the street, well Berkeley is a small town, and in the beginning, I wasn't living in Berkeley, so nobody—I didn't run into people. I didn't move over to Berkeley until 1979, I guess. Yeah.

Right after Tom left, people didn't know who I was, except the avant-garde people, so they had no idea who was doing the programming when Tom left. Finally Lynda Myles arrived, so I got to know her, and then I left, and when I came back in 1983, I don't think anybody knew who I was then. When I walked into the theater in 1983, I was a new—except for a small group of people who remembered me working for Tom, they didn't know who I was. So, it was years later, I think, that I got the sense that somehow there was a name out there. Remember, because we didn't travel, most of my relationships were on the phone or in letters, then telexes, then faxes, and finally email. So, so many relationships were never face-to-face. Colleagues you never actually met.

02-01:34:35

Geritz:

That's true.

02-01:34:38

Kramer:

I'm sure there are still colleagues probably I didn't meet. Ultimately, most of them that I worked with, over time I did. It was Adrienne who connived to get me my first jury, foreign jury, and nobody knew who the heck I was on this jury. And FIAF [International Federation of Film Archives] made us known in a way, but we were known before that. We were known for our programming and people were interested, so they kept asking us, why don't we join FIAF. They just assumed we had everything else going for us, which we didn't. Yeah, so then you met all your other colleagues at FIAF.

02-01:35:38

Geritz:

I have just a couple of last questions for this interview, that are just very briefly about the institution in terms of curating, and then later, we'll go more into depth about it. What are some of the particularities to curating within the institution where you worked, inside of a museum, inside of a university, that you haven't touched on.

02-01:36:05

Kramer:

Have I touched on the bureaucracy?

02-01:36:08

Geritz:

No. [laughs]

02-01:36:11

Kramer:

I mean, once you go into an institution there's bureaucracy, but a university, I mean you're—I've been in a museum before, I understood museum bureaucracy, but nothing compared to when you're in a museum and a university. Then it's like unbelievably burdensome in terms of efficiency and getting things done and getting bills paid. Everything has to go through so much protocol and everything takes so much time, and things don't get fixed when they get broken. So, I'm not a person that enjoys bureaucracy, I'm not a good bureaucrat. I always wanted to just sort of barrel through it all, just say well, let's just do this, let's just go. I didn't want to wait, I never wanted to wait. There isn't enough time to wait. So I think I had a tendency to be a bit aggressive with the administration. I was very lucky they didn't fire me many times, because I was very outspoken and aggressive with all of my directors. I liked them actually, I got along with them. I got used to their idiosyncrasies. But I didn't like meetings and I always wanted to cut to the chase, not have meetings about meetings. It goes with my not being able to delegate very well. It's the other part of that, is that I tend to say, well let's just get this done, let's do it, kind of thing, not wait. So I don't fit very well into bureaucratic—

That's why I think in a way, I was much more creative when I was at Canyon and I could start the cinematheque and do things. It was a free period, there was no bureaucracy. And even when I was at SFMOMA, on the whole, I was left alone. You're hired part-time to do this film series, just do it, and I pretty much did what I wanted. At one point they wanted to know if they could have this committee to select films and I told them no. I'm the curator, that's it, that's the way it's going to be.

So, no, bureaucracy was—I got used to it but I was never happy with it. I think small is good. There was a time when I very much wanted to work in New York and I never was—and we talked about this—offered a job, but I remember applying to MoMA, right after I got my bachelor's degree [from the University of Michigan] and I was in art history. Every art history graduate tries to apply at MoMA, and of course, what are you going to do? You apply at MoMA. You don't know anything, you're just a student with a degree. You don't know anything about curating. But how do you start?

There's no course in it, you have to start someplace, so you start at the bottom. That's the only thing I knew, that you get in and start at the bottom. The thing is, the first thing they asked me is do I type or do shorthand, and I didn't do either, and I had to go to business school to get those skills. Then I didn't get a job at MoMA, but I sort of accidentally fell into a job at the Yale Art Gallery, and found myself being a docent and lecturing, and that was just a lucky accident.

Later on, I thought to myself, what would have happened if I had gotten a job at MoMA? The way Adrienne did, you start at the bottom and work your way up. Much later I thought, would I have been happy as a curator at MoMA, and I thought no, I don't think I would have. It would have been a luxury in many ways; the money, not the salary, I mean the money to do programs in-depth, to travel, all this, the knowledge you gain, but I don't think I would have been happy there. I think I'm a small-town, small-potatoes kind of person basically. I like a momma poppa shop. I don't want to be part of a big institution.

02-01:41:29

Geritz:

That will be interesting, in a later interview, we could go into that, because when you started at PFA, it was small, versus when you left.

02-01:41:37

Kramer:

And I think I'm certainly partially to fault, our rapid growth. I think maybe that was wrong, we shouldn't have tried to do so much. It's hard to resist it, everything. You chase money and the money makes you grow. It's complicated, as you know, and all that, but I know when we started getting those grants that have us do all these other kinds of things, I was so against it. I was so against it. I did not want to participate in those, like the Pew and whatever came before. I thought this is not our mission, we are going off mission, and although I don't like the language of mission, you know that kind of language, I understand you have to have—whatever you want to call it, you have to have a definition of what you are and who you are, and you have to adhere to that, or change it, or change that mission. I came to this because I thought there was a certain thing we wanted to be, and we grew in ways we would regret later on because it was not supportable. So, a really good manager would understand, you must not grow too fast, you must not try to be bigger than your britches. You've got to be very careful you can support whatever increment.

I remember the first, you know, Nancy Goldman, PFA's Librarian, and her wonderful idea for CineFiles and all that, and I didn't understand computers very well, but she was very articulate about it and I thought it sounds good. I said, "Are we really going to save paper and we're going to have the space?" Yes. In fact, you need the hardcopy as well, and so it's like what did we accomplish? I'm not sure I know what we accomplished. [Note: In fact, Nancy was ahead of her time, with her digitization project CineFiles, and I

wish we had had the financial support to fully realize her goals. I hope it will eventually get the support it needs.]

02-01:43:47

Geritz: I think she would say access.

02-01:43:49

Kramer: Yeah, but now— Access is good but it's sort of boundless. It's not supportable, the vision of. It unfortunately is not supportable, if you don't have the staffing, if you don't have the equipment. And everything gets obsolete. We're in an age of built-in obsolescence, wherein a previous age, when things could last, and coping with that takes a whole other kind of vision. So, yeah, I would have been better off with small. I like small and perfect, that's my goal, be small and perfect, a gem but not something oversized.

02-01:44:56

Geritz: Do you know how long you worked at PFA?

02-01:45:00

Kramer: I arrived here in January of 1975, to work for Tom. I had started working on a project he had, I had started earlier. I was teaching at UC Davis, so I wasn't going to be through until December of '74, but because he had the grant, he and Sheldon [Renan] had this grant to buy avant-garde films, and they had been sitting on the money and they had to spend the money in a very short period of time, Tom asked me if I could start working on that before I actually reported for work. So, sometime in the fall of '74, I started contacting filmmakers or making lists of what I might be able to purchase.

I actually came into the office in January of '75, stayed until April, '81. Came back January, '83. Officially retired July, 2003, that was my official anniversary, rehired at 49 percent or something like that, and actually left the building October 17, 2005. I remember I have to clear—I remember Susan arriving October 17th, everything has to be cleared out of the office, everything in order. Of all dates, it sticks in my mind because everything has to be clean, the office ready, all the files put away. I've just got to make that deadline. [laughs]

02-01:46:56

Geritz: That's so funny. I feel like you probably talked a little bit about this, but I had a question that during the years you were here, did the varying job titles you have at all suggest to you, different ways to approach your work? Was there any relationship between what you were called and how you approached what you did?

02-01:47:22

Kramer: No. They were all to me, absurd, from museum scientist or lab assistant, in the beginning, to eventually getting a curatorial title. Nothing made any sense in terms of titles. You could have called me a programmer. I never understood

actually, when I took over Lynda Myles's job, when I took that over I thought to myself, why am I a director and curator?

02-01:47:58

Geritz: Oh.

02-01:47:59

Kramer: Did it stop?

02-01:48:01

Geritz: No, it didn't. I just looked.

02-01:48:02

Kramer: I mean, I wasn't even sure why, why do I have two titles? Why am I a director and curator? I was always a little bit worried about the title director, because I knew the dangers, because there was nothing comparable on the gallery side. Right? In the, shall we say tension, that goes back to Tom and Sheldon, I saw the tension in 1975, I already knew the extreme tension that existed within the museum and even the university, as to what the archive was and what it was doing and who's in control, and so on and so forth.

There weren't clear titles then. I was Tom's assistant, whatever that was, I don't even remember what the pay title was. I'm not even sure what Tom's title was then, because I don't think he was called the curator.

02-01:49:03

Geritz: Interesting.

02-01:49:05

Kramer: I'm not even sure what Sheldon was called, I'd have to look that up. I'm not sure what they were called internally, as opposed to university. So, knowing these tensions, you know up upstairs, downstairs kind of situation. It was very much an upstairs, downstairs. I was not concerned about title. I was concerned only to have a department that ran well, that did good things, and my feeling was, if the department runs well, then the museum will be happy, it can only be a plus. That was my argument to the successive directors, was if we do our job well, we will not be a burden on you. You will be able to celebrate that, that's part of the museum, and you can point to a functioning department. So it was sort of my psychological way of saying to them don't worry, don't feel there's a problem, unless we're not doing our job right. If we're not doing our job, tell us immediately, but if we're doing our job well then be happy. It's one less burden for you.

I became good friends with Jim Elliott, and although he wasn't particularly interested in film, he'd joke a little bit, called us what, PSA? The airline. Still, he was respectful, he was very respectful. I think was it Jackie, who gave me the title of curator? I don't know. I might have become a curator finally, under Jackie Baas, because I was fighting for parity in salaries, I mean the endless fight within the museum, trying to get people to be—the endless fight,

reclassification of people and parity. I think it was Jackie who realized that there was no parity in my salary, with the gallery side, so I think she made me a curator. I think that's when I got, I don't know what, I was assistant curator or associate curator, went through that.

Yeah, so the titles didn't matter to me. What mattered to me that I was responsible for this unit and therefore the unit had to perform well in order to be accepted within the museum. That was the way I saw it and I didn't give a damn what my title was. And I do think it presented a problem, to be director and curator, that people confused... thought "director," that must be the director of the museum. There was confusion and I knew that was bad, very bad. So, if they had taken away director and just said you're senior curator, but this is your bailiwick, fine. Or chief curator of film. Most other places, you don't have a director, when you have an archive within a larger institution. It's not usually director of the archive. It's senior curator, chief curator, something like that.

02-01:53:20

Geritz:

Great. So, I think that we'll stop there, and the next section, I'm still working a little on.

Interview 3: March 13, 2014

03-00:00:04

Geritz: So let's see, today is Thursday, March 13th maybe?

03-00:00:15

Kramer: Thirteenth. I think it's the thirteenth, yes.

03-00:00:17

Geritz: Edith and I are in the small screening room, resuming our discussion. I think I mentioned to you that Garbiñe [Ortega] had hoped to be here for this interview, and so she also sent a few questions. A couple of the ones she had related to some of the things we talked about earlier, so I'm going to just throw those in first.

You know how we talked about the background of how you got involved in curating, with your dad's home movies and all? She also wondered, were there any people involved with film in your own circle?

03-00:00:57

Kramer: At what time?

03-00:01:59

Geritz: Say, when you were sort of trying to decide what to do with your life.

03-00:01:03

Kramer: I'm still trying to decide. [laughter]

03-00:01:06

Geritz: At any point going back and up until when you started teaching film.

03-00:01:14

Kramer: No, I don't think so. I don't recall having made the acquaintance of or known anybody involved in any way. I don't think so. I hadn't met any writers or certainly not any filmmakers. I hadn't met any curators at the time. Yeah, no, there was—what I do recall as being significant, I think to some choices I made at the time, was that when I was in graduate school, in art history at Harvard, so that would be the late fifties, my colleagues in that class consisted of at least three others, one of them being Henry Geldzahler. I already knew Henry from a job I had had as a docent, at the Yale Art Gallery, when he was an undergraduate at Yale. I had helped him with some paper he was writing. I can't remember exactly why or what, but somehow, probably in an editorial sense, not knowledge or something like that.

I don't know if at that moment when I first met him at Yale, he had expressed his interest in film, but by the time I got to Harvard, where he was in the PhD program, he had been there before I got there, he and these two other guys, they were very interested in film, and finding some way to include film studies, film history really, in art history. We were like minded and we were the gang who went to the Brattle Theater and sort of soaked up all the foreign

and classic films that they were showing in their repertoire, as well as any contemporary things. It was that exposure to foreign cinema that was so important for our generation, postwar, and also re-looking at the films that would have been current in our youth, that we might have—we'd forgotten, you know, going back into film noir and things like that.

So that's, I think the first time, I was conscious that there were others trying to figure out, is there something we could do with film, and the logic was, since we were art history students, it belonged in the discipline of art history, especially since we were all interested in contemporary art history, which at that time was defined anything from impressionism to Jackson Pollock. That was sort of what you covered at that point. Those would be the only people I came in touch with before I made that detour.

03-00:05:02

Geritz:

It's funny, that thing that you found out later, that Tom Luddy had actually been from the same area you were.

03-00:05:09

Kramer:

Right. And he had gone to work for Brandon, Tom Brandon, in his youth, and Tom Brandon was not far from where we lived, Tom and I lived. Was he in Mamaroneck or Rye, or something like that, somewhere around there, that was where Tom Brandon lived. But Tom was ten years younger, so there's a time difference there in terms of when he goes to work for Tom Brandon, Tom goes to work for him, and I had already left. But yeah, I must have seen—There are some peculiar, isolated memories that I cannot pin down, like recognition things, of having seen some film someplace, that wouldn't have been in the regular theaters that I frequented, so it meant I must have seen some films at MoMA, in their film series, some classic films, but I cannot pin a date or anything like that. But they made an impression that had nothing to do with people. It was something that I picked up on later, when these memories came back, you know?

03-00:06:38:

Geritz:

Mm-hmm, without fully remembering how it was that you were there, at MoMA.

03-00:06:41

Kramer:

Yeah. It's just like I try to track how would I have seen this film in my youth. It certainly did not play in White Plains. It did not play in a commercial theater, so I had to have seen it at a museum or something. It wouldn't have played in school, they would not have shown this in school. We got educational films, we did not get cinema. All I can think of is I must have gone to the Museum of Modern Art and seen some films there. It was *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and some other German expressionist films, I know I saw.

03-00:07:19

Geritz: Yeah. And the fact that there's more than one suggests too, that it's a series.

03-00:07:27

Kramer: But they also had those in their circulating collection, do you remember?

03-00:07:30

Geritz: That's right, yeah. They had the whole German expressionist little section.

03-00:07:32

Kramer: That German stuff, and that's sort of what I recall, but I can't pin that down to when, but I know it made a huge impression.

03-00:07:46

Geritz: I wonder if MoMA programmed the same way then, at that period, where they had screenings in the day.

03-00:07:54

Kramer: Oh, yeah, they had screenings in the day. It would have been in the daytime. I wouldn't have gone to MoMA at night, as a young person. It would have been daytime.

03-00:08:06

Geritz: Another thing she wanted to ask is did you realize you were creating or shaping a new profession as you were working in the field of curating?

03-00:08:21

Kramer: Not really. There were so many people doing different—sort of changing courses in their life at that time. There were so many people trying to find interesting things to do, just sort of following what their interests were, that sense of oh, if you're interested in this, pursue it, that possibility. I would say that was perhaps the most interesting thing about that period, the sense that it was okay to just follow your interests and to fail, you know that was okay too. If it didn't work out, no big deal.

So I think I didn't necessarily think it would be something that would last or that would last for me. I was exploring. I was experimenting with my own life and I didn't know where it would take me. I always say, I think I just sort of fell into jobs, you know I didn't really apply for things. I just sort of fell into things. I did something and somebody would call me up and say, would you do this, and so I'd say oh why not, and that's the way it went.

03-00:09:45

Geritz: Did you ever end up with a resume?

03-00:09:48

Kramer: No. I'm trying to think of the first time I ever did a resume. I had no resumes, nobody ever asked me for one. I probably didn't have a resume— Maybe for my part-time teaching at UC Extension. I must have had to submit something, you know.

03-00:10:14
Geritz: And probably for some grants.

03-00:10:17
Kramer: There were no grants.

03-00:10:19
Geritz: Oh. [laughter]

03-00:10:22
Kramer: My dear, we don't do grants.

03-00:10:23
Geritz: I forgot.

03-00:10:35
Kramer: I actually remember when they first started offering grants to filmmakers. I was working for Canyon Cinema. I think it was the AFI [American Film Institute] announced that they were going to do this, and Stan Brakhage was outraged and he said, We must not compromise, we must not go for these grants. Be suspicious. I'm paraphrasing, I forget exactly his words, but he went on this whole thing that, you know, we would lose our independence, we would lose our integrity, that once you take money from the government or any organization, they own you. That was the late sixties.

03-00:11:00
Geritz: Yeah. So, Canyon was not functioning with grants, oh, okay.

03-00:11:04
Kramer: No. I'm trying to think when the first film grants came in. Were they in the seventies? It must have been in the seventies.

03-00:11:10
Geritz: Maybe the NEA/AFI thing.

03-00:11:13
Kramer: I just remember the AFI. Maybe they were, but I think it must be, there were the individual film grants, but I think it must have been in the seventies, early seventies.

03-00:11:22
Geritz: I'll have to look at that, yeah, yeah. Because yeah, the whole time I've been involved there's been grants.

03-00:11:28
Kramer: Yeah, no we didn't have grants.

03-00:11:34
Geritz: Maybe it was a little bit like Tom Luddy's early days here, you're sort of just working with a little bit of magic and energy.

03-00:11:45

Kramer:

A lot of volunteerism. Probably, there were nice people who maybe just helped us with donations, I suspect, but I don't remember exactly. Professional people donated services, like lawyers, accountants and things like that. There was a kind of volunteerism of people who had skills volunteered to do things in the art world. People offered space at a ridiculously low rental, use this space. It was often shared space, it was part of somebody else's space, an extra room or something like that. Didn't write grants, didn't have to have a resume.

03-00:12:50

Geritz:

The next section that we want to ask you about is kind of going more in detail about the practical, or the step-by-step of curating. We talked a little bit more about the ideas about it before. I'll start with a couple of questions that Garbiñe had. What are a few ideas a curator should have in mind when planning—and there's three different ones, so I'll say what the three are and then go back—a thematic series, presenting new films, and experimental cinema. What are three ideas a curator should have in mind when planning a thematic series?

03-00:13:39

Kramer:

Well, you have to think about how do you come up with a theme. You have to question, what's the concept, is the theme interesting to you? It has to be really interesting and challenging to you, for you to pull something together. I don't think you go looking for a theme, I think it comes to you. I think if you try to look for a theme in that conscious way, it will be hard. I think it's inspiration in a way, I mean that's sort of the part of programming, that you suddenly get this notion and then you have to test it out, explore it, and see, is it substantial enough, can you do something with this, in terms of wherever you're programming. Different places, different strokes.

Obviously, there are some themes that aren't based on inspiration, like you could do an international series. You could say that new Iranian cinema is a theme, but it's not really, that's not anything particularly creative, that's something belonging to the time and place, and something becomes available, usually it's more like a touring thing. Although, when I did that big Arab series, that was not immediately available. That was a theme that had been sort of percolating for a while and thinking there's enough there, I should pull something together. Is there something really happening that's fresh, and we need to pull this together, but you also need to go back and look at its predecessor. So, that sort of thing, but that sort of percolated for a couple years, I think, as I watched what was happening.

So I think the most important thing in terms of thematic, is that an idea has to come to you and then you have to kind of research it and test it to see if this is the time. Sometimes things take some time to develop. It may not be the moment, but you put it in the back of your mind and you see if other things sort of come to you that fit into that, and then you might slightly change the

way you initially thought of the theme, because as other things come to you. It's that theme but it might branch off somewhere and you realize, I'm going to take this angle as opposed to that. I think you focus it. That, to me, is important in thematic.

As we talked about before, all these different things can prompt you. Your reading, what's going on around you. It could be politics, events, it could be something local. It could be you happened to watch certain films and suddenly something, that comparison that you automatically do with films, this reminds me of this, which reminds me of this, which reminds me of that. Suddenly says oh, there's something that links these, and it could be playful, serious but playful. So, yeah, I think that would be. And the next one was?

03-00:17:28

Geritz:

Contemporary films.

03-00:17:30

Kramer:

Contemporary films, that's probably a no-brainer, because on the one hand it's what you have access to and what isn't being shown already in your area, so what you feel people need to know about. Something is going on someplace and nobody else is doing anything with it, so it's your responsibility to introduce it. Of course my time is pre-digital, so I do not regret having to deal with what you guys have to deal with now, because the sheer quantity of stuff you would have to preview to keep up with contemporary. Our choices were limited, because we were not going to be swamped with unsolicited—we got some unsolicited but we certainly didn't have the preview possibilities, so we were not going to be overwhelmed by the productivity of the world and everybody calling themselves a filmmaker when they pick up a video camera. It was far more limited then because we were dealing with motion picture film; whether it was small gauge or large gauge, it was still a much more limited pool.

Also, clearly, for political reasons, we didn't have as much access to films from certain countries and when we did, that was exciting. That was a challenge, to get access. So to get contemporary cinema from, say Hungary, or contemporary cinema from any country within the Soviet Union, or from China, that was exciting, because this was not territory that we could easily cover. You had to grab at any opportunity that meant those films would be made available, in terms of what was going on. So, the times, what was happening in the world, influenced that, I think.

Then, if you include, within the contemporary, your so-called experimental avant-garde, in a way, our response was partially dictated by where we were located, I mean the fact that we were in the Bay Area, and that was such—It would be the same for people in New York, in the Bay Area. If we had been located in Iowa City, there's nothing wrong with Iowa City, but we would not have had that community of filmmakers. We might have brought things from

other parts, but here we were, sitting on this amazing amount of activity. The archive itself was influenced by that in its founding. So, it's a responsibility.

And you had group shows, because most filmmakers didn't have that many films, and then as certain filmmakers ended up with an hour's worth of film, you know? And when you're doing short films, that takes a while to get that many films, then you could do one person shows, but most of the time you had to combine films to get what was considered a sizeable number of films or running time. And of course that's arbitrary, when you think back on that. Why did we have to do it that way? It was dictated by the theatrical running time, wasn't it? It still is. People still think, in order to charge admission for a show, you have to have at least seventy, to eighty, to ninety minutes of film. You 'd like to get away from that. I mean if a filmmaker has three films to their body of work and those three films are wonderful and you want to show them, and the running time is forty-five minutes, why couldn't you do a forty-five minute show? I always thought, why do we have to do seventy minutes or ninety minutes? We're kind of stuck with that programming slot, and I think it's detrimental in some ways.

03-00:22:28

Geritz:

Yeah, if you think of—I mean, we used to talk a lot about animators.

03-00:22:32

Kramer:

Oh, God, yes.

03-00:22:33

Geritz:

So, I'm doing three animation programs this summer. The shows are all between thirty and forty-five minutes.

03-00:22:40

Kramer:

Perfect.

03-00:22:40

Geritz:

They're going to talk about the process and it will be what it is.

03-00:22:44

Kramer:

And as you know, if you have very short films, you exhaust the viewer with too many short films in a program, because then it all sort of runs together and they can't remember which film is which, and so on and so forth. I think, you know, we should have gotten away from that time definition a long time ago. We should not have been bound by the theatrical format. Festivals find themselves bound by that too and I think it's detrimental to the films.

03-00:23:26

Geritz:

Interesting. You mentioned, you know, the artist, in relationship to short films, but when we go back to the notion of contemporary, there also would be the focus on a contemporary artist, where we weren't having the person at all. We were just bringing forward their films.

03-00:23:45

Kramer: Right.

03-00:23:46

Geritz: And then there would be ones where actually it was also to bring the artist.

03-00:23:51

Kramer: Okay, if you don't have the artist, you may be combining films by different artists into a series. You can do retrospectives without the artist. If you don't have the money to bring the artist. I mean that was always a big difference between us, say, and MoMA, because MoMA generally wanted to not only bring the artist, they'd bring a whole group of people, something like that. That was very expensive, and then they would have to be socializing, there would have to be parties and entertainment, hotels, all this sort of stuff you know. So if you don't have the budget, you don't even worry about bringing—shall we say not essential. The important thing is to show the films.

In the beginning, Tom was very big on bringing the artist, but you know, it was also a time when artists were traveling and they weren't necessarily getting money to come here. In other words, very often their countries or some other thing was paying. I mean not that Tom didn't also pay to bring people, but a lot of people came without the financial burden that came later, of trying to do that. I think the eagerness of east coast artists wanted to travel to the west, foreign artists wanted to come to the U.S. I mean, a lot of things changed as the years went by, so we reaped the benefit of people wanting to travel for their films.

03-00:25:52

Geritz: I wonder, I mean maybe it's a question for Tom but maybe you know. It was also a time when it was hard to see films. There wasn't a VHS and DVD.

03-00:26:01

Kramer: That's right.

03-00:26:02

Geritz: And so I wonder if filmmakers were also traveling, like some of the European ones like Herzog, et cetera, wanting to see films that were in the archive.

03-00:26:12

Kramer: Most of the filmmakers who visited us wanted to see, if not what was in the archive, they wanted to see what was playing in the theaters. Especially filmmakers who came from Cold War, I mean countries that are adversaries in the Cold War. They were dying to see contemporary American films, and by contemporary, that included a lot. They also wanted to see porno, I mean whatever was forbidden.

I do remember, you know, filmmakers spending a lot of time in our—since the Bay Area offered porn houses, it was one of our contributions to contemporary cinema. We had two major producers in San Francisco and they

wanted to see those. But also, they were so—the American films they got to see, if they got to see any of them, were things like prewar, you know, in many cases prewar films. So yes, they really wanted to see American cinema, whether it was Hollywood or experimental. They wanted to know what we were doing because they were cut off from that. So, it was like a cultural exchange. We got to see theirs, they got to see our stuff.

For the German filmmakers, they had been cut off by the war. They were a postwar generation, so they wanted to see. The Japanese filmmakers too, cut off.

03-00:28:09

Geritz:

Yeah, of course. Just one follow-up question in terms of showing contemporary film. At some point you created the Theater Near You series, which is yet another way to think of presenting contemporary film.

03-00:28:25

Kramer:

That came much later. When did we start that?

03-00:28:27

Geritz:

Gosh, very—

03-00:28:29

Kramer:

Nineties?

03-00:28:30

Geritz:

That's what I was going to just guess. [Note: this occasional series started in May 2005.]

03-00:28:34

Kramer:

I think that was a response to the closing of the repertory theaters. When we were programming before that, there was the UC Theater. We had, shall we say, competition. So, if certain things were going to show there, well then we should do something different. Sometimes unavoidably, we were doing parallel series or something overlapped. I used to say what was our bread and butter became their bread and butter. Then you let them do it, you know?

If you look at the early calendars with Tom, the amount of noir we showed, right? Well, then you end up with a noir film festival, an annual SF noir film festival that's successful. This was like our baby. It was our bread and butter for many, many years.

But anyway, then the actual theaters that could play repertory began to diminish. They ran into problems and you suddenly realized that there were films that were actually more or less contemporary, or they were available as new prints of classic films, and that they might not play in your local theaters. It might not be anybody would play them. So we could fill a void by saying okay, we're the theater, we're now the repertory theater. So the notion that that now becomes our responsibility and why not? Now, we weren't giving

theatrical runs, that's the difference. If we had had two theaters, that's what we could have done. I knew that right away, that at that time, if we had had a second theater, that would have been the smart thing. We could have done a Film Forum, you know. We could have taken a lot of those films and just played it for a week, even for a weekend, because otherwise, they just came and went.

03-00:31:00

Geritz:

What do you think about the way film series are programmed today?

03-00:31:04

Kramer:

I'm not really keeping up, Kathy. There was a while, the first few years after I was retired, I was still reading everybody's programs, and then I just sort of stopped. I'm not so sure I know what people are doing. I read our calendar and I'm glad to see the diversity and I'm glad to see it's rich with classic, as well as new films. Occasionally, I look at what MoMA is doing, because they still do these enormous series, and often things that were done years ago, but the knowledge that you have to keep going back and redoing, whether it's [Pier Paolo] Pasolini for the umpteenth time, or German cinema, the Weimar Republic, or whatever, because there are young people who don't know it. That's the wonderful thing about programming, because you're always going to have another audience. The old audience will die and you have to reach out to young audience, who have had no opportunity to see these films. Yes, they could be available on Netflix or they could be available on DVDs, but what makes them choose those films? Why would they select older films if they have no encouragement? They would more naturally go to modern films, to see what they might have missed in the theater. They aren't necessarily going to go and look at Orson Welles. It always amazed me how many people have not seen *Citizen Kane*. So you can no longer assume people have seen anything that was a kind of staple of film history.

Back to the question. Did I miss it?

03-00:33:21

Geritz:

No, no, just what you thought of how series are programmed.

03-00:33:23

Kramer:

Yeah, so I'm not a good judge. I'm always glad, if I do come across a program, I'm glad to see it's diverse. I'm glad to see it keeps the earlier films coming, as well as contemporary films that might not get their due. Occasionally, I've looked at Film Society, the Lincoln Center. I don't know, I just sort of thought well, I'm out of this world.

03-00:34:00

Geritz:

Related was, how do you think about how experimental cinema is programmed. You mentioned a little bit about the time slot. Part of the reason Garbiñe and I ask is she did that Vogel series, Amos Vogel, and so in interviews with Amos Vogel, he talked about the way he presented

experimental cinema was a mixture of shorts. And then there was a split and the Jonas Mekas people thought it should be focused just on experimental and on the filmmaker, and in Vogel's time, there was never an artist in person, and Mekas's—

03-00:34:46

Kramer:

Was there never an artist in person with Vogel? I was trying to think, there might have been some New York people or something.

03-00:34:53

Geritz:

In an interview that he did with Scott McDonald, he said we just didn't think that way. And what was really interesting is you know where their energy went, was to engage writers to write about the work, to give a take through the written, rather than through the filmmaker in person.

03-00:35:10

Kramer:

That's very interesting, I didn't realize that. I just sort of assumed that—I mean he went back in time, the artist wouldn't be around, you know his mixture, but there were New Yorkers working. I do like the way he programmed, because I think the thing I liked was that the concept of experimental wasn't narrow. I don't really like the word experimental. I mean, I know we use it at a certain time, but I think it doesn't quite work. It suggests a very narrow kind of view. And avant-garde, I mean all these terms get stale, that's the problem. Remember all the years, trying to figure out another term for it, and then that gets meaningless. So, whatever.

What I like to see, mix documentary in with narrative, so there was not this break between them, and I think what determined his programming was an aesthetic consideration. He was very strong about formal. He wasn't bound to storytelling. There was interesting content when it was important content, it was there, but it always had to have a formal thing, so his approach to documentary was not just issue related. So I think that Amos was a programmer of the art of cinema, however it was manifested, at any time, and that's how he could mix it all up, and I like that, I really like that. Now that you tell me that he didn't consider inviting filmmakers, well that gave him a certain freedom didn't it?

03-00:37:28

Geritz:

Good point.

03-00:37:29

Kramer:

It does. I mean with all due respect to filmmakers, they can restrict you. I'll never forget, you know certain filmmakers, I won't name them, who, at a certain point in my programming said, I don't want to show with anybody else. And not necessarily because they had seventy minutes of work. No. They just did not want anybody to see anybody else's films next to theirs. It's a kind of selfish thing, but I try to put myself in their way, and I think well, in their struggle for recognition, but it's also very difficult for the programmer. You

end up with not necessarily the program you'd most like to do. It doesn't necessarily fit your construction of a program. So once you get into the one person shows and the artists in person, very often even, even working closely with the artist, thinking that they would be sensitive to how their films worked together, I don't agree. I often have disagreements with the filmmakers in terms of what film goes next to another film, that I think that they see it differently than the programmer. Is one better than the other? No, I can't say, but I think sometimes a little distance is helpful, that the programmer might have. Maybe the programmer is a little bit more tuned to the audience and how to lead an audience, and the filmmaker sometimes takes an antagonistic or adversarial relationship with the audience; I'm going to show them, they have to understand this, they have to respond, and if they don't they're dumb. I mean, I've seen that and sensed that kind of resistance

On the other hand, other filmmakers are very generous and can help an audience understand their films. So, depending on the filmmaker, how that works. I think having some distance is good in programming.

03-00:39:56

Geritz:

Going back to doing series, well even individual programs if it's a shorts program, in terms of titling a program or a series, what was important to you?

03-00:40:10

Kramer:

When I was doing something, I usually had to rely on Judy to come up with a good title. I would have these very—she says, "What do we call this?" I said well—and I'd have this dull title. I said I know it's not catchy but that's what it is, okay? Now we'll work from there. That's essentially what it is. But the nice thing about working with somebody like Judy was that I would have to sit down and talk to her about what I was thinking with the series, so I had to go through that process. I couldn't just say we're showing this, this and this, and that's a series. I would have to say why I put it together and what I was thinking, and then she was very good at trying to find something fun. And then of course, I said, you know, how many times do we have to say New French Cinema? It's like the annual series or the every two years, you know, I'd say God, this is boring. Do we have to use the word "new"?

03-00:41:11

Geritz:

Renew.

03-00:41:12

Kramer:

Again? French cinema again? Here we go again, because these were these touring packages and they were new in the sense that they're within three years, two or three years, and it was from that country. I hated those titles, framing, and you wanted to—those were boring, boring titles, but people understood what they're coming to. And two, that I became very aware, when I was doing that project here, working on correcting the database. I started to laugh when I came across titles to some series because I thought, how in the world would anybody know what we were doing, because when you read

back, when you go back in history, you see some kind of title and you think, well at the time that was great, but you're reading it now and think... If you just saw that title, you wouldn't know what the hell they were doing.

03-00:42:17

Geritz: In other words, the title was humorous or poetic?

03-00:42:20

Kramer: Yeah, and if you didn't have the series in front of you, and the article, you didn't know what... So you have to think, how does history read this, you know how does it work over time. At the moment it might be great, but it might not endure. I think, why in heavens name did they use that? So, there are things that work at the time and they don't necessarily work later.

But yeah, you end up with a lot of boring titles. It's with the more creative thematic ones, that you can be more playful with the titles, I think. I know with the avant-garde, when you have a group show it's tricky, really tricky, coming up with something that pulls together all the films. That's really hard and again, I think probably over time, that might not mean very much.

03-00:43:28

Geritz: It's interesting that you say that. I never think of posterity with a title. I think of audience.

03-00:43:34

Kramer: Right, that's why we do it, yes. It's the audience now. You're trying to grab the attention of an audience, and much of your program has to deal with that. You've got to get butts in the seats, now. It's not how people will read this ten years from now. In fact, they won't even care whether anybody came or not. It's history.

03-00:44:00

Geritz: And it's kind of fun. It's just a fun thing to be thinking about, when you're doing the dishes or something. I mean, I still do rely on people like Judy and Steve, because they're so clever with words, but it's still, it's a fun thing to be thinking about.

03-00:44:13

Kramer: Oh, yes. It's being witty and playful, and it's also, I think it helps to sharpen the way you look at things in comparison, if you can find these points that are shared identities.

03-00:44:40

Geritz: Absolutely, yeah.

03-00:44:41

Kramer: Helps with your introduction to a group of films, how you talk to the audience about it, what they might be looking for, among other things.

- 03-00:44:57
Geritz: In the sort of notion of the step-by-step, what was a regular week at the PFA like before the Internet era?
- 03-00:45:05
Kramer: A regular week before the Internet, well I'm before the Internet.
- 03-00:45:07
Geritz: Or a day. Right, but you were also here after.
- 03-00:45:11
Kramer: Yeah, but I wasn't really—we weren't using it that much were we, when I was here? I can't remember.
- 03-00:45:19
Geritz: Well, of course we ended up with a database.
- 03-00:45:22
Kramer: Well, the database, yeah.
- 03-00:45:25
Geritz: And it's email versus a phone call.
- 03-00:45:27
Kramer: I'm trying to think. Suddenly I was using a computer and had to do email, and we looked up things. For a long time, I didn't use our—I went to the library. I liked going to the library and looking up things. I didn't go online. Nancy keeps saying, "Go online, go online." I was like really slow to do that.
- 03-00:45:50
Geritz: So when you say looking up things, you mean books and our film titles files?
- 03-00:45:59
Kramer: Past programs and things like that. I just went and looked in the files.
- 03-00:46:05
Geritz: Catalogs.
- 03-00:46:07
Kramer: Catalogs and things like that, yeah. It took me a while to use the Internet as a programming aid or research aid. I really felt more comfortable going to the library. Hardcopy, working with hardcopy. I did that really more than using the Internet. I was late in terms of using the Internet.
- So what was the question again?
- 03-00:46:40
Geritz: What was either a day or a week—I think you could just say a day—like, before the Internet.

03-00:46:47

Kramer:

We spent a lot of time reading magazines, skimming them, not reading them. There wasn't a night I didn't go home with magazines or journals or things like that, to skim. Whether it was the *Times* and *Variety* and the *Village Voice* and *Sight and Sound* and *Film Comment*. There was just endless, endless. I just remember taking these bagfuls of things and having to skim through that every night, to try to keep abreast or to know what people were writing, what books were now out, or something like that. I never had the time to read anything straight through. Maybe some things would catch my eye and I'd read that straight through, but it was just like trying to keep up with that. So, you weren't going on the Internet to do this. You had always hardcopy.

I don't know, I'll ask you. I remember reading reviews, an enormous amount of review reading. Do you read reviews of international cinema on a daily basis?

03-00:48:07

Geritz:

Not like before, because I don't know if you know how much *Variety* has changed.

03-00:48:11

Kramer:

I do.

03-00:48:12

Geritz:

Yeah, so like *Variety* was a huge source for it.

03-00:48:14

Kramer:

And the *Times* changed, the *Times* has changed, the *Village Voice* has changed.

03-00:48:19

Geritz:

Exactly. So I actually start much more with other people's programs and certain journals, and then I'm finding out oh, a new print was made of this, or somebody's bringing attention to a filmmaker I don't know, and then I start researching. So it's still a similar starting point in that I get all the stuff I get that day and I go through it, and then I start researching from it. But it's not so much review based any more.

03-00:48:48

Kramer:

So, I read a lot of reviews from festivals. All the festival catalogues that—festivals, I thought were significant.

03-00:48:59

Geritz:

Absolutely.

03-00:49:00

Kramer:

You select. But there were a lot of—I mean, we're talking internationally, so there were festivals in different countries that you had to keep up with. It's like you read... I'm trying to remember them. Cannes and Berlin and Rotterdam were these huge things, overwhelming, but there were all these

specialized festivals that you read. I remember the delight when *DOX Magazine* came across my desk and I thought oh my God, these are reviews about documentaries that I've never heard of before. Where are these things showing? That was just hugely useful.

So, a lot of reviews, and knowing how to read—you had to learn how to read a review. If it was in a certain magazine, what the angle would be and what they wouldn't talk about, as opposed to what they would talk about, and how to get another angle, and when you saw something that was anything, you started calling colleagues saying, have you seen this, have you heard about this, any other information you gathered. A lot of talking to colleagues in different places and sharing things like that.

How ever I used the Internet when I finally started using it, never with that intensity of reading as I did then. And now, I don't trust Internet reviews. It's like blogging. It's just so much—there's so little analysis.

03-00:51:03

Geritz:

And then certain views cluster and they just get repeated.

03-00:51:11

Kramer:

My tendency now, if I go on to do any research, is to look for some obscure, more specialized magazine and a certain author who might be writing.

03-00:51:31

Geritz:

What about, okay, you've chatted with your colleagues, you decide on some films, and now you need to book them. So of course now, we send an email, et cetera.

03-00:51:39

Kramer:

You've got to find it.

03-00:51:40

Geritz:

What was the work that you did once you were—if it wasn't a tour.

03-00:51:46

Kramer:

Well, finding usable prints, especially if we're talking 35mm. So, it was still a time when you had access to the studios and through FIAF, other archives. So it's tracking down who has a print and who has the rights. It was an enormous amount of time in making—in fact, in your planning stage of say a series, you might, before you went ahead, first have to do initial research. Can I get a critical mass of work to show, because I can't do this series if I can't find the work. So before you go for it and say I'm going to do this series, you've got to know, I can get at least ten films, you know, because if you don't have enough films, the whole theme isn't going to work. So there's a lot of time spent locating prints. And then, can you afford them. Who's going to charge what and what is it going to mean budget wise? Are you going to be able to rob Peter to pay Paul. If you're going to have to pay \$500 for this film, are there enough films for 150 or 200? Is it going to work out, is the \$500 film, you're

going to show twice, or whatever. And then you have, how many films are you going to have to bring in from outside the country and what are the shipping expenses for that.

Then, okay, this is going to cost you a lot. Is there anybody you can share this with? Then you start calling colleagues and you have to convince them that maybe they'd like to do, if not the whole series, a part of it, maybe there's one film they'd like, because no one's shown this film, you know? And wouldn't they just like to show Oliveira's *Satin Slipper* for three hours or four hours of the show? I mean, it's not going to be showing, you know? And you do all of that, so negotiations and phone, a lot of phone. I spent more time on the phone than on email, because you called people.

03-00:53:58

Geritz:

And what if you needed to call Europe?

03-00:54:00

Kramer:

I called them at night, from home. I did. One o'clock in the morning, I'm calling London or France. I made a lot of international calls, because Europeans didn't answer their faxes.

03-00:54:14

Geritz:

That great invention.

03-00:54:15

Kramer:

They turned off their machines at night in France. Five o'clock, they went home, they turned off their fax machines, it was ridiculous. [laughs] No, I mean, I think they were always surprised, because we work differently in the United States. We're [snaps fingers]—we tend to respond instantly. It's a work ethic of Americans, or at least it was then, I assume it still is, but we're workaholics to some extent and we don't work eight hour days with lots of breaks, and we work weekends. We were accustomed to disregarding the hours of the day and the days of the week and we just, if we had something to finish, we'd just work seven days, night, day, whatever, to get this to work, this series to work. There's always a deadline. So we just called all over the world. If people had responded to faxes and then later to emails, in an immediate way, we wouldn't have had to, but they didn't. Even Americans didn't necessarily always respond when you wanted them to. The notion of a fax or email was to be instantaneous communication. It wasn't supposed to sit there like a letter. The whole idea was you could respond. Now of course people are overwhelmed with emails and even though it would be very easy to hit reply, you have so many, right? We didn't have that many in the beginning, I mean we weren't overwhelmed with it during my time. It seemed like you got a lot of emails but nothing compared to what it is now.

03-00:56:30

Geritz:

During that week, how would you stay in contact with your staff?

03-00:56:39

Kramer:

Well, we saw each other, we had meetings, not that the meetings weren't always successful in terms of, I think everybody resented meetings as intruding upon their work time, everybody was so busy. So I was aware that meetings are supposed to be good ways to bring everything together and it was actually everybody sort of was too busy to have their meetings and just wanted to get them over with. And then I of course had to go to meetings with staff of the museum at different levels. So if you want to say how your week went, it also was interrupted constantly by the meetings with different levels of the museum administration, with other colleagues. We had such a different deadline mechanism than the gallery side, our constant turnover was so demanding on the amount of hours we had to work.

03-00:57:54

Geritz:

Yeah.

03-00:57:56

Kramer:

So I always felt like in a way, the easiest communication was one-on-one, going from office to office, or people coming in to see me, that it was like trying to keep up with individuals as to where they were, based on what they did.

03-00:58:16

Geritz:

As opposed to a group meeting, a staff meeting.

03-00:58:19

Kramer:

I never managed—I'm not a good—I don't conduct good meetings. I never could manage—to this day, I don't know how you have a really good meeting. I never learned it. I never thought it was viable. The corporate concept of meetings doesn't—I didn't—it was interruption. It always felt it was an interruption and people were resentful of that interruption of time. Maybe if things were more relaxed and they weren't always under pressure, they would come to the meetings full of fresh ideas and feeling like they could spend time working on something. It seems like as the years went by, there were many more museum meetings. In the beginning there weren't so many, but as we went into the Internet age, I would say that on every level, whether it was fundraising, administration, publicity, everything seemed to get more corporate, and I'm not a good corporate person. I work better in a smaller kind of organization. I don't think I fit very well in the whole contemporary hierarchical structure. That didn't suit me very well, so I didn't function very well there.

03-01:00:19

Geritz:

Not about meetings, but just about the booking and all that, this morning I was thinking, before the computer, I guess there was a lot we did by hand and on the typewriter. We have those binders when we booked a film, and then our confirmations were Xeroxed, and then we typed in the title and mailed it off.

03-01:00:40

Kramer: Right.

03-01:00:41

Geritz: And then I was trying to even remember the calendar boxes. I think they were handwritten and then we'd erase.

03-01:00:49

Kramer: Remember we had those big calendars on the wall?

03-01:00:52

Geritz: Oh, yeah. I was trying to remember.

03-01:00:54

Kramer: It was very mechanical. It was very mechanical, it was also very visual. We used to always think of the calendar as this sort of interactive block, interactive not in the digital sense, but if you're looking at this visually, as how things relate to each other on this grid, and our visual sense of it as we were individuals doing our programs, but how this relates to that. So I think all of that mechanical stuff had a way of also making it very cohesive, and I think when we went to digital, we had those printouts of those little things. It wasn't quite the same as seeing it large, you know? And where you saw everybody's thinking out there, but that could just be the way I think. It could be that I'm not a digital person and I didn't make—a younger person would think differently, because they would have grown up with this whole digital, and they might be able to see what I want to see, in the digital, but I only saw it in the mechanical layout. [Note: The reference here is to a wall-sized calendar grid upon which everyone's programs were written, and could be viewed at-a-glance as a whole month.]

03-01:02:15

Geritz: In part because what, you could see the erasures, or was it the scale, or was it a combination of all of that, the act of?

03-01:02:27

Kramer: It was a way of everybody looking at everybody else's, and how it played out. God, I'd forgotten about that. So, we went smaller and smaller, as we got to these small little boxes and things, individual little sheets. Eight and a half by ten. And then we're just sort of looking at our blocks, I think, not so much across the entire calendar. Now, that's sort of interesting. It seems to me, we didn't maybe mess about in each other's areas as much, you know we didn't go back and forth.

03-01:03:19

Geritz: Oh, well you know, that goes back to the fact that it was vertical programming, and so you knew your day, and you could move things around without impacting anyone else, because you knew your series was on such and such a day.

03-01:03:37

Kramer:

Yes. And when the Calendar format changed to being ordered by series rather than chronologically, then you always had this thing, what do you do with these films that don't work into series? It was like something leftover, an appendage, extra, you know, and how do you bring attention to something that doesn't fit into a series. It's a series of non-series films, and that was awkward and it never quite got the visual attention in the calendar. It didn't kind of work in that thing.

03-01:04:30

Geritz:

That was a radical shift, the idea of foregrounding the thinking behind the series, how the curators were thinking, versus the day of the week that you might be wanting to go to a program. And we debated and debated and debated it. Any thoughts now, after it's been so long?

03-01:04:55

Kramer:

I'm assuming everybody is content with the series thing. I doubt anybody has done a research project to compare how series do now, versus how they did before. I mean that would be—I don't suppose anybody ever will. In terms of the audience, did the audience respond differently, more of them, less of them? There are too many variables also, to affect that study, in terms of audience participation today, as opposed to then. The audience adjusted. They figured out how to read the calendar obviously. Some people claimed they liked having it organized by series. Was it detrimental to the films that weren't in series? But you would have to do a study.

03-01:05:49

Geritz:

I had to go back and look in an old Calendar at a series just the other day and I had forgotten that we didn't have writing on every series.

03-01:05:57

Kramer:

That's right.

03-01:05:58

Geritz:

It was program note and there was only an introduction to some of the series.

03-01:06:07

Kramer:

We had longer program notes.

03-01:06:11

Geritz:

Yeah, it was a little bit of a shock.

03-01:06:12

Kramer:

But also, there's another thing, when I was going back and looking at the earlier Calendars, sometimes, for a big series, there was an introductory article but it wasn't on the film pages. One month, PFA got to do an introductory article and one month the museum did. So sometimes we were providing a major article for one of the series, and so you won't find—and that didn't go on the Internet. So you won't find that explanation, it's elsewhere in the

calendar. And that was sort of nice when you could get a major article as part of the—

03-01:06:52

Geritz: It was like an essay.

03-01:06:53

Kramer: An essay. So that changes how you read that. So, it was constantly evolving, and some things, therefore, got more attention than others.

03-01:07:21

Geritz: That's true. It brought more attention to the largest series and the shift, or it brings—there still is kind of an almost expectation that more attention will be put on the big series, but every series gets a little bit of contextual information. But smaller and smaller and smaller, so it's almost nonexistent again.

Was the shift from vertical programming to series, that begin on different days, under you or under Susan? Were you still only on the vertical programming? Do you remember?

03-01:08:04

Kramer: The shift happened when I was working. It was a redesign of the calendar.

03-01:08:09

Geritz: No, no, I mean when the idea of vertical programming, meaning the avant-garde is always on Tuesday, if there's a Satyajit Ray series, it's Friday and Sunday, that kind of vertical, day of week programming.

03-01:08:35

Kramer: That goes back even to Tom's time, although it got mixed up. I was assigned Tuesdays, in 1975, I was assigned Tuesdays for avant-garde, and I didn't do any other programming, and then gradually, I started doing other programming, so I got some other days. But, you realize how many programs we did, I mean in those days we did not only double bills on a Tuesday, but we did triple bills on weekends and sometimes there were four shows, and then we had Wheeler going on Wednesdays. At the same time, we didn't close this theater, we did Wheeler and this theater in competition with each other.

03-01:09:04

Geritz: I used to come to midnight screenings, or maybe they were 11:00 p.m.

03-01:09:06

Kramer: No, we had midnight screenings. The museum was open twenty-four hours a day. We didn't have the modern security system. There was many a night I slept here. You say what was a week like? Well, it depended what year. In the early days, there was a kind of live-in, people working here through the night, and that changing. Did I leave anything out on a week?

03-01:09:57

Geritz:

Well, I guess what I was trying to ask is right now, a series might be more horizontal, there's a chance that it will be like a Tuesday, a Thursday, a Sunday, and then a Wednesday, Saturday, Monday, and then it's over, versus that it goes quite a bit through a calendar, on the same day a week. I don't know if you've noticed that.

03-01:10:36

Kramer:

I think after I left, well two things of course I know, one of the things Susan did was to, you know, on a given day, if you have two shows, they aren't necessarily the same series. I was still working under the sort of double—what did you call it?

03-01:10:44

Geritz:

Double bill.

03-01:10:46

Kramer:

Yeah. And that maybe the people who went to Visconti at seven o'clock, would go to Visconti at nine o'clock, and that once you're out, you want to stay and do the Visconti. And the assumption that it would be very difficult to get somebody just to come to a late show, for another series that—well, the realization that fewer and fewer people were going to late shows.

03-01:11:15

Geritz:

Exactly.

03-01:11:17

Kramer:

And that even though students are young and they go out late at night, they were too busy, so they wouldn't necessarily go out. And we couldn't depend on the young audience actually going out late at night. So that awareness as the years went by, that it was difficult to find a time when the students would in fact come, and doing late night didn't necessarily draw them, and that we had an aging audience. I mean, you sort of realize it yourself, are you going to go out late at night? You're the same age as a majority of the audience, or something like that. But in the earlier years, yeah people would for, whatever it was, a dollar extra, a dollar and a half off, I can't remember. The price changes, but it was oh God, yes, if there's a series there, involved in, yeah I'd rather go—I'm here, I'm going to go to the double bill. But Susan realized that again, the changing way in which people were going and that double bills didn't work anymore, they weren't a surefire thing, so you might as well do another series. So, that's completely different. I thought about it, I understood that, but it didn't change then.

I tried to keep to a pattern of days for different series, so that the audience would have an easier time remembering. It's also like oh, yeah, it's Tuesday; therefore, I need to go. It's Wednesday, oh yeah, I've got to go to that. It's that sense of continuity, and then probably it doesn't matter, maybe it doesn't matter. Is that the way people think still? There was a time when it felt like you're planning ahead. Okay, I've got my calendar at home. I'm going to be

busy on Mondays and Wednesdays and Fridays, because I'm watching this, or whatever. And maybe as audiences change, you have to be willing to change with them and understand what is your audience doing, how do they live. What makes them go out when.

03-01:13:33

Geritz:

And that you lose—what we've started hearing is you've got this on Fridays, I have another commitment every Friday, I'm missing that whole series.

03-01:13:44

Kramer:

You listen to your audience and they start telling you things, so you do have to. The commercial theaters know that they're going to be empty Monday through Wednesday, I mean they're really not going to have very many people in the seats. You go there and you think my God, how can they afford to show this film? And then from Thursday to Sunday, the people. But Friday and Saturday nights, that's the big thing, then it's jammed. So you also try to learn from what's going on in the theaters. When are people going? Although we could get people on other nights, because of the unique things we showed.

03-01:14:37

Geritz:

You were talking about what the week was like and the day was like, and spending the night.

03-01:14:44

Kramer:

I just remember day went into night. There was a week, any week of work was kind of nonstop. You were never caught up. There was always more correspondence, there was always more reading, there was always, shall we say, putting out fires, the films that don't arrive. You're making changes. Wanting to be at the theater to see how—I mean, include that. Go to your programs to see if they're working the way you intended them to do or this one is not working. Should you be introducing everything? Are they going to get bored with you introducing every time? Just occasionally introducing, you know? But be there to sense, is this film working, or not, was that a mistake? So, you want to know how the program actually works. You're in the now, you're in the future, and in the distant future all the time. You're in three time zones in programming, and keeping in touch with the field. Meetings, actually getting some work done.

03-01:16:17

Geritz:

Did you think about balance in your day? Was that a concept that you thought about and what role did humor have in making it all manageable?

03-01:16:33

Kramer:

Did I think about balancing the day? I think maybe not consciously. I knew that the time you get to spend in the office, do the stuff that can only be done in the office, if possible. Reading, you can always do at home. When we were reviewing videocassettes, I bought the equipment at home, multi-standard, so I can always view at home if it's an issue. Don't take time during the day to view, don't take time during the day to read. Use the office time for phone

calls, meetings, contacting distributors. What are the hours the people you're in contact with, what are their hours? So, use the day to get that done and once you have a computer at home, you could do entries at home. You don't have to be entering all your stuff in the office, on office time. You can sit at home and you can enter, to get all those forms filled out and things like that. True, you do a lot in the office because stuff is handy to you, there's less stuff to take home, but also finally, you know, before Judy would have to get the stuff, the calendar stuff. Not Judy. Yes, Judy, and then design, making sure all the fields were filled out in our program database and shipping had all the information, cleaning that up and getting that all filled out. Some of that could be done at home. So, yeah, I was conscious of do the stuff during the day that can only be done in the office, and just pile up the stuff that you can take home.

03-01:18:24

Geritz:

And humor?

03-01:18:27

Kramer:

Well, you should laugh about something every day, I guess. I always have to—I mean, a day is not a good day for me unless I can make fun of just funny things happening, tell stories. Lots of times, sometimes the phone calls to colleagues, you could share a funny story. You could say what happened at the theater the night before, an audience question or something. I think being on the phone a lot was the personal thing with people, and it wasn't just, I need this film or do you know where this is, but it was also socializing, and humor came into that. And when there's a crisis or fixing things, try to have a sense of humor about it. When the film didn't arrive, oh, drat, but okay, this is what we can do. It's not the worst thing that will happen. God knows all the times I was embarrassed in front of the audience, with crazy things happening in the theater. It's awful when it's happening and you feel humiliated, but then have a sense of humor about it. To do that, I always had to tell somebody the story, sort of like what happened today, and to make that into really a funny story on yourself, and that would do it.

03-01:19:53

Geritz:

You talked about being in contact with your colleagues, and most specifically, I think the implication has been that they're like curatorial colleagues, like MoMA and Film Society, at some point, back when Richard Peña was in Chicago, those colleagues. I remember also, you had, say the friendship with Mel Novikoff, which is more from repertory. Gary Meyer, also repertory. Faculty like Albert Johnson, who also had a connection to the San Francisco International Film Festival. Peter, festival curator. Could you talk about the kind of array of that community of people you spoke with.

03-01:20:44

Kramer:

First of all there's local. In the beginning, we all got to know each other anyway, because that film community, they could be filmmakers, they could be programmers, they could be festival directors, they could be critics. There

were critics that we were friends with. You felt like it's an industry. These are the people in your field. They do different things but they're all part of the field, and it's a small town, but in New York everybody—you realized that New York, it's a big city, but they all sort of are around. They don't necessarily all like each other, but they all appear at the same events and they all know each other. They may be in competition, but they know each other, and the same thing here, only on a smaller scale. I think probably, we might have liked each other better. I always used to—there's more cutthroat kind of competition in New York, but here it was mostly we liked each other to some extent and there was a certain amount of socializing. That was very important.

I remember when I used to go home late at night, a lot of these people also worked long hours and it was very commonplace for Peter and I to talk at midnight, about our day and to talk about ideas. We'd have our midnight or one in the morning phone conversations, because we'd both be working at home at that point, on our stuff. Regular dinners with Mel, and he would talk about the theatrical business, and I always learned from that. And then there would be visiting film people coming, and so there were dinners and socializing, to meet them. Then of course, if you traveled at all, to a festival, you're meeting colleagues, or to a FIAF thing, you spend a lot of time socializing with international colleagues. That was very important, you learned a lot. It was very pleasant, it was nice, fun. You could share your stories, your experiences, you would learn things.

It was nice, not to be so isolated, because you did work hard. It was very nice to be able to find others who did similar things and worked as hard, and could share experiences and stories.

03-01:23:47

Geritz:

Did distributors fall into that role also?

03-01:23:50

Kramer:

Yes. I made friends with distributors. First, frankly, I thought you had to. I thought my phone calls to distributors were personal, I mean some more than others, but I always wanted to be a person to these distributors. When I called, I wanted them to not mind my calling. I could ask about their family. Is it a good day for you, or are you doing well with this film, you know what's new, coming up in your world, or something like that. I could have long conversations. It was just about booking a film, but I'd talk around other things, if allowed. A lot of these people I never met.

03-01:24:40

Geritz:

Phone friends.

03-01:24:41

Kramer:

You had these phone friends and you didn't meet them. I finally met Tim Lanza from Rohauer and Douris, at the San Francisco Silent Film Festival, and he said, "I've been waiting all these years to meet you." I saw this young

man and I think oh my God, he must have been a child when I was talking to him. I mean, he's not as young as maybe he looks, but he just seemed to be a very young man and it was very funny. All those years of talking on the phone. And who is it, Dennis Douris always laughs about his conversations with me. He said, you stayed on the line so long, I kept reducing the price. [laughter] He said, by the end of the time, he said, I'd knocked off a hundred dollars off the rental.

03-01:25:31

Geritz: That's great.

03-01:25:38

Kramer: He said you gave good phone, you know?

03-01:25:40

Geritz: Yeah, that's the difference now, so much is on email, and people do try to be personal, but you don't get the tangential.

03-01:25:47

Kramer: You don't. Email is so impersonal and can be so misconstrued if you try to be personal. It can be misread. You know when you have a voice at the other end, by the tone, whether you're coming through. You know if somebody doesn't understand what you're saying or is getting the wrong meaning.

03-01:26:08

Geritz: Right.

03-01:26:09

Kramer: You know if they're friendly. You know if it's a good day for them, they're grumpy or they're not grumpy. It makes a big difference.

03-01:26:21

Geritz: Yeah, it's really interesting. Like you know how people, they lamented the end of the card catalog, because it was the idea that you found things by accident.

03-01:26:34

Kramer: Oh, wonderful, yes.

03-01:26:35

Geritz: Yeah, and then online is a direct search, and the phone call was digressive.

03-01:26:41

Kramer: It was wonderful. Also, remember it wasn't only calling your peers. In fact, what I always used to say to the shipping people, get to know the shipper at the institution, get to know their people. Get to know the—you're going to be talking to other staff members. They aren't necessarily the top people. You form relationships with the staff, all the way down the line, that's very important. I used to love my conversations with Isa Cucinotta at the Film Society of Lincoln Center.

03-01:27:14

Geritz: Oh, she's so great.

03-01:27:15

Kramer: You know?

03-01:27:17

Geritz: Well that reminds me, like at the very early days, when I was first working here and I would write some letters for you, and you would say, now be sure to introduce yourself to the person and ask them a few questions. Elaine Burroughs and I became great, in those days, letter correspondents, because she was in London, because you had set up that, even if it is a letter, you create the personal connection with the person, whereas I thought I'm as low down as you can get on the totem pole. Who am I to be... but that's the relationship you set up.

03-01:28:00

Kramer: You have to set up personal relationships. I don't know, in this world, how that works. I don't know. Of course, if you go to festivals, you meet people and they're real people. For years I worked with James Quandt, we had never met, and then we finally met in Cannes. Adrienne arranged the introduction, because he was in Cannes, and I went once and I met these people I'd been writing and talking to but never—

You had asked a question last time, about my awareness of being known, and it wasn't until you went out in the world, then you found that somebody actually knew who you were, and that was a surprise sometimes. I think we were very focused on our work here and the day-to-day getting through it and getting to the next—getting through that calendar of shows, and on to the next and on to the next and on to the next, and it never stopped. It never stopped. It's hard to pick up your head and look around.

03-01:29:22

Geritz: When you were mentioning just now, trying to know everybody at different levels of staff, in another institution. It reminded me also, there's certain filmmakers who always want to meet the projectionists, because they understand that relationship.

03-01:29:37

Kramer: When I visited other institutions, I always went to see the projectionist. I asked to be taken to the booth and meet the projectionist.

03-01:29:46

Geritz: Absolutely.

03-01:29:54

Kramer: I remember the first time, when Tom asked me to be a guest curator at Telluride, after I retired, I said I want to meet the projectionists there. That was the first thing I did is I went to the booth—introduced myself to the projectionist, because they don't necessarily work with the curators. I said no,

we're going to work together on these shows, you're the people, you're the most important people for me, you're projecting these films.

03-01:30:29

Geritz: So I think maybe I'll stop there. There's some related questions that I have, but I'll start with them next time.

03-01:30:35

Kramer: Do you think I've covered the, what a day is like? It's hard to...

03-01:30:40

Geritz: Let me think about it afterwards, but I think you covered the notion of how do you transport information within the institution, a meeting or one-on-one.

03-01:30:53

Kramer: For me it was better one-on-one, in terms of actually finding out what was going on, and communicating. Sometimes you spent more time with one person because they were having more difficulties than somebody else. I regret that I couldn't do good meetings. I don't know. I don't think I've ever been to a good meeting too.

03-01:31:21

Geritz: I think I've been to one, and it was shocking for me to see how this person ran a meeting, it was so good. I guess in the end, I think that almost every meeting one goes to, there's a level of resentment, but there's a couple of meetings that if you don't have them, actually more problems happen, and those are the ones where you quickly share where you are and that there's memories of several people going oh, but what about that, do we have something covering that? Has somebody gotten the stills? Which you might not have done if you all hadn't quickly come together. I had to always remind myself oh, okay, we wouldn't have covered everything if we didn't quickly come together.

03-01:32:09

Kramer: Right.

03-01:32:10

Geritz: I think the problem is that they go long.

03-01:32:12

Kramer: And of course again, I have to say, there might have been more—it might have been easier, in my time, to operate within the museum on a one-on-one basis, because I had my fingers in a lot of pies. It wasn't so segregated. So, I went up to design. When we were in design, I went and talked to the designers about what was happening. In a way, I had a say on how the calendar was laid out. I would talk to Nina and others, I'd say no, that still does not look good there, I don't want that still. I did not leave it totally to them. I wanted to see it and say, you can't crop that still that way, it doesn't read. So I was messing around with that stuff. I was very intimate with design and things like that. I didn't have the sense that these were boundaries I couldn't cross.

03-01:33:33

Geritz:

Yeah, that's part of that I have some questions to ask about, the shifts, with the shifts in scale of the organization. And I guess on some level, you're saying that you personally functioned best one-on-one, whether it was with your colleagues or with your staff, and when it moved away from that, that maybe you work personally, person to person.

03-01:34:03

Kramer:

Yeah, and it did. Under the different people I worked with, everything changed. Every manager, director, had a different style. But later there was a very distinct, hierarchical structure and it was not an easy structure for me to work with. I felt like I was cut off from people I had worked with before, and I thought we really had a good relationship and shared the goal of getting the best thing out, the best way. I felt now we had barriers to that. That wasn't easy for me to do. It was counter to the way I had worked for years.

Yeah, I think because I go back to early days, when you had to do everything and everything was sort of kind of wonderfully disorganized, but it was sort of like everybody was mucking about in everybody else's area.

03-01:35:24

Geritz:

You had to.

03-01:35:24

Kramer:

We did our own calendar once, did the layout, we did our own publicity, we did everything, and that's where I function best. That is something I can work well with. I can multitask and be in charge of multiple things at once. It's fine, fine, with few people.

03-01:35:50

Geritz:

Maybe you're more of a holistic person. You like the totality, the ways all of the things are working and the way that as an organization gets bigger, it's a kind of thinking that's structural. I'm thinking how you said oh, you weren't good at running meetings, that's like more of a structure. Does that seem possible?

03-01:36:15

Kramer:

It might be. It's kind of like when I took on the job at Canyon Cinema, there was no structure, and it was like, you know, and we kept expanding and fine, give me more, I can do more. I can do—I get energized by doing more. Maybe I'm getting exhausted but I don't know that. I actually get energized by doing more, and I think better. I think I'm sharper if you pile it on.

03-01:36:50

Geritz:

It relates to what you said before though, liking to be doing lots of things at once. It's like maybe juggling or something.

03-01:37:00

Kramer:

Yeah, but I think I can juggle and I can multitask, and it makes me very sharp; much sharper than if I have just one thing to do at a time. I will procrastinate

if you give me one thing to do. I became very aware of that; I'm doing my taxes at home and I could have done it earlier. I just keep procrastinating, it's just one task to do. It's the only task I have and when I finally last night, sat down and filled all the forms and things like that. I have an accountant, but he gives me a twenty-page worksheet to fill out, which I think is ridiculous, but I have to look up all this sort of stuff and fill out all these things and try to understand what some of this stuff is. I just kept putting it off, and then I sat down and did it, and it went like that, [snaps her fingers] and I think, why was I putting this off. But I needed to have the pressure of several other things to do and I didn't.

03-01:38:05

Geritz: Interesting.

03-01:38:08

Kramer: But I really will perform much better if you put on the pressure. I think when you were sort of in some ways responsible for everything, you saw all the links. Then you knew, whether it's from programming to getting the Calendar out, to the theater. Theater managing was like when we got so separated, I wanted to give a course in theater managing, I really did. It was in my mind. I wanted to be able to be in control of how we managed our theater. I always wanted to be, and I felt frustrated that I had no say in that, because I would train ushers.

03-01:38:55

Geritz: I have the same feeling.

03-01:38:57

Kramer: But what is it? It's an extension. It's not separate from what we do. To me, the presentation, the audience, is no different than the programming. It's all one.

03-01:39:11

Geritz: Part of it, yeah.

03-01:39:12

Kramer: Is that what you mean by the holistic?

03-01:39:13

Geritz: Yeah, yeah, seeing it all intertwined.

03-01:39:16

Kramer: To me it's all connected and they should not be separate tasks.

03-01:39:21

Geritz: I even pick up the paper towels in the bathroom. It all relates.

03-01:39:25

Kramer: I used to fix the toilet in there, because I know how to, you know, with the plunger and the thing, when it gets stopped up. Change the light bulbs, I mean

you could wait a month to get a light bulb changed. Get a mop. Figure out how to fix a leak. It's never going to be fixed but what can we do. That, to me is you roll up your sleeves and you get in there, but it's a mentality that goes back to a mamma papa shop. It's like Canyon Cinema. That's what I do best. Thank God, I never got hired by a big organization like MoMA. I would have been a disaster there, a disaster.

03-01:40:20

Geritz:

It's a good point, this idea of the mom and pop, like ethics that arose out of maybe being in Canyon early on, and actually that era. What happens when the institution is shifted into another scale, like as you called it, using more corporate models.

03-01:40:43

Kramer:

And I don't mean that negatively, it just is something different. You're bigger, more people, and everything gets specialized, and you don't see the chain. Even fundraising, development, I was right in there cultivating major donors and working on them to get money. And it wasn't a quick thing, it was like it took years before you make the ask, and then you make the ask and you go back again, to see if they're going to respond, and doing it that way. I don't like asking people for money, but for a slow cultivation, I didn't mind that. To get to know the Oshers [Bernard and Barbro], to get to know George Gund, that was okay. I didn't feel embarrassed finally, after years, of asking them.

03-01:41:39

Geritz:

Interesting, yeah. That made me realize that I don't have anything about that side in my questions, so I'll have to—

03-01:41:47

Kramer:

Well it's just, you know, I would never want to work in development. I always used to say to development, "Do you like asking for money, don't you mind asking?" No, they don't. I always minded. I'm embarrassed to ask somebody for money, but at least with a long, slow cultivation, I felt I was somebody they trusted, and if I was going to present it to them, they wouldn't look at me like I didn't know what I was talking about or I was just trying to bleed them dry.

03-01:42:19

Geritz:

And would you see that cultivation as finding out, like in the case of Gund, we knew what kind of films he liked, et cetera. The Oshers, it was much more to do with the region that they're from. Or is it not so film related but rather, person to person?

03-01:42:40

Kramer:

It's person to person. Film is your business you might say, but also, you have to be trusted as a person. I think Jim Elliott taught me a lot about that. Do you remember Jim Elliott at all?

03-01:42:58

Geritz: Oh, yeah, yeah, very much.

03-01:43:00

Kramer: He spent all this time in cultivation.

03-01:43:04

Geritz: I didn't know that about him.

03-01:43:06

Kramer: He took donors to dinner, he went over to make sure everything was all right. Who is that woman who gave all that money to Matrix?

03-01:43:16

Geritz: Oh, that it's named after.

03-01:43:18

Kramer: What was her name? Phyllis C. Wattis. Anyway, she lived alone. He took her to dinner, to concerts. He helped her at her home. I used to think my God, but that's what traditionally, museum directors used to do. I don't think they do it now so much, maybe people at MoMA. It's almost like being an escort, but it's an old word, older version of cultivation, of where you... And you think it sounds very crass, but you became a genuine friend of someone you cared for. And I understood that you don't exist in the same world as very, very rich people, you're in another world, but if you're going to cultivate them, you have to find a place where they're comfortable in your world and you're comfortable in their world, something that as human beings you share. With George it was the ranch, the horses. With Barbro, it's a little different because it was maybe her culture and her love of education, the importance of education and the arts. She really felt that our culture did not do enough to educate people in the arts, especially for young people. This, I was very attuned to, was her interest in education for young people and what our school system fails to do. Aside from, you know, to promote Swedish culture, [Swedish cinema, of course].

So, I felt like we could be friends. She had a good sense of humor too, I liked that. [George, of course, also had a great sense of humor, although I often didn't understand what he was saying, because he often mumbled, even though he had a strong clear voice when speaking in public.]

Geritz:

You need a translator.

03-01:45:48

Kramer: Did I cultivate anybody else?

03-01:45:54

Geritz: Well, Packard.

03-01:45:55

Kramer:

[I didn't really have to cultivate Packard; he had a foundation through which he had been funding film preservation and programming at other archives, so it was natural to apply for support. However, this was facilitated by his opening his own theater in Palo Alto, and that provided some common ground. I learned his interests and also his dislikes, and guided our funding requests to only the activities he would approve.]

03-01:48:15

Geritz:

So I think we'll stop here, and then there's some things that will lead right out of this discussion, so maybe we'll start with that next time.

Interview 4: March 27, 2014

04-00:00:04

Geritz:

As Edith said, it's the end of March. I believe it's Thursday, March 27, 2014, and we're in the small screening room. So, when we talked before, we were just going over that you had said a little about what a typical week was like, but of course there's times when things go wrong. A film doesn't arrive, there's a problem with a filmmaker. I'm thinking mainly about those kinds of disasters that are more about the public event, than the other kinds of disasters. The ones that have to do with the media program getting on. Do you have any stories or memories of such an instance or two?

04-00:00:52

Kramer:

I certainly remember the nerve-wracking hours or maybe it's a day or so, of worrying about whether a print will arrive in time for its scheduled screening, or sometimes in a way, a more annoying or nerve-racking issue is when half the print arrives, because you're sort of, you know, it's like when does the next shoe drop. I think in some ways that's worse, because you want to believe that the other half will get there in time, an effort has been made, something has been shipped, half of it's arrived, but you can't show half of it. I think those are always quite memorable, and you're trying to just will it in, you know? Meanwhile, you're trying to do a kind of detective investigation through the shipping agency and the people who originally shipped it to see, is that half still sitting at the previous venue? Does it happen to be in their booth, you know in fact they didn't ship both parts? That sometimes happens, and so you call there. There's always an instant deniability and then people search and sometimes they find it. Woops. Other times no, it did go out, and then you're trying to track it with the shipping company. It could be FedEx, it could be UPS, and of course, they usually are a little bit disbelieving at first, and you have to work through them and go through—you have to go back to their depots and track all the way through.

I do remember one wonderful, funny story. It was a Saturday show and you can't expect much to happen on a Saturday that will get you out of a jam, because there's no shipping on Saturdays unless it's an extra cost, but generally Friday is your last day to get something in for the weekend. This was a case, 35mm print. We had one canister and one canister was missing. We knew the FedEx depot locally, I mean the last stop before they put it on the truck to deliver, and you learn that there were certain depots and you'd track back. So, all the evidence suggested that the print had gotten as far as Oakland, and it had actually gone out on a truck to the Emeryville depot, which is where it gets on a truck to come to Durant Avenue. These are things you learn. Also, when your shipper gets to know the various agents who work for the companies in the different depots, and because you're a regular customer and you get to talk to them and you say, Bill, we've got a problem, or whatever.

So on Friday, we knew we had a problem and our shipper had called the Emeryville depot and they were puzzled. They said, you know, the tracking indicates that the film left Oakland for Emeryville and it was complete, that there were two canisters. That could be wrong but we think actually two canisters got to Oakland and two canisters got on a truck to go to Emeryville. Okay, how many trucks go out, how many times a day. There are night things and so on, but since our building closes, there's only a certain window in which they can deliver it. Could it still be on a truck for redelivery? There can be an emergency delivery Saturday morning. So anyway, they couldn't find it, they couldn't find it, and our shipper said, "Give up, Edith, we've done everything we can, there is no way." So, we have to have a backup film for that Saturday. It was the first show on a Saturday evening, so it was like a seven o'clock show. I don't know why, I was just so stubborn, and on Saturday, I call the Emeryville depot and I talk to the guy and I say, "I don't know why but I think it's in your depot," and he says, "That's impossible." He said we would have—bar-coding, we would have found it. I said, "Are you very busy?" "No, no," he said. I said, could you just go into where you have the—and just take a look again? You know, with the barcode thing. This is like we're now in the afternoon and he calls me back and he said, "You'll never believe it." He said, "It had fallen through another box, it was in somebody else's box." The canister had been apparently on top of a cardboard box, and it had fallen through and was in another box, which wasn't slated to go out yet. And he said, "I found it by accident. I started moving boxes around and I saw that the top of this box was broken, and there was your canister, sitting in there."

04-00:06:57

Geritz:

Amazing.

04-00:06:58

Kramer:

And he personally delivered it and we made the show. But that's like really unusual, a happy ending, but it was also just like the most bizarre kind of thing that could happen. In most cases, when you had a crisis like that, you had to be prepared with a backup, and then tell the audience and explain to them, sorry, and refund people's tickets if they were dissatisfied. You did the best you could. Given the number of films we showed over the years, I would say our percentage of mis-shows for that reason was quite low. I think we did pretty well.

04-00:07:45

Geritz:

I remember you coming in, in the morning, saying you had spent the night visualizing the film arriving.

04-00:07:52

Kramer:

Yes, I used to try to dream it in. I used to also have these dreams. I had shipping dreams, of something's not going to arrive. I would come in the next day and say, do we have any problems, is it possible, with this particular shipment? I said, "I'm anxious about it, I dreamt about it. I think we have a

problem there.” People would look at me like I was crazy. I was often right. I don’t know why, but I was so obsessed with that shipping thing. It was shipping anxiety and I would get this sense that this was not going to be a smooth delivery. But yeah, you do, you try to will it in.

04-00:08:47

Geritz:

How did you track film sources and did this change over time?

04-00:08:54

Kramer:

It certainly changed over time because companies change, companies go in and out of business or they merge with other companies. And then there were eventually, you know, the dissolution of many of the 16mm distributors. They went out of business first in a way. But also, as we went from non-theatrical to theatrical, our sources changed, because we had access to studio prints and so on. We do keep records of where prints came from, and that’s invaluable, to be able to look back and say okay, in such and such a year, this is where we got that film from, whether it was 16 or 35. So, that’s a starting point for trying to find it today. If it’s an American film and you know the producer or the studio, you generally go there to find out, do they still have a print. They might still own it but they might not have a usable print. And then you start going to other archives or private collectors that you find out about and you keep information on that, and you have to keep all of that going. Your colleagues are very helpful, you network. They come to you, you go to them. It’s like who last saw this film, and where was it and when. So, you’re accumulating records, you’re keeping a lot of stuff in your memory. I think when you’re very active in something and you’re doing it so frequently, you’re really able to hold a lot in your memory. When you stop that, it goes, because it’s so specific to what you’re doing, and I think it’s like unnecessary information when you stop doing that. But while you’re doing it, you really accumulate a lot of information and you really hold on to it, because you can find it quickly in your memory. It’s not only looking it up, but you really hold on to a lot of that.

Of course, if you’re getting film from the filmmakers themselves, then you have to keep track of where the filmmakers are. In a way that’s easier than distribution, because there’s more variables with distribution, what happens to prints.

04-00:11:45

Geritz:

Two follow-up questions. One was from you mentioning shifting from non-theatrical to theatrical. So when you started at PFA, it was membership.

04-00:11:56

Kramer:

Right.

04-00:01:57

Geritz:

What was the reason for membership and then what was the reason and logistics of the shift from non-theatrical, to being able to access theatrical, the studio?

04-00:12:09

Kramer:

If you look, it's interesting, because when I was doing that project of going back to the earlier records, I'd forgotten that we mostly showed 16mm, and of course that was our non-theatrical days. Sixteen millimeter films were plentiful, there were many, many distributors of 16mm, for both international and domestic production. Nonprofit film societies, which is essentially what we were like, often had membership in order to charge admission. I think that was it, wasn't it? I'm trying to remember. If you're non-theatrical, there was an issue about admission, whether you were paying a fee or a percentage. My memory is bad on this. I think membership offered you certain privileges about admission, I think that was it. And promotion, I think there was something. You know, I've forgotten it.

04-00:13:39

Geritz:

We used to not be able to take ads out on certain—

04-00:13:42

Kramer:

Yeah. I've forgotten, this is terrible. You better ask Nancy.

04-00:13:48

Geritz:

Yeah, and Tom Schmidt might remember.

04-00:13:50

Kramer:

Because it's so long ago. I used to know this so well, but I think there was some issue about charging admission and advertising, and there was of course, the different kinds of advertising. If you were on campus, you were considered a university film society, you could advertise within the campus but not off campus. You know, the distinction between taking out an ad in a daily newspaper, as opposed to having something in the *Daily Cal*, or something like that, or flyers. So I think membership had something to do with the issue of admission charging and advertising, but I can't remember it any more. I've forgotten all of that. But there was a reason, I mean because the membership fee was very low. You didn't make money with the membership fee. You charged a fee but it was very modest. So it had something to do with allowing you to—it may have actually have allowed you to have the non-theatrical status, something like that.

I think Nancy, from her years of distribution, will probably remember that better than I do. That's really bad of me, I've completely wiped that from my memory. But I do know why we changed to theatrical. We didn't have access to the 35mm prints from studios, only regular theaters did, theatrical bookings. If you were connected with the university they immediately said no, you're non-theatrical. But then I said to them, but, we do advertise off campus, we do take out ads, and we're not like a classroom. We happen to belong to the

university, it's a state university, but we're operating as a public institution. Our audience are public, general public, not just students, and our general public pays to come in and we advertise. And so I presented this thing as therefore, we are no different than the theater down the street, and I won the argument. Other people had tried similar things, that didn't win. It might have been just the people I was dealing with at that moment, but I tried it first, I think with maybe Warner Brothers, and then I tried it with Sony. I sort of had to go to each of them and say if one allows it, then the other, if they do it. Some were more resistant than others, they didn't like this, but I pushed it and I had the documentation, and so I said if we do this and this, according to your rules, that makes us theatrical, and we are doing this and we have been doing this and I can prove that. Therefore, you know.

Now that didn't stop us from showing 16mm, but we had to go roundabout. In other words, to have a 16mm print from Films Inc or Sony, meant first we had to go to the studio that owned that and they didn't have a 35, so then they allowed us to go get the 16 print, because essentially, they were sub-distributing through the non-theatrical houses. And then of course we had to pay a guarantee, versus a percentage, of the gate.

04-00:17:54

Geritz:

Once you were theatrical.

04-00:17:55

Kramer:

Right. There were no longer flat fees.

04-00:17:59

Geritz:

Yeah, but the flat was lower than, say Swanks', the flat part of—the guarantee was lower than Swanks' flat.

04-00:18:09

Kramer:

Right, because the flat fees of course had risen. They used to be very cheap. I remember when they were like \$50 for a feature, and then suddenly they were \$400. So if you went to the theatrical, your guarantee was less in most cases, and you only paid the percentage if you went over that amount. So we saved money actually, at that time of the changeover. Later of course, the theatrical guarantees went up enormously.

04-00:18:46

Geritz:

You also mentioned that on the project you're doing, of going back in the Calendar, that you've seen how much 16 we had, and so part had to do with the fact that we were non-theatrical. What role did 16 have in the programming, as well as in the collection?

04-00:19:06

Kramer:

Well, there were also the filmmakers who worked in 16, or even smaller gauge. So, these were not studio reduction prints, these were films originally made in 16mm, and since we had always, from the beginning, part of our mission was to show the avant-garde, as it was called then, or independent,

experimental, all those different names. This was essentially 16mm production from the postwar, post-World War II on. So we had a special dedication to showcasing those films and we were collecting those films, so we had a 16mm collection. We also had—the distributor of 16mm films, when distributors went out of business, we often got huge collections of 16mm feature films, both international and domestic. It was more international than domestic. So we had to have good 16mm equipment for the filmmakers.

And then a very interesting thing we shouldn't forget about. When filmmakers in Europe were getting money to make films for television, these were feature films, but they were first aired on television. They were working with 16mm mag sound, and often later, they were blown up to 35 for theatrical. But the money, the production money, for the New German Cinema, was often TV, and it was often 16, they worked in 16 mag or super 16. So, it wasn't just the American avant-garde or independent, there was international film that was originally shot in 16.

04-00:21:16

Geritz:

I have the memory also, that there were 16 films, that as you mentioned, we had in an international—it would be like an educational collection, the Morrison and the Audio Brandon collections, but that some of those films, particularly say from Eastern Europe, weren't—that we had in 16, weren't available in 35, for certain periods.

04-00:21:38

Kramer:

There was, during the Cold War, many films that we actually had, had been banned, and so it was very difficult to get access to prints. George Gund was enormously important in those years, because he made it possible to see Hungarian and Polish and Czech films. He bought them. They were happy to have U.S. dollars and he bought prints that weren't necessarily being shown in their own countries. And some filmmakers came, traveled. We had Soviet directors coming and sometimes they left the prints here. The Soviet embassy or consulate, didn't care that much about whether they were shipped back. They were with English subtitles, they didn't have too much use for them, and making prints was not a problem for them. Tom was especially important in negotiating and saying well, could you leave the prints here? There were touring series and he just, he made good relations, contacts, with the diplomatic personnel, either in Washington, D.C., or here locally in San Francisco, where we had a consulate. Often, the embassy in Washington. It's an individual decision and they said yeah, keep the prints. They'd have to pay to ship them back, they didn't need the prints. They could always crank out more prints if they needed. I'm sure other archives did the same thing, but Tom was particularly good at negotiating for whether a filmmaker traveling with his prints, or the embassy, you know the cultural offices, to let us keep the prints. So we ended up with some wonderful 35mm prints that were never in distribution.

04-00:24:07

Geritz:

And what would be cases where you'd show a 16 from the collection, that wasn't an artist, that was a former distribution print.

04-00:24:16

Kramer:

Well, if we couldn't get a 35, and the 16 was of decent quality, we showed that. Certainly in the early years, as I said, you see more 16s being shown than 35s, because our access to 35 generally was based on an individual filmmaker or producer coming, or a touring package.

04-00:24:42

Geritz:

Is that right? That's so interesting.

04-00:24:44

Kramer:

When I was reading through the notes I realized okay, we had a 35 here because this was a touring series, or a producer or a filmmaker came with film.

04-00:24:58

Geritz:

So that was really the Film Society model, 16. I didn't realize how deep those roots were.

04-00:25:07

Kramer:

I'd forgotten really, how much, but then you just go through and you realize, my God, this is all 16mm.

04-00:25:15

Geritz:

I know from—and you mentioned this, that from working at Canyon, you had deep and extensive relationships with artists, that you brought that when you came here, because you started off also doing the avant-garde programming. But also now, you're mentioning the relationship to filmmakers, producers, et cetera, also led to the screening of international programming. Could you talk about how you developed your relationships with artists.

04-00:25:48

Kramer:

From the Canyon times?

04-00:25:50

Geritz:

From Canyon, and then how that differed once you were here at the PFA and the programming expanded.

04-00:25:57

Kramer:

Well, through Canyon, of course I dealt with the members, and as the membership grew, that meant more filmmakers. There was also a time in the sixties, late sixties, for me, it might have started earlier but for me it was the late sixties and seventies, of American filmmakers especially, traveling around the country to show the—have films, will travel. But then the Brits came and the Germans came, and so there was this, at least a decade, of enormous amount of traveling of filmmakers, whether they were in the

experimental or avant-garde category, or whether they were narrative, fiction filmmakers.

This interest in traveling around, there weren't as many film festivals. You didn't have a film festival in every city. Obviously, films went to major film festivals, but you didn't have so many local film festivals. San Francisco is an old festival and that was quite special, and you had New York and Chicago, but it wasn't wall to wall film festivals. So filmmakers found their audience by traveling, and cultural organizations like the Goethe Institute or the Italian Cultural Institute, something like that, facilitated filmmakers traveling. They applied for travel grants from their own government and they had a plan, and they showed that if they went to this country, somebody would give them a show. There was this kind of cultural exchange.

So, extensive filmmaker traveling enabled you to meet filmmakers, invite them, get to know them. The distribution at Canyon, I knew the filmmakers who were the members there, and I got to know filmmakers who were members of the New York Co-op, even before they necessarily put their films into Canyon, because they traveled. So, I would say, and one filmmaker who gets to know you then tells another filmmaker, and they say oh, contact so and so because we had a good experience. That's a growing kind of network.

So, when I came to Pacific Film Archive, one of my first assignments was to purchase some American avant-garde films, especially if they were Bay Area, because PFA already had a grant and the grant was going to expire soon. I came in and there were only maybe six months or so left to that grant, that you had to spend the money. I guess we could have gotten an extension, but at that time, everybody was just concerned, spend the money, get the films. It takes time to buy films, I mean it's not just that the print has to be made. You're negotiating. Filmmakers are all eager to have their films bought, but it's like you're dealing with individual filmmakers and when they get around to making a print. It's not like a manufacturer who's got them on the shelf.

So that was my first job, through the contacts I had made, and actually, I bought some films from filmmakers I didn't really know, so I made contacts that way. I mean, I knew their films but I didn't know them, but I contacted them, so that kind of extended that. But, you know, Sheldon and Tom had already started doing shows with avant-garde filmmakers, and so I continued that. That was supposed to be my area of programming, in addition to being an assistant to Tom on everything else, doing the daily work. So, I had one night a week, I think it was, one show, and then it grew. Then there were two shows and then, because I had other interests and I was so excited to have a theater where I could show a 35 and it would look good. At SFMOMA, I was able to show 35, but I didn't get access to it very often, and here, it was better access. I just suggested things to Tom and if he liked them, he let me do a series. So I accumulated more programs, and I think for him it was fine,

because it gave him more freedom to do what he wanted to do. He was always doing the majority of it, but I could at least have a couple of days to do stuff.

So, you meet more filmmakers, and Tom was very, very big on inviting filmmakers, having people in person. We did so much in person in those early years. Tom didn't worry so much about the travel and accommodations, and they weren't very strict about our budget, I think, to be honest. We didn't have, shall we say the very sensible restrictions or the bureaucracy saying what are you doing here. We were a little freer. So, it was very easy and very quick to invite people, and people love to come, they loved it. Nobody was hesitant, as I recall, of coming. If you could pay their way, if you could forward them a ticket, you could—and you often put them up in people's homes. It wasn't hotels. People really wanted to travel. More audience for their films, that was sort of what the climate was like, and so you get to meet a lot of people. Certainly, if you travel to film festivals, you get to meet filmmakers there, but I didn't do very much traveling.

04-00:32:52

Geritz:

And then eventually, when the budget was more, maybe you might say monitored, by the university, did the number of artists decrease?

04-00:33:05

Kramer:

I think probably yeah, probably the total number, yes. You had to watch travel expenses, especially bringing people from out of the country. It wasn't so bad within the country, airfares were still not so outrageous then, by comparison to today. International travel, you depended on the Goethe Institute or similar cultural organizations, to do that. So if you're bringing people from outside the country, you tried to partner with a cultural organization that took care of the airfare.

04-00:33:48

Geritz:

And then it was a long, long time before we did residency grants.

04-00:33:56

Kramer:

That came much later.

04-00:33:57

Geritz:

So, so much later.

04-00:33:58

Kramer:

Much later. The whole thing of grants, the possibilities. We didn't have much in the way of grants in those early years. There was the grant to buy those films, but grants were far and few between. There weren't all the different organizations that offered grants for film, there were just a few, and they weren't so conceptual. You know, it wasn't so much like you would say, I have this idea. It was more like is there a grant for filmmakers, is there a grant for films? It was not so, shall we say imaginative. When we sort of enter into the real grant period, then it's you and everybody else thinking up ways to get

the attention of these panels, because everybody's doing the same thing. All your colleagues are going for the same grants.

04-00:35:13

Geritz:

Let's see. This is kind of going back to what you were talking about just a little bit earlier. Was print quality always an important part of the consideration and did the importance of finding good quality prints change over time?

04-00:35:33

Kramer:

It definitely changed. I think it was always, no one wanted to show a bad print, and of course people might say that's funny, well you showed 16mm, that can't—you know, if it's a 16mm reduction from 35, as opposed to made in 16 originally, then you're already, you know, you don't have proper film quality. Interestingly enough, there used to be very high quality 16mm made. You could get really sharp, very good 16mm prints, and they looked pretty good up on the screen, but we began to see 16mm prints decline, I mean there was a decline. People were letting their libraries get dupey, and not going back to the source to make new prints or making new negatives. So we saw a gradual deterioration in 16mm distribution prints. It's a financial issue certainly, for them, that they weren't keeping it up, and I think they didn't think it was important enough. But in the beginning, a lot of 16 prints were superb actually, sometimes better than 35 prints. Very often you found that a 16mm print might be longer than a 35 of the same film, because the 35s had gotten cut in distribution and the 16 hadn't. Also, the 35 went around and bits and pieces got taken out, and they kept distributing them until it was sort of impossible. So you always used to compare running time on the 16 and the 35, to make sure you had which was the more complete version, if you had an option.

Of course, once you turned to 35, at first you just, you were naïve and you assumed that if you get a 35 print it's going to look gorgeous, and then you find out, not necessarily true. You were introduced to fading color, you were introduced to worn out 35 prints, because theatrical projection was, in many ways, more aggressive on the print than the non-theatrical. Of course, the non-theatrical got bad when the auto load projectors came in. Once the auto load projectors came in, then you saw an enormous amount of damage, sprocket damage. Thirty-five prints that went from theater to theater to theater, theatrical distribution, got very beat up. So you learned that you could not trust, just because you got a 35 print, you could trust that it was good print, and at some point or another you started wanting to show more archival prints or more so-called vault prints of studios. As you did more business with a studio, they trusted you and they let you use the vault print. Eventually you find out that even the vault prints aren't in good shape, because they stopped paying attention to that, but in the beginning the vault print was higher quality usually, less used.

All these things eroded over time and then I think as that erosion became more and more apparent, you were more and more concerned about print quality. It sort of kind of went with that.

04-00:39:44

Geritz:

What would be some responses? Of course you're asking—you know, you're trying to get information, but did you institute inspections on our end, or was that always— Like what was the role of the shipper and the projectionists in relation to print quality? Did that develop?

04-00:40:03

Kramer:

The projectionist, in the beginning, was the only one dealing with print quality. You relied on Craig Valenza, or whoever was in the booth, to tell you, if the print had already arrived, to say is there a problem here. Usually at that point, of course if there is a problem, you're not going to be able to get something else, but you want it at least to be, know what you were dealing with and be able to alert the audience. So we had the idea that if there's a problem, let the audience know—that the problem will spoil the audience's appreciation of the work, you must let the audience know. Now some of my colleagues think that's wrong, they prefer not to let the audience know. I mean, I have had arguments with others who say no, just don't bring their attention to the faults. If they say something to you after the screening or if they yell out during the screening, one thing, but no. No, I did have discussions and people thought, you're ruining the show by getting up in front. I felt obligated to do that, but I also thought it was an education thing. I thought they would learn how to be very appreciative when you got a really good print, and they'd know, not only for our own venue, but for other venues, when they weren't getting something that they should be getting. To hold the theaters responsible too, for not showing bad prints. We know that theaters would get away with showing things that really should not have been projected, and they certainly shouldn't have charged anybody for it.

Also, I thought you should let the distributor know if there's a problem, because maybe they don't know, because I mean many distributors say, well we don't do that kind of inspection. A lot of distributors say what we do, we run our inspection after a rental, to just make sure all the reels are there, and if we don't see anything like a whole bunch of stuff spilling out and it has to be rewound, we don't know that there's sprocket damage. We just look to see if most of the film is there. They wouldn't check to see if the ending of the film is not there because somebody cut it off, something like that. I remember showing films and then suddenly it ends and the last moments of the film are not there, but their inspection, in their warehouses and the depots, where they just bring in films, turn them around and send them out, do not necessarily indicate that. They weren't necessarily deliberately cheating us or deceiving us, but their own inspection was of a very limited kind. They didn't check for fading on color and I used to say to them but it's very easy, you just have to hold—you don't have to unwind the film. You just hold it up, you can just see

the red, I mean it's easy. They didn't know what I was talking about, because in their training, the way they inspected, they don't do that. So, when you finally had very good relationships with the vaults, then they were more aware of what you were saying. I used to report it to them, say you need to know that such and such a print, and I give them the print number, is faulty because of the following. And usually they were appreciative if you told them that, but it doesn't mean they necessarily pulled it out of circulation. That you have no control over.

04-00:43:59

Geritz:

Were there challenges to having a booth, a fully running booth, keeping 16 and 35 going, and did that change over time, the challenges to having the booth?

04-00:44:13

Kramer:

Well, our booth, of course was this interesting, very clever way of having two 35s and one big 16, and that you could slide the 35s out of the way and move the 16 in, to avoid getting any keystoneing. There are people who have booths and they have two 16s or two 35s in, but you do get some keystoneing because they can't get everything centered on the screen. I often saw a lot of keystoneing in other venues. Not that many venues did what we did; had the railroad tracks, but it's not unknown now. And of course, you learned so much as you work. When I first saw the big 16, with a huge reel, which meant splicing reels together, I thought it was terrific. But only later, as I knew more about archival distinctions, did I understand that no, you should do changeovers and you shouldn't be splicing reels together, even though it's convenient and it's space saving, because you have one 16, and they were good projectors, that archivally, you should have two 16s and do changeovers, and never do any splicing. You should do the same changeover system that you do in 35, but of course, our booth was not designed to have four projectors. Even with the railroad tracks, you couldn't bring in two. So, there were many ways that people dealt with that. There were combination 35-16 projectors that some people had, and some people had big booths, really big booths. Adjusting so you had no keystoneing, that was key, and we had accomplished—we had gotten rid of the keystoneing and we had a very quick projectionist, who was very quick at making the shift, putting the 16 in play or taking it out of play and moving the 35s back. I clocked him. I think Craig used to do it in three minutes.

04-00:46:57

Geritz:

The other thing that happened over time is that even artist's films became precious, and they didn't want anything cut on them either, and so building up a reel meant there were huge amounts of time between the shorts.

04-00:47:12

Kramer:

And rightly so, they suddenly realized my God, if people start splicing our films together, parts of our films are going to go, it will happen. It definitely is a danger.

04-00:47:28

Geritz:

And so after a period, keeping a 16 alive, a 16 projector, especially an exhibition one, must have been a challenge, because that equipment started going before even the, of course 35.

04-00:47:45

Kramer:

In those days, I mean those days, earlier on, you didn't imagine that you wouldn't get parts, you know? You didn't know that 16 would be phased out, and that meant that the parts to your projector would no longer be available, that your projector would no longer be manufactured. I witnessed these things happening over time.

I remember when Craig told me that we really needed new parts for the Hortson, and there were no parts available in the United States. I knew that the Hortsons were used at the Cinémathèque Française, because I had been there and I had been to their booth. I liked always, to go to booths, if I visited an archive, to know what they were using and why, and how it performed. So I asked my colleagues at the Cinémathèque Française, where do you get your parts, and they said, well there's a Hortson parts place right on the outskirts of Paris. So I took a trip with this list of parts that Craig gave me, none of which I understood. I had no idea what these were, how big they were, but Craig made a list of all the parts that needed to be replaced, and he indicated how many copies of those parts. Not just to buy one part, but he looked ahead about ten years, again, not knowing what would happen ten years later or anything like that.

So I went, found this place, I presented them with the thing. It was a little difficult, the language, because they didn't speak English and I didn't speak enough French to explain, but finally we got an interpreter to come in, and with sign language and drawings and everything else, they allowed that they could do this, but the parts weren't there on the shelf. What I didn't realize, because of my lack of comprehension, that they were going to tool and die all of these, that they were made to order for our Hortson, because when they came, it was this little box that came out, and I thought is that what I just spent all this money on? I mean there was this little cardboard box that came in the mail, and I took it to Craig and he opened it up, and it was carefully packaged in little individual packets, with all kinds of cushioning, with these tiny little gears. There were these tiny little pieces of metal and Craig was marveling at them, he said, "These are better than the original parts because these are tool and died, these are not like stamped out." These were custom made, so they lasted longer than we ever thought they would last, and thank God for the duplicates.

But, you won't probably use a Hortson when your new theater opens, right?

04-00:50:51

Geritz:

Well at the moment, there's no money for other projectors.

- 04-00:50:54
Kramer: Oh, because I thought maybe you were going to get combo 35-16s.
- 04-00:50:58
Geritz: We've heard, it's not yet been verified, that the company has gone out of business.
- 04-00:51:05
Kramer: But there may be projectors on the market though.
- 04-00:51:08
Geritz: Maybe. We just heard last week, so Susan is looking into it.
- 04-00:51:12
Kramer: Because all our colleagues had bought those projectors, so somebody is going to have to provide parts for all our colleagues, ones who keep. It would be interesting to talk to the other archives, to see what they're going to do, because they all went through that change.
- 04-00:51:27
Geritz: Exactly. It's interesting, what you're describing for 16 is happening for 35, of course.
- 04-00:51:31
Kramer: Right, and we didn't imagine it then.
- 04-00:51:34
Geritz: Never. With the switchover to digital.
- 04-00:51:37
Kramer: To digital.
- 04-00:51:39
Geritz: And how quickly all that will change. It's an amazing shift, from something that's 19th Century.
- 04-00:51:46
Kramer: Right. Now of course the thing is, for archives, one could manufacture your own projectors, they're mechanical. In other words, you could have—I mean, this was discussed in FIAF, of having one place for international archives that would make mechanical projectors for the archives, and the parts. This is a theoretical decision, but if all the archives participated—I mean, how are they going to show their 35mm collections or their 16mm collections?
- 04-00:52:24
Geritz: That's great, what a story.
- 04-00:52:26
Kramer: But I mean, it's not impossible.
- 04-00:52:30
Geritz: No.

04-00:52:31

Kramer: They're mechanical.

04-00:52:32

Geritz: Exactly, yeah. And then you have people who are mechanically oriented, like our projectionists, who know how to keep the equipment going.

04-00:52:45

Kramer: So it's a skill that we want to preserve, because those people will not be around, and will there be anybody in a younger generation who understands or is trained to build a mechanical projector. It's not rocket science. It's actually a lot simpler.

04-00:53:13

Geritz: It's almost like flipping back to the first moment, right?

04-00:53:15

Kramer: Yeah.

04-00:53:16

Geritz: When all these mechanically oriented people were developing them.

04-00:53:25

Kramer: There are many parts. You have to have the optics, but lenses continue to be made because in the digital world you use lenses. Still, yeah, you can use lenses, but maybe at some point it's important that you won't. That's possible, because if you just do fiber optic streaming to a screen, digital screen, I mean you can bypass projection. You have to have a digital screen. It's more like television.

04-00:53:55

Geritz: Yeah, exactly. But optics, that seems fairly safe, with microscopes and telescopes. How about show times? Was that something that you evaluated much or did they feel like they were standard?

04-00:54:32

Kramer: We were always talking about it, endlessly talking about it. I think every year there was a discussion of show times. Should we go earlier, should we go later, should we not go so late, should we do more matinees? I always wanted more matinees, but as time went, we had to share the theater. We couldn't always get the matinee slots, because you shared the theater with—it's the museum auditorium and the PFA theater in one venue and there was always that kind of competition for the one place you could put a lot of people in at one time. I knew that ultimately, the later shows would go. I always knew that. In the early years, when Tom was there, we could do midnight shows and we had an audience. But you could clearly see that that wasn't going to work. It didn't take very long before audiences decreased their attendance late at night, even with young people.

- 04-00:55:37
Geritz: I wonder why that was. I started going here when those screenings were, and we all went to them. What was there about that moment?
- 04-00:55:45
Kramer: You didn't have video. You couldn't go home and watch a videotape, right? How much television were you watching at home? Did you have a television set?
- 04-00:55:55
Geritz: No, I didn't, yeah.
- 04-00:55:56
Kramer: I think there were a lot of students who didn't even have television sets.
- 04-00:56:00
Geritz: Yeah, you're right.
- 04-00:56:01
Kramer: There was less TV watching at home, there was no video, so you went to the movies, of course more on weekends than during the week but sometimes even students went, I'm sure, during the week.
- 04-00:56:27
Geritz: We'd go to the late screenings after studying.
- 04-00:56:29
Kramer: After studying, okay.
- 04-00:56:30
Geritz: It would be like a reward. Oh, you studied until eleven, you'd go to the screening, when it was things like, *The Prisoner*.
- 04-00:56:39
Kramer: You didn't worry about sleep, right? Especially, you know, if you had eight o'clock classes, maybe it's different. Yeah, so all those things kind of changed more or less around the same time, as to what there was, what became available to you changed how you viewed, when you viewed, where you viewed. It was competition and so then you didn't necessarily have only the movie house to go to. You had a nice alternative. So part of that evolution.
- I was always thinking what will work best. It's even when you're programming; is this a film to show early or late? You make decisions, especially when you're doing double bills, what film is better for an early show. But I myself had grown up with going to matinees, as well as evening shows, and in my great marathon movie going when I was in graduate school, in Cambridge, the five-thirty show was my favorite time, because we were in class all day long. I was going to have to do a lot of homework at night and for me, never mind dinner, got to a five-thirty screening, go home, just grab something quick to eat and then study. But the five-thirty screen was, for me,

fantastic. I never could understand why it didn't take off here, but everybody I knew back east, the student population, five-thirty screenings. It was just perfect.

04-00:58:59

Geritz:

I remember we tried free five-thirty. Nothing. So, speaking of another show time, at some point you instituted the Film 50. Can you talk a little about your thinking behind it and then obviously, you came up with a time, which is a late afternoon slot.

04-00:59:22

Kramer:

When I first thought of Film 50, it had been percolating in my mind, some way to have PFA teach a basic film history course, but have it partnered with the university. It came out of the development in the university, of a film major. It was still the group major in film, but I saw what was happening. We were moving and we were happy to see, I mean we fought for this, we wanted to see this happen, but we saw that there were going to be a lot of students majoring in film, even though it was a secondary major. You had to be in English or history or something, but still, that meant you were going to have a faculty teaching courses for beginning, intermediate, advanced students, and there were to be only so many students majoring. I thought, that means they're the only ones who get film history in an academic setting. What about the rest of the students who are in other subjects? Why couldn't they have a film history course? In the same way, I remembered taking a music history or music appreciation course as an elective when I was in college, and how wonderful that was. It has nothing to do with anything I was studying and it was just a joy and I learned a lot. It was just such a relief to go into something that wasn't in my major, but also to learn something about another field and to have a better understanding of music.

So I thought, this is a unique opportunity and I thought, well why wouldn't—people go to the movies. They take for granted you go to the movies. Why wouldn't non-film majors want to know more about the movies; how it all happened, how one thing led to another, and things that they're not going to see in the theater. If they just randomly come to whatever the archive is showing at a given time, that will be wonderful, but they won't get a sustained history. So, that was in my mind, that we ought to be able to provide a service to the campus that isn't provided by the film major and that would be enjoyable, it would be an elective, they could get credit, providing I can convince the film department to provide a teacher, because it had to be a partnership, because we can't pay a teacher unless one of us does it. But then if no credit is given, the students won't take it. What you want when you're a student is to have electives, and you want to be able to have things that are different than what you're majoring in. So I thought okay, there's a need and we could fill that need if we could convince the film department to partner with us. But then I also thought, but we open it up to the general public and there's a need there too. The general public is more of our audience, but they

jump in and are looking at whatever we're showing them at any given time. They're not getting a systematic film history to support the film series they're coming to see, some of the background, and I knew, from my own experience, that adults that have leisure time like to take courses. That I already knew. It's an extension, UC Extension and all that sort of stuff, adult education. I firmly believed in that and we have people with leisure time. We have retired people, we have people who don't work, their spouses work, but maybe they're not taking care of children at home any more or the children are in school and they have some time. So, I wanted it to be in the afternoon, and I didn't want it to take away from the nights, our own series. We needed those night slots, so we had to get an afternoon slot.

But I also saw it as a kind of—the word that was popular at the time, empowerment, everybody was using the word empowerment. I said, well this is a kind of empowerment. If you get knowledge by taking a course, then you feel more comfortable in your own opinions and responses to film. You don't have to depend on a reviewer, what somebody else says. You learn a language that you can use and it gives you more confidence as a viewer, you'll try tougher things. You won't be scared of trying a foreign film with subtitles. You won't be scared of trying an avant-garde film. You come with some information and understanding of how to look at things. So I thought it would make you braver, it would take you out of your comfort zone and you'd be excited to go out of your comfort zone. So I thought that could work.

I thought if we really said we're an educational organization, then we had an obligation to explore every educational method we could. I was sure that I would get general public. This was before we reduced it to membership only. It was not just members only, it was anybody in the general public. First come, first serve, sign up. The first time we did it, we had to turn away the general public and we also had to turn away students, because they reacted just like we thought they'd react. Oh, this is a breeze, an elective where I sit and watch movies. What could be better? And then the good fortune of finding Marilyn Fabe, I mean who was just... it was perfect for her and Russell Merritt. It had to be an instructor who liked doing lectures to large groups of people. It's a lecture course, and of course it offered—for graduate students or advanced students, it offered TA possibilities. The film department needed that. At that time, also, they did not have enough sections for their students. They needed to have more courses that had sections. I remember that.

04-01:07:00

Geritz:

For the grad students to teach.

04-01:07:01

Kramer:

Yeah. They were under-performing in that respect. So they were very happy that they could—what, three? I think you would get three TAs out of that, or maybe in some cases four. I don't know how many students you have to have,

but there were enough. The enrollment was big enough so that you could help with the TA things. So I think it worked for everybody.

04-01:07:33

Geritz: Do you remember when that was, around when you started it?

04-01:07:35

Kramer: No.

04-01:07:37

Geritz: I could always look it up. [Note: it was spring semester, 1993.]

04-01:07:38

Kramer: I really don't remember what year it was. There must be a record someplace.

04-01:07:49

Geritz: Yeah, sure. The film studies department, how did they respond?

04-01:07:55

Kramer: The people that I talked to at the time were Tony Kaes. I can't remember whether Linda Williams was—was William Nestruck still alive? I'm trying to remember.

04-01:08:12

Geritz: I don't think Linda was here. I don't think Linda was here yet, but I'm not—that's a good question.

04-01:08:19

Kramer: Definitely Tony Kaes.

04-01:08:20

Geritz: He was probably chair.

04-01:08:24

Kramer: He sometimes says he started Film 50 but that's okay. In a sense, he was my partner, right? Also, I'm trying to think, had we started that council on the arts that I attended and Tony attended. It's now something else.

04-01:08:50

Geritz: Oh, the Consortium [Consortium for the Arts].

Kramer:

The Consortium. When it first started, Tony and I were original members of it. It was started by the Dean. She became Vice Chancellor later, and then left for Harvard.

Geritz:

I know just who you mean. Christ is her last name.

Kramer:

But I'm trying to think what is her first name. [Carol] Anyway, she instigated that [the Consortium], and I think that might have been about the time that I came up with Film 50.

Geritz: And so you ran it through the Consortium also?

Kramer: Well, I remember telling them about it.

04-01:09:41

Geritz: Because they were trying to bring attention to the arts throughout the campus, and so of course they would be interested in that.

04-01:09:51

Kramer: I remember Tony and I brainstorming on it, but I've forgotten the year.

04-01:10:09

Geritz: What about the role of children's programming?

04-01:10:12

Kramer: Ah, yes. When I first came to the archive, we had a very active children's program, both on the museum side, I mean we had art classes. There was a museum education person for children you'd see all these kids coming in and doing art things, you know, and of course we had a very active film series—it was Films for Big and Little People. That title came later, because when I was working on the database project, I realized that even before Films for Big and Little People, it was called children's matinees and things like that. So I think from the very beginning, they had programs designated for children, matinees, and the schools program. Linda Artel has the history on that, because she was here when I arrived and she was already doing it.

04-01:11:08

Geritz: She was?

04-01:11:09

Kramer: Oh yeah, she was doing the children's stuff.

04-01:11:15

Geritz: And did you see a role for children's programming within the overall programming, in the sense you were talking?

04-01:11:24

Kramer: I did, but I also was very aware that you needed somebody who knew how to do that. I felt, I can do a certain amount of children's programming, but people might not like what I would do. [laughs] I know what I would show children, but in Berkeley, you run into parents. If the parents were not in the way, I know exactly what I'd show children. But as someone who doesn't have children, I have a very different approach. I base it somewhat on what I went to see as a child, what I read as a child. I don't believe in having to stick to what is it, strictly speaking, children's films. I think children—well, we all know that you can show avant-garde films to little children and they respond very well, and our early children's programs did do that. They saw abstract films and things like that, because before they're tainted by their growth and their development, they respond very intuitively to abstraction on the screen. You have to have short films, because their attention span is not very long.

You have a hard time showing them a long film until they've grown quite a bit. But the parents are the problem. The parents are so demanding, you can't show my kid that, you can't show this, you can't show that. It's like negotiating what parents allow, that you need somebody who understands parenting and understands the whole thing. I am not sympathetic to that at all, I'd be the worst person for that. But I think it's very important to have a program, to show kids films from the time they're very young.

We had the stuff that went with the schools and that takes somebody also, to understand. It's the curriculum. I had no idea what people—I mean the curriculum in—you don't call it elementary school. What do you call it now, primary school.

04-01:13:37

Geritz: Primary.

04-01:13:39

Kramer: When I was young it was elementary school. So I think it's primary school, and I don't even know what—

04-01:13:45

Geritz: It might be K through five.

04-01:13:46

Kramer: There's preschool, there's kindergarten, then there's first grade through what?

04-01:13:50

Geritz: I think through five, and then most places now have six in the middle school.

04-01:13:54

Kramer: Then it's middle school. We didn't have middle school, we had junior high school, but that started with seventh grade I think. Yeah. So, everything has changed, but anyway, you have to know what the curriculum is in your area for the public schools, and so you have to know all that stuff. I mean you can learn it but still, you have to work with the teachers as well as with the parents. That's a job. I think that takes training and skill. I didn't have the time or inclination for that, and of course when I came here we had somebody, so I just assumed we would continue to have somebody, that that was an important area. The first thing I saw disappear was the museum side of the education, that went. Is that coming back in the new building?

04-01:14:45

Geritz: It is, in the new building.

04-01:14:46

Kramer: I heard them talk about that.

04-01:14:49

Geritz: They're having spaces for—

- 04-01:14:51
Kramer: So the idea is to bring back children.
- 04-01:14:53
Geritz: They're already doing some pilot programs.
- 04-01:14:56
Kramer: So, will they hire somebody just for that?
- 04-01:14:59
Geritz: I think that they've just gotten permission to do that, and they're even, I think hiring now, to get some things in place.
- 04-01:15:06
Kramer: Because Sherry Goodman won't be burdened with that, no.
- 04-01:15:08
Geritz: Right now, Karen Bennett, I think is doing most of it, but there will be someone.
- 04-01:15:12
Kramer: Yeah, because there's a big difference between the adult education and what you do with kids.
- 04-01:15:17
Geritz: Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. When Linda left, we had Joanne Parsont as the contract person for a while, but it's a whole different thing if the person isn't on the staff.
- 04-01:05:31
Kramer: So, if you're going to do it right, I think you have to have a staff person to really integrate it. The school thing broke down because there were so many cutbacks, and you couldn't get the kids delivered here. We couldn't go pick them up.
- 04-01:15:50
Geritz: In fact, we wrote a grant even, to see if we could get buses for them. That was really the sign of the end.
- 04-01:16:00
Kramer: There are not that many—I remember before I retired, looking at other people's programs and there were not that many places that had children's program any more.
- 04-01:16:08
Geritz: But now they do.
- 04-01:16:09
Kramer: It's back.
- 04-01:16:09
Geritz: It's a huge thing now, yeah. I think that there's funding for it again.

04-01:16:18

Kramer: Good.

04-01:16:22

Geritz: So in a different realm, thinking about showing contemporary work in a feature length, how important were premieres to the institution, to PFA, and to you personally?

04-01:16:37

Kramer: Personally, it didn't matter a bit to me. I really hate the whole concept of premiere and Bay Area premiere, California premiere, U.S. premiere, world premiere, I mean it's a festival line. I deplore all of that. You get trapped into it because you're doing everything you can to get audience, and if that works then you use that, and PR people think that works. I myself could care less whether you're the first, the second, the third or the last show of a film. If it's a film you want to show to your audience you show it and never mind whether it's the first. I'm not always sure that saying premiere means anything. I'm not convinced that it's a natural thing. Certain kinds of films, it works more than another kind.

I think if there's a buzz around something already, people know it's out there and they're hot to see it, and you're the first one to show it, then you get the big rush. It doesn't mean you can't show it later, but there is that thing. There has to be a buzz out there. If you just say premiere of something and nobody's ever heard of it, what? Who cares? So, now you see festivals and 90 percent of a festival's screening now is premiere, but does it make any difference? If there's no buzz on this film, people are going because it's a festival. If you didn't say premiere, they'd probably still go to the film. We did it, we fell into the trap too. I just never believed in it.

04-01:18:38

Geritz: So, as you mentioned, one way to show contemporary work and if needed, premieres, was of course through our relationship with the San Francisco International Film Festival. Can you talk a little about how that came about and what some of the thinking was about that?

04-01:10:57

Kramer: Yeah, because I remember proposing that. There had been an informal relationship prior to that. When I first arrived at the archive, Tom Luddy was very involved with the festival. He knew Albert Johnson of course, and everybody, and so on and so forth, and he would pick up films right after the festival. In other words, a film would be in the festival and then he would jump on it if he thought it is something that we could show here, and so it would be kind of almost an extension. And then that increased and he would work out, sometimes a kind of—I don't exactly know how he did it, I don't remember, but he was doing it before I arrived on the scene, but he would do some cooperative screenings. There was nothing formalized. It could be one film, it could be a couple of films, he did them after the festival. So, he did

just do some, I think working with Albert and Claude Jarman and things like that. You have to ask him, maybe, for the details on that.

I think it was after I came back, right, in '83, that I formalized it. Peter was then—Scarlet, had become artistic director. My idea was that okay, it's very difficult for us to program against the festival. The reality is, we're not going to have any audience, we might as well close down. Can we afford to close down completely? Should we just go dark and we'll run off to the festival, that will be fine, take our break then. And then I thought well, what if we can do a form of partnership, and I thought about it, and then I wrote it out and I called up Peter and I said, "I have a proposal for you." Of course, I argued it on economic grounds. I knew it was going to benefit us, but I had to make it benefit them. I said look, I'll work with you, selecting films, I mean you're the person selecting the films but I will watch films with you, if you need help, I'll recommend, anything like that. I'll do the work and our staff will do their work, and we won't charge you for our time, and you have to use other theaters. You're renting theaters basically. You don't have to rent ours. You get a free theater and you get free staff. Think about it. But I decide what films get shown here, or I mean you can say no, you can't show them, but you can't put films into the archive just because that's another venue. I get to choose which of your films come here. You get to say yes, you can have that one or no, you can't have that one, that I accept, but we don't charge you for any of our work and our time, and you know you get good projection. We'll take our responsibility on the shipping part, you know we'll do all of that. I said, so essentially you get a free theater and staff, and you get my support and I'm willing to put in all the viewing work, and then we'll give you 50 percent of the take. I said, "You can't lose." You get 50 percent of the gross, I think it was the gross, not the net, gross, and there are no expenses. I said, "It's win-win-win for you." Peter thought the argument was a good one and convinced his board and that's how it started.

04-01:23:18

Geritz:

And how did the audience over in the East Bay respond?

04-01:23:22

Kramer:

They were delighted. They flocked to it because it was so much easier than trying to go over to the city. Of course, it's only a small selection, you know, thirty to forty films, from a hundred films, but they trusted our selection and it was so much more convenient and they loved it.

04-01:23:47

Geritz:

And then how did the relationship with the Asian American Film Festival develop? That was later.

04-01:23:52

Kramer:

Similar. There was a similar kind of thing. Was that later or before? I can't remember which came first actually.

- 04-01:24:02
Geritz: I believe the San Francisco came first.
- 04-01:24:05
Kramer: I'm not sure.
- 04-01:24:06
Geritz: You're not sure? [Note: PFA began screening the Asian American International Film Festival in Fall 1982 and the San Francisco International Film Festival in April 1983.]
- 04-01:24:06
Kramer: I'm not sure, because I think they—the Asian American International Film Festival—might have approached us for one time, you know, and then it worked and we did it again
- 04-01:24:19
Geritz: Oh. It's a good question then.
- 04-01:24:21
Kramer: I can't remember who was in charge at that time, but they reminded me, somebody reminded me, said do you remember when we first asked you if you would do— You know how festivals come and ask you?
- 04-01:24:30
Geritz: Mm-hmm.
- 04-01:24:31
Kramer: And they came and asked us, just like many other festivals, and I wasn't sure, I think probably a first time I said, well we'll try it. And then it worked so well that we did it again, and then it became a formal thing. I'm not sure, I wonder if it was before San Francisco, the first time.
- 04-01:24:55
Geritz: I'll have to look into that, because there were little things. As you were saying, there were cases where there would be an individual or a couple nights, like the Human Rights Watch Film Festival, different—you know, different festivals.
- 04-01:25:09
Kramer: Something small, and I think they began small. You're going to have to find the first one and see what the date of that is and whether we were also doing San Francisco.
- 04-01:25:25
Geritz: Was it ever an issue to you, the sort of balance of outside programming, like festivals?
- 04-01:25:36
Kramer: Well, everybody wanted to—once we started doing them, or even before that, everybody came to you with things and you had to be selective, because

otherwise, you weren't doing your own programming. There were enough things going on here. There was a woman's festival, there was a this festival, there was a that festival. We started getting lots of local festivals and breakaways from San Francisco, because they didn't feel it was enough attention to their particular—everybody had their own little cause and group. I realized we could just go under with this, I mean it would just consume us, and I thought what really... So I made a selection, I said what really works in our favor, what's in our best interests, as people refer to in politics, you know, what is in our best interests, that's finally what it's about. We're not a rent a theater. We have a way, you can rent the theater. You want a weekend festival, you can rent our theater and by all means do that, you may find it works very well, but not part of the program. People were often annoyed at me that I didn't make the program. I just said, it's not in our best interests, I mean that's the truth of it. [Note: When all these festivals asked us to partner, they often didn't realize or take into account that "partnering" with PFA meant our own curators selected what showed in our program under our name. The festival could not impose films on us that we wouldn't have otherwise chosen. Therefore there were only a few festivals with whom we could partner.]

04-01:26:59

Geritz:

Did you ever feel there was competition between your institution and other venues, to get a film or a series, and how did you deal with this?

04-01:27:09

Kramer:

Yes, you did compete. As more and more festivals or more series, there's always competition. I didn't want to be competitive with people. I always thought there's room enough for all of us. Some people act very aggressive. I didn't want to be aggressive in being competitive. I didn't want to say, I'm going to make sure that person doesn't get... I never wanted to do that. I know some colleagues do work that way and I decided I didn't think that was correct behavior. I thought okay, somebody may get it and we won't get it, that's fine. The important thing is, it's getting shown, and maybe later we can show it in another context. Don't be upset if somebody else does it first, there's plenty to do. It's always been my—don't get into that war. It gets ugly and then you lose colleagues and ultimately, you'll need colleagues. I didn't want to get into that, so I lost things, it's okay, there's plenty.

04-01:28:26

Geritz:

Sometimes you'd lose something because say, what the rental rate was, like if it's too much.

04-01:28:31

Kramer:

Yes, couldn't afford it.

04-01:28:33

Geritz:

How did you make decisions about what to pay artists and distributors?

04-01:28:40

Kramer:

Well for a while, I'd say we had a sort of fee, that we wanted to pay all the artists the same. And then of course you have to factor in whether they're traveling or there's hotels, so that's a separate budget. I think the important thing was to treat artists the same.

With distributors, it was often rob Peter to pay Paul. You know, if you could get enough cheap ones, then maybe if you really needed something you could pay more for something, but there were also limits. So you tried, with series, when clearing rights got to be ridiculous, it was like okay, if you're going to pay that for this one, which is usually the international films that were the problem, how many others are practically nothing. It was just, you would try to balance it out on the overall budget, but sometimes you just couldn't show things.

04-01:29:43

Geritz:

Did you have sort of a figure in mind, like try to keep the average to this?

04-01:29:50

Kramer:

The average went up over the years but yeah, I tried to keep a kind of average in my head, because we had clear budgets, what we could spend, and so I tried to keep that. But the average kept going up over the years. Shipping went up, everything just kept endlessly going up.

04-01:30:17

Geritz:

And how did you deal with that, the sort of rising costs but fairly stagnant budgets?

04-01:30:26

Kramer:

Cut back often, didn't do as many things as you might have. There were series that maybe you didn't do because they were too expensive. Partnering, more partnering. You were very aggressive in seeking partners for things you really wanted to do. Can you share this with somebody. And then of course the grants and more fundraising going to cultural. Much more fundraising on individual series, but the grants became—I mean all of this sort of happened at the same time. You were getting more grant opportunities, there were more people to go to, to ask for money, just as the prices were going up too. I think interestingly enough, they kind of were parallel strands.

04-01:31:26

Geritz:

That's interesting.

04-01:31:31

Kramer:

You learn that okay, I'm going to have to be more active in fundraising if I want to do certain things, but in fact, there are now more opportunities to ask, and everybody else is doing that.

04-01:31:49

Geritz:

So that grew as a part of your job over time.

04-01:31:51

Kramer:

Yeah. What we didn't have that many other people had, was sponsorship. There's restrictions in the university. In a sense we did get it but we didn't get it. I mean, you couldn't do sponsorship where you advertise a product, because the university thing. Private institutions could have—I mean like MoMA could have commercial sponsorship. You could have a company essentially sponsor a show and make it clear that they were the sponsorship, with their goods in some way displayed.

Of course Stephen Gong—a Toyota was—somehow had gotten money from Toyota and they put a Toyota in the lobby, and he got hell for that. That's still the way, right, with the university? You still, you can't do anything like that, right?

04-01:33:00

Geritz:

No, not at all. We do exchanges, you know, our sponsorships are things like memberships, discounts, things like that, but no signs or... What about decisions to go into Wheeler, to think there might be more income from—

04-01:33:21

Kramer:

Well, in the beginning, we were in Wheeler and we were here, and sometimes on the same night we were in both places. There was enough audience to go around and the more the merrier. Wheeler, if you had a particular film or guest with film, that you thought was a hot ticket, and you budgeted Wheeler, I mean you looked at Wheeler like how many—it's not necessarily whether you fill it, it's how many people—how we used to do benefits too. How many people do we have to break even? How many tickets do we have to sell to break even if we go there, and what are the costs of going into Wheeler, because they're expensive. And if you figured that your break even point was very much within reach, then you could do it and hope that you could go beyond breaking even. So, as audiences dwindled, the opportunities for Wheeler also dwindled.

I remember some disasters. I always remember when I had Toshiro Mifune and I felt well, it was just fine and I didn't want to charge too much, and we had 3,000 people show up.

04-01:34:44

Geritz:

I had to walk down the line to tell people they wouldn't get in. It was all the way to Bancroft, and they still thought maybe they might get in.

04-01:34:51

Kramer:

Yeah, I mean they didn't go away. I was so naïve, I thought well, we can certainly go into Wheeler with the—[laughs]. I mean, it was madness. Madness.

04-01:35:08

Geritz:

I've never seen anything like that.

04-01:35:14

Kramer:

I also remember when we had Robert Frank with *Cocksucker Blues*. Now, it wasn't that kind of line, but we had packed them in. If it had just been Robert Frank. No, it was *Cocksucker Blues* that packed them in, and some guy who disguised himself as a janitor came in with a mop and pail. I mean, how desperate to get in. How telling that years later, Nakadai is our guest, and we fill this theater here in the museum and we only turn away maybe forty, fifty people. Nakadai may be not as big a name as Mifune, but he was up there with the best, and here, I mean what a change.

04-01:36:21

Geritz:

That leads me to ask a question that you'd already been talking a little bit about, the role of guests also. In mentioning Mifune and then earlier, Albert, there's also the role of the guest host, so like Audie Bock was so central to so many of the Japanese guests, and Albert Johnson brought his grace to—

04-01:36:47

Kramer:

Celebrities, Hollywood celebrities.

04-01:36:48

Geritz:

Mm-hmm, the well-known.

04-01:36:50

Kramer:

Also, certain foreign directors, because of his travels, he knew them all. Wherever Albert went he made friends and filmmakers loved him. Albert was just a natural. He could just so charm an audience and he was so delightful to hold a conversation. He just had this gift, amazing gift. Very few people have what he has, very few. Peter Scarlet has some of it, Peter can do it, but Albert had this charm, I mean it was just fantastic. It was a great loss, to lose Albert, a great loss, as a friend but from what he brought to the archive and to the festival.

So when you find good local people that make wonderful hosts. David Thompson does wonderful introductions, Greil Marcus. They have their own cache, which they bring with them, but it adds a wonderful vitality to the program, to have guest introducers who are good, and they have a following.

04-01:38:34

Geritz:

Yeah, absolutely. What role did the Q&A have for you and did this change over time, and how do you feel about Q&As?

04-01:38:45

Kramer:

In a way I don't like them, never happy with them. It seems democratic, but the fact is, only a small proportion of your audience have either the courage or wit to ask a question, and those who have courage don't necessarily ask good questions. It very much though, depends on the guest, because the guest can make better questions happen. You learn that. A guest who's experienced either in lecturing, teaching, or very audience effective, can change the whole tone, can elevate the kinds of questions, but there's a relatively small number

of your guests who can do that. Out of the whole—in fact, I don't care if they're filmmakers or what, they aren't necessarily public speakers and they can be defensive and not gracious and open. They may not be articulate with verbal explanations of what they're doing. They may not know how to turn a dumb question into a good question, how to turn it around or play with it, and we've all seen that.

So on the whole, I find Q&A tedious. I rather like when you get a guest filmmaker who simply takes over and talks. I think probably the audience benefits more when they are able to completely control the thing, and they start telling you things about how they made the film and what concerned them in the process, and they start sharing the process. That's really wonderful and I always thought, I don't really want so many guests, because I think so many of them are a waste of time, they're not adding. The film speaks for itself in a way, they're not adding anything.

04-01:41:13

Geritz:

It's interesting, because we had talked a few times ago about the early Vogel series, where he just said it never occurred to him, to have the filmmakers. He was more interested in that there be good writing about the film. So that it actually has to do with what you're saying; astuteness and content.

04-01:41:33

Kramer:

You know, during the festival, I used to hate it with all the guests, because most of them were terrible in front of the audience.

04-01:41:47

Geritz:

Do you think it's because it was films they hadn't talked much about, they're still finding out how to speak about it?

04-01:41:53

Kramer:

They're still finding their audience. A recently made film and most of the screenings are not going to be in front of a live—they're not going to have a live interchange. The distributing people never— So, this is their— you know, what they faced before is press. They faced press and that can be antagonistic, but general public asking? Most of them don't get that, except at festivals, and then it's a crap shoot, and you don't know if they're prepared or even interested. You actually find out during the festival that many of them are not even interested in spending time with the audience, and the festivals don't give them much time; less time than our normal programming does. It's in and out, so it's kind of a joke in that sense.

04-01:42:53

Geritz:

In that sense. There was a value to meeting the filmmakers who were making some of their first films and developing relationships with them, because you had met them and you were interested. Both of us helped people with distribution.

04-01:43:08

Kramer:

That's between the curator, but you know, it's the audience, it's that whole thing, I think so many times it doesn't work. I wish the filmmakers who hit the road, whether it's festivals or single engagements, understood their responsibility, what they need to do, and prepare, because it is partially their responsibility.

04-01:43:47

Geritz:

We have, as you know, this new grant that we've now had four years, it's conversations, where we bring in a critic or a scholar, and there is that sense that you have to prepare. You're going to be in conversation for a half hour and we found that that model at most times, really does work.

04-01:44:07

Kramer:

Yeah, it does take preparation and one person is having the conversation, not all over the place. Generally, they meet together beforehand, to kind of map out where they're going, and so they have a kind of plan, it's not cold turkey. I think that's intelligent and if the person, the interviewer, is good at this, then it facilitates it. So no, I think I like that idea.

04-01:44:49

Geritz:

Did you see a role more for introductions say, of bringing in someone, or were you mainly saying oh, just get that film on the screen and let the audience have the experience of it?

04-01:45:05

Kramer:

Well, I thought that introductions were partially—and I think this is important, to welcome the audience. I do believe that you treat your audience like your guests. This is your space, you've planned these things, you've invited them there. Yes, they're paying, but you should make them feel comfortable and welcome, that it's good, it's a good thing to do. Personalize it, make them feel important, that their opinion matters. You may disagree with it but it's okay, but they matter. They're your bread and butter and that's who you program for. You're wanting to educate them and enlighten them about film, as well as entertain them.

So I think introductions, a very important function is a welcoming. More so in many ways, than the information, specific information you might give them. Now, if you've got good program notes, you don't have to repeat that, they can read. But sometimes you feel that some films need some help or a direction, you want to sort of make them go beyond. So much is content, and I think a function has always been, don't get bogged down just in content. This is a love story, this is an adventure. We're so content-driven and the whole point of looking at cinema as an art form is to go beyond content. So, trying to get people to think about how these stories and ideas are presented, what is the form in which they're presented. What is the look of this film, what is the style of this film, what are some unusual things. And trying to make them think about this as they're watching. Something to kind of challenge them is

helpful, or some information that you think is important for them but isn't in the note. You can tell them why you put the series together, what interested you as a curator, to share that. They like that, any technical information, they like that. It's all part of educating.

I'm glad you asked that question, because recently, I went to see a film at the Shattuck Theater, and I went to see a film at a multiplex.

04-01:48:12

Geritz:

United Artists? Was it on Shattuck too, the United Artists?

04-01:48:17

Kramer:

I haven't been into the UA recently. I was in the Shattuck Cinemas recently, but I was in another theater recently, it might have been at one of the AMC things down in Emeryville, somebody took me to a screening there. And I've also had the experience at the Elmwood. I noticed that they introduced the films, and this is a whole new experience, and they're young people. I'm thinking oh my God, they must have learned this at PFA. No, I said this is a whole new thing and I like it, and I think oh, this person is doing a very good job, or this person is not so good, they need some help. But I thought what a nice idea, somebody has decided to bring that into the commercial theater.

04-01:49:05

Geritz:

I've seen it definitely at Landmarks.

04-01:49:07

Kramer:

And it's very personable and it's enthusiastic and very gracious, and the audience loves it. I'm sitting there and the audience is applauding the person. It isn't just something that only we do, this is now something that a commercial theater does, and this is good!

04-01:49:29

Geritz:

Good point. You mentioned the writing, like that oh, well they've read the note, et cetera. How important is it to you that there be original writing each time the film is shown, to have the writing reflect the thinking behind why you're bringing a film back, its new context.

04-01:49:55

Kramer:

I always thought that the writing in a series, if you're doing a series, then the writing should say something of how this fits into the series, as they're tied together. You could write a note without referring to the series, just as an individual, but the point of doing a series is you've got to indicate why this is in the series. And then there's just a certain amount of things you have to—you know, not too much content. You can have the genre, but don't tell too much of the story, that's for sure. So many notes, people's program notes, you read, it's just too much. Even reviews today, it's too much story.

Something about the qualitative assessment, why the writer, the programmer, thinks this is an interesting film, but also, avoid hyperbole, avoid the over...

it's like when I read the film festival program notes I just laugh. This is the greatest and this is the greatest and this is the greatest and this is the most and this is among the most, and it's like every film. Who are you kidding? That doesn't tell me anything. I don't believe any of that. Tell me something useful. So, that kind of simplistic writing, I think should be thrown out. You don't need superlatives and hyperbole. We need to give the audience a sense of why you programmed it, some brief thing, what interests, how it fits into a series, if it's part of a series. Minimum content. Is it a comedy, is it a tragedy, is it romantic, is it adventure, you know, what genre is helpful. Then something about it. Maybe the film appealed to you so much because of a performance, a unique performance. Maybe it's the cinematography was spectacular, maybe it's the compositions. Whatever, just something that arrests you, that you can give them a little guidance.

And of course it's troubling when you have shorter—when you have to cut back on your note writing. It's much harder to write a short note than it is to write a long note, much harder. How to be succinct, how to say something in a few words, that's key, that's really hard.

04-01:52:44
Geritz:

We've talked a little about audiences and how they've changed, like with the change in say repertory, TV. Even just a few minutes ago, you were talking about the range of times people would go to movies and all. What do you think that audiences ask for now, that they didn't ask for when you first began programming?

04-01:53:17
Kramer:

Okay, I have to go back to when I was still programming, and you could see an aging audience, that's for sure. They loved going back to the classics. There's a familiarity, but seeing things they remembered, being interested in when they were younger, they really liked, felt good about that. I always notice how much, was it nostalgia or whatever, but anyway, just the wanting to re-see the older films, that it struck them.

In terms of comments, what I glean from questions, the questions seem to remain the same. I don't notice whether it's young or old, I don't notice that much change over the years in the kind of, you know, what a young person will ask, what an older person will ask. I find there's a certain repetition there. Clearly, it's harder to get audiences for avant-garde and experimental, but that started a long time ago. By the eighties, we were in a decline in terms of people being supportive, including the filmmakers supporting each other. And at different times, certain films, will drop—especially with a certain young audience or younger audience, there would be the Hong Kong craze or the Bollywood craze, I mean there would be fashions, there are fashions, and suddenly everybody comes out for that. And then that wears off and it's something else that becomes talked about and buzzed around and people want to see. You have to sort of keep up with what that buzz is.

And then there are of course, certain audiences by nationality or ethnicity, dedicated to their own culture, who want to always see those films, but as assimilation takes over more and more, that becomes less and less. How many Japanese go to Japanese films? Why did the Japanese film theaters close in Japantowns? Because a generation no longer treasured their language, their culture in that way. It was for old people.

So, what will happen with the young Iranians, Persians? Will the next generation sustain the interests that we've had? It's a close-knit group and over already several generations, they come together socially, they keep that social, they keep their language, and they want to see their cinema, but at what point will the children born here be so assimilated, they're not even speaking Persian or Farsi at home. I don't know when that happens. They've held on a long time.

Certainly Chinese, I mean I have Chinese friends who are in their sixties, they don't speak Chinese any more. Only their grandparents or their parents maybe, but young Chinese Americans, they don't speak Chinese.

04-01:57:34

Geritz:

So that cultural realm changes the desire to come to a theater for cultural reasons. Did you see any change in the desire to come to a social space?

04-01:57:53

Kramer:

The people who come clearly like the social space of the theater. I remember once, I was on the bus and there was a young couple and a baby sitting across from me, and they smiled at me and I smiled back and they said, "We used to always come to PFA, but now we can't. We hope you're still there when our baby goes to school," or is older, I can't remember what, "And then we can come back or at least one of us can come." You know, that period of life when you can't go out the same way you did before. They had no social life any more, they were home with the baby, and that was going to go on for a while. So, there is an ages of life, times when your socialization process changes; where you socialize, how you socialize.

The seniors need socialization, they need to go out. They don't want to sit at home. They need to see others like them, even need to be around young people. They need that, they need the theater, whether it's plays or concerts, they need that. So, will that, because of people in the digital, who are so into their cell phones and their games and their computers, that's not a social situation. I mean they're socializing on the Web, but that's not physical, being together. So, will they develop into a generation, and their children, that don't have to ever go out? I don't know. You could ask the students, to what extent do they need to go out?

04-02:00:03

Geritz:

That's interesting. I always talk to the students in the curating class, at the beginning of the semester, and then again at the end, about their experience of

going to the archive and to films in general, and this semester it was really interesting. A number of them responded with a certain amount of anger at the feeling that a lot of programming was toward nostalgia. They used that exact term that you used, and that there wasn't—they didn't see their interests as reflected in the programming. So I was like, what is your interest?

04-02:00:44

Kramer:

Okay, so what is their interests?

04-02:00:46

Geritz:

Contemporary filmmaking. So it's kind of like work that they've heard about, as opposed to work they've read about or heard their parents speak about, or that is that they feel they want the exciting work of their generation, as opposed to the exciting work—

04-02:01:02

Kramer:

Sure, but is it film? Is the exciting work of their generation cinema or is it something else? That's the issue. It may not even be cinema.

04-02:01:14

Geritz:

Yeah, and because they're film majors, they were talking of their interest in film. It's a good question, what about their peers, because they do say it's hard for them to get friends to go to movies with them.

04-02:01:27

Kramer:

The thing would be what films—make a list of the films that they would like to see if they were programming. Is it American films, is it foreign films, is it big studio films that are just being made, is that what they would flock to see, or would they like to see less known? Define contemporary, what is it that interests them. That is interesting, because they're so interested in what's on the Web, I'm not sure—that's a different kind of socialization. I don't even think it is socialization, it's very—

Peter called me the last time and he said, "Have you heard the latest Zuckerberg, the Facebook guy?" He says, "Have you heard his latest idea?" I said, "No, what's the latest thing?" Not that I would understand it, since I don't do Facebook. He said he wants to do three dimensional Skype, where you have a Skype conversation with your Skype partner, but you already can have a video chat, I mean you can turn on the video camera, film yourself, and they see it and you see them filming themselves, and you have these ugly pictures of each other on the computer screen. But no, now he's going to have a virtual, 3D space, so it's you and your Skype partner in a cube, I guess, in this—I mean it's a virtual, you're three dimensional, talking to each other in this made up space.

04-02:03:15

Geritz:

It's as if you're visiting, but you don't have to.

04-02:03:17

Kramer:

And I thought, I guess it will catch on but I don't know why. I don't know what the point is. You can't touch. So there are all these efforts to make the computer, or the digital, do things that are like reality but not. They have to provide smell and touch and you know, and all the other senses. They eliminate a lot of the senses. But, no, I do suspect that—I think that there will be, and there's some evidence there's already some sort of backlash of people wanting to go back to the theater, and I don't mean the old people. I mean there's been some discussion in articles about suddenly, people being aware that it's not satisfactory, just having you and your iPad, or whatever, your phone.

04-02:04:37

Geritz:

The smartphone.

04-02:04:38

Kramer:

Or whatever device, digital device, that there's something nice about being in a room with other human beings.

04-02:04:50

Geritz:

We talked at one point, about showing short films, the very short to the medium short, et cetera. What about very long films?

04-02:05:00

Kramer:

Remember we discovered, there were people who were absolutely fascinated with the endurance factor. They took pride in seeing all of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* or *Satantango*, and boasted to each other that they sat through the whole thirteen hours or seven hours, and did marathons and they love the marathons. It's a sort of fetishizing in a way, but it was, I mean the films had to certainly hold your attention for that time. It offers some other kind of challenge to people—watching Warhol's *Sleep*. Wasn't there this thing at a museum, I didn't go to it, some exhibition which takes twenty-four hours?

04-02:05:58

Geritz:

Twenty-four hours.

04-02:05:58

Kramer:

The Clock? [Christian Marclay's film]

04-02:05:59

Geritz:

Yeah, *The Clock*, yeah.

04-02:06:00

Kramer:

So to see the whole thing, you have to be there for twenty-four hours, in one twenty-four hour cycle, and people were boasting about that.

04-02:06:10

Geritz:

The immersive. As you say, just the endurance, but there's also something about an immersive experience, I think, that draws people.

Back when we were talking about 16 mm prints, I had a question that I forgot ask, about bringing William K. Everson. If you could talk a little about the history and the importance of what that collection offered.

04-02:06:33

Kramer:

The first time I brought Bill was when I was at SFMOMA. I invited him there. I think I called up Tom and said would you like to do something with him, because I'm bringing him over, and he said sure. But he knew him from back in New York. I had not met Bill. I met him when he came out, was my guest the first time. He was happy to come to SFMOMA. I might have had him twice there. He also would go to PFA, and then when I came over to PFA, just continued with Bill, and he became so much a part. And then of course when James Card resigned from Telluride, Bill was invited to be the other co-director of Telluride. So, Tom had a special link to him and I had a link to him.

04-02:07:26

Geritz:

So you said when he resigned from Telluride but what you meant is when he resigned from George Eastman House?

04-02:07:32

Kramer:

No, James Card was co-director of Telluride Festival in the beginning.

04-02:07:35

Geritz:

Okay, so when you said when he resigned from Telluride he did what? So, I just missed it.

04-02:07:41

Kramer:

Oh, when he resigned from Telluride, Bill Everson took his place on the Telluride.

04-02:07:44

Geritz:

Oh, Bill took his place, gotcha, gotcha.

04-02:07:47

Kramer:

So Tom had this ongoing, from his youth, knowing Bill in New York, and his screenings and work, to PFA, to Telluride.

04-02:07:58

Geritz:

Got it.

04-02:08:00

Kramer:

So we had strong ties to Bill, and there was the Bill audience.

04-02:08:11

Geritz:

I wonder if such an audience still exists.

04-02:08:14

Kramer:

They're there, they're in your back row still, some of them, still hanging on. They go down to Niles and they're walking encyclopedias of early cinema. I guess some day they'll be gone, I don't know. They'll probably be some

younger people like that, who pick up on that, but they'll be dealing with the Net mostly, they'll be streaming or looking at YouTube.

04-02:08:48

Geritz: It's perfect for that kind of obsessive filling in type.

04-02:08:51

Kramer: Yeah, yeah. I mean, you can find almost everything at one point, on YouTube.

04-02:08:58

Geritz: How much did deadlines impact on your process or shape it, and did you see yourself working with limits or working expansively and exhaustively?

04-02:09:13

Kramer: Part of me hates the deadlines, you're angry at them because it's so much pressure. But on the other hand I realize, I work well under pressure and it sort of stimulates me. The constant deadline kind of pushes you to exert, I think, more energy, to, I always say, be quick stepped and quick witted. I get sloppy without the pressure, I procrastinate, don't focus quite as sharply. So, as much as I hate them, I must admit, I probably respond better to the deadlines than not. Pour it on and it pulls something extra out of me. I might forget some things, things might drop out that I intended to do, they get pushed, but on the whole, I think I work better.

04-02:10:22

Geritz: Can you describe three, or maybe more, emotional moments of your career?

04-02:10:29

Kramer: Emotional moments? Hmm. I don't know how to answer that, emotional. Anger at myself when I make mistakes, always, embarrassment when I put my foot in my mouth. I don't enjoy that but I can laugh about it. You can tell funny stories to your colleagues afterwards, my most embarrassing moment, can you top this? I think I've topped some people's. I've challenged them to come up with something worse. So I do have a sense of humor about them, but at the moment they're happening, you sort of want to shoot yourself.

Happiness, just there's that moment of elation when something goes well. It's brief but it's a lovely feeling, the little high that you have, just when something just went right. You sense it, you feel it, and maybe you get some feedback too, from audience or colleagues, that it went well, and you think oh, that's terrific, that's the reward.

It's nice for me now and then, I run into people on the street, in a shop or someplace, younger people, and they will remember me and thank me for something they learned or experienced, and I find that very rewarding, very nice, to think that somebody actually—you know, it meant something to somebody and they remember it and they want to thank you. I think that's quite extraordinary. What could be better than that, than having someone say that? It happens too with older people, but older people, I think oh, that's just

because they're stuck in their ways, that's just because they're like most of us at a certain age, we hang on to things from the past. So it's much more important to me when a young person greets me and remembers me and says something like that. That to me matters, I would say that's a high.

04-02:13:06

Geritz:

I think this is a good place to stop this, it's at the end of a section. Thank you.

Interview 5: April 24, 2014

05-00:00:04

Geritz: So, Edith, do you agree to be recorded?

05-00:00:07

Kramer: Yes. You mean, I have a choice?

05-00:00:10

Geritz: And today is Thursday, April—

05-00:00:16

Kramer: Thursday. The twenty-fourth?

05-00:00:17

Geritz: We'll guess that it's the twenty-fourth, Garbiñe [Ortega] and Edith Kramer.

05-00:00:23

Ortega: I thought that it will be really interesting for us to talk about a specific series more in-depth, and I chose the Primal Screen, as it is like—I think that it's a very particular case, and so I will ask you about this series. First of all, I would love to hear about the origin of the series. What came first, the idea of putting together certain films that you loved, or you had another idea to build this series?

05-00:01:04

Kramer: Definitely another idea. It has nothing to do with films that I love, which is one of the problems with the series, because I obviously didn't do it well enough or make it clear enough, because people thought it was about films that I love. The people who came too, were actually physically there in the theater, might have understood better, because I made an introduction and I tried to make it very clear in my introduction before the programs, that this wasn't a series about just films that I liked. But people who only read the calendar, I mean then it becomes a little more abstract. They seem to interpret it as my way of doing a kind of canon, you know? And that was not the intention, it was not how the film series started at all. It came from a completely different direction.

05-00:02:10

Geritz: And what was that direction?

05-00:02:11

Kramer: You want me to go further?

05-00:02:14

Geritz: She was saying origins.

05-00:02:15

Kramer: One, it had to do with place. Remind me the actual date, the year, the month and the year of the series. Do you have it there? I've forgotten.

05-00:02:24

Ortega: It's November, 1992.

05-00:02:28

Kramer: Nineteen ninety-two. Did we already know that the building—we hadn't heard about the earthquake.

05-00:02:35

Geritz: I believe we were here until '97 [correction: '99]. I mean, we had of course had the earthquake, so that it was on our minds. And then the fire.

05-00:02:40

Kramer: So we didn't know that we were going to have to leave that theater, right?

05-00:02:45

Geritz: No, not yet.

05-00:02:46

Kramer: In a way, it would have been interesting to have done the series later, after I knew that we were going to have to leave the building, but I was trying to recapture that time. It did have to do with the theater. I had a very particular feeling about that space, from the time I joined the PFA, which was in 1975, and certainly until we had to leave that space, and that feeling comes back to me even after we were in the temporary structure and all of its positive elements. But there was, for me, a very special aspect to screening in this old theater. It was the quality of projection, visual and aural. It was the particular idiosyncrasies of making the space work for traffic of the audience. It was the ambient sounds that came with the space, that were not intended, like the risers that the seats were on, because they were wood risers. We later changed to concrete, but in the beginning they were wood risers and when people walked up and down the aisles, before, during or after a film, they made a very distinct noise. Especially young people, who had a kind of brisk way of going up and down the stairs, and it made a lot of noise, and I was very sensitive. I think all the staff were extremely sensitive to that noise. That was part of the overall experience in that theater.

We didn't have doors to close the space off completely. We had a curtain that had to be pulled on a runner when the film was ready to start, and to signal to people that a film was in session, don't come into the space without caution. And the lights would be out, and that curtain made this noise as you pulled it across. So, there were all these different sounds and actions that you had to take before you started a show, and all of that came together with, shall we say the presentation mode. You could say it had a certain accidental performance quality to it before the light of the projector ever hit the screen.

Also, the booth was not totally soundproof. There were openings in the booth so that sounds from the booth leaked into the theater, and vice versa. You could hear when the projectionist turned on the power to the projectors. You could hear when he lighted the lamp, it made this little sound. It wasn't just

that you saw it but you heard it. So there were all of these sounds, you could say mechanical sounds, that went with the preparation, we're about to begin, we're about to begin, we're almost there, we're not quite there, we're there, in the start of a film. All of these were so part of my consciousness of any given show, and some of it was annoying and some of it I grew to love, I mean it was just a kind of familiarity, like going home. If you go to your home and maybe there are certain sounds from the steps or the way the door opens or the key in the lock, or if a dog barks. I don't know, that's all part of something familiar and repeated.

So, I had this very strong sense of that room, its quirks, and that all of this and all of the things you had to do before the show actually started. I had this sense of anticipation with every show, kind of almost like butterflies when you go on stage, you know, for the first time. It's kind of that anticipation. The audience is a little bit unruly when they first come into a space, they haven't settled down, they're talking to friends, they're rustling their papers, they've got their bags. They make a lot of noises and even when the film is ready or somebody's making an introduction or the lights dim, they may still be making some noise, and it is sort of a gradual quieting down as they get their focus in place. They're looking straight at the screen, they know they have to stop talking and rustling. They enter into the moment of presentation and that's all part of the presentation. That moment at which you know you have the audience's attention.

So, I wanted to work something of that into a program. I wanted to combine the actual film you show with the moment that it catches the complete attention of the audience. That's the primal moment for me. It's something—we the audience have to give up something, we have to give ourselves to the screen, and we give it at different moments. Some give it very willingly, some are a little resistant, but there's something, I think, in the opening of the film, as well as how we prepare for that moment, that tunes us in. So it was an attempt to combine the opening moments of certain films. It could be credits, it could be sound, you know that comes on before. It could be a logo even. It was a kind of ritual. I wanted to portray the ritual of watching a film, the actual film, the moment, and the peculiarities of that theater and how we prepared the audience to be ready. It seemed primal to me and I said Primal Screen, because we always had to think up clever titles to series. And then I found out that someone had already coined that phrase. Andrew Saris had written an essay on the primal screen, which I had never read, but I discovered that I thought oh, I've got to change the title of the series and then I decided no, I don't want to change the title of the series. I don't quite mean the same thing that he means. He was talking about films, certain films, and about some primal entry, where we enter into a film. He was talking about something related but his had nothing to do with the theater, the space, or anything like that. So I wanted to acknowledge that he had written something, and so I think I said something in the essay, in the notes, and of course I explained that when I spoke in front of the audience, so people would understand I became aware

of that and I didn't disregard his, but it was like I still wanted to use that title, because the word screen was very important to me in this, the screen on which we project. So that's how it came together, but as I say, misunderstood. I didn't do it correctly obviously, because I didn't make it clear that this was not about favorite films.

05-00:12:11

Ortega:

We'll talk about the program notes later, but in your film notes you wrote about this proper environment to watch a film, and to experience this primal screen experience. Could you talk a little bit more about that experience, to describe that feeling? What did you mean by—what was for you, the primal screen experience once you get into the film?

05-00:12:48

Kramer:

No, but the primal screen includes everything leading up to getting into the film. It's not once you get into the film, it's everything—I mean, I could go through and try to remember all the things I said to the audience. I don't know if I'll remember all of this.

I think the first thing is we drew the curtain. I think first is the sound of drawing the curtain. That's a signal to the projectionist, because that told him we were ready. And he had a way of very slowly dimming the lights. In every theater, people do it differently, if you look, if you pay attention to when the lights go down and how they go down. Do they go down all at once, do they go down in banks of lights. When is the last light out?

Craig, and I have to speak—this is Craig Valenza. He was our chief projectionist at the time, but of course we had other projectionists, but this was something I was used to with Craig. He was the first projectionist I met when I came to work at the archive in 1975, so it was kind of like this was Craig's training of me. He had a style. So we drew the curtain, that made this noise, everybody knew okay, we're going to start. They still were talking. Craig starts to dim a little bit. He turns on the motor to the projector, you'll hear this thing, motor sound, mechanical sound. He lights the lamp, it gets a sound. So now we have a lamp, so there's light on the screen but we're not projecting anything but there's light on the screen. He adjusts the masking, which makes noise, because the masking was this automated masking, not top and bottom, only sides, but it went [imitates masking sound]. It came in and then it had to kind of settle and then he had to do it again sometimes, to just get it to frame perfectly. So now you know okay, you know if it's going to be a four-by-three or you know if it's going to be—not four-by-three, that's television. You're going to know if it's a one-three-three or it's a one-six-six or it's a one-eight-five or it's a CinemaScope. It was really wonderful when you knew it was going to be CinemaScope, because suddenly there is this whir and the curtains go all the way open, and this is exciting, you know, because you're going to get the whole screen and that sets up the whole expectation.

So there's that, there's the noise of the masking, we've got the lights going out, we've got the motor running, we've got the masking now, and then he keeps dimming some more and finally, he's got it almost perfectly dark and the first image of the film hits the screen and then it goes completely dark, because you always left just a little bit, little bit, little bit, with the first image. We used to talk about this, I wasn't sure we should do that. I wasn't sure whether I wanted it totally dark. But he liked the suspense, I mean it is suspense. This is primal. I'm so excited, I'm sitting there, it happens to me every time, it doesn't matter what the film is. I am in such tension because for me, this is a very special moment. A film is going to hit the screen, I'm going to watch a movie.

I think Bruce Conner's *A Movie* is so much about that. Remember? The opening titles over and over again, in the movie. That's why I always thought of that movie, because I think he understood that. Anyway, okay, so finally, the film hits the screen, whatever that film is, and what's the first thing to hit the screen, it's some form of credits, it's a logo, it's whatever, there may or may not be sound. After that, the opening shot is very important. How do you open a film? And I always think about, it's something, when you talk to filmmakers, how important it is to know what your opening shot is. If you know how to open a film, and of course if you know how to end a film, you're pretty much there. It's the two hardest things, I think, to start a film and to end a film. So in this case, I wasn't worried about ending a film, it was this moment. So the films I picked, my recollection is that they had great opening moments. What came afterwards might be good, might sustain itself, might not always, but the opening was something special. So, it was in a way about that.

At one point I thought, I'll just do clips. At one point, when I was thinking of it, I think I'll just do opening moments. But it's a little hard to—or maybe I should have done that, but you can't just do a succession of start the program all over again, we just get this opening, no more film.

05-00:18:34

Ortega:

The series is really broad and we see all kinds of films, different genres.

05-00:18:39

Kramer:

It had to have a lot of variety of films, and I wanted short films and long films. So it didn't matter whether it was an avant-garde film or a traditional mainstream feature film, it could come from any country, but it's something to do with the way the film started.

05-00:18:56

Ortega:

And how was the selection process of those films?

05-00:19:01

Kramer:

What came to mind. Like any selection process, you have a concept, you have an idea. Then you sit down and you start thinking what films come to mind.

That's the first level, and then you go over that, is this really viable or is this too much the same thing, this film is more like that film. So, we'd have to pick one, not two, and then you keep going and you keep going and you keep going. But that's in all programming, you have a concept and an idea, and then you have to start thinking, from your viewing experience, what films might work in this, and you have to be open to, as I said, I set the rules of the games in that I would be open to any kind of film, whether it was a so-called avant-garde film or a narrative, traditional narrative film, whether it was a long film or a short film, medium length film. Also then, what films might work well together in a given program.

05-00:20:07

Ortega:

Normally, PFA doesn't include a short film with a feature and the series often did. Can you talk about this decision, of programming a short film with a feature film?

05-00:20:20

Kramer:

Well, we don't regularly use that format. I happen to like it. In my first programming experience, I always had short films with long films. It was a little more difficult to do in a consistent way, it had to do with running time and cost. But I happened to really love programming, where you can have short films.

When I went to the movies as a young person and even into adulthood, it was normal to go to a theater and get short films. They could be cartoons, they could be documentaries, you had newsreels. They weren't programmed to go necessarily with the feature. It's just that you gave the audience a variety of film forms, and there was a huge production in terms of documentaries and newsreels. So, distributors and theaters, that's what you did. You grow up with that and I always liked it, but I also, in terms of the kind of programming we did here and I did prior to coming to the archive, what interested us always, was if we could possibly find a really nice connection programmatically, between a short film and a longer film. Of course there were always programs of shorts, a multiple short group show, as you could say, there's always that, but it's putting a short film with a long film, that takes a lot of work.

05-00:22:17

Geritz:

That was a really different moment, twenty odd years ago, in terms of the ability to preview work.

05-00:22:24

Kramer:

Yes.

05-00:22:25

Geritz:

And given what you were just talking about, about how important the opening moment was, were you drawing on your memory, or your sort of just sense of the film, or did you actually review works?

05-00:22:42

Kramer: I think all three.

05-00:22:43

Geritz: All three, mm-hmm.

05-00:22:44

Kramer: Certainly, I drew on memory, because I was stewing over this idea for a while, it didn't just come to me the month I needed to program the next month. We were doing a month by month calendar, or were we doing bimonthly calendar?

05-00:23:04

Geritz: Two months.

05-00:23:05

Kramer: Two months, already we were doing two months. Well, whatever. So think back how far in advance your deadline is. Actually, I had been stewing over this for a while and I think at one point we had a curator meeting and I threw out this idea of wanting to do something, and my biggest concern was that it was a very personal show and I would have to sort of—it was about me curating, and I didn't normally think that that was— Well, normally I didn't do that. I tried to, shall we say be more objective in programming. Yes, of course anything, any program you do is personal, but I didn't talk about my personal experience with the films.

So this would be the first and only time in my history as a programmer, that I was going to allow something very personal about my way of programming, the things that I feel in programming and in presenting. Maybe more my feeling as a presenter, maybe it's really more what it is to present to an audience, what it is to, in a sense you're shaping an audience's reactions, preparing them, guiding them, sensing them, because you stay in the theater. I used to say I could—I always liked to stand, I didn't like to sit down, because when I sat down, I was completely immersed in the film and I forgot the audience. But if I stood, even in the dark, I could see the audience, from the light from the screen, and I could see the film, and I could hear the ambient sounds of the audience better when I was standing up. I could hear if they rustled, I could hear if they opened up stuff in their bags or their paper. I could hear if they talked of course, I could hear if they coughed. You could hear a lot in the theater, I mean if you stand up, and so I could hear the moment at which the audience settled in fully. I could hear the partial settling in, but I could hear when suddenly, there is no sound other than people breathing. That's the maximum sound you get, except from the screen, and the way I felt is I'm breathing with the audience at that moment. My breath and their breath are absolutely in sync, we're as quiet as can be, we're just breathing. That moment is when you feel the audience has given itself utterly to the screen and that's what I was trying to explore.

05-00:26:42

Ortega:

In scanning the series, when you realize that there are some formal elements that are explored throughout the programs, such as silence or black and white photography, as well as some other ideas such as nostalgia or meta film. Did you have those ideas in mind beforehand, as concepts that you wanted to explore in this series?

05-00:27:08

Kramer:

Just variety, diversity. The point was to have diversity. It wouldn't have made any sense without diversity. So as I made lists of films and tried to figure out how many programs we'll do. I had many more films than ultimately we'd do. Always, when we do programs, we end up with huge numbers of films with a concept, and then you're paring down, paring down, paring down. And of course what's available. Maybe you want a film, it's not available or the print isn't good. You had to have good prints certainly, for this. You didn't want to have this bad print, it would distract. You want to have the best possible print in any one of these. So, the quality of the print, diversity. I wanted to show that you could do this across the board of any kind of film. That was built into the concept.

05-00:28:14

Ortega:

Could you tell us about the order of the films?

05-00:28:18

Kramer:

I don't remember. I mean, what was shown on what day?

05-00:28:24

Ortega:

No, I mean like if you wanted the people to see certain films before others.

05-00:28:35

Kramer:

I think in all series again, it's like making a film. You've got to have a good beginning and you've got to have a good end and depending on the length of the series. If it's a long series, you've got to do something in the middle. I mean you have to keep people's attention if you want people to travel with you through the series. It's a kind of imaginary audience because what's on paper is not what actually happens. On paper, when you're programming, you imagine this audience, the audience is you. You're the fictitious, imaginary audience and you think well, if I start here, that's a strong start. Maybe I'll get their interest and maybe they trust me, and maybe they'll come to the next program and the next program, and so on and so forth. And you think well, if it's going on this long, they're going to lose interest, they'll go to something else or they're too busy. You want to make sure there are some titles, some films that will draw their attention, both because they're different but, you know, yeah. So, you try to have order, at least some sense of a strong beginning or a provocative beginning. By strong it doesn't mean necessarily, they're going to like it, but provocative perhaps, and wrap it up in a decent way, with some kick possibly.

- 05-00:30:06
Geritz: Let me tell you what you did show.
- 05-00:30:08
Kramer: Oh, what did I show?
- 05-00:30:09
Geritz: You began with *Lyrical Nitrate* and *Black Narcissus*, and you closed with *Sherlock Jr.*, and what is written as other silent comedies.
- 05-00:30:23
Kramer: Shorts?
- 05-00:30:24
Geritz: It says William K. Everson, compilation of two reels, by Chaplin, Charlie Chase, and Laurel Hardy, among others.
- 05-00:30:32
Kramer: Wow, that must have been a long program. What was the running time of that?
- 05-00:30:37
Geritz: Approximately two hours is listed.
- 05-00:30:40
Kramer: Probably too long. Fun, fun. That was a program to laugh, to just get an audience totally laughing, a release of laughter and the momentum of laughter. The first one, yeah, *Lyrical Nitrate* was a relatively recent film at that time wasn't it?
- 05-00:31:09
Geritz: Ninety, mm-hmm.
- 05-00:31:10
Kramer: Yeah. We had already shown it. Have you seen *Lyrical Nitrate*? Well, it's clips, it's a film made up of clips of nitrate films, and of course *Lyrical Nitrate* itself is a safety film, with a safety film made from bits and pieces of nitrate, and some of the nitrate was actually decomposing. So you had that combination of an image that might be elusive, and then it was decomposing, and the images in and of themselves were quite stunning. But then you have this decomposition, which gave it this abstractness. It was about film moments, it really was about film moments and how that grabs you, so I thought it would work very well as a short, to start, because you weren't going to see a whole film, you were just going to see these absolutely breathtaking moments.
- 05-00:32:23
Geritz: And you showed it with *Technicolor for Industrial Films*, which you borrowed from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

05-00:32:30

Kramer:

It's an instructional film that Technicolor made, to show how they could give you a very high quality, if you were making an industrial film. It's a demonstration of Technicolor, three strip Technicolor, in all of its glory, and the film of course is in Technicolor. You don't often get a genuine Technicolor film, it's hard to get those. So here was this absolutely gorgeous 35mm piece of Technicolor, which demonstrated Technicolor. It was just so lush, it made you gasp. It was just eye candy, it was total eye candy.

Black Narcissus, that was a special print I borrowed from the Academy, right?

05-00:33:33

Geritz:

That's right.

05-00:33:34

Kramer:

Okay. We were still showing nitrate. That was—I don't think I said it there in the program guide, did I? No, I couldn't say it. That was a 35mm Technicolor nitrate print of *Black Narcissus*. Pristine. No one will ever see that film like that again. It's been restored, I mean from nitrate, there are DVDs out, there are 35mm safety prints. Nothing, nothing will ever look like that. It's the kind of film that when it hits the screen, your heart just goes into your stomach, I mean it is drop dead, you know. And so that whole program was sort of drop dead moments. It didn't really matter what the films were about in some ways, you know, the story. It was utter lush moments, yeah. That may have been the last time we showed that print of *Black Narcissus*.

05-00:34:58

Geritz:

I think so. I can't remember when we had to move everything.

05-00:35:05

Kramer:

I can tell you a personal story about *Black Narcissus*, a funny thing. My family's first television set was a black and white television set, of course, and I think our first television set was in 1950, '51, or something like that. We had no color and you had live programming, I mean there were live shows that came on to television at that time, but then a lot of old movies. I was primarily interested in the fact that I was getting to see all these old movies. There was a lot of public domain stuff that they showed, there was a lot of 1930s films, 1940s films, and everything was black and white. So, there were the endless, endless library of films that the TV stations bought in those days and they just showed them sort of—it wasn't round the clock, I know it wasn't round the clock, but it just seemed hours after hours, you could sit there in front of it and watch these old films.

Later on, I realized that there were two films from that period of early television that had wowed me. I didn't know anything about them. I didn't know who the directors were, I didn't know anything about when they were made. I just saw them on some night and I just like, [gasps] these are extraordinary films. One of them was a black and white film— The other was

a color film and I didn't know it, I saw it in black and white. But something about its composition amazed me. It was *Black Narcissus*, on a 13-inch television screen, a black and white version of *Black Narcissus*, and I could not forget this film. Who made this film? Having no idea that I was seeing a color film in black and white, and I didn't know who Michael Powell was at the time, even though I had seen earlier films by him, but I didn't know who he was because I hadn't studied film names as such. I just looked at films.

The other film was Ophüls, black and white, it was a black and white film, *Letter From an Unknown Woman*. So later in life I discovered I was right, those are good films. [laughs] You can imagine the surprise when I first saw the Technicolor print of *Black Narcissus*. It was better than it was on TV.

05-00:38:15

Ortega:

And do you remember some films that you wanted to include and you didn't?

05-00:38:20

Kramer:

I don't remember what else was on the list at this point. It was a long list, I probably threw it out, I don't think I kept it. I don't recall what I left out, for whatever reason I did.

05-00:38:40

Ortega:

And what would you have done differently today?

05-00:38:45

Kramer:

The notes probably would have to have been more explicit, if I were to do it over again, with each film. I think I would have had to have explained more. I might have to introduce—I don't know if I introduced each program. I can't remember. If I didn't introduce each program, each program definitely needed an introduction. I would have had to maybe make it clearer in writing, this is not a list of my favorite films. That's not what it's about. I don't know, or maybe not do it at all, or maybe it should have been just one program. Maybe it should have been just one night, curator's night, in which I would just talk about presenting and this room. It would have been a good program to do when we left the theater, because you know it was a funny thing, when we moved into the temporary theater and people accustomed themselves to it and thought, oh it's comfortable seats, a lot of things were really positive. And then over time people said, you know, we miss the old theater, and I used to ask people to tell me what they missed. Things came out which I think touched on what I felt, but it was different audience members. I think there was some sense of loss. I mean, there were so many crazy things about that theater when you think of it, the noises, the sounds, things that really were poor designs. You don't want a booth that was porous, that you hear back and forth, you don't want risers that make the noise, you don't want to have to pull a noisy curtain. You don't want that theoretically, but it was very human, it was a very live space.

05-00:40:52

Geritz:

And it wasn't originally designed as a theater. Some of the things you're talking about have to do with that it was—

05-00:40:59

Kramer:

It was to be a dual purpose space. When the museum opened, the idea was that this would be essentially, a big black box, for whatever the museum wanted to present. It could be a dance performance, it could be an exhibition space, another gallery, multimedia, and then it could be a theater because the risers, the seats were on this platform, like at a sports stadium, which could, in a few hours, with four guys from prep, pull the thing down and stow it away. Of course, we made that impossible, because we stored films underneath it, and it became impossible to take the thing down. We just took it over and the museum sort of gave up ever being able to take this thing down without too much cost and effort. It was kind of gradual, redefining that it was going to be a theater and only a theater.

05-00:42:14

Ortega:

Do you remember some of the challenges of working on this series?

05-00:42:20

Kramer:

No more, no less than any other series. You try to be clear about what you're trying to do, shape it. Judy Bloch usually wrote my program notes. Judy wanted me to write the notes and I'm a terrible writer, really bad, so I didn't want to write the notes. I mean, I just freeze trying to write. I wrote the introduction and then Judy edited it, it was a little longer, but I think she got the essence of what I had written very nicely, I mean I don't think I wrote it any better. It was just longer, more elaborate. And then I would write a few sentences for each film and then she would elaborate from that. I didn't like what I wrote. I didn't care for my notes particularly, so that was a problem for me. Easier for me to talk about it to the audience than to write it.

05-00:43:42

Ortega:

In general or in this specific series?

05-00:43:46

Kramer:

In general, but certainly for this series. Other notes are much easier to write, because they're not personal and you can be much more objective. You can quote other people, you can—you know, a certain amount of description of the film, minimal. Some critical assessment, some historical placement.

05-00:44:12

Ortega:

That was one of the questions actually, how did you deal or think about exposing your own ideas and thoughts, your own subjectivity in this series? Writing the program notes, how you dealt with your own ideas.

05-00:44:41

Kramer:

Well, I didn't really write the program notes, they were Judy's. I wrote a couple of lines and she... to give why I chose that film and why it fit in the series, some aspect of it. But as I said, I didn't do that very thoroughly, so I

didn't really—I exposed myself in the introduction, that's where. The notes, individual notes, not so much.

05-00:45:09

Geritz: And was it important for you in general, to write the program notes?

05-00:45:15

Kramer: Pardon?

05-00:45:16

Geritz: Was it important for you to write the program notes in general?

05-00:45:19

Kramer: I didn't want to, it was Judy's idea. She insisted that I write something.

05-00:45:27

Geritz: The introduction.

05-00:45:29

Kramer: The introduction, I was prepared to write, I knew I had to write that. That I needed for myself, I needed to write that out, but as I said, it was much longer, and then we have a space thing, everything gets cut

05-00:45:47

Geritz: You know, I have it in front of me and I see, just by looking at it casually, and of course Garbiñe looked at it more in-depth, that you mention moments, like sensual moments of movie going, unforgettable, irresistible, sublime, deliriously sensual moments, and that takes me to part of the title, that is the screen. What happens to the screen when a film is on it, not just the opening moment. And I wonder if part of your idea did include that at the time, from this.

05-00:46:28

Kramer: Yes, yes. I also meant sensual in the very broadest sense. Kind of I feel it in my body and my mind, awakening, and I'm sure since it's personal, it's a conditioning, I mean I am excited at the moment a film begins. I always have been. I think that goes back to my childhood experiences with the movies. You either really like movies or you don't like movies. Some people are completely ambivalent about movies, you know? Eh, a movie. I get excited at the opening of a movie. I have no idea what's—or maybe I do. Maybe I've seen it before, I'm going to see it again. There's something, when the light hits the screen and the film goes on. Movies, movies. Movies are—I'm in love with movies. Not necessarily the movie, but movies. Moving images. It entranced me as a child. I could sit there watching it over and over.

When I went to the movies as a youngster, in the theater, I'd watch the whole program and then I'd sit and watch it over again. Not because I missed something. I just didn't want to leave that sensual experience. I hated going out into—out of the theater, into the light. It was such a shock and it was such a downer. So I have a thing about movies.

- 05-00:48:33
Ortega: In the introduction, you also quoted, as you said, others, such as Andrew Sarris. Why did you include others' words and how did you balance it with your own thoughts?
- 05-00:48:54
Kramer: Why did I include Andrew Sarris? Because he had coined the term.
- 05-00:48:59
Ortega: But I mean this is just an example, you quoted also, Roland Barthes, as well. How do you balance—
- 05-00:49:06
Geritz: Roland Barthes.
- 05-00:49:08
Kramer: I didn't use him, I don't think, did I? Is that Judy or me?
- 05-00:49:12
Geritz: No, you did.
- 05-00:49:13
Kramer: Was it me?
- 05-00:49:14
Geritz: Do you remember that very, very short piece Roland Barthes wrote, called, *Leaving the Movie Theater*?
- 05-00:49:20
Kramer: Oh yes, yes, yes. See, I've forgotten. Did I quote him? What did I say?
- 05-00:49:31
Geritz: He called it the lure of the filmic image, and you said, "The very environment of the movie theater can place us in this cinematic..." No, it actually starts earlier, "Which Roland Barthes points out is not only the essence of reverie, it is also the color of a very diffuse eroticism."
- 05-00:49:52
Kramer: Okay. I thought he's a much better writer than I am, don't you think? So, yeah, why wouldn't I quote him, because he was saying exactly what I was feeling, but I don't have the skill to write those words. That's why you quote. I'd forgotten I found that. I don't even know how I found that at that time.
- 05-00:50:16
Geritz: I gave it to you.
- 05-00:50:19
Kramer: You did?
- 05-00:50:20
Geritz: Yeah, because I used it in my classes, so I gave it to you, when you were talking about the series.

05-00:50:33

Kramer:

Okay. All right, so when we were talking, you gave it to me. Thanks Kathy, see, she gave me... No, I wasn't necessarily looking for quotes, but that was perfect. I'm sure there are others who have written about—well, when I was studying art history, actually when we did the film curatorial thing. Panofsky wrote on film and I studied under him and it meant a lot to me. Gombrich wrote on film and I studied under him, under art history. So they tapped their early descriptions of cinematic experience, the power of the movies. I am certainly somebody who was seduced by the power, inherent power of movies. Not seduced by digital, unfortunately. I'm waiting. [laughs]

05-00:51:27

Geritz:

It would be a different series.

05-00:51:35

Ortega:

Looking at the calendar, there are some other quotes in the program guide.

05-00:51:40

Kramer:

Ah, good, what?

05-00:51:41

Ortega:

That are really nice and I think it gives you like another perspective. You quoted Douglas Sirk and it says, "Angles are the directors thoughts and lighting is his philosophy," and I thought that was a really nice way to create that context as well, for the viewers and the readers of the calendar.

05-00:52:04

Kramer:

I think the Sirk quote was in relationship to a particular film, wasn't it? Or was it in the journal introduction?

05-00:52:11

Geritz:

It wasn't in the introduction. It's just like a quote that is in the program guide, somewhere here. There are like different quotes throughout the calendar.

05-00:52:25

Geritz:

Oh, see look, Edith, they put them around the photographs.

05-00:52:27

Kramer:

Oh, I had forgotten that they did that.

05-00:52:29

Geritz:

Yeah, me too.

05-00:52:30

Kramer:

I wonder if they were taken from the original, long article. It might have been pulled out.

05-00:52:37

Ortega:

So there are like different quotes that I thought that it was a really nice idea.

- 05-00:52:41
Kramer: Let me see them. I don't remember any of this. Where is the other one?
- 05-00:52:54
Ortega: This is the—
- 05-00:52:57
Kramer: No, where's the—you said there's another one.
- 05-00:52:58
Ortega: The Andrew Sarris, yeah, here.
- 05-00:53:00
Kramer: A full quote. Or it might have been something written on the *Final Accord*. The *Final Accord* is a Douglas Sirk film that I love, so maybe.
- 05-00:53:12
Ortega: Here.
- 05-00:53:22
Kramer: Okay, that's Sarris, that's *The Primal Screen*, that's why that's quoted. No, because I read Sarris's *Primal Screen* when I discovered that he had written it, because I wanted to find out if there was any point in doing the series, or should I do Andrew Sarris's series, you know? Anyway, I think the Douglas Sirk is because my choice of the *Final Accord*. Have you ever seen that? It's a great film.
- 05-00:53:55
Ortega: But I thought that it was really nice to have these quotes in the program guide.
- 05-00:54:00
Kramer: Well, that's Judy's decision, to pull things to do that. That's what a good editor does. They know where to put things, how to do that. I wouldn't think of doing that, put quotes on that. Maybe I would, but unless it was like a subtitle under the main title. Sometimes we'd have a title to a series, then we'd have a little subtitle, pull a quote to kind of take it further, but Judy was brilliant, always brilliant at this. She was the greatest film editor, notes writer anybody could ever hope to have.
- 05-00:54:37
Ortega: And how was the collaboration with her?
- 05-00:54:40
Kramer: Oh, it was a joy, absolute joy, I mean it was amazing. You could just start to say something and she got it [snaps fingers] like that. It was as if she read your mind. I mean, she had her own ideas too, because she was a very good programmer herself, but I don't know what it is, she had this—maybe that's what a great editor is. She knew how to edit people's books, full length books, of understanding what somebody is trying to say. It was extraordinary to work with her. You just had to sit down for a short period of time and just talk it out, what you're thinking, and she'd pick it up.

05-00:55:34

Ortega:

There is a quote that I really like, that says, “Curating is a process of learning in public.”

05-00:55:41

Kramer:

It’s in public, that’s for sure. You hang your laundry out there. If you make a mistake it’s made in public. You can’t hide anything. If you don’t show it, you haven’t done it, so it’s out there and you make mistakes and that’s how you know you’ve made mistakes. It’s like an experiment, you test it out. You hope it works, sometimes it doesn’t, or sometimes a part works and a part doesn’t. And if you don’t reevaluate and you don’t learn, then you’ll just keep making the same mistakes again and again, you won’t grow. The public doesn’t always see your mistakes. Sometimes you see them, they don’t see them.

05-00:56:41

Geritz:

Actually, I wanted to ask you about that in terms of this series, because my memory is you were there. I’m not positive, but that’s my memory, is that you were at the screenings. Do you have any memories of how the audience received it? I know you have memories of how people from afar understood it from the calendar, but that’s a little different than our audience.

05-00:57:08

Kramer:

Oh, I remember when they got angry because I put in the—you remember that, was Dennis Jakob, right?

05-00:57:14

Geritz:

I know, it was.

05-00:57:15

Kramer:

Dennis Jakob was a regular, a very smart guy, a filmmaker himself, but he had this booming voice. He was incapable of lowering his voice, even if he wanted to, and he would come barging into the office. Everybody hated it because he would just shout at the top of his lungs, "I’ve got a great idea." Anyway, he was in the audience because there was a film in the series he wanted to see. [Note inserted in editing: The Dennis Jakob story not with this series, my memory incorrect. He objected to the shorts in the John Alton series.]

05-00:57:47

Geritz:

It’s the one that has Phil Solomon’s film first.

05-00:57:51

Kramer:

What was the film with Phil Solomon?

05-00:57:53

Geritz:

I don’t remember. I’ll find it.

05-00:57:54

Kramer:

Because I know it was one he wanted to see. He didn’t want to see Phil Solomon.

05-00:58:23

Geritz:

It's great seeing these, looking over the list. I don't think you always wrote the shorts down. Maybe I'm wrong, maybe it wasn't a Phil Solomon one.

05-00:58:50

Kramer:

Anyway, it was an avant-garde short, before a narrative feature, and when the short was over, he screamed, he stood up and screamed, "Never again! No more of this avant-garde stuff." You know, it was sort of like I came to see the feature, what have you done? He was so outraged at having to sit through whatever it was, ten minutes of some short. Anyway, he was so outraged and it was so loud and it was so disruptive, I just started laughing. I mean, it was wonderful. If you wanted to be an agent provocateur, I have succeeded. If I wanted to wake people up. [laughs] Anyway, that was a funny experience. Otherwise, I don't recall. I don't recall anything unusual. I don't recall the audience.

05-00:59:59

Geritz:

Because I could imagine, with those kinds of introductions and that writing, that the audience could possibly focus more on their experience, and that they might want to share that. But it is so long ago.

05-01:00:12

Kramer:

But you're right. I think I had hoped that somebody would share, of course. You always hope that somebody goes to your program and gets something that you were thinking about, aside from just attending, and says something to you or questions you or something. I don't have the memory of anybody, maybe somebody did, of sharing, of saying anything. I don't. Do you? Do you remember anybody?

05-01:00:45

Geritz:

I don't remember. I just have a memory of the experience of the films, not of the afterwards.

05-01:00:55

Kramer:

So that's another reason why it probably failed. Nobody shared with me, their movie going experience, their special moment.

05-01:01:10

Ortega:

And do you remember the experience of being in the theater with all the things that you described, like this ritual and everything, actually watching those films that you've selected so carefully.

05-01:01:29

Kramer:

Yeah, I was probably there most of the time. Maybe I wasn't at every program, I don't remember any more, but I had to be there for most of them, to introduce or say something.

05-01:01:40

Geritz:

Was it primal?

05-01:01:44

Kramer:

Yeah, yeah. Some more than others, some films at that moment, hit me more than others. The funny thing is, later on, in some ways if a series was good for me personally, I used it in another way that had nothing to do with our audience. I had to give a lecture once at Eastman House, George Eastman House. I was talking to students who go there to study how to be an archivist. They study preservation, it's hands-on, as well as theoretical. I had been invited as a guest lecturer, to talk to these students later in—well, I went on several occasions over a period of years, but the first time I went, I was asked to explain curating, programming that is, to them, so I did like seminars over a couple of days. It was kind of like my philosophy of programming and what I think a programmer has to learn and be sensitive to. And then I gave them exercises that they had to do in programming, and critiqued it. But at one point, I described to them, something about working with a projectionist. I think it had to do with something about working with your projectionist and the importance of your projectionist, and that you're not just somebody who selects some films and puts them on a program, but you have to be in the theater and you have to work with the projectionist. Even the presentation is a team effort and an appreciation of the projectionist.

I told them the story of Craig and his ritual and I described this ritual of that particular theater, and I said how significant that was, and that whatever theater you're working in, you should think about the space and what happens and the projectionist and everything, and that every night you go in, there is a ritual and you should think about that in your programming. So I had described this quite vividly and Paolo sat in, was absolutely amazed by my description, and in subsequent years, he kept asking me to repeat my projectionist story. He's used it as something about working with projectionists and appreciation of projectionists and things like that. So he has forever, you know, remembered this description of starting a film in the theater, and Craig's ritual.

I think if you analyze it, probably most projectionists have some sort of ritual. Well, maybe not most projectionists, but projectionists who really care about film, and Craig cares about film. He's very special about film, yeah.

05-01:05:48

Geritz:

Because I have this on my lap, the old program calendar, I see that one thing that makes it a little hard to fully, maybe you know, you said you weren't sure people got your idea. When one does a calendar, there are two ways, and we've done them both ways. One is chronological.

05-01:06:11

Kramer:

Right.

05-01:06:11

Geritz:

This is the chronological calendar.

05-01:06:13

Kramer: This was still the chronological.

05-01:06:15

Geritz: And then the other is how we eventually did it at Judy's prompting. Of course we weren't sure, we debated everything, and that would be to group everything that was from the series together. And so this old program calendar is organized chronologically by date, so it is, here's Primal Screen and then wait, what is this? It's the Romanov Twilight: Early Russian [Cinema]. Oh, wait, experimental, and then I see oh wait, here's one that she didn't mark, maybe she even missed this one.

05-01:06:44

Kramer: It wasn't presented in the calendar as a series. That's interesting. I wonder if it made any difference. Maybe nobody would have come.

05-01:06:56

Ortega: No, I think that it will help actually, because yeah, it's difficult to get the sense of the whole series, reading it this way.

05-01:07:14

Geritz: I remember how much we debated that. Is it that the concept becomes clear, so does that help the audience? It helps the curator. Or does someone use it by day? Am I going to go to the movies today? But then we ended up eventually saying well, the way we think of it and organize it is around the series, and so let them see that thinking. And it's been so long, I kind of forgot what it was like to look for one [a series when the calendar was organized chronologically], and I was like, you know, I mean it's recorded on here, the sounds of us trying to go through the pages to find it.

05-01:07:54

Kramer: Remember we used to also, because we had chronology, we used to say oh, look, this one relates to that one in another series. We were always looking for the secret connections, the unintentional connections between one series and another, and we'd think how brilliant we are, look what we did. If you see that, you see this, you know? Oh, all the series relate fundamentally. Anyway, but that's the abstract part of programming in a way, because that's a curator's language, programmer's language, and not necessarily the audience's language.

05-01:08:42

Geritz: I wanted to ask you what did you learn from this project.

05-01:08:53

Kramer: Well, I learned that it failed essentially and move on, do something different. Probably satisfied something in me, at least I got that out of my system. I needed to try to explore those feelings and those ideas and see if I could put it out there for the audience to find useful or interesting. So, yeah. I learned that it was very flawed, and what the flaws were and what the difficulties were. You move on. It's over, move on to the next.

05-01:09:55

Geritz:

I mean, when you look at the series, it's actually a very exciting series, and the films that are brought together, it's very exciting. I wonder if why you see it as flawed and failed has to do with how hard it is to capture, to communicate why one loves an experience. You had difficulty putting it into words, you didn't necessarily want to, but you chose to try to put that out there. What is it to have an experience that is about cinema, regardless, as you said, of what film it is. It's the experience of cinema. And so for anyone who loves film, to go back and look through it, it's like you start trembling with that excitement again. As you said, how many people have even written about it? There's this little thing that Barthes wrote, there's a little bit that Sarris tried to get at it, there's a little bit that you did. Or Nick, you could say Nick.

05-01:11:03

Kramer:

Nick's book, *Devotional Cinema* [by Nathaniel Dorsky?], is really an attempt—it's obviously successful, because people all over the world have responded to it. Although he has a harder time, I think, when he's in the theater, showing his own films and explaining to an audience. He's saying the same thing there, that he says in his book, but the audience doesn't always get it at that moment. He gets frustrated sometimes, up there trying to explain this. Somebody raises their hand; well why didn't you use sound? It's so beside the point, I mean it's not what he's about. Why does it fill twenty minutes or why is it at silent speed, and things like that. It's like this denseness of what he's trying to say, not getting through. It's very difficult to do it. Fortunately, he was able to write a book and get people to feel that. Maybe it's easier to do in writing. Maybe it's something that has to be just like Barthes and Sarris, maybe it's something you have to write out.

As I'm talking, I'm thinking maybe one program would have been enough. Just do one thing. I'm going to talk about this experience and see if—and the question is, what is your experience? What makes you go to movies? You know? Is it because you're going to see a love story, are you going to see an adventure story? What is it? What makes you sit here, paying attention?

05-01:13:16

Geritz:

Or even like a few over a weekend or something, where the conversation builds, where it is conversations, that could have been really fascinating. It was a gift, but what if it was a conversation with your audience.

05-01:13:33

Kramer:

I think that would be the way I would approach it now. That would make more sense, I think. You don't need a long series. You need variety, because you can't have people think oh, it's just this kind of film. No, it's got to be varied.

05-01:14:00

Geritz:

I think it is always successful, because you were sharing, very generously, the films that you love and that made you feel this way. So even if intellectually,

as a viewer, you cannot put in words what you are feeling, it's about living the experience, right? So, I'm sure that it was successful in that way.

05-01:14:30

Kramer:

But no more than any other series. I certainly got much more generous feedback from people, like when I did Ozu series, or when I did the Visconti series, of people coming up to you and actually saying, this has changed my life. So struck by a group of films that they watched in a certain order, and so taken with it, that they couldn't escape this feeling, it sat with them. They were just awed by it and once in a while you'll get that in your programming, from the audience. You suddenly have the audience coming up to you with this sense of discovery, discovery.

05-01:15:31

Geritz:

You know, that's an interesting point. So, something like the Ozu series, the gift the program gives is you move through them and you start deducing what is it about this person's style that is moving me, and you build internally, as a viewer, a larger vocabulary and receptiveness to the style. The gift of the series is the digestion, that's not the right word, that you had already done, and so each one of them was that experience. It's a very different gift.

05-01:16:05

Kramer:

It's like preparing a wonderful dinner with many courses, say if you're a great cook or something like that. I always thought film programming was like if you were a good cook and you invited people to your house to have dinner, and you had slaved over a hot stove all day long, and you set out an exquisite first course that got your taste buds alert, but you didn't—not too much. You have to leave an appetite, must not be stuffed. Don't let them eat seconds and thirds, just a little taste, and then you go to the next course and that builds on the taste of the first, and maybe it's a contrast or it's a variation, or something like that. Again, just enough, and so on and so forth. And you finish, you have a finish. You have a beginning, you have a finish, and you have a middle, and then the finish is how you finish it off with a sweet, a sour, a savory, what, you know, a coffee, an alcohol drink, whatever, and it ties it all together and mellows it out and you leave. You're satiated but you're not stuffed, you're not uncomfortable, you mustn't be uncomfortable, and you just have all of these wonderful tastes running around, this sensual experience, and it's just been wonderful. That's what a film program should be like.

So, when you're lucky and you can get it just right, you know, the right number of films, the right theme or whatever, and you build it, and you help people digest. I liked the word digest, I think it's a very good word. You digested, yeah.

And it's interesting, in the Ozu, because if I go back to that series. We'd done Ozu plenty of times before, so what was different? What made the difference? We've been doing Ozu since the archive opened. The order of the

films, the timing, when we did it? The print quality overall? I did introduce almost every program.

05-01:18:42

Ortega: Yeah, I think that's probably—I mean you—

05-01:18:45

Kramer: I got caught up in it. I didn't know it was going to be like that. Again, you're feeling your audience. I knew something was happening, I could feel it happening. And so then it was like the audience and myself, we're together in this, we're having a new experience.

05-01:19:09

Ortega: From what I know about the series, that you talked in the past, probably it's because you were there guiding them, and you talked about this.

05-01:19:20

Kramer: Well, you had to—I mean it was like you could not leave, I mean you could not be without them. You needed each other. I needed the audience, the audience needed me. We were in this together, you know? It probably doesn't happen too often to programmers, I mean you don't get that, you're too busy doing other things and on to the next, another deadline, another series. But sometimes it happens, yeah.

05-01:20:05

Ortega: I remember this beautiful idea that you told me about the Ozu family.

05-01:20:11

Kramer: Ozu makes these films about these families, and it's like you get the titles, you start forgetting which title, which season you're in, but it's always a family. It's children and their parents, and it's children and their siblings, children getting married, children having children, and so on and so forth. So it's the life cycle of families and so it can be any family, it can be any culture. There's some basic universal truth there and that's what of course, people can cling to, identify with. Anyway, so you have this, one family movie after another, and then suddenly you realize we're a family, the audience is a family. We're a family. The Ozus have a family and we're a family and we're the Ozu family. You know, we've joined his family. I think at one point I said to the audience, "We're the Ozu family," and they all laughed and applauded. But you didn't know that was going to happen when you started, at all.

05-01:21:44

Ortega: That was probably why it was so special.

05-01:21:50

Kramer: It was a bit risky because we were doing it in one of the worst periods for programming. May is a terrible time to program and December is a terrible time to program normally, because school is getting out and the students are preparing for finals. They're focused on that only, that and getting out of town. Christmas vacation, I mean everything is coming to an end, and here

you are, you're starting a series, a big series in November and going right up until the time you close. We were forced into that. We didn't have a choice of when we—if it was a traveling series. So you think this is going to be a failure, that's what you assume. And it was just the opposite.

05-01:22:57

Ortega:

I loved the story about the Ozu family because it's this idea of engaging people, to make them feel that they are important and that they are your friends and the theater is like a home.

05-01:23:13

Kramer:

Well, I think that's what programmers should do, wherever they are with their audiences. If you have a regular venue that you program for, which means you will have a regular audience, small or large, but you will have regulars. They're your family and if you wanted to make a larger family, you've got to treat everybody as if they're family. You have to welcome them, you have to listen to them, even when they complain or are difficult. You have to treat them with the same regard, presumably, you would do your own family, unless you have a very dysfunctional family. Your audience can be dysfunctional too, but you have to try to make it functional.

No, I don't understand programmers who don't get to know their audience. First of all, I think they're missing something. What a shame, really, I mean why do it? This is your place, you're doing it for them, why don't you want to get to know them and be their friend and guide, and listen to what their needs are? It's the ultimate reward and satisfaction. I know there are programmers who distance themselves, who never get to know their audience, avoid them, but I don't think there's any fun in programming then.

Interview 6: September 25, 2014

06-00:00:04

Geritz: It's Thursday, September 25, 2014. Edith, you agree to be recorded?

06-00:00:12

Kramer: Yes, I do.

06-00:00:13

Geritz: Okay, so we'll get going. In one of our earlier discussions, we were talking about audiences and I wanted to ask, what kind of viewers did you encounter and how did you see them differing? And I'm thinking also in terms of from the film fan to the cinephile, like how people approach what it is to view film in a theater.

06-00:00:47

Kramer: But you're speaking specifically about my experience at the PFA [Pacific Film Archive].

06-00:00:51

Geritz: To start with. I was going to ask you about a few other experiences as well.

06-00:00:54

Kramer: Because I think in different theaters it's different.

06-00:00:57

Geritz: Absolutely, so I was going to start there.

06-00:01:03

Kramer: Of course when I came here, I inherited an audience that Tom Luddy and Sheldon Renan had already developed. You knew there was the university component, not just students but faculty and staff, that's the community you have. So you know you have a certain sophistication on the one hand, but for the younger, really they're just out of high school, they just got to college, or maybe they're upperclassmen. So you have a kind of sense of what kind of makeup that audience has and you quickly learn, just by the questions and the films that they're coming to, in what quantity. Which films are getting the larger audiences and which films are getting the smaller audiences. You pick up on what the audience is learning towards, what their expectations are, and maybe where you have to direct them to get more people to try out other films. And in the—if there is a Q&A because there's a guest or something else, you also learn a lot by the kinds of questions they ask, but you also learn that there are only certain people who put their hands up and ask questions, that others don't ask questions, although they may be thinking, have very interesting things to say, but they're not bold enough to raise their hands. They come up to you afterwards and talk to you in the lobby or they talk to the guest in the lobby. They're the people you have conversations with outside the theater and I often found that the people I had conversations with outside the theater gave me the most input about the quality of the program I did, what worked, what didn't work, what they would like to see, what they know

nothing about. So I always learned a lot from the audience in the so-called informal chats, and it could be in the lobby, it could be on the street because I bumped into people. The actual Q&As gave me less and less. It was more the one-on-one with audience members, in the informal chatting.

It was important to me to get to know the audience, the regulars of course, but if I saw a face once and then I saw it another time, that I recognized, that made me feel good that somebody was trying, even if they weren't a regular, but that was coming back. So I really liked getting to know the audience. I like to think of them as your family. Peter Scarlet used to say, "I treated the theater as my living room." It's true. I did that at SFMOMA [San Francisco Museum of Modern Art] but I had to build an audience there, from nothing to something. I started with thirty-five and ended up with four hundred. It was still my family.

06-00:05:00

Geritz:

Now, at SFMOMA, were you starting with an audience that had an art interest? I mean of course, PFA is also inside of a museum, but was there a distinct way that the series you did at SFMOMA was inside of a museum?

06-00:05:19

Kramer:

Not at first really, because it was a peculiar situation into which I walked. Yes, they had been showing films. The education department was in charge of a committee, made up of trustees, arts council members, membership volunteers, you know member volunteers who do things in a museum everywhere. So they had a committee, they had a committee for the fine arts, so-called, and they had a committee for film and they had a committee for events, things like that. So there was a film committee and the person in charge, the staff member in charge, was the education department director, and together they chose films and it was hit or miss, and it was not a regular series. So, I was brought in to create a series on a regular basis, and when they offered me the job, one of the questions I was asked in my interview was would I continue to work with the committee, and I said, "If you want me to do this job, I want to do it alone, I will not work with a committee and I will not even work with the education department. I will do this as a lone curator, and if that isn't good for you then you don't want me."

So, I had to start from scratch, because there was nothing, in what they had been showing, that gave me any sense that there was an audience. So I simply started with what—I just started somewhere. I don't remember what it was I started with, but I started with some series and waited to see who would show up. Now, yes, museum members did show up, because I guess they got in free or something, I don't know, with a membership. I'm not sure if they paid or maybe very modest. So, there were museum members, which means to me that they went to the art events, but then there were a whole bunch of people who did not use the museum, they were interested in film. Some of those people had known me at Canyon, the Cinematheque, they had followed me

there. There were residential hotels in the area where elderly lived, those are all gone. I think they were on McAllister Street and around there. All that was taken down, but at that time there was not the urban renewal there, and these were really residential hotels for very poor people on pensions, women and men. It was like Tenderloin hotels and I had people from there, people who were educated without means, had very few places where they could go and feel comfortable. I had a lot of them there because it was inexpensive and it was close, they could walk there at night and walk back to their hotels. They were a very interesting audience. They were senior citizens or retired or widows, you know, something like that. They didn't have family to take care of them, but they had some formal education and they were extremely grateful. It was a very gratifying audience because they were so thirsty for something that they could afford to go to. They couldn't afford to go to the theater and even though the regular movies were not so expensive then, SFMOMA was cheaper.

06-00:09:56

Geritz:

And so at Canyon, you probably had a lot of viewers who were artists themselves.

06-00:10:03

Kramer:

You had a lot of artists, but there was also that—it goes back to what J.P. Gorin was talking about, it was that sixties community of people who were excited by the promise of change. It was everything from antiwar, sexual liberation, socialist, communist, Marxist, whatever you want to call them, protestors, I remember, because I made a very, very close friend with a woman who was older than I was, there. An amazing woman—she's part of that Petaluma group, you know the chicken farmers, the Jewish chicken farmers? She comes from that. Her family, her parents, had come from Russia as communists, agent provocateurs. [laughs] You know, they had come to organize labor, and they had ended up in Petaluma, on the chicken farm, these Jewish communists, and that's how she had been raised, she, along with Tillie Olsen, she was a friend of Tillie Olsen, was of that generation. She shows up at Canyon Cinema. Why does she show up? Because she's terribly excited by—she went to the poetry shows, she went to the art, what the young people are doing, this supposedly revolutionary period. So it was an interesting audience. It was made up of the artists, fellow filmmakers, poets, painters, photographers, young people, older people, lefties.

06-00:12:03

Geritz:

And you had a way of knowing that people from the other arts were coming to the screenings.

06-00:12:09

Kramer:

We intermingled a lot, because it was also that period of, you know in the coffeehouses, where poetry was being read and films were thrown on in the back, and then it was the music scene, right? The Avalon and the Fillmore, and filmmakers were there and the light shows and the rock bands. It was this

mix of all this stuff, and then there was this guy at Intersection, Robert Johnson, an artist himself, painter, who did this thing called the Rolling Renaissance. Did you ever read about that?

06-00:12:53

Geritz: I read about it, yeah, someone did a book on it.

06-00:12:55

Kramer: It was a San Francisco-wide exhibition, it was all over the city, and Canyon, we took part in it, and it was to bring all the arts out; music, photography, painting, film, everything. It was a celebration of what was going on then. Not of the past but the now. It did include the beats, so it was beat literature, poetry, photography, and it merged right in with the rock, hippie, flower children, so it put it all together, but it took place in venues all over the city. Galleries, museums, outdoor things, it was very ambitious, the thing that Intersection supported. So, yeah, it was an interesting audience.

06-00:13:57

Geritz: Did you find, in programming at those different institutions or thinking how to put programs together, were you thinking of different kinds of viewers; artists, lifelong learners, the encyclopedic fanatic, the cinephile, or was that not part of your thinking, these differentiations?

06-00:14:20

Kramer: I did think about it, but I also, as I already obviously said, that different venues had different things. I knew, when I came to Berkeley, that I wouldn't have the artists the way I had in San Francisco, because they didn't live over here. Some of them did, but we didn't have the concentration in Berkeley. In fact, I didn't want to come here at first. Tom Luddy offered me the job a couple of times and I resisted. I had an excuse, I wasn't available, but even when I was available, I resisted because I didn't think I understood the Berkeley audience. I wasn't sure I could find my audience, the audience I wanted to program for here. I was totally confident in the city, whether it was Canyon or SFMOMA, that there I knew I could get the variety, the mix I wanted, it was just the urban quality of it. I thought that for me, Berkeley would be a university town, and I've lived in university towns a lot and I had the experience in Eugene, Oregon, and I felt okay, it will just be the university students or staff. Who lives in Berkeley? Who lives in Berkeley besides people connected to the university, I had no concept of, and it's not an urban place. To me it was a suburb.

06-00:16:01

Geritz: A university town.

06-00:16:02

Kramer: A university town, and most university towns I lived in had this very town and gown thing, you know, there was a clear separation, so I didn't know what I would be dealing with. I was lucky, because an audience had been developed by Tom. I had been part of the audience. Whenever I could, I would drive

over to see films here, but I was just like a commuter. I would get in the car, whip over, see a film, turn around and leave. I didn't know anybody and I would just come over by myself and then go back to the city. So, I like an urban audience, I think. Yeah. I think I respond.

06-00:16:55

Geritz:

You mentioned "the mix I like, I didn't know if I could have it." What does that mix give you?

06-00:17:06

Kramer:

It's probably a very idealistic thing, but I like to think that the films I want to show are for everyone, obviously some more for some people than others, but I don't want all just white, middle-class people in there. I want people of color, I want people of different ethnic, national, religious backgrounds. That to me is interesting, you get interesting feedback, and because I also believe cinema has been this sort of universal language and that it can travel to every place and to everyone in its history, so why not in your own theater. Yeah, I think I wanted ideally, the same audience to be able to sit there for avant-garde or for African cinema or for Hollywood cinema. In fact, it doesn't really happen. There is a crossover of certain people, those are the cinephiles. Oh, and cinephiles exist everywhere, I mean the backseat, the back row, every theater has it.

I had a group at SFMOMA, after every program we went out for coffee together and we sat up for hours in a coffee shop, old-fashioned coffee shop, talking about films. It was a small group and it kept getting bigger and bigger, because people found out we were doing this. See, there was no café at the museum, I mean when the film was over we left the museum and the museum closed.

06-00:19:01

Geritz:

Because you were in the old building, the Veterans Building.

06-00:19:02

Kramer:

Yeah, on Van Ness. So we didn't have any place to hang out and there was nothing around there to go to. We used to drive all the way out to Laurel Village to sit in an old fashioned, giant, all night café, with those great big booths and the leather chairs, because a whole bunch of us could get there. I mean we did, we started out with about four people and then it ended up being about ten.

06-00:19:27

Geritz:

Lovely.

06-00:19:28

Kramer:

And it was what Tony Kaes always wanted to have, you know?

06-00:19:31

Geritz:

Yeah, yeah.

06-00:19:32

Kramer:

It was that thing, and at Canyon we had it. I used to go out afterwards with a group of people. We used to go to North Beach. Mario's, we used to go into Mario's.

06-00:19:48

Geritz:

Tony always said that film needed the conversation. It wasn't a film without the talking.

06-00:19:53

Kramer:

Yeah. That's what I wanted, I wanted that, and the archive didn't offer me that. I knew that when I came over here, there was no place anybody went to sit around and talk and have a conversation.

06-00:20:11

Geritz:

You mentioned the one-on-one, in some ways that became the conversation, right? It's just one-on-one in the lobby and lots of times it went on for quite a while.

06-00:20:20

Kramer:

And sometimes too long, sometimes you couldn't get home.

06-00:20:23

Geritz:

How often did people really notice the curating, or was it more—because you mentioned them saying what you were doing right and what you did wrong. Or was more of the engagement with the work that was showing?

06-00:20:42

Kramer:

If you had a substantial series, I think they talked about the curating, they got it, I mean they got into it about why did you put this here, or what came first, the order, something like that. That took a certain level of sophistication, but there were regulars who were very much into that and they liked to talk about that. Most people took you on work by work or, but, yes work by work, but everybody talks about works in comparison to something else. It's the way we talk about the arts. It's always in relationship to something else you've seen or know.

06-00:21:24

Geritz:

Compare and contrast.

06-00:21:25

Kramer:

Right. It just goes on forever. So every audience member who talks to you about a film would always bring in some other film they had seen, wondering if you'd seen it and it reminded them of this. Did I think there was a similarity? Sometimes they talked about films I didn't know, because they didn't remember the titles, and they're telling me there's this film with this person in it and there's this scene, and I'm thinking what film, what are they talking about? Eventually, sometimes you figured it out, because why should they remember it, but the images are there, the sounds and the images are in their head and they've spotted something in watching tonight's film. So it's

always in relationship to something. Sometimes it's in relation to something they've read, because there's the narrative and they think about books they've read, the film brings something to mind. Sometimes it's a life experience, because all these people come with their own baggage. You don't know what their story is and after a while, you begin to realize, some of them have amazing stories. It comes out in bits and pieces.

06-00:22:46

Geritz:

Yeah, it's an interesting aspect, they're a public and in that sense, general, but there's ones that you get to know as specific, and yet they're still part of a public, you don't know them necessarily intimately.

06-00:23:00

Kramer:

But you find things out about them because in talking about the films, they're talking about themselves. They're talking about their feelings and their own experiences. So, yeah, you find out about people. Tom could sit down and tell you stories about a lot of the regulars when he started out, people who—Louie, a retired postman, you know, who was there until he died, or this old man, I think he had died before you came around, but we all know Mrs. Carlton.

06-00:23:54

Geritz:

Yeah, sure. I knew Louie too.

06-00:23:56

Kramer:

Oh, you knew Louie. But Mrs. Carlton was, I mean she's a movie.

06-00:24:02

Geritz:

A thing unto herself.

06-00:24:05

Kramer:

Her story, I would have liked to have met her son and found out more about her, you know really find out what that made that woman the way she—what was her life?

06-00:24:20

Geritz:

There was something just so touching in the way that the restaurant, the collective, they ended up being her family.

06-00:24:31

Kramer:

The time I took her to the hospital, I told you that story.

06-00:24:34

Geritz:

I don't think so, or at least it's not ringing a bell.

06-00:24:40

Kramer:

The film is over and she's still sitting. Everybody has gone home and she's sitting in the theater, and I turned to the theater manager, who was Bonnie, I think, and I said, "Why is Mrs. Carlton still sitting in the theater?" And she says, "You know, she's been complaining. We've been having trouble with

her every night, she doesn't want to leave the theater when the film is over. She just sits there and when we ask her she says she can't get up." I said, "You mean there's something wrong with her." They said, "Well we ask her and we've helped her up and then walked her out and asked her if she wanted to call a cab but she says 'No,' but we've had to help her up." I said, "Well, there's got to be something wrong." So I went to Mrs. Carlton and I said, "Mrs. Carlton, are you in pain?" And she said, "Yes." I said, "And where does it hurt?" She said, "My hip," and then she said, "My side," and I said, "Can you stand up?" [She said] "No, I can't get up." I said, "If I help you, can you get up?" [She said] "I think so, if you help me." So I helped her and she leaned on me and I helped her out and I said to the theater manager, I said, "Can you call a cab?" I said, "I'm going to take her to emergency." So I took her to Alta Bates—and this is late—I mean, it was the late show.

06-00:26:00

Geritz:

The theater is closing.

06-00:26:01

Kramer:

It's about eleven o'clock at night. So I take her to Alta Bates emergency room, and I go up to the counter there and I say I've brought this woman, and I explained to whomever was on duty that I don't know anything about her health insurance or anything like that, but I know she lives alone and she comes to the theater regularly and she seems to be suffering in pain, and I'm afraid that something is wrong and she's not getting medical attention and I think somebody should look at her. I said, "I don't know how you do this in the emergency." I said, "She's not dying and she's not bleeding, but I'm afraid to have her go home." So they said, "No, that's fine," and they handed me this questionnaire form. "You need to have her fill this out." It's a medical history thing. So I go back and sit down and I said, "Okay, we have to fill this out before the doctors will see you." I said, "Your name?" She can't remember her name. I said, "You're Mrs. Carlton. Mrs. Carlton, what's your full name?" "I don't know." She gets very vague, like this. I said, "How old are you? Where do you live?" I mean these are basic things and it's like she can't answer anything. I asked her about health, when is the last time she's seen a doctor. I mean she is like as if zero memory. Smiling, sweet, but I'm thinking my God, you know, she can't be this blank a page, I mean the woman lives alone for goodness sake. She comes to the archive every day. Yes, without—in her slip sometimes, without a skirt but—

06-00:27:47

Geritz:

She's there.

06-00:27:48

Kramer:

But, you know, nowadays they dress like that, and we didn't know that then. Nobody would have minded today, right, if she had come in her slip. It wasn't sheer. Anyway, eventually the nurse comes and they take her in and I wait. About twenty minutes later, the doctor comes over to me and says, "Mrs. Carlton has been here twenty-six times in the last month. She does this with

people. It can be people on the street, taxicab drivers, anybody. She just comes here if she needs attention. You've just been taken in by a little old lady who desperately needs attention." He said, "Our emergency room is too busy for this, we can't have Mrs. Carlton coming back here."

06-00:28:54

Geritz: Oh, dear.

06-00:29:00

Kramer: So.

06-00:29:01

Geritz: All things to all people.

06-00:29:03

Kramer: What a place to hang out, right? Poor Mrs. Carlton. So, out comes Mrs. Carlton and I said, "Well, let's go home, Mrs. Carlton," and I call a cab. The cab pulls up outside the emergency room, Mrs. Carlton and I walk out and the cab driver takes one look at Mrs. Carlton and he says, "I am not driving you." He says, "I know that lady." "I am not taking you," he says to her. "I am not driving you." I said, "Come on, I'm taking her home, I'm paying you, what's the problem?" He said, "No." He said, "The last two times I had Mrs. Carlton in the cab, she said she couldn't find her keys, and I had to go through her purse and find everything and try to figure out how to open her door. I had to go through a window." I mean, all these things. So, Mrs. Carlton. Anyway, I had to guarantee that he could dump us at the street no matter what happened, he was not involved. And he did, he dumped us on the sidewalk, drove away as fast as possible, and I took Mrs. Carlton to the door and of course she couldn't find her keys, and I went through this.

06-00:30:23

Geritz: Yeah. Film theaters end up being, you know, the show space for all types of enactments.

06-00:30:31

Kramer: It's strange isn't it? Dear Mrs. Carlton.

06-00:30:44

Geritz: I assume, like over your lifetime as a viewer, you were different types of viewer. I remember you saying that when you were young, living at home, that you were almost fanatical about going to film. Could you talk about how you grew as a viewer?

06-00:31:20

Kramer: Well, certainly as a young person, I was a consumer, I consumed cinema, whatever was there in the theaters, in the four theaters in our town. I just consumed it and I consumed it multiple times, the same, because if I could, I'd sit through films twice. Those were long, because you had a double bill and you had newsreels and you had cartoons. While in the war, you had these bond, you know, what did we call those bonds? War bonds. You collected

money for things, the Red Cross and whatnot, I mean there was all of that. So, sitting through movies was a lot of hours, plus doing it twice. You didn't have to pay extra, you could just sit there, you know nobody—

06-00:32:24

Geritz: Make it through again.

06-00:32:25

Kramer: Nobody charged you extra, they didn't clear you out. So I was just this voracious consumer. The selectivity didn't really come until maybe adulthood, when... When did the selectivity? No, I was still consuming. I was still a consumer in college. I remember the first four years of college, five years of college, I was still a consumer, looking at everything that was available to me. Lots of things weren't available.

I think it was in graduate school, when I went to Harvard, and the Brattle Theater was there. That was when I understood curatorship, I mean I understood what they were doing at the Brattle, because they were doing seasons, they were doing series. Whether it was a Bogart series or whether it was film noir or whatever, but there was a concept, and so that was very interesting to me, in addition to just seeing all the foreign films that they were showing, because I hadn't had a chance to see much in the way of foreign films. We didn't start getting much in the way of foreign films here until the fifties, later even, and you had to have a theater that would show them, and the normal, Hollywood owned corporate theaters were not showing those films, they were showing Hollywood films. So you had to go to special theaters. You had to find art houses. Now, Manhattan had art houses, but if you weren't in Manhattan, you didn't have all that. Being in Cambridge, you had the Brattle and that was the art house. You got the best of what you could get in New York. Yes, if you were in New York, you could also go to MoMA, they had a film series, but most museums did not have film series. There were not even college film series.

When I started teaching, it was after graduate school, that was when I started seeing universities have student, faculty, staff run, you know, extracurricular kind of film series on campus, but that's really a sixties thing, a late sixties thing, I think. Yeah, so the Brattle made me very aware of what you could do curatorially, with film.

06-00:35:43

Geritz: And so you were noticing directors, you're noticing genre.

06-00:35:46

Kramer: Actors.

06-00:35:48

Geritz: Actors.

06-00:35:48

Kramer:

Genre, countries. We had all this Swedish cinema coming. It wasn't just Bergman. Or we had neorealism from Italy. But because I was in art history, it just seemed so obvious, because that's what you do in art history. So I just saw film exhibition, film curatorship, really exactly like art history, and that's why, while I was a graduate student, along with three other graduate students, including Henry Geldzahler, we went to the dean of the art history department at the Fogg Museum and said they should be teaching film history, and we were told that was impossible, you know it didn't belong in art history. Of course, that changed later on. But we knew, as graduate students, as art history graduate students, that you couldn't possibly teach 20th Century art history, or late 19th Century to the present art history, without including film. It was absurd.

06-00:37:29

Geritz:

So you're both making a claim that film is an art form, but were you also saying that you took principles you were learning, of analysis, visual analysis or form, from art history, and applied them to seeing film language and style? Are you saying both things?

06-00:37:46

Kramer:

Yes.

06-00:37:50

Geritz:

Could you say a little bit more about how you might have come to be able to look at and analyze a film.

06-00:37:56

Kramer:

I just think that, at that point, the discipline in art history was so internalized that you just automatically applied it to your viewing of film. It's a visual medium with movement and maybe sound, maybe not sound. I think our big ignorance was in sound. I think that all of us were very, very sophisticated visually, but what we had to learn was sound. That's why silent films were easier for us, because I think unless you were a musician or a student of music, the sound part was the more difficult thing to analyze.

06-00:38:54

Geritz:

Yeah, I think that's a really important point. Even in film history, the sound was ignored a lot.

06-00:39:01

Kramer:

Terribly, terribly. I think there's the thought of misconstrued film critical writing, because you're forgetting about the sound and the evolution of the sound, because while the visual stays fairly consistent in its rules, the sound technology is changing very rapidly.

06-00:39:43

Geritz:

When I think of how film entered into schools, the classic examples are art history, the arts, or the languages, and so it is to do with the spoken and cultural, but not sound.

06-00:39:57

Kramer: Right.

06-00:40:00

Geritz: You never hear of it entering through music, those departments.

06-00:40:06

Kramer: So in a sense, what J.P. Gorin is talking about, the importance of the sound of a film is in its own way, an acknowledgement of that lapse. I mean, there had to be people talking about it of course, but it wasn't in the general critical dialogue.

06-00:40:39

Geritz: When you went to films at that point, you had to see them in a theater, I mean that's how one saw our work, right? How important was it to you to see film in a theater and has that changed over time?

06-00:40:57

Kramer: Well of course, I grew up assuming that's—no, back up. We forget, I had my father's home movies, which were in the dining room, sitting around the dining table facing one wall, where a bed sheet was hung. So I had that experience, that's my first experience of cinema. The home movies in the home and yes, you don't even have the pull-up screen that everybody had later on. But the projector, which is noisy, not because it's a sound projector, but it's the motor, so you hear a motor going, that's your soundtrack. It's okay to have a bed sheet, it's a clean bed sheet, but you know, it might drape a little bit. You tacked it up so it wasn't weighted at the bottom, so there would be wrinkles or something. So you didn't have an absolutely flat surface and it's not a reflective surface, there's no light. It's just this blank, white. That was perfectly acceptable, we didn't find that a problem for our 16mm home movies at all, not a problem at all.

I grew up with a theater being a really quite remarkable place. It had this wonderful carpet that was so thick and you sank in, because it had been designed to keep everybody quiet. You realize that. So, upholstered, I mean these are just ordinary theaters in a small town, but a theater has heavy, heavy, indestructible carpet and heavy upholstery on chairs, and the walls have drapery on it and the lighting is muted. Lights are on dimmers and they go on and off, but nothing is ever really bright light or anything like that. There's that whole ambiance even without the film on the screen that the theater presented. Of course, there's the smell of popcorn and there's the concessions and all of that, but there's a kind of hushed quality and you were respectful of that when you went in. Kids of course stormed in screaming, at Saturday matinees they were noisy and they'd run up and down the aisles, but those were set aside times for that group. I didn't go to those shows, I went to the adult shows. I did not go to those morning shows. I did not like that noise and running around, that was distracting from the cinema. So I chose always to go to the adult shows. Kids could come, but I did not go to the morning ones. I

started at one, after lunch, and there was less running around, it was much quieter, but also the ushers really were there to police.

06-00:44:23

Geritz: Why did you like that kind of experience?

06-00:44:26

Kramer: Because of focus. It shut out everything from the outside world. It allowed me to immerse myself in the screen and to be totally focused, nothing to distract me. So, a theater for me meant this sort of room like space that was protective of outside sound and bustle, and created an ambiance of kind of respect and you're here for one purpose only. You're not here to talk, you're not here to run around. We're all facing front. That's the way I saw my cinema, and for me it was always part of the cinema experience, so a good theater.

In the sixties, when you had to show films in commandeered spaces, you dreamt of having a theater. That's why I came to PFA. That was the seduction.

06-00:45:47

Geritz: The theater.

06-00:45:48

Kramer: The theater.

06-00:45:50

Geritz: In one of the earlier interviews, we talked about Roland Barthes' article about upon leaving a movie theater. Do you remember how you left a theater in those early days?

06-00:46:06

Kramer: It was like traumatic. When the film was over and the lights came on, the exiting was horrible, it was painful. Going out into the sunlight from an afternoon screening, hearing people chatter, the noise of the street, hearing people talk about the films. I wanted to be alone, in silence. What's it when divers go into the water and have to come back up, to avoid getting the bends? Decompress.

06-00:46:52

Geritz: Decompress, yeah.

06-00:46:54

Kramer: I needed decompressing. So I liked to be by myself, not chat with anybody about the movie I saw, and to let it sort of linger in my mind and go over it in my mind for several hours, and to be very silent. That's how I came out of it.

06-00:47:21

Geritz: Might it be that the present way that you primarily view, with digital works at home, and I don't know how all you view, whether it's streaming or people give you digital.

06-00:47:35

Kramer: I get DVDs and I stream.

06-00:47:37

Geritz: Does that recreate that or prolong that feeling?

06-00:47:41

Kramer: No. It's awful.

06-00:47:43

Geritz: It's awful. In what ways?

06-00:47:46

Kramer: Well of course quality wise, the size, it's tiny, I mean whatever screen I'm looking at is too small. I have to be up close. I can't sit at the back of a big space and have this huge thing, larger than me. I'm larger than it at home, I'm much larger than it. So, I see everything around it at the same time. I'm completely aware of my entire room. The cat on the bed or the light outside, I mean there's stuff. It's very difficult to be tunnel visioned with the small screen. My peripheral vision takes in too much. It's not dark enough, so I can't get into that total immersion. But, if the film is engaging me, whether it's on the computer monitor or if it's on the TV screen, quality aside of the image, if for some reason I'm engaged in it, then after a little bit, I will manage to blot out things and I'm attentive. But when it's over, I don't have that feeling of having to come out of a deep immersion, because I don't think I go that deep. It doesn't do, you know, have the impact.

06-00:49:46

Geritz: Barthes' other comparison was to television, which he said was domestic, and it's kind of what you described, the cat's there, the room is there.

06-00:49:57

Kramer: But television as television, is different than film on television.

06-00:50:02

Geritz: How do you distinguish that?

06-00:50:05

Kramer: You accept television as television, there's going to be constantly interrupted with advertising. So you can get up and go to the refrigerator and you can get up and go to the bathroom. You know exactly how long, most of the time, the ads will be, or the breaks, every fifteen minutes or every half-hour, depending on that station or that format. So, you know you're going to be fed stuff in small amounts. A scene, an episode, and then you can come back to it. Also, you don't have to turn off the lights. You can watch it in the daylight, it doesn't matter, visually it doesn't matter. It's mostly shot in close-up. If it's too dark, you can't see it anyway. So you're looking at something for which it is difficult to do medium and distance shots, to be read, for which it is difficult to do much with lighting and certainly not chiaroscuro, darkness. It's very difficult to read that on a TV screen. They have a different palette, I mean it's

a very limited palette. After a while you realize my God, isn't it interesting, all these TV shows have the same color. It's as if you were coloring by numbers. The same even lighting, there's that TV aesthetic. It's very undemanding, you know? It's largely content. It's the information, the content, that for the most part is what you're taking in, not the formal elements. Now occasionally there's something that's done really well and it's made for TV and it does something, but most of it is very look-alike. You can go from channel to channel to channel and you feel like you're watching the same program. It doesn't matter what they call it. You can go from seven o'clock news, just go from one channel to another and it's just different characters but it's absolutely identical expressions, body gestures, framing, positioning, voice modulation. I sometimes play with that. Sometimes I think here is a dramatic story. I wonder if somebody's voice will be adjusted properly to what the drama is, as opposed to the formulaic oh, how sad, the anchor is sort of oh, that's terrible. And today in sports... [laughs] I mean, with the same modulation, the assassination of five women, you know, in this country, and the Giants winning, it is exactly the same drama between the anchors.

06-00:53:47

Geritz:

And so why do you preview in that kind of environment? Are you, at this point, largely trying to fill in areas, so that the theater experience isn't primary, because you are very particular about what you're viewing?

06-00:54:06

Kramer:

Mostly people are sending me so much stuff that I'm just looking at what gets sent to me. And then there's people who I know are very selective and they'll ask me if I want something. Because I know they're selective, I'll say oh, yes. I kind of appreciate that, when somebody says you might like this and sends it to me, and then I know that we'll have a conversation about it and I enjoy that, having the conversation afterwards.

For a while, I had Netflix for a while and I was ordering things.

06-00:54:56

Geritz:

You were an early Netflix adapter.

06-00:54:58

Kramer:

Yeah, and I tried it for a couple of months and I would go through things and I'd say oh, I've seen that, I've seen that. There was very little that I hadn't seen that intrigued me, but that was in the early days. I'm sure there's much more. So, I kind of thought this isn't worth it, and also I got some really bad DVDs, I mean they had glitches in them. I don't know if they had just been played too often or what, but nobody was doing any quality check on the DVDs, so you'd get crap or the subtitles were impossible to read. So I thought the hell with it.

Then, I got fascinated with the TV series, and then, since I don't have HBO or Showtime, and whatever all those other premiums, I would listen to what

people were telling me about TV series, and when they were done with a season, I would then order them as DVDs, and that was with, “The Wire.”

06-00:56:11

Geritz: “The Wire,” yeah, so you were getting into longtime viewing.

06-00:56:14

Kramer: I couldn’t see “The Wire.” Yes. So I just ordered the whole thing. Fortunately, I get AMC, so “Breaking Bad” and “Mad Men,” those have been all on AMC, that I get, that’s basic cable. “The Americans” is on F/X and that’s J.P.’s and my latest obsession, “The Americans.” That’s more sort of funny, because of the wigs, but also because it’s a history, it’s a period we know very well. It’s the fifties and the sixties, and it’s the “Cold War.” So, it’s something that we experienced directly and it’s going back over this history. And then there’s, shall we say the anthropological approach, and isn’t it interesting that we have a series today, in the society in which we live, in which the writers, and they got away with it, the Russian spies are the heroes and the FBI are the bad guys. I mean that’s the drama. So I think, and how does that come off today, I mean what kind of crazy society are we living in. So we’re sort of intrigued by that.

06-00:57:46

Geritz: And it’s still yet a new kind—I mean, we began by talking about ways of viewing. It’s a new kind of way of viewing, where you choose when you view and you can view a season all at once or one at a time.

06-00:58:01

Kramer: And that’s what the Netflix people and all these streaming things are finding, is that people want the choice to be able to see things all at once. I went back on Netflix last month, because they had a free offer for streaming, and I had never used their streaming. That’s a newer thing with Netflix and I thought, well let’s just see what I can stream. I did marathons of TV series, 12 chapters at a go. I did a month of marathons, which I sat in front of my computer, because I can’t stream to my TV set. The TV set is too old a model, I can’t do that. So, in a ridiculous, sitting there, two feet from my screen, I did six hours a day. Kathy, you walk around in a daze, you don’t know where you are. My eyes were like rolled back in my head, but I did it.

06-00:58:58

Geritz: And do you still have a subscription?

06-00:59:01

Kramer: It expired. There were two other series I hadn’t gotten to.

06-00:59:07

Geritz: You have to wait until they have another offer.

06-00:59:13

Kramer: No, but I did these marathons.

- 06-00:59:19
Geritz: The theater offers a lot, from what you were just saying, but it doesn't offer that.
- 06-00:59:24
Kramer: So that was kind of interesting. It prompted me. I thought, if I'm going to continue this, I've got to buy a better TV, with the wide screen format, because my screen only has the four-by-three, so I'm cutting off stuff at the sides. But I also need the updated connection so that I could take a cable from the computer to the TV set.
- 06-00:59:53
Geritz: Yeah, the flat screen and the digital.
- 06-00:59:56
Kramer: I don't know what the sound is like in those flat screens. Does everybody add extra speakers or are the built-in speakers any good?
- 06-01:00:02
Geritz: I still have the old TVs too, you'll have to ask Steve, but he'll know, Steve will know.
- 06-01:00:05
Kramer: I keep telling myself, I have to go buy one of those things if I continue with this madness.
- 06-01:00:14
Geritz: I want to go back to something you mentioned a few minutes ago, that home movies you viewed, that was early part of your experience. What do you think we as beyond a family member, get from seeing things such as home movies, amateur films, industrials, and what Rick Prelinger called "ephemeral films."
- 06-01:00:41
Kramer: Well for me of course, it's what I first knew. It's always had a kind of charm for me, but I'm also always super aware that everyone who makes home movies is informed by their own experience in the movies or today, television, that they make their home movies as if they are making regular movies.
- 06-01:01:15
Geritz: That's interesting.
- 06-01:01:17
Kramer: That doesn't mean they're as good as, but it's a language they've learned. I've just finally digitalized my father's home movies, because they're no longer projectable, they've shrunk. I mean they're here at the archive but you can't project them any longer. So, Rick digitalized for them, and he put them on a hard drive, uncompressed, and then he made DVDs for me, and the DVDs are also on the hard drive, but he made me sets of DVDs, which I just have sent, with my own annotation. I had to look at these movies maybe ten, twenty times, to try to do the maximum identification of people and places, it's a kind

of family history, but a lot of things I don't know. I sent them a set, there are two DVDs, two hours, to each of my nephews and nieces, with the annotation. I've only heard back from one nephew, about his response to them, and I was very happy about his response. I'm waiting to hear, if I will hear, from the others, will they respond and what will they say. I'm very curious. What will the annotation mean?

But, as I'm watching these, I'm laughing because there's one movie in particular, I don't even know if it's one you ever saw. It shot in 1930, winter of 1930. My mother and father are on a funky cruise ship. It looks—let's put it this way, the swimming pool is a tank, it's literally a tank. It looks like, if you watch these crab fishing videos, it's where they throw the fish, into this tank, that's the swimming pool on this cruise ship. It's a tank. It's [got] tile sides and there's like a ladder that takes you down into the pool. They didn't have shuffleboard, they had miniature golf on the deck. It's this really funky cruise ship, and they leave a dock in New York. It's either New York or New Jersey, I couldn't tell from the shot, but the sign, it's a shared dock and it says, Hamburg American Line, and then it says United American Line. And so we looked it up and United American was a sort of subsidiary of the Hamburg American Line. The cruise ship takes them from New York to the Caribbean, and they go to different islands. In some places, the ship doesn't even dock at the island, they get into a little trawler and the trawler takes them to the island. Then there are these unbelievably un-PC shots being photographed, of the natives. I mean it looks like, who are our Italian filmmakers, *From the Pole to the Equator*.

06-01:04:30

Geritz:

Angela Ricci.

06-01:04:33

Kramer:

It looks like they're colonial figures, you know, in Africa. These are my parents and other members on the cruise, in Haiti or Dominican Republic, wherever they docked, because I don't know, it's one tropical island after another, plantation, whatever, standing, posing with the natives. But, my father keeps having these shots in which everybody is clowning, and they're doing Laurel and Hardy, they're doing slapstick, they're doing everything they saw in slapstick movies. It's home movies but everybody is hamming up for the camera, mugging, but it's all right out of slapstick comedies.

06-01:05:21

Geritz:

So they were too, they were watching movies too.

06-01:05:23

Kramer:

Right? And I've never seen a home movie that didn't somehow reflect that the people who are making movies have been to movies. No matter how amateurish or how awkwardly, they learned something. It's like the Kuchars. The Kuchars made it an art, a craft, developed it, didn't just stay with the first film they ever shot, they learned. They turned it into a selected aesthetic, the

home movie aesthetic, whereas most people, they simply come to it, perhaps unconsciously, but they come to it having seen movies.

06-01:06:20

Geritz:

Now occasionally, you would include, maybe not home movies, but amateur or industrial or ephemeral films, in a public program. Why?

06-01:06:33

Kramer:

Because I found them very beautifully shot, aside from—well, okay two reasons. I might have chosen them for the subject matter, it's possible. I don't have an example but it's certainly possible that you could choose a newsreel or a corporate film whose subject matter was a comment on or foil for, the fictional, or for a documentary you were showing, that you might—I mean that's an easy kind of thing to do in programming, it's a fun kind of thing. So that's content oriented.

The formal qualities that might be in the educational, ephemeral, corporate film, could be as high value as a Hollywood film or an avant-garde film, because the filmmakers who made them were trained, schooled. When a J.C. [Note: Jam] Handy makes those GM films, I mean they are gorgeous films. I was talking to J.P. Gorin this morning about this, because I said last night, this factory film, I was watching that factory film [on the Dziga Vertov Group program with a clip from *British Sounds* of the car assembly line] and I was thinking well you could have, if you had the commentary that would go with a General Motors film, you could have just as easily have put that commentary along with the factory as the Marxist one. In other words, if you're just doing it's a sound and as, you know, push-pull, it would be just as facetious right, to put, this is wonderful General Motors and our wonderful factory and our latest technology, and look at the workers and the clean environment or look at them eating in their cafeteria, whatever. You could have celebrated that just as much as talked about the defects of capitalism and the enslaved worker. And I said to J.P., and then if you look at that footage, it's beautiful footage.

06-01:08:47

Geritz:

That tracking shot.

06-01:08:49

Kramer:

This long tracking shot, the gorgeous colors of the cars, the shine of it, this new paint, shiny, shiny, shiny, and of course the cars are nicely shaped. Particularly, if you notice the front of one of these cars, the way the headlight curves in, it's a very sort of bullet looking front, and you wonder what car is that, I'd like to drive one those cars, and they're convertibles. But you also look at the way the workers are moving, like they're choreographed. There's a kind of ballet quality and they're not slaves. They're very clean, they're very well-dressed, they look perfectly content. You could also find, and I've made a point of watching assembly line scenes from the earliest cinema that had them, because I've always liked assembly line scenes, the machine, my fascination with the machine. Factory scenes and assembly line scenes are

some of the earliest— Some of the early actualities were these interiors of factories. They're silent, so you don't hear the din, but you can imagine, when you look at those machines, what the din would have been like. In the textile factories, in the metal places and the steel mills and things, people are sweating and it's terrible conditions. Those textile factories in hot places, no air conditioning, I mean they were miserable, and there of course, the misery of the worker is seen. But in the modern car factory, the worker is not miserable physically, but what you don't have is the din, the factory din, you need the sound film in order to have the factory din. So, you get the din in J.P.'s film, but you get the formal beauty of the assembly line as a choreography, as a ballet, and these beautiful colors and the beautiful panning shots. And of course who of J.P.'s colleagues makes the Citroen factory film, [*Humain trop humain* or *The Human Condition*], it's Louis Malle. And who else is interested in the din and the sound of work? Wiseman.

06-01:11:06

Geritz: Oh, yeah, that's right.

06-01:11:08

Kramer: Do you remember his meat packing plant?

06-01:11:09

Geritz: Yeah, yeah.

06-01:11:12

Kramer: Wiseman loves looking at work, the way people do work, whatever it is, and he loves factories, but he loved using the sound, the din, of the factory.

06-01:11:24

Geritz: I was trying to remember, in those Jam Handy ones, whether you had the sound of a factory or not.

06-01:11:32

Kramer: I don't think it did.

06-01:11:33

Geritz: Yeah, because I think there's voiceover.

06-01:11:35

Kramer: There's voiceover.

06-01:11:37

Geritz: So that's part of why it was so—they were so elegant.

06-01:11:39

Kramer: It's exquisite. Factory din is unbelievable.

06-01:11:48

Geritz: There's a film that Jim Jennings did underneath a subway.

06-01:11:54

Kramer: MoMA.

06-01:11:56

Geritz: Yeah, MoMA. Ernie Gehr said the people living there never get to experience the space the way your film shows it because your film is silent. You get the beauty, the total beauty, not the eroding—

06-01:12:12

Kramer: The sound in subways, my God, it's a very particular sound. So there is the absolute—there's the craft of cinema, it is in every kind of cinema. We talk about the art but we don't talk about the craft. People think of the word as something lesser. I think craft should be celebrated. I think the craft of doing anything, whether it's painting or music. There is the craft.

06-01:13:05

Geritz: I want to sort of leave this section. Well, actually there's a related question that's maybe a segue. I remember you saying that when you watched home movies, that in some ways you got an early introduction to experimental language because your dad would play the film backwards.

06-01:13:35

Kramer: He did it for us. When you have a home projector, these early ones, they're very simply made, I mean heavy, built like a tank, but a minimal number of parts, really the simplest kind of... The later ones look much more complicated, but these early home projectors, 16mm, were unbelievably simple. A child could run it. You had a little toggle switch, on and off, and you had a little knob for variable speed that you just turned, it was really simple, no gear changing, nothing. Turn it on, slow it up.

06-01:14:19

Geritz: Fast, slow.

06-01:14:24

Kramer: You could rewind your film by running it backwards, or you could take it out of the gate and just do this. Nobody thought it was wrong to rewind it by just flipping it backwards. So, you just quickly discovered that when you're rewinding the film, oh, I can watch this backwards. And then you start to giggle if you're kids because everything is Méliès, right? No matter what the film was, you've turned it into Méliès, by running it backwards. So, whatever we were watching, we'd go forward and then we had to rewind it anyway, and rewinding meant oh, we had another film, we were going to watch it backwards, and this was our ritual, because we would just be giggling and laughing. It was thoroughly entertaining. I jokingly said years later to somebody—somebody had asked me how I got interested in the avant-garde, I think I was being interviewed when I was working at Canyon, and I said it must have been my father's home movies, because we ran everything backwards and things jumped and popped all over the place and everything

was absurd and surreal. I don't think, I might have said Méliès, but I said, so I think that was my early experience of experimental filmmaking.

06-01:15:45

Geritz:

And when you became more interested in experimental filmmaking, when you began showing things in Eugene and then came down here, was it the film language? Was it partly the times, the culture? What drew you to continue to immerse your—because not every viewer does continue to immerse yourself in that world of experimental film, both through viewing and programming.

06-01:16:14

Kramer:

Well, I think two things happened or maybe three things happened, that coincided. One, I'm teaching a basic history of cinema, so part of that is the 1920s avant-garde movement in France, Germany, Sweden, Scandinavia, Denmark. So this early movement away from the narrative, a pure, theatrical kind of narrative. People were trying to find what they think is uniquely cinema, belongs to cinema and a form of language, and what cinema's task should be, to distinguish it from the other arts, whatever the philosophy. Of course, there were the people like Delluc. They weren't abstract or anything like that. They wanted to go out, open air, kind of non-studio sort of thing, so there's that aspect of it.

Anyway, I had to deal with talking about that and showing those films in the basic history. At the same time, I am aware that there's something going on today with people who were considering themselves experimental or avant-garde, because it's the sixties and you're aware that this is happening. I think, although I was a little older than everybody, in the sixties I was already thirty I guess, I was part of that hubbub of voices. I was part of that thing being in the air, the *Zeitgeist* or whatever, of wanting change, of embracing, looking for something new, change, politically, socially, and therefore, was the answer in the arts and in education? I found myself involved with faculty, anti-administration protests at University of Oregon. I was aligned with students who were protesting. It was a tricky place to be because I was faculty and I was a very low man on the pole. I knew it could jeopardize my job, but I had a very nice dean, who was very kind about it and tolerated me. I was a bit irresponsible, but I decided I would go out on strike with the students, or whatever they were doing, and I would protest against the administration. And yes, we were a little bit, shall we say a little delayed from California, you did it first out here. I was in little Eugene, Oregon, which was a very conservative town, and just the notion that this was a town where my first year there, an organization called the Moms of Oregon had burned Ginsberg's, *Howl*, on the steps of the student union, and where I chose to wear jeans and a black turtleneck sweater to lecture in, and people would lean out of their car windows and scream beatnik at me, with nastiness, not with humor.

So, I had come to a town that I had not seen the likes of and had not seen the likes of me. It was a moment, an unfortunate moment for many people and in

the beginning, an unfortunate moment for me. I was ready to turn around and leave within twenty-four hours of having arrived, when I saw the environment in which I was going to live and work, and then I said no, you can't do that, you're an honorable person, you have a contract and you will do your time.

06-01:21:08

Geritz: Was it a year or a semester?

06-01:21:11

Kramer: A year. By the end of the year, I had made friends and I had seen the possibilities and I said, it will do you good to stick this out. And so I spent four to five years and it taught me a lot. It was good for me and maybe it was good for some of them. But you know, I was a New Yorker. I had been living in Boston, in Cambridge. To be dumped into Eugene, Oregon at that time, which was essentially retired folks of the most conservative persuasion, and yet next door was Ken Kesey, so not uninteresting. It was, as J.P. said so clearly, there was a lot of noise, a lot of voices, most of it silly. You knew most of it was silly even then, but some of it was very powerful and very seductive and it allowed you to make some noise and it allowed you to think, I can experiment with my life. Filmmakers experiment with film, but experimenting with your life is a lot more dangerous. A lot more dangerous. So I chose to experiment with my life.

06-01:23:08

Geritz: And in your experiment with your life, you had lots of different work experiences. We talked about how you were at Canyon, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, PFA, at Davis, teaching there, various aspects, and at different points, you tended to move on. What would be the indicator that there's time for another experiment?

06-01:23:44

Kramer: I don't know, I had this two-year thing. I would get restless, two years and I'd—it took me two years to master what I was doing, and by master I don't mean it was great, but I mean to feel like I had learned the ropes and I had accomplished something for myself, if not as well as for the position, and at that point I would get restless and think, it's sort of like I need something new to learn, to conquer. Conquer is not the word, because I'm not like a mountain climber, but it's sort of the same thing. Why do people climb mountains? Because it's there. And then they have to climb the next one. I was sort of like that with jobs and I was always asking myself this question, is this all I can do, can't I do something else? Not meaning that it was a different thing, but can't I push myself further, challenge myself. Is this enough of a challenge? How far can I go?

06-01:25:02

Geritz: And is that still a factor when you're retired?

06-01:25:05

Kramer:

To a certain extent. One of the problems about retiring is of course then you're no longer employed, no one's asking anything of you. So, it makes you lazy a little bit, right? So, can you demand it of yourself without anybody asking it of you or paying you for it. So then you have to be your own boss in a sense and you have to find things that you've never done before and you don't know if you can do them and you're going to try them. The pilates was one of them. When I went into that, part of me was saying you can't do this, and the other part was saying well, let's see if you can do it. Can you do anything physical?

06-01:26:02

Geritz:

And challenge was something that you embraced. I want to take that idea back to when you—we've already spoken about the fact that you were at PFA for a period, when Tom invited you, and then you left and then you came back, and you came back as a director. There was the whole challenge of the fact that Tom had built a wonderful reputation. I'll come back to that idea, but I want to begin with some of the things that weren't curating, that then became an aspect of the work you did in that second incarnation at PFA.

When you first were hired by Tom, in that first incarnation, I remember you saying that the first thing you did was buy some films. He had a grant and it was to buy some experimental films.

06-01:27:01

Kramer:

They had the grant and nobody had done anything, it was going to expire, so we had to spend the money fast. That was my first assignment. In fact, he gave it to me before I came onboard, because time was of the essence, and I was still teaching at Davis. We had already arranged that I would come here in January, after the teaching at Davis ended, that semester ended, or quarter, I can't remember what they were on. Anyway, he said, "But can you start on this early," he said, "because we've got to spend this money by June," I think. I knew and he knew that filmmakers are difficult in terms of time. Ask somebody to do something by a deadline, you're in trouble. So I actually started working on it before, making lists and thinking about who, and running it by Tom and Sheldon I guess. Then, when I arrived, I had to pursue that, finish it, spend the grant by the deadline, get everything, at least a contract. Not that everything had arrived but at least paid for, invoice paid for, on the books. You know what that is with grants. I'm pretty sure we did not ask for an extension. I don't think we knew about extensions in those days.

06-01:28:34

Geritz:

Those were early grant days.

06-01:28:36

Kramer:

You didn't talk about extensions, for God's sake. The fact that you had a grant. But I was also Tom's secretary in a sense. I answered his phone, I did

the calendar with Dan Tanner, the two of us did the calendar, because we did it in-house. Were you around when we were doing it in-house, that one sheet?

06-01:29:00

Geritz: I was, as a student, but I wasn't working here.

06-01:29:03

Kramer: But you know, that was where you had to do layout, cut and paste, with your little X-ACTO knife, and then you went to a printer. You went to a printer and you had galleys and all that sort of stuff. So, I did that. I did all the PR, I wrote ads, public service announcements. I did PSAs. We had an ad budget for the Daily Cal, so I would type up the ads and race them down there. We had no computers, we had no fax machines. We didn't even have telex then. Everything was either phone, mail or hand delivered, and letters. When we previewed films, films came here to preview, including 35mm. So, there was a lot of office work. I was an administrative assistant—like you were when you came to work—with Tom. I did administrative stuff, secretarial stuff, curatorial stuff, publicity. What else?

06-01:30:28

Geritz: The avant-garde series.

06-01:30:32

Kramer: The avant-garde series. And then I was greedy enough to push my way, to ask Tom if I could do some silent films and things I enjoyed doing. I didn't think we—we didn't see enough of them on the calendar. And of course he was fine with that, because he was an add-on guy. It would never occur to Tom not to do more. Not to do more, of course you do more. I wasn't charged with paying for it. He was the fundraiser, I didn't have to worry about that. However, the administration upstairs indicated to me when I was hired that they were expecting me to monitor the budget, that it was a condition on which they had agreed to give Tom an assistant.

06-01:31:30

Geritz: And when he had spent too much.

06-01:31:32

Kramer: Right. I did find subtle ways to talk about budget.

06-01:31:44

Geritz: How to track it.

06-01:31:45

Kramer: Track it. I would let him know when this was going to be very expensive, or something like that, what are we going to do about that.

06-01:31:55

Geritz: And do you think the two of you balanced off different strengths, or was there a lot of overlap?

06-01:32:02

Kramer:

I think probably balanced, although I picked up a lot of his habits. I liked his multitasking, that suited me. I had a tendency to be a multitasker but he was the multitasker par excellence and I thought, oh I'm going to learn that, I mean the speed, the alacrity with which he could multitask, and that I picked up. So I would say we both, we entered into a kind of speed contest on that score.

06-01:32:34

Geritz:

Give an example. What would you be multitasking?

06-01:32:38

Kramer:

Oh, it's like being on the phone and writing and typing and directing things. Open door, as you know me, anybody can come in, it can be Grand Central Station. You can have endless conversations going on, you could be on the phone and you could be on the typewriter and you could be solving a crisis, and you could be oh, so-and-so's here, well he wasn't supposed to be here. Okay, send him up. You know, that. It's kind of like a Howard Hawks movie, with overlapping dialogue. That's what it's like. It's kind of like the one with Rosalind Russell.

06-01:33:25

Geritz:

His Girl Friday.

06-01:33:28

Kramer:

Snappy. Yeah, *His Girl Friday*. It's that kind of— yeah.

06-01:33:33

Geritz:

I was thinking of the drawings someone once made, of Linda Artel in the library, when she was doing ten things.

06-01:33:42

Kramer:

The adrenaline, it's a high, it really is, and so I caught that from Tom and learned it and we liked it, we liked it. At the end of the day it was kind of let down when you went home. You were exhausted but it was a kind of—and then going right into the theater with the public and the film and that whole thing.

06-01:34:12

Geritz:

Are there other things you learned from Tom?

06-01:34:21

Kramer:

Oh, how to cut and paste a note together.

06-01:34:24

Geritz:

From other sources.

06-01:34:25

Kramer:

Yeah. I mean he's amazing. He could produce notes for films with incredible speed by just doing this collage of other people's writings. But they were right on, you know, ch-ch-ch-ch. He had this, it's like a photographic memory of a

paragraph or anything like that. I learned to do it but I don't have that photographic memory. I'd have to think, oh yeah, I think I could go here, but I'm much slower at it, but I learned how to do that. I'd never done that kind of note writing before, so I learned that. And of course, just learning about a lot more films because he showed them so much, getting to see stuff I didn't know anything about. Some of his particular interests and aspects of cinema that I hadn't given that much thought to, where there was a particular cinematographer or a writer, I wouldn't have known. Otherwise, I think we probably did—I felt like I made a very good house frau for his being out there in the world, and that suited me, I think. I didn't really want to be out there. I preferred to be behind the scenes, it's a comfortable place for me to be, so I was happy for him to be the person out there dealing with the guests, especially if they were famous or celebrities. I didn't want to deal with them. It's hard enough to deal with experimental filmmakers. I could deal with them, but the Hollywood people or the famous directors and actors. I remember once, Tom left me alone for one evening with a French actress he had invited, and she was having a tantrum, and all I wanted to do was slap her. Tom of course would have mollified her, and I wanted to slap her. [laughs]

06-01:36:47

Geritz:

Keep you behind scenes.

06-01:36:57

Kramer:

So, we're very different in that respect.

06-01:37:00

Geritz:

So I mentioned, we talked about that one of the first things you did was buy those experimental films, and later, when you came back, you brought attention to care of the collection and building the collection. What do you think is important about having a collection as part of an exhibition space?

06-01:37:23

Kramer:

Well, knowing what I know now or even knowing what I knew by the time I came back, was that you don't start a collection unless you know what you're going to have to face in the future, that it was a very foolish, irresponsible thing for us, Sheldon, and I've told Sheldon this many, many times, that collecting is not just acquiring, because they require very specialized care, which is very expensive, space wise and climate wise and technologically, none of which we had, none of which was even in a plan for the future. There was no strategy and we were totally ignorant about what happens to film. Here, you start an archive and you're influenced by people like Langlois who didn't know how or had no resources to take care of a collection. There is something to be said for—somebody has to do the collecting, right? Somebody has to be able to get it, give it, but to do that as an institution, without any plan for storage and specialized storage, and for cataloguing. What is the point of having it if you don't have access. People don't get access unless you've got at least an inventory and some sort of catalogue, a full catalogue. And of course now in the digital age you know that even more. If

you don't have the information, what are you searching for? It's useless to try to search. And that it quickly gets out of hand, that no matter whether you're a small institution or a big institution.

MoMA is not on top of its own collection, a big place like that, which had the storage facility. Its collection got completely out of hand and stuff has not even been identified. They've got boxes full of stuff that they don't know what it is. So, even the big, well-endowed places can slip up. It's where your priorities are and where your staffing is, and so on. So in a way, it was very irresponsible for Pacific Film Archive or any institution like it, to say we're going to have a collection, we're going to be an archive, without making plans for the rest. In the time between I left, I mean I was aware of the problem when I left, with the films underneath us, but it wasn't my area. But when I left, I had time to visit other archives and talk to people in the time I was gone and to learn a lot from the [International Federation of Film Archives], and I thought, what the hell are we doing with a collection, unless we can turn this around. That's why when I came back, that was—I felt like, the president's second term, right? What will you be able to do in two years, you know, what will you be able to do in four years. What will your legacy be? What can you leave this place that is better than when you came into it? It was a miracle, thanks to George Gund, that we got the storage we had, but by the time we moved into it, we knew that was less than adequate, because we already knew what was happening with the vinegar syndrome. The first time in the archive, we didn't know anything about vinegar syndrome; neither did anybody else. When I first learned from the projectionist, I think it was Craig, that films were doing this strange thing, it might have been—was it before I left the first time?

06-01:41:59

Geritz: No, it was the second time.

06-01:42:00

Kramer: It wasn't during Lynda Myles, when Lynda Myles first came, because I overlap with Lynda.

06-01:42:06

Geritz: It might have been then, because I remember, I was there.

06-01:42:10

Kramer: You were there, okay, because Lynda didn't come for a period of months. I was by myself from the end of '79 to fall of '80, when she showed up. I don't know if it was during that time that the projectionist told me about the warping and the stink on films.

06-01:42:31

Geritz: It was a little later.

06-01:42:33

Kramer:

But at any rate, I remember calling up UCLA and asking about this and they could not give me an explanation. They said oh, yeah, we have some films that do that, but they had no explanation for it. I started calling around to all the archive people and nobody could give me an explanation, but they all admitted that there was something, that they had some deterioration, but nobody knew. I went to a FIAF congress as an observer, we were not FIAF members, and I went to a scientific symposium in which a chemist was talking about film decomposition, and he told me, he explained. It was like going to chemistry 101. He explained what was happening to our films, and I came home and I told everybody, this is what's happening to our films. But, we didn't have a way of stopping it, because we didn't have climate controls. We had storage but we didn't have climate controlled storage.

06-01:43:53

Geritz:

That was the other aspect that changed when you came back. You said Tom had been responsible for fundraising, you hadn't, and so there were these issues that came up, like storage and climate control. So, that was a new area, I suppose.

06-01:44:11

Kramer:

And also, supporting the program. If you remember that every year, the university started cutting back on the amount that they contributed through, what was it, from the student reg [registration] fees or whatever proportion we got from that. There was a time when 60 percent of our funding was from the university and by the time I came back, it was like under 50 percent and kept going down, down, down. By the time I left it was down to about 20 percent. So, all you were doing was more fundraising. When I came back, I realized I was going to be fundraising, not only for storage. We also wanted to revamp the theater, because the technology was changing, and I had to fundraise for exhibition and I had to fundraise for our salaries, because we were not getting the support.

06-01:45:17

Geritz:

How did you approach that? It was a new area for you.

06-01:45:22

Kramer:

Yeah, it was a new area. I knew a little bit about it from Canyon days, not that we were particularly successful, but I understood something about it. I knew it from working in museums, because museums always fundraise. I picked up enough. I understood what development departments did. But it was also an era where there were more grants, so I understood that we could get into the grant—well actually the grants started when Tom started, we began to be able to have grants, but slowly, but more grants. By the time I came back, there were more granting organizations. That was one thing. Researching what grants were out there, for what kinds of things, and how could you play that game.

But I also understood that you had to cultivate people, the rich, and you learned that in the museum world, in every museum. And it is no different in university fundraising. Museum directors cultivate rich people, and I had watched a lot of that. But the only rich person I knew was George [Gund]. [I had known George since 1970; we became friends because of my persistent urging to restore a Czech film *Marketa Lasarova* that he owned.] I told the museum administration that I had a plan for George, but it would take time. I knew it would be slow, knowing George. [Note: He had been a supporter of PFA from its beginnings.] But we had always nicked and dined George for short term projects like a plane ticket for a foreign director, importing a film print. [Cultivation of a potential major donor is matching their interest with your interest.] You can get a lot done with one person, and it suits them and it suits you. But it takes time and you mustn't rush it. There has to be trust and it has to be done properly, there's an ethics to it. It's a contract, so you have to find the right match, and for George, I was convinced that he would want the films to have proper storage, because he's a collector, that he would understand that. I was also convinced that he would help refurbish or refresh a theater, because he enjoyed watching movies in a good theater.

When I got to know the Oshers and I understood their philanthropy, I understood that for them it was education, and to the degree to which what we did was educational, we had an educational mission for young people. I mean by young people, I mean high school, college young people, young adults, teenagers. That was what they cared about.

There were areas I was not successful in at all. It's this whole thing that universities do, which is naming. I wasn't any good at that, people who want their names on things. There are people you can cultivate, it's the kind of monument to somebody, but I didn't have access to those people really. It's also, it's hard to find people who have a film interest. If you're opera or theater or a fine arts museum, symphony, there are many more people, but film doesn't have the same cachet.

Endowment fundraising was also difficult; sometimes there were bequests that went to endowment, but living donors often didn't want to do endowment gifts because they felt their own investments produced better results than that of the university.

And then there's the other kind of fundraising, which is just asking for donations from everybody. We did that, small bits, \$100, \$500, \$1000 gifts, totaling about \$25,000 a year, you know that kind of stuff, but it all added up. What was hard for me was when we entered that period of grant writing, there were so many grants being offered for doing things we didn't want to do. That was the hardest thing for me, the pressure to do that, because I kept thinking, we're getting away from our mission, we're getting away from our mission. We're getting the money, we're spinning our wheels doing things that have nothing to do with our mission, and I regret that. I don't think it advanced us.

06-01:52:04

Geritz:

I don't know if you want to be on record with this or not, but are you thinking of things like the Lila Acheson Wallace, where, the grant from that collection.

06-01:52:09

Kramer:

Yeah, I thought that that was not a success. Did you think it was a success?

06-01:52:13

Geritz:

No, it was a very difficult grant. I mean it did push us to really examine what was in the collection, but it was difficult. It was so many years of programming that had to go back into the collection, when really it was a small percent of what we would traditionally show.

06-01:52:33

Kramer:

I just think it took too much energy and it was not our mission.

06-01:52:38

Geritz:

And we had to be inventive in ways that were, I mean not quite perverted, but that were odd.

06-01:52:46

Kramer:

Well, they were perverted in a way, because we were making up things. I thought in a way, we were cheating in some kind of way. You know? I mean, we were twisting things to fit the grant, and I was thinking, the grant is based on somebody's experience some place, which doesn't necessarily apply to everybody. It's this notion that there's all this stuff sitting in basements. Yes, there is a lot of stuff sitting in museum's basements, that have been collecting for hundreds of years. Stuff does get into the basement, it's the storage area. And also, there's stuff that was collected that doesn't have the same value today as it once had. So, I thought it came from a notion that museums were warehousing and hiding treasures. Not necessarily, they may be hiding junk. They just should have de-accessioned the stuff. [Note: And with film, there were prints that were not of the best quality, not exhibition quality, but okay for research.]

06-01:53:58

Geritz:

Well, it's hard for me to think back on any one series from that and go oh, that was great, whereas most of the grants I can, and so that makes me think we had to brainstorm how to meet the grant.

06-01:54:12

Kramer:

Yeah, and I think that's the cart before the horse.

06-01:54:17

Geritz:

And so we did react to that and from then on, we tried to go after the NEA ones, where we could define some project.

06-01:54:25

Kramer:

So it was that period when I used to tear my hair out when a development person would come to me and say, "Oh, Edith, there's a grant here, can you

think of something to go with it." I'd look at it and I'd say, "No, I don't want to do that, that's not what we do." Sometimes I could be persuaded to find something, but most of the time I was just horrified. Everybody knows me, knows about that with me. I'm uncooperative in that respect, but it's just, I like to focus and say this is what we're about and this is what we're good at, don't fix what's not broken.

[Note: There was also a situation at that time in which foundations were caught up in what was "fashionable" and would change their guidelines to coincide with the latest or current discourse in the art world. Long term projects, requiring staffing, storage, infrastructure, and ongoing work of high quality were "unsexy." Buzz words like "access" and "digital" attracted grants, but only funded the initiation of a project; its sustainability was of little interest to these foundations. Their focus was on new projects.]

06-01:55:11

Geritz:

And how would you define what you were good at? Was that something that you consciously were thinking about regularly, or was it part of budget planning where you'd go okay, we're really being strong on this, we need to do this, we could grow in this direction if we found some funds. What was your process for both defining and then figuring well, what would make sense?

06-01:55:36

Kramer:

I thought we were really very good at presenting what our mission is, of presenting the entire history of cinema in a variety of ways, for all kinds of audiences, for all kinds of ages and backgrounds, that we could program film history every day in a different way in some ways, and that this was valuable. The test of its value was the very warm response of audiences, of them telling us how meaningful it was, whether they were an elderly person or a student. To have the faculty and the students and the residents of Berkeley and Oakland, within our five mile radius, the regulars, tell us how much our presence meant in their life, that to me was proof that we were doing the right thing.

Our opening statement, which was in our first brochure, of what we were about, I thought that was perfect. I don't mean the redefined mission that we went down to retreat for and came up with those words, that doesn't work for me, I don't like that. I liked the simple one, which was in the early mission, which was very clear, maybe not very sexy, but stated our educational purpose of showing films and also promoting filmmakers, emerging filmmakers from all over the world, supporting filmmaking, film education and filmmakers in these ways. That was our mission and we were good at that.

Now, in collection, we were not so good, and if we had a collection, therefore, we were responsible for it, so we were going to have to fix that. We didn't have the money to really enlarge the collection. I knew what I would have

liked to have done with the money, in a systematic way to enlarge the collection, but I wanted the storage first. I didn't see that it made sense to actively acquire films with the same problem of the storage, it would be throwing money out the window. We would be buying things we would watch disintegrate. That didn't make sense to me. It takes a lot longer to get the storage, as you know, and proper, with the climate and all that. It takes an enormous amount of money and it's not sexy. It's not sexy to anybody. George was the only person for whom it was sexy. He understood that, but the rest would go, it's not even a building anybody goes to visit. You know?

06-01:59:11

Geritz: Although, I think Susan and Mona took a bunch of people there, like Veronica Selver, and they love it once they're behind the scenes.

06-01:59:19

Kramer: Of course, a filmmaker, yes. No, but normally. No, it's beautiful. You've been into good archives' vaults, right? It's wonderful, I mean it's cold and wonderful, but it's clean. It's very special to see that.

06-01:59:40

Geritz: But it's true, most people don't think of it. Where are those films kept. As you say, it's just not sexy, but when they see it, it's like oh, that's something I haven't thought about, and they have these needs. The care of the collection.

06-02:00:00

Kramer: It's like in your home, it's like having a good pantry or a great refrigerator, with all the compartments. How did we start on this, there was a question. I think I might have gone off the question.

06-02:00:22

Geritz: Well, I had asked about the fundraising, and then we came back to it.

06-02:00:30

Kramer: It's grants and it's cultivation and then there's the benefits. There's the nickel and diming kind of stuff, asking people, your members, to give extra that year. It's all the different things, but I don't like asking people for money. I could never be a person with a career in development.

06-02:00:59

Geritz: I had forgotten that I had also then gone on to say how you decided what was important and you said you went back to the mission, the original mission.

06-02:01:09

Kramer: I believed in that. Right or wrong, that's what I believed in.

06-02:01:14

Geritz: I have a few more questions, but maybe I will just ask one, because it relates to that. As someone who worked under you for, I don't know how many years, maybe twenty-odd or more. I forget how many. Many years I worked

under you, as did a number of other stuff. Judy Bloch, who wrote the notes, Nancy Goldman who worked in the library.

06-02:01:38

Kramer: Steve Seid, Mona Nagai.

06-02:01:39

Geritz: Mona, who is in charge of the collection, and Steve, who started off with video and then went on to programming. And there was a generation—

06-02:01:47

Kramer: Dennis Love, who came in and went in and out in various capacities.

06-02:01:52

Geritz: Yeah, and Sally Aberg did the same. Many people who stayed for many years, but also, as you just were indicating—

06-02:02:00

Kramer: And Craig Valenza.

06-02:02:01

Geritz: And Craig. That a lot of people grew within those positions while working at the PFA. The boundaries around job positions were not as concrete as they are now, and so there was something very remarkable about how people were able to grow within the institution, grow with the institution, and in a way even be mentored, because the mission that you were talking about, the sense of values, the ethics one brings to it, I think became very much ingrained in all of these people we're talking about, because it was a staff that worked very closely together. I wondered if you had a consciousness of the role of—I don't know a better word, I'm just using the word mentoring, of passing on experiences and approaches.

06-02:03:04

Kramer: I didn't think of the word mentoring at the time. Later, I realized that's probably a good word, but I didn't think of that, but I did always have—it's an ethic I think I got from my father, who sold his factory to his workers.

06-02:03:25

Geritz: I never heard that.

06-02:03:32

Kramer: I remember this part of family history very well, it was a very important moment. This was, I think in the fifties, he did this. He could have sold it to another corporation but he didn't. It was a, what do you call it, one industry town in upstate New York. Everybody worked in the factory, it was the main employer. It was a mill town. He knew what was coming down the pike. He had to get out because his heart was bad and he had to stop doing this work and stay home. So, he was an idealist and he couldn't think of anything better. This was the place where the town worked, it was what they knew, they should own it. So, I think I've always had the notion that if you work

someplace and you're in charge or the manager or owner or something like that, that everybody who works with you, under you, for you, however that is defined, should be learning about how it's—not only doing their piece but learning the whole and participating in that and helping each other to make that, and then claim it, and that's what you pass on.

I think in educational, or in a museum world or an educational institution, that would be the ideal way. So, when I worked for Tom and Tom announced that he was going to leave, he said to me, "So you'll take over my job." It wasn't his to give to me, but he knew that I'd have to apply, but he just was saying, "I'm telling them you should follow me," and I said, "Thank you but no thank you, I don't want your job. I want to stay where I am, as a curator. I don't want to have to do what you had to do." I didn't want to be a fundraiser. I didn't want to have to deal with upstairs and the whole university bureaucracy. I wanted to be protected from that, I wanted somebody else to deal with that. But then James Elliott [the museum's director] said, "Oh, but you're going to have to be acting director while we look for somebody." Those few months that I had to do it were very instructive. It was probably very valuable in terms of coming back, because when I came back to be director, I kind of knew what I was getting into and I thought, this is heavy, this is heavy stuff. It will be interesting to see just how long I'll last. I thought I'd last two years, but I wasn't ready, after two years, to go, because I hadn't learned enough. It was too all-consuming, I needed a little more time, and then suddenly it was like I didn't know how to get out.

06-02:07:32

Geritz: The decades went by.

06-02:07:37

Kramer: But I was very glad that all of you hung in there. I felt very good that when I said I was going to retire, I thought well, I don't have to worry about the place, you're all there. I forgot though, how old you were. [laughs] I somehow thought that you weren't getting any older. I don't mean you personally. I mean, I just sort of forgot that other people were aging too, that ultimately, you'll all leave. But so many things change in an institution and then believe it or not, the finances could get worse and worse and worse, and you didn't know where the bottom was. And what do you do then? And then the bloody building. I think the biggest, the hardest thing was when they came and told me, I'm in that meeting, you know you've got to move. I mean, I just thought, where did this come from. There was a moment there, I was talking to Steven Gong and said, oh, God, I don't know if I'm ready to deal with this, but we dealt with it and we got through that.

06-02:08:56

Geritz: Move the theater.

06-02:09:00

Kramer:

And I thought that's amazing, we got ourselves a theater, a temporary theater and we're still in it. And, you know, when you move to that new building, I bet that theater is still going to be there. We could take bets on when that's going to come down. Maybe you could run two theaters. It could be your Annex, it would be theater number two. The campus theater and the off campus theater, right? Pacific Film Archive one and Pacific Film Archive two, why not?

06-02:09:30

Geritz:

We never thought of that, yeah, yeah. We wanted two theaters originally.

06-02:09:33

Kramer:

Right.

06-02:09:38

Geritz:

Dennis did a great job on that.

06-02:09:40

Kramer:

Amazing, amazing, jaw dropping. At one point I kept saying, I should be doing something, and Dennis said, "Don't worry." I'm thinking, what are we doing? Really amazing, really amazing, and people liked it.

06-02:10:00

Geritz:

That was what was so incredible. I mean, we kept saying goodbye to this theater. Let's say goodbye one more time, because it was such an—I mean, and you spoke about it in an early interview. It was an amazing viewing space. But people like the new one. They like the good—

06-02:10:15

Kramer:

The leg room.

06-02:10:16

Geritz:

The leg room, and that you still can see over people. They like it.

06-02:16:23

Kramer:

Yeah. And I don't know what the new theater will be like, but whatever it is, if you put on good shows they'll like it. If you do your best to make them feel at home or comfortable. Maybe the seats won't be comfortable, maybe they will be comfortable, who knows, but whatever it is, if the program is good enough and you make our audience feel at home, if you welcome them, you make them feel like you're working for them, then I think it will work. That's the best you can do. I think places that don't care about their audience and aren't secure in finances, will have a hard time, because you need the loyalty to be able to keep fundraising and keep, you know... people saying you should give to this organization, you should help support that—

Interview 7: October 9, 2014

07-00:00:04

Geritz: Today is Thursday, October 9, 2014 and Edith and I are here. I wanted to go back to our conversation a couple of weeks ago, just with a follow-up. We had talked briefly about film collection and I want to go back to the original part of the question about, what do you think of the importance and challenges of an exhibiting institution having a film collection.

07-00:00:42

Kramer: To start with, that exhibiting institution is not necessarily calling itself an archive, right? I mean, it could be a cinematheque.

07-00:00:52

Geritz: Exactly.

07-00:00:53

Kramer: It hasn't set itself up right at the beginning. Well, from somebody who's worked in the archival field, we always start with the assumption that all film should be saved, and that's a very broad principle. Therefore, if you decide you are going to participate in collecting with the idea of saving film, you quickly find out that if you get into that, you've got a lot of problems. You've got storage and storage for anything, whether it's film or anything else, is real estate, and that means cost. Just finding the space, aside from the cost, defining a space that can take whatever you're collecting and does it allow growth and what kind of growth, for how long, how much. It immediately dawns on you that you can't accept everything. It's a little like immigration policy. If you open your doors and you say we're going to take everything then watch out, everything will come to your door, more and more and more, because people will bring you things, and it has to be taken care of. People will bring you things in the way of film that aren't necessarily in good order, so right away, there may be issues of conservation, preservation. Collecting doesn't necessarily mean you're set up to do the technical stuff for conservation, preservation. You might be a passive collector and there's a value in being a passive collector, but you still have to have the storage, because if you take it on and you don't have the right storage, well in fact you are destroying what you're collecting. You might be speeding it along. It might have been safer where it was before it came to you, for one reason or another.

So, you're very naïve if you think you can collect without having a policy, a collection policy, and you're very naïve if you think that you can collect everything, that ultimately, you have to be selective, and that means you also need to be cooperating and in communication with other institutions of your kind, because if you all agree that everything has to be saved, then you're going to have to share resources. No one institution can do it on its own. I know this now. I didn't know this at the beginning of my career, I was very naïve. My predecessors were equally naïve and it's not unique to my work

experience or my predecessors. I find this all over the world among colleagues. There are prestigious institutions who started with the same naiveté and with the same kind of eagerness and energy to embrace a collection of cinema, but they never took care of that cinema, and the years passed and the collection grew and it languished in improper conditions. Then, as time went on, the more difficult it became to take care of it, because then it's overwhelming.

07-00:05:36
Geritz:

Good point.

07-00:05:38
Kramer:

And then you don't have the staff resources and are you going to be able to get the human personnel to deal with the backlog, to get through it? And that's even just identifying what you have, because you have to view everything to identify it, and you go from basic inventory, to some level of cataloguing, and then hopefully to full cataloguing, because then there's access. What's the point of collecting all this material and trying to save it if no one has access to it? So, you have to deal with how you provide access. Yes, there probably would be things in your collection nobody will ever look at, but you need to be prepared for in case somebody does need to look at it. Those are the responsibilities, so no one should go into this lightly, and I think that probably, younger institutions should be very cautious about deciding to have a collection. They should consult established archives to understand what those responsibilities are, how you find a reasonable policy, and you have to have a very long-term vision, and it's hard to have long-term visions in institutions. People talk about it and you talk about, you do your five-year plan and your ten-year plan, but we're talking much longer than that, because you are talking real estate and you are talking energy and staff, labor, and then you have technology changes. So you did things one way when it was analog, and then the digital technology comes in and now it begins to take over and the analog materials disappear. And if you do go to digital preservation, are you prepared to migrate? It's a whole other kind of storage and technical knowledge. What happens when there's no longer film material manufactured?

07-00:08:04
Geritz:

This is long-term vision.

07-00:08:06
Kramer:

Yes. It's a bit scary. Now, it's scarier than when you were dumber and didn't know all this. It's really, it's fascinating, but the issues, we know so much more and we're facing yet another kind of unknown, of the materials with which we will work and what that will demand. So, I think in one sense I'm not very encouraging for beginning institutions to think about collecting, and certainly, I think larger institutions have to be helpful to each other and be less, shall we say competitive? That they should be really assisting each

other, looking at what areas need to be collected, where we're not paying attention and how to share resources.

07-00:09:34

Geritz: More sustainable models.

07-00:09:35

Kramer: You do need something like that. Unfortunately, because of the way institutions get funded, they are essentially competitive, and they do sort of fight for the same slice of the pie. They don't cooperate that much, but it seems to me you have to be prepared for what's coming down. I regret that when we started, we didn't know all this, we didn't think this through. I regret that it took us a long, long time to be selective. I regret that we didn't just sit down with UCLA and say let's—well, we stored our nitrate there, but then of course we found out they didn't have climate storage for the nitrate. Okay, legally at least they could keep the nitrate, but it wasn't climate storage, not until recently. That wasn't necessarily the best thing for our nitrate. We probably should have been working out something to store the acetate too. We probably should have been doing something more collaborative with them.

07-00:11:12

Geritz: Let's go back to those early moments that you're saying, where you didn't know. You come to PFA and even kind of before you're here, one of the things you're doing is augmenting the collecting in the sense that you purchase some avant-garde. What was your knowledge of the collection at that point? Did you know anything about it, like for example, what avant-garde they had, or the fact that they had none?

07-00:11:42

Kramer: I came in absolutely with no knowledge of what they had. There were these—you've seen them, those binders. They weren't even in binders then, we hadn't even gotten to that stage, but there were at least typed lists of stuff. I think Linda Artel and people in the library, because people were viewing things very early on, because the library had tried to organize the things that people most likely would view, and so there were some avant-garde films because Sheldon had donated.

07-00:12:23

Geritz: Some of his.

07-00:12:24

Kramer: His personal collection. Tom had gotten some filmmakers. I think he had gotten... what did he have? I'm not quite sure now whether it was Tom's—Tom had personal prints that he had here, but those prints maybe were given to him, I don't think he bought them, I think they were given to him. So they sort of eventually became part of the collection, things like that. Yeah, so there were a few things, odd things, and sometimes it wasn't very clear whether the stuff was on deposit or whether it was owned, and we only sort of

found out later on in questioning filmmakers. Is this a gift or is this a deposit? It was a little vague.

07-00:13:22

Geritz: What would the difference be?

07-00:13:26

Kramer: The deposit meant the filmmaker left it there but still owned it, and so we were providing free storage. A lot of places did that. You could use it while it was—I mean you could use it in exhibition, but the filmmaker could come and claim it any time. So, there was always that. I remember looking through these lists when I came in, it was one of the first things I did, was I combed through whatever lists there were and made mental notes. When I came, there were films here by Werner Schroeter, mag tracks, 16mm. There were early films by Philippe Garrel. They were deposits, we didn't own those. But it was all very vague. But I quickly, since it wasn't such a very large list, I quickly memorized more or less what we had, and so it wasn't difficult. It wasn't an enormous amount. So, I could know, when I was buying the avant-garde, what we didn't have, or if it was a deposit, we didn't own it. I think there were some Bruce Conner deposits and I knew we didn't own that, we had to buy some Bruce Conner because we were going to own it not have it be separate. So, yeah, there wasn't that much, it wasn't a problem so much, of going through, it wasn't like going through thousands of titles.

07-00:15:28

Geritz: And so in general at that period, there were the lists and then eventually there were binders, and there were different categories—the shorts, the documentary, features.

07-00:15:39

Kramer: Yeah, and that was mainly for access, I mean that was the library really putting that together so that when people called and said, do you have anything on this subject, do you have any children's films, do you have any shorts, do you have any documentaries, do you have any French films, so that it was usable. It's like having an early search engine for the kinds of things people are going to ask. That's really what it was like, and that was very useful. It was actually quite well conceived, I thought.

07-00:16:15

Geritz: And then within that collection, what are some of the other collections. I know film studies had some material, or perhaps there were some things jointly owned?

07-00:16:30

Kramer: Well, film studies, there was the Morrison collection, which came out of Audio-Brandon actually. That was owned by Film Studies but stored by us, and then the Audio-Brandon collection itself, which was a kind of gift because the local distribution division was closing and they didn't want to pay the money to send all the prints back east to their main headquarters. We didn't

own it. It was a gift but, you know, but it was kind of one office closing, take this off our hands, because it's better to do that. We don't need all these extra prints. And stuff came in and out. For one time, we were a shipping depot for New Yorker Films. So we didn't own those prints. We had access to them over here but we were to service west coast theaters, theatrical or non-theatrical, and of course the prints got so worn, it was embarrassing to send them out. We kept saying you shouldn't rent these but they kept renting them. So then eventually, we just felt we couldn't keep repairing these things, so we sent those back to New Yorker. There was some fine titles in there but the prints were a disaster.

07-00:18:08

Geritz: Glauber Rocha—

07-00:18:13

Kramer: We had, I think, some Corinth titles too at one time I think, similar things like that. SFMOMA, at one point, had circulating prints from MoMA. They were kind of West Coast library for the 16mm MoMA circulating.

07-00:18:34

Geritz: I didn't know that.

07-00:18:38

Kramer: A similar kind of deal. And then of course Tom Luddy was very alert and active about if it was a touring series, finding a way to keep the prints. That's the story of the Georgian films, but also the Soviet silents of him working with the Soviet diplomats and such, the powers that be, so that after a touring series came through and they landed here, they stayed here. Now, of course the major thing was what Sheldon Renan did with the Japanese collection, and in many ways that's our core founding collection, and that was the issue of storage, of West Coast depots for Japanese distribution companies, Daiei and Shochiku, but also Nikkatsu and Toho, Toei, who, at the height of their success as west coast distributors, had all these 35mm prints in warehouses in L.A., and then the business changed and it was no longer important for them to keep these 35 prints. They had really very little use for them in terms of theatrical distribution and no use non-theatrically, and they didn't want to pay to send those prints back to Japan. So, they probably would have destroyed the prints, what major studios did, and Sheldon was smart enough to know that he could present an offer to them and say, essentially we're offering you free storage. They're your films, but Sheldon figured that possession is kind of nine-tenths of—how do you say it nine-tenths of the law?

07-00:21:02

Geritz: Of the law, mm-hmm.

07-00:21:03

Kramer: And that ultimately, if we had them physically, we could ultimately own them, which is essentially what happened. Not the rights but the property, the physical property, and that's important because even if color faded and

vinegar syndrome hits them, as it turned out, we saved a lot of films because they weren't saved in many cases, in Japan. And we also had English subtitled prints that didn't exist anywhere else. So, in our own modest way, the collecting there had a very positive effect.

07-00:21:57

Geritz: Were you here during the project to catalogue the Daiei collection?

07-00:22:03

Kramer: I came as that was going on, when—

07-00:22:09

Geritz: Linda Provinzano or someone else? Audie Bock?

07-00:22:13

Kramer: Audie, when Audie was viewing things for the descriptions, she was on the flatbed viewing. That had already started.

07-00:22:25

Geritz: And do you know how it came about? Was it a grant?

07-00:22:28

Kramer: It was a grant, I think there were grants for that. I'm sure Sheldon was responsible for that, and that was extraordinary. Of course, once that catalog was out, then everybody in the world knew we had this and then came all the demands and it was sort of like if you do something like that, don't publish it and send it all over, because you're not equipped. You're not set up to deal with the demand. There, the access took over and we didn't have the staffing. We weren't a distribution company and we really were not properly set up to handle the demand. People kept saying, why don't you make another catalog like that? You don't see other archives doing that. Now of course with online, it's a very different story isn't it? Because as archives go online, then people really know what they have, and then they have to be very clear about their loan policy.

07-00:23:43

Geritz: When you mentioned the staff and how you were set up back then, at that point, there wasn't a film collection department.

07-00:23:55

Kramer: Not really. I mean the library assumed the access, that was the library's job.

07-00:24:00

Geritz: Which it still is. Did they also handle access outside of the building or was that handled?

07-00:24:08

Kramer: No. I think Linda Provinzano essentially was shipping. Shipping collection was sort of one thing, but also Tom probably responded to requests and things like that and would work out things, and maybe Sheldon did too, before I

came. I think there was probably not very much loaning, it was more the other way. In other words, we weren't known as a loaning institution. In fact, we've said very clearly, in our descriptions, we're not a circulating collection. So that was made very clear, non-circulating. So when people automatically came to us and said oh, you have films. No, no, we're not circulating. The distinction between maybe loaning to another institution, another archive, in return for maybe being able to borrow from them, that was very limited. Once you joined FIAF, then you have another kind of responsibility. Mostly, we were the ones borrowing, not the ones loaning.

07-00:25:41

Geritz: At the point not that long ago, where Mona Nagai had to move the collection. They bar-coded everything and at that point, they finally knew everything that was in the collection. They actually had to touch every single piece.

07-00:25:58

Kramer: It's miraculous. I love it.

07-00:26:01

Geritz: They found a film I've been looking everywhere for.

07-00:26:03

Kramer: Which was it?

07-00:26:05

Geritz: *Exiles*. We had one in the collection and so when Thom Andersen did the series *Los Angeles Plays Itself*, he wanted *Exiles*, there was only the print at USC, you had to find the family.

07-00:26:14

Kramer: That's wonderful.

07-00:26:15

Geritz: We had it. Yeah, isn't that a great story.

07-00:26:17

Kramer: Is it in good shape?

07-00:26:18

Geritz: Mm-hmm.

07-00:26:19

Kramer: Fantastic.

07-00:26:21

Geritz: So, how was it that it wasn't known what was in the collection? How did things come in, or is that mainly before your time?

07-00:26:31

Kramer: No, things were here when I came, and they were under the seats in the theater and they were in hallways.

07-00:26:44

Geritz:

And when I came, there were still films over in the parking garage.

07-00:26:49

Kramer:

That's right, the parking garage, but before that there was another place out in Richmond, I think it was. When I first came, not where we are now, but there was some storage place way out. Linda Provinzano could probably tell you where it was, but it was somewhere in Richmond. It was university property and it was dirty and filthy, in some warehouse. Then, we got kicked out of there. It was always a series of getting kicked out of a space because either it was being sold or a different appropriation of the space, I mean one thing after another. The history of university space, and we were certainly low man on the totem pole, so we had no clout to protest. On the other hand, we didn't really like it out in Richmond and so going to the Zellerbach parking garage, with all of the fumes and dust and soot coming in on the films, that was disgusting, I mean it was horrible, horrible. So, there was no ideal storage, no I would say really properly designated storage when I arrived. The situation was already bad, the situation of films here taking up space and under foot, shall we say, was disastrous. So things just came and there was no place to put them.

I came in '75, I left in '81. I came back in '83 and things had just gotten worse, because we had more films. I would say the collection had probably doubled. I think when I left, it was probably about 1,500 [Note: collection department estimates 4,000] or so films. When I came back there was about 3,500 [Note: On reflection, more likely 5,000-6,500] films or so, somehow. Maybe it wasn't that much, but there was an increase in the films, but nothing addressed in storage.

07-00:29:14

Geritz:

Do you think those were mainly donations then? It was people donating and that thing you were saying of just accepting.

07-00:29:20

Kramer:

Yeah. Donating, found films, and people just leaving films, deposits. I mean, there was an awareness among local filmmakers, we built an awareness that they needed to have storage, we offered it.

07-00:29:45

Geritz:

Because of course, that was a commitment to serve local filmmakers.

07-00:29:50

Kramer:

I, from the very beginning, would tell local filmmakers that. Yes, they're desperate, but I would tell local filmmakers, check with other archives because we don't have climatized storage for you, and you have a responsibility to your films and if you decide just because we're local and convenient, it doesn't mean your films are going to be taken care of the way they should be. Again, filmmakers needed the education. They were not

thinking long-term. Look how many filmmakers left their films in labs and didn't even know where their originals were.

07-00:30:40

Geritz: And that's another way we actually got work, labs closing.

07-00:30:42

Kramer: Yes, labs, that came later, with all the 16mm labs closing. When I first came to the archive, we had Palmers, we had Diners, we had Multichrome, and what was the fourth one? There was another one. Oh, dear, I'm forgetting. [Note: Monaco] I think there were four labs, and if they didn't close, they changed eventually to video, digital or analog, then digital. So, that was a problem and that was a problem for wherever there were labs and archives, what to do. We used to get messages from our colleagues in New York, you know, "This warehouse, they're throwing out the films." I mean, there would be national calls. And theaters.

07-00:31:48

Geritz: Theaters, that's what I was going to say.

07-00:31:50

Kramer: The Asian theaters that just had films, those Hong Kong films just sitting behind the screen or something.

07-00:32:02

Geritz: And then there were also 16 collections that slowly places decided not to maintain, including UC Extension, which had quite an extensive collection.

07-00:32:18

Kramer: There was Clem Williams. There was a whole bunch of 16mm collections.

07-00:32:21

Geritz: Kit Parker.

07-00:32:23

Kramer: In the Bay Area and in California, northern California. So the 16mm business is failing, and so then those films become available or they're going to be thrown out. It's like endless rescue missions because people are throwing away film. And what about later of course, what about when the media department, what was it called, UC Extension, decided to get rid of its 16.

07-00:33:04

Geritz: Exactly.

07-00:33:05

Kramer: All the educational films. Thank God for people like Rick Prelinger, who stepped into the situation. So, you have this history of films being discarded. It's been the history of cinema, right? Thirty-five, 16, 8mm, Super 8.

07-00:33:35

Geritz: VHS.

07-00:33:37

Kramer:

VHS, laser. And you realize that you're just—I mean then, here you are, and you still don't have a policy and you're overwhelmed with what's coming at you that has to be rescued, and the instinct, it's rescue first. You say get it off the streets, get it out of the garbage bin, then repatriate. We did repatriate films. Do you remember the films we sent back to Taiwan? So can you repatriate? Can it go to another archive because it's more their area? They have the space. And what just sits here until you can figure out how to deal with it. Repatriating films to filmmakers from the labs, all that. It's a huge amount of work and where is the staff to do it?

07-00:34:49

Geritz:

There was a time that you spoke about already, where say some of those films would be shown even if they were 16. I remember you were talking earlier that you were surprised how many films we showed were 16, in the very early days. So, some of the collection was used in that way, and then of course 35 exhibition prints, depending on the quality. What was the use, pre-digital, on the campus? How much was the film collection used as a teaching collection?

07-00:35:29

Kramer:

On campus, outside of the archive?

07-00:35:32

Geritz:

Well, I know some classes were in the theater for years.

07-00:35:36

Kramer:

Oh, the classes coming to the—

07-00:35:35

Geritz:

I don't necessarily mean only in say, 142 Dwinelle, but the use of the collection for classes.

07-00:35:47

Kramer:

It seemed to me that the Morrison collection and the Audio-Brandon collection were heavily used for the classes, but you realize that you have another evolution, and that is the evolution of a film department. So, you have this very loose situation of professors in different disciplines teaching some kind of film class within their own departments. And then the group major in film, so it gets more centralized and there's a curriculum. People like Nestruck, Professor William Nestruck, and Seymour Chatman and Bertrand Augst, are very, very active about teaching with film. And then you have Hubert Dreyfus in philosophy, for his existentialism course, has his few films.

07-00:36:48

Geritz:

Richard Hutson.

07-00:35:49

Kramer:

Hutson and his course on the Western. Or even the history professor, Leon Litwack.

07-00:37:01

Geritz: That's right, yeah.

07-00:37:04

Kramer: Had his films he always taught. So, you get a kind of regular use of the collection, I mean you know in the fall, and Albert Johnson's huge classes, images of minorities one semester and third world cinema the other. Now, that went far beyond what we owned. He had a budget for renting films, a generous budget, whereas Nestruck and Chatman and Augst and the others were essentially using the Audio-Brandon, Morrison collection, I think predominantly that.

07-00:37:57

Geritz: And so they would check them out, I guess. Eventually, that's handled by film collection, but I imagine earlier it was handled by—

07-00:38:08

Kramer: We sort of facilitated it, I think, yeah. It had to have some sort of management, because if something went wrong, if a film got broken or had to be repaired. But, yeah, it was heavy use.

07-00:38:31

Geritz: We only have a few minutes left, only in the part because I have an appointment, but I wondered if you could talk about that sort of one of your parting things was that funds were raised in your name for a teaching collection. Why a teaching collection?

07-00:38:52

Kramer: I didn't know that this was going to happen. I think if I had known that that was an idea, I might have suggested something, another way to go, I mean only in retrospect.

07-00:39:14

Geritz: When you say it wasn't your idea, it came out as a surprise.

07-00:39:17

Kramer: It came as a surprise, at that party.

07-00:39:19

Geritz: So it came out of development or the administration.

07-00:39:22

Kramer: Well, it came because it was in response to things I had been talking about, but I didn't know that anybody was going to raise any money. No, I had been talking a lot over the years, I'd been talking about collection policy and I'd been talking about where we should go in terms of continuing to collect. I was worried about storage, even though we had gotten, through the help of George Gund, the storage at Marchant. I knew this was inadequate. It wasn't so much the size that was inadequate, the conditions were inadequate. It was not cold enough. We saw that the vinegar syndrome was active and we had no climate

control there that could stop it or prevent it. It was not clean, what we considered a properly clean space. We had invested in that. The university had given us the space because we had the money, I mean we wouldn't have gotten the space if we hadn't had the money. It was like this circular thing, you don't get one without the other, and that was the best we could do with the money we had and what the university gave us. It was an improvement over Zellerbach, it was an improvement over stuff in our offices and under the seats, which of course was illegal, fire laws, you couldn't have it under the seats. All these things became issues, one thing led to another. Everything we were doing was incorrect, so we had a temporary situation.

Temporary, as we know, at this university, can mean a very long time. Decades. I knew that, so I kept thinking okay, we should not take in more films without a policy. What should that policy be? And I thought, we're a teaching institution in terms of our mission, we consider an exhibition program to be educational, it's open to the campus, it's open to students, it's open to off campus, because we're a state university. All these things I've talked about that I think is our mission. But then if we're a teaching institution and we have a film major, and I knew ultimately it would become a film department. You knew that's what it would—you didn't know how long it would take to become that, but that there were more and more faculty, there were people majoring. Then, we ought to have films that are basic teaching, I mean that's what we should collect, but then of course, we wouldn't have to collect things if they were already in distribution, not knowing then that of course distribution would disappear, not be smart enough to know how soon distribution would disappear. Right?

07-00:42:46
Geritz:

Yeah, mm-hmm.

07-00:42:47
Kramer:

So again, your vision isn't long enough, not knowing that the technology would change things so drastically. So, I kept talking to people, our collection policy. I would talk about it in meetings and I would talk about it to trustees, so people knew that I thought we should build something like that, but not duplicate what we can borrow from other archives, not duplicate what's readily available in distribution, but there's so much basic cinema that is not available. And so I just laid that out, that should be part of the policy. And I had actually thought that other archives could join in, we could have a consortium. In fact, I used to go to those CNAFA [Council North American Film Archives] meetings and I put forth this idea and we talked about having—we talked to MoMA and everything, it was like that there could be a consortium of U.S. archives, to support a teaching collection for everybody to share. Nothing ever happened but we talked about that.

07-00:44:00

Geritz:

Wonderful.

07-00:44:02

Kramer:

And then came the retirement and suddenly there was this money, and it was so sweet, but it was of course, just a gesture. You couldn't do that much with it and there I was, running around, trying to think well, I love this film and that would be—I kept thinking of silent films that would be easier to get PD, public domain films, things that were silent, rather than things where you have to deal with copyright and trying to get some things. I think I didn't entirely spend all the money. I think Mona said there was a little bit left, but you've bought things since, so I'm assuming the money was spent. But no, I still think if you're able to collect any film, if there's film out there to collect, you should still think in terms of teaching, even though we know that the faculty have completely embraced the digital—we saw this. Even when we could get 16mm or 35mm, they embraced digital, because it was easier for them. That was why Film 50, for me Film 50 was a way to keep showing film for people who might later become film majors, but for any student on campus, that they would have the film experience. I don't know how much longer you'll be able to show film in Film 50. I don't know what will be available to you. You can borrow from the archives, so one hopes that you'll be able to borrow, but I don't know how limited that will be.

07-00:46:02

Geritz:

Okay. Well, thank you.

Interview 8: December 1, 2014

08-00:00:05

Meeker:

Today is the first of December, 2014. This is Martin Meeker, interviewing Edith Kramer for the University of California oral history project. This is actually tape number eight, session number eight, in a longer series of interviews. This is the first interview that I am conducting. Previous interviews were done by Kathy Geritz. So, with that said, we are going to start out by asking you a few questions, following up on the interviews that Kathy did and then over the course of this session and the following session we will come to some issues that weren't covered in so much depth, such as the relationship between the Pacific Film Archive and the larger university community and its teaching and research mission.

What I'd like to start out with today is asking a few follow-up questions of you about the question of audience. It's such an interesting topic and covered really thoroughly in your original sessions with Kathy, but there are a few things that I thought could use some further unpacking, so here it goes. At one point in time in your interviews with Kathy, you talked in passing about grading an audience, and how one, you know as a curator, as a programmer, is sometimes critical of the audience, but then how sometimes you tried not to be critical of the audience. So I'm wondering, what were the guiding principles in this? When you came out of a particular series or a presentation, were you always thinking how good is the audience, and how did you make that determination?

08-00:02:23

Kramer:

Yes, you do it. I think probably every programmer or curator presenting a series of films for a public audience does this unconsciously, if not consciously. I think I did it consciously. But it's a reflection on your own work, that's very important. So I'm grading myself. When I'm grading the audience, I'm also grading myself. It takes two to tango. So, if the audience does not appear to be attentive, or by their questions after the screening, or comments made to you afterwards, you have the feeling they didn't get it. You know, they didn't get the point, they didn't understand this film, they didn't understand the context in which it was presented. There are several variables.

It's not a question of whether they liked it or not, that's different. Did they understand the material, what was being presented and how and why it was, or even what the film was trying to do, whether it was successful or not? But that is also a judgment on the curator. So yes, I'm judging the audience, because I then sort of know, did I do this program well? Did I present it properly? Did it need a different kind of introduction? Did it not need an introduction? Sometimes you say too much. Were the notes confusing? Should I have presented this particular film in a different order in relationship to the other films, say if we do a series, and it's mostly series. So I have to

learn from the reaction of the audience, therefore I have to measure the reaction of the audience. It's a circle.

Then there's the other aspect of judging the audience. Very often we would have guest speakers and more than not it would be the director of the film. It could be a writer, it could be a cinematographer, it could be an editor, it could be a performer, actor, but most of the time it would be the director. If that happens, then after the film is shown, we invite the director (or other guest) to come up and take questions from the audience, and you pray that they will not ask dumb questions. Every programmer knows that there are going to be certain questions asked regardless of the film, the director, and it isn't your institution only, programmers get together and say, I bet your audiences ask this question, we joke about it. There are maybe ten questions that everybody gets from their audience, you expect that.

08-00:05:58

Meeker:

Are those questions specific to each film or in general?

08-00:06:01

Kramer:

They're generic. It's like how much did it cost, was this film shown to the audience in the country where it was made (always when it is a film with political content)? I mean, there are just some—you can go around the world and the same questions get asked. I always say to my colleagues, that's a kind of introduction before the real questions come out, just to break the silence, because the director gets up there, the audience is waiting, and nobody wants to be the first hand that goes up, except those people who want to hear themselves talk. You have people in the audience who will ask questions because it's their moment of fame. That's human nature. But there are also these basic questions which are kind of like to get out of no-man's territory, to break the ice and find a comfort zone where director, guest and audience can speak to each other. Now, this is also hindered or facilitated by the skill of the guest. There's many a filmmaker who shows up with a film and in a way, it's not their forte. They can make the film but they're not adept at speaking to the public or even to the press, or even to a single interviewer, about the process of making their work. They're not really good at explaining and making it interesting. You've seen such things on television, when somebody is promoting their film and they're interviewed, whether they're interviewed by— who's the guy?

08-00:08:09

Meeker:

Charlie Rose.

08-00:08:10

Kramer:

Charlie Rose. Or they're interviewed on one of those shows like *Entertainment Tonight* (or late night talk shows), you know, very different kinds of interview questions. But the guest often says the same thing. They're sent out by the PR of the production and they have to say certain things, they have to promote their film, but they don't necessarily say anything very

profound. Then, there's somebody else who really has something to say (and the interviewer is probing). You can't assume that your guests will be comfortable in that situation and will be able to direct the questions. You know there's a difference because you get guests who are brilliant at it, and the response of the audience follows that lead. If the guest is really good at handling a question, even the so-called dumb question, because a good guest can turn the dumb question into a smart question, can turn it around, because he (or she) knows that that's really just this lack of comfort, and he or she takes that question, flips it and starts talking. Once that guest starts talking in a really analytical way, your audience intellect is awakened and you will suddenly see people you thought were asleep come to life. That's where you really can measure it, because when you get the full response, you know what your audience has learned or not learned. And I want to add that the guest has to respect the audience, show interest in them to enable a good Q and A.

08-00:09:55

Meeker:

You know, these are such intangibles though, when you talk about the way in which the audience is responding, and if you see them come alive. I guess I'm trying to figure out how is that you actually can do that?

08-00:10:11

Kramer:

You feel it. I mean, I don't know what others would say if asked the same question. First of all, you the programmer, who's making these judgments or doing this analysis, you have to make sure that you are present at the shows sufficiently, to get a feel for your audience, which is your community, your public. You can't just sort of come in now and then: (to determine) how many people in the house, blah-blah. No. You've got to experience—to my mind, you have to, over and over again, experience the films with them. It's a joint effort.

Everybody has their own way of doing this. I have colleagues who sit in the projection booth. They don't want to be with the audience because they don't want somebody to know they are there (and they don't want comments from the audience)—they want to experience (the screening) but they don't want to be recognized. So they're somewhat physically detached.

Part of my enjoyment, of my work, is to be in with the audience, but for very specific reasons; I don't take a seat with the audience. I had a place in the back, in the corner, I leaned against the wall in the back for several reasons. From that position, I could see the screen, so I knew if anything was not correct on the screen, if there was a problem with projection. I knew immediately if something was losing focus, if something wasn't framed correctly. I could also hear, so I know if there's a problem with the sound. So for technical reasons of presentation, quality of presentation, I'm also near an intercom, so I can quickly, quietly go for the intercom and talk to the projectionist and say something doesn't look or sound right and he can tell me whether that's in the print itself and it's not correctable or what. We can

quietly talk that way, or if necessary, I can run out of the room and up into the booth without disturbing anybody. It would be awful if I had to jump up in the middle of an audience and do this. So you have to be prepared to be the gopher between the audience and the booth. That's one thing.

All right, so I'm monitoring the screen and the sound, but I can see, even in the dark, when your eyes get accustomed to the dark, because there's light from the screen. I can see the audience and I can hear them and if they're making noises in their seat, fiddling with their clothing, fiddling with their plastic bags. There's nothing worse than the plastic. It used to be great when, you know, things were not in plastic bags, aside from the recycling problem. The plastic bags that people carry have this life of their own. They put them on the floor and then they start to crinkle and crack and sort of expire and breathe, and it's very irritating. So I can hear all that. I can hear the noises that people's bodies make in restlessness. I can also hear of course, if they're yakking to each other, which in our theater, in the beginning we have a sign that says "no talking, no eating, no nothing." You can hear the food that's snuck in, you can smell it. So you become very attuned, but this takes the experience of being in the theater with the public. You know when they've snuck in food, you know when they're talking to each other and you know when they're restless. At the beginning of the film you get a lot of that (restlessness), until they sort of—the film grabs them and they settle in. There are always some audience members who just think talking to each other through a film is the way you see a film, because they're used to being able to do that in a commercial theater. That's why our ushers are trained and they have to go down and say please, you know, and if somebody's unruly then you have to ask them to leave.

At any rate, from that position, I hear all this, I mean some of it's very subtle, but I really have a trained ear to hear all of this. I used to joke and say I listen to people's breathing. That's not literal, but I have the feeling I am listening to an audience's breathing and a certain quiet, a physical, auditory quiet, settles in on the audience when they're really immersed in the film, or I could say it the other way, when the film has really grabbed them. You feel it in a kinesthetic sense, because they're not squirming or moving, so there's audience silence. But it's also as if everybody were holding their breath. Nobody's coughing, there's nothing, it's this wonderful quiet. You know when you go to a concert and in the beginning there are all these coughs? Not everybody has a cold, why is everybody coughing at the beginning of a concert?

08-00:16:38
Meeker:

Yes.

08-00:16:39
Kramer:

Hadn't thought about that?

08-00:16:41

Meeker:

Oh, I've thought about that. [laughs] I've always wondered.

08-00:16:44

Kramer:

But I think that's the live performance. It could be theater, a concert, but the live thing of how the audience gets rid of all that stuff and can settle in and be quiet and attentive. Film has its own stuff around it, it's not just coughing. In fact, it's not coughing for the most part, it's this body stuff and the chatting and the moving your objects.

08-00:17:25

Meeker:

Running to the bathroom.

08-00:17:27

Kramer:

Well of course, as your audience ages, they run to the bathroom.

08-00:17:30

Meeker:

More often. [laughter]

08-00:17:32

Kramer:

When I was younger I used to think, why are these people getting up in the middle of the movie, what's the matter with them? Why are they running to the bathroom? I mean, it's not like this is a four-hour film, this is a ninety-minute film, they ought to be able to sit still. Then as I got older, I understood, and all my friends got older. Aha! Well, unfortunately, we can't hold it.

08-00:17:55

Meeker:

But that's such an interesting description, to actually really be able to sense through your senses, how an audience is responding to it.

08-00:18:06

Kramer:

That's the way I did it, but it takes being in the theater for a long time, I think, to develop those senses. As I say, I think for people who would rather not be in the theater with the audience, and I know people who prefer that, for me it was essential. I don't mean I attended every film, but certainly every series, I had to be there for a certain number of them. Sometimes I was tired or I had deadlines and I would sort of check in to watch the film begin and then if I felt okay I would leave (but often I lingered, stayed the entire program because of the shared experience, even though I wanted to get home). But then I'd always get a report from the theater manager (the next day), "How did it go, did everything seem okay?" It was the way I could tell whether my selection and the way I presented it was okay. So it was judging the audience and myself.

08-00:19:10

Meeker:

So taking this maybe one step further, and that is again thinking about audience. You had mentioned, in your previous sessions, about how you wanted to create a sophisticated audience, and you defined that generally so that they demand more, if I remember correctly.

08-00:19:32

Kramer:

Yeah.

08-00:19:33

Meeker:

Actually, there's maybe a difference between a sophisticated audience and then a sophisticated viewer, because there's a group together and then there's an individual.

08-00:19:49

Kramer:

I guess both then, I would say. I always looked upon our work as educational. We may entertain you, that's fine, there's nothing wrong with entertaining people, but we wanted people to be able to, even unconsciously maybe, analyze what they were seeing, to sort of understand how a film works on you. To be able to recognize what makes one film better than another, whether it's in parts or in its whole. So, in one sense quantity helps, in other words, the more films somebody sees, the more sophisticated their viewing experience is because they have something to compare, whether they're conscious of it or not. Exposure develops sensitivity, and exposure to variety, not exposure to the same kind of film. If I just showed people one genre and one director, you know, they would perhaps—well, they would presumably learn a lot about the signature style of that particular filmmaker, as well as what that filmmaker would do in one genre. But if I then give them another director with the same genre, then they'll be able to compare two directors. If I give them a different genre but the same director, then you'll see how that filmmaker works in another genre. So there are many, many ways in which one can develop a kind of sophisticated viewer.

Okay, so there's the individual viewer, there's the individual in the group, and people are different. Some people will take to this much quicker or in more depth than others, that's certainly true, but I like to go in assuming that we all start equal, at a certain level. I mean, we wouldn't be there if we weren't able to participate, and so I think whatever the ground zero is, everything can go somewhere, be raised. So I try, through the way in which films are shown in relationship to each other, the way in which we design series, what's written about them, what the introductions are, discussions afterwards, to enhance and enrich someone's viewing experience, if they want that experience. We're there to enhance and enrich.

Then there's a group thing that happens—something about film, it was designed really, for group viewing. That's changed today because the Internet and the digital devices actually take you away from the group experience. I don't do social media. You probably do, I imagine, most people do, but when people talk to me about social media, I'm assuming it's a group experience yet I find it's not very much of a group. I find it's very individual. I'm not explaining that very well, but I don't see it as a group experience the way going into a theater with strangers is, and film was designed in a way, to find the group. That's why, when I'm in that corner, listening to the audience, and if they're all breathing the same, then the group is having an experience, it's

not just individuals. And if at the end of the film, many people come up to me with similar responses, there's a commonality. So, I think I'm trying to educate not only the individual viewer, or at least enrich their viewing, but also the group, to have the group experience.

In some cases it's very obvious. There's nothing more wonderful than a comedy in which the laughter goes through the whole—catches everybody in a theater, that everybody is participating at the moment, the same moment, in laughter. It's an infectious experience. That's obvious because you hear it, but in a moment that's not funny, in a moment that's frightening or a moment that's terribly emotional, you can tell by the way people—the sound of people's breathing and the way the, [inhales] you know, that kind of tension, you can feel that, so you know it's not just a couple of individuals, it's going through the whole group.

08-00:26:04
Meeker:

Do you feel like over the years that you were at PFA [Pacific Film Archive], the audience was reasonably stable in how sophisticated it was?

08-00:26:20
Kramer:

It is because you had what you called the regulars. You build an audience. You start with nothing, they come, and then there are those who come again and come again and come again, and try more things, they're your regulars. They like to sit in the same seat often. They treat it as their home away from home and you want that. You want them to be comfortable, you want them to feel safe and familiar because it helps them relax and get the most out of the film. You need to welcome them. I always felt for my own role, and I asked all the curators that came to work with me, the first thing, please welcome the audience to the theater. This is our living room, this is our home you're in, and we're here for you and we've invited you, you're our guests. So that's the atmosphere I wanted.

So then you have your regulars and then, in addition to the regulars, you have the people who just come to that show or maybe a few shows, or they only come to a certain kind of film, because there are specialists, people who love animation, they come to all the animation films. People who like film noir, they come to film noir, and people who like westerns, they come to westerns. People who like war movies, mostly men, and so forth. There is the devoted audience for the avant-garde programs and the video artists. Everybody has their specialties and then there are people who come to everything. As you get to know your audience, you get to know the specialists among them and the things that they're most likely to come to, or not, and you get to know them as individuals, you talk to them. Berkeley is a small town, I mean, most of our audience is coming from within a five mile radius, according to the studies that were made years ago, which seems reasonable. I meet them in the supermarket, I meet them in the drugstore, I meet them at other theaters, I meet them on the sidewalk, on the bus. So it's not only in the theater that you

meet your audience. You meet them in your town because, you know, for the most part we all live here.

The audience, you develop these groups of people within the group, and you have conversations with them as you get to know them and you can say oh, you know I'm working on a series I think you'd really like. Pay attention to the next calendar, there's going to be something you once asked me about and I remembered that, and there's going to be a series. I did that kind of sort of one on one, with audience members, and so did the other curators. You keep all of that in your head and when you're programming you think, oh so and so would be interested in that. There's that aspect to knowing and developing the audience. You want new people of course, because after a while you realize you've got a core audience and they're probably in a certain age bracket, educational bracket. Every theater has their own. Our theater, I would say thirties up, you know. In other words, finished school, employed, or unemployed as the case may be, but you know, from before starting a family to empty nesters, as they call them, and seniors. Seniors have a lot of free time, so you learn that if you have an early enough show time or matinees, you will get more seniors, because in general, the seniors would prefer not to go out late at night, unless they are still driving and have a car, but then there's the parking issue. As a senior myself now, I realize I don't really want to walk home late at night, because there's hardly any light where I live, and I'm afraid of falling. I've reached that age. My sidewalks are up and down, with cracks, and there's hardly a streetlight. When I was younger, I just boldly walked home in the dark and didn't think of it. Now I have to think about where I put my feet. I totally understand, and I go to matinees and early shows myself. You learn that, that the seniors would prefer certain things.

You learn that the people starting a family, they are not going to get out to the movies very much. I remember a couple, a young couple, I had met them on the bus one day and they said to me—they recognized me and they said, "Oh, we're very sorry that we're not in the audience as regularly as we used to, we just had a baby. We'll see you in fifteen years," you know, or something like that, and we all laughed. That's a reality. They were young, unmarried, or young without family, and then comes the start of the family and they can't get a babysitter or they don't want to get a babysitter, or they can't afford it, so they're stuck at home, they've dropped off. And then they reappear, if you're lucky, when the kids are in school. And eventually you get their kids, which I have experienced.

There's a cycle, a lifecycle, that happens with your audience actually, from the young, through the middle and to the old. People used to assume that we had a captured audience of students. That's not true at all. Our captured audience was, I would say, in the forty to sixty range. That was the captured audience, because they have the leisure, they have the income, they have the basic education to want to come to our kinds of films. It's always the aim every year: how can we get the new students to discover us, to try us. The

thing you learn about students at Cal, they're very busy, they have homework every night, they have exams, they have papers due, not to mention their own social lives, which are very, very busy, I mean it involves all kinds of activities. It could be sports, it could be just, I don't know dances or whatever young people do. Other movies. There's a lot of stuff going on. They have concerts, there's theater. There's so much going on in Berkeley, we're just one activity. There's a lot of free things and students still have to pay to come to PFA. They get a generous discount, but it's still not free, and there's a lot of free things to do for students in Berkeley. So, they're not our captive audience, but we belong to the university and we should be getting the students. The best way we get students, we discovered, is if we're doing films in connection with a course that's being taught, and before there was a film department, there were courses being taught that used film. It could be in the history department, African American studies, English literature, comp lit. These are the faculty who came together ultimately, to create a film department, but they were teaching courses that involved looking at film and courses on film, and we were there. So, we designed our programs to fit certain courses. That way, students would be assigned. Now, in the beginning when they were assigned, the department might subsidize their admission. When that didn't become possible, then students who had to take the course were let in free. That sort of evolved, but somehow we had to pay for the theater, (staff) and the films, and we had to figure out a way that we didn't get in the hole, and at the same time the students, if they're taking a course and the films are required, really shouldn't have to pay—

08-00:37:28

Meeker:

Additional.

08-00:37:29

Kramer:

Additional. Although, the early arguments were that well, faculty require their students to buy books, and the books are very expensive. When I compare what books cost now to what they cost when I was in college, I don't know how anybody affords these books. Maybe now they'll just go online, I don't know, but somebody will have to pay for the online publications. So, what they pay for the films is far less than what they pay for books. These are all issues that always led to endless discussions. You always had to work to introduce young people, and the young audience, it's not a stable audience, they come and they go. Every year you lose them, every year new people come, and they seem to be younger because you're getting older, and in a way, that makes a difficult gap. You do experience the generation gap over the years. You're less in touch with what their background and interests are and that makes it harder to connect to the young people. That's yet another challenge, remaining relevant.

08-00:39:00

Meeker:

It's interesting, thinking about this idea of bringing a new cohort in each year, a new audience cohort in each year, with students arriving on campus. There's the argument that it's a university, you're obligated to make yourself relevant

to undergraduate students in particular. There's also the idea that well, that is an audience potentially ripe for the picking, it's good to develop that. But as the years go on, you know in the 1980s, a lot of students probably have their own VHS, VCR machines.

08-00:39:50

Kramer: After '85, they started.

08-00:39:53

Meeker: And then certainly in the nineties and two-thousands, and now I bet a lot of students have their own subscriptions to Netflix, et cetera.

08-00:40:00

Kramer: Oh, of course.

08-00:40:02

Meeker: I would imagine, when you talk about the generational divide, one of the difficult things to convince students of are in those cases that the movies are otherwise available. There's a different case when the movies are not available, but when the movies are otherwise available, have you learned how to communicate the value of seeing them in a theater setting?

08-00:40:28

Kramer: Well, that was one of our big efforts, and every year, as I said. Every year it's another generation, not generation, it's another class coming in, freshman class, who don't know our arguments in this respect or why we do what we do, so we have to reach out to them.

There's an interesting phenomenon. Even though everybody, young or old, has access to an enormous quantity of movies on their phone, on their home computer, on their smart TV, whatever the digital device. What they don't have is access to the way film was originally created and what filmmakers even today want. And this is changing. It started changing from the advent of movies on television. It goes back to analog. Remember, Hollywood in the fifties, tried to compete with television, and they went for the wide and wider screen and 3D. More recently, we saw Hollywood and TV, bring back 3D, which by the way didn't pan out so well.

But they did, they reacted the same way, we need more spectacle. If we think of the theater experience as spectacle, then that's something that your iPhone or your computer can't give you, and even if you have a home entertainment center and you have a sixty-inch screen or whatever it is, at home, that's not spectacle, it's still in your living room. Spectacle is really big, spectacle is IMAX today, and there are more and more films being made for IMAX. IMAX is incredibly expensive to produce, so you have to—the return is a real problem. You've got to make sure you're able to get the return on that because the production is hugely expensive. But it's spectacle and people react to spectacle. Well, I can't say that PFA is really spectacle, but it has an aspect of the spectacle, because when you go into a dark room and really dark,

and you're forced to focus forward. You have no distraction, you can't run to the refrigerator for food, lights are not on. You're not supposed to talk to others. You're only facing in one direction and there's this big screen illuminated, a single light in the dark. The spectacle aspect of film comes through, and that is part of the cinema experience, and it may disappear, it's quite possible, in the future. In the near future, I don't know. On the other hand, there may be a reaction and there may be a return to it. It's sort of like LPs are back in, right?

08-00:43:53
Meeker:

Vinyl, yeah.

08-00:43:54
Kramer:

Well, everybody wanted to go smaller and everything in digital. All of a sudden people are avidly collecting LPs and they're buying turntables again. Interesting. In some ways, the proliferation of small portable and personal screens reminds me of early cinema viewed like peepshows, before cinema's great entrepreneurs saw the value of a large screen in front of a large audience.

08-00:44:09
Meeker:

Did you ever figure out a way then, to communicate that to the students, because I imagine you can't say, "Come to us, we're a spectacle, maybe not like IMAX, but we're still spectacle." Did you ever figure out how to message that?

08-00:44:26
Kramer:

One of the things we did, the creation of Film 50, which was a partnership between PFA and the film department—well first it was the Group Major in Film Studies, —to create a course with credit. It would be taught by a faculty member. The students enrolled would get, I think three credits. So they're investing faculty and teaching assistant salaries. That's the film department's cost. We supply the theater and personnel and we pay for the films. That's PFA's cost, plus our publication and promotion. The course is an undergraduate course, not open to film majors, but it's open to the entire university. It's an elective. My theory was that if you're a film major, okay, you will ultimately come to PFA. I mean it's a little bit difficult to be a film major and not come to PFA, or you're not really serious. But, there are some film majors who didn't come as often as they should and therefore didn't get as good an education as they should and could have.

08-00:46:22
Meeker:

It's like being a history major and not coming to the Bancroft Library.

08-00:46:26
Kramer:

Exactly. I used to joke with some of the students, I'd say okay, I haven't seen you at the archive. I know they're film majors. Oh, but I saw the film on DVD. I said, you're a film major. You're going to go out in the world and you're going to teach film. What are you going to teach, DVDs? Which is in

fact the case. Then you may have to—but if you don't know what it comes from, if you haven't experienced the cinema, who's going to hire you?

08-00:46:53

Meeker: Interesting.

08-00:46:55

Kramer: Academically, you know. It's kind of like you're a PhD candidate and your research is done only on Wikipedia. Anyway, so my idea was that what better way to serve the university than making a course that any student can elect. What better way to introduce non-film interested people to the archive and understand what we do, and since we're offering this free to these students, because they're enrolled in a course, they come just once a week, for three hours in the afternoon, to the PFA theater for a movie and introductory lecture and Q&A afterwards with the faculty, and then they have sections with TAs, which take place once a week in a regular classroom. From the moment we designed that—oh, I had to set limits—because we only have 220, 230-some-odd seats, in the theater, and then there's how many TAs, you get, based on the number of students you have. I think it's what, one TA for sixty students? I don't know what it's like now but I think that's what it was. We agreed that we'll have a maximum 150 students and the rest of the seats we'll open to the general public. When this was designed, I thought to myself, the public is going to come, I think our senior citizens are going to come, and sure enough, we were sold out the minute we announced this. We were over-enrolled, we had a waiting list for students and for the public. Of course for the student it was, I get three units credits for watching movies. What a lark, right? I mean, I knew that would be fun, why wouldn't it, why wouldn't you? You need to have so many electives, why wouldn't you choose that? That's the candy and I want exactly those students, who come in for the candy and I hope go out with a steak. That's what I want. [laughter] And they're going to have lives and they're going to have children and they'll pass this on. I'm thinking ahead.

08-00:50:11

Meeker: Do you feel like it's been successful in that regard?

08-00:50:13

Kramer: It was enormously successful. It got to be so successful, before I retired, we could no longer open it to the general public, it was only members. So then we increased membership in the museum. People joined the museum just to take Film 50. And not only that, the members would take it—oh, that was the other thing. There were two different faculty members who taught it. They thought I was kind of ruthless probably, but I love them dearly, they did such a wonderful job, but teachers have many things to do and once they create a course, they like to be able to repeat it, and I told them they couldn't repeat it, that they had to use different films each year, which means they have to work on a different syllabus.

08-00:51:08

Meeker: Syllabus, lectures.

08-00:51:11

Kramer: Right, different lectures, different films.

08-00:51:15

Meeker: That's a lot of work.

08-00:51:16

Kramer: So I made them change the films every year. I'm a pain in the ass. [laughter] But because of that, the same members would come year after year after year, because they were getting essentially a different course. The same style and structure but different films, so they were learning more. My successor, Susan, told me that things are changing now because everybody's had cutbacks and also both faculty members who taught this course retired, so another faculty member has taken it up, but the film department doesn't have the financial wherewithal, I think, this is what I understand, that the course may have to be changed because the film department might not be able to carry their part of the financial burden. Now, what we have moved into, which I think is not the same but absolutely a wonderful thing from what I understand, and the first example of that was this fall, is to partner with OLLI [Osher Lifelong Learning Institute], the adult learning. What do you call it? Learning center?

08-00:52:47

Meeker: It's the lifelong learning.

08-00:52:49

Kramer: Lifelong learning, yes. So, Susan Oxtoby, who's my successor, is doing this amazing series on Georgian cinema, and so she did an OLLI course on Georgian cinema, which was a huge success. But that's not for the students. I don't think the students on campus attend OLLI. It's for people who are finished with school and want to continue their education. That's a terrific thing. I don't know what's going to happen with Film 50, but for whatever reason, the years, and many years, that it existed, I myself was very, very excited by it. I felt this was a wonderful partnership for PFA and the university and that it was part of our mission, to be relevant to university students as well as the community beyond the university, and to be a teaching organization. And a book came out of Film 50, *Closely Watched Films*, written by the first faculty member to teach it, Marilyn Fabe.

When I first came to the museum, my understanding of the museum's function is that it was a teaching museum, and I think if you asked anybody in the museum they would say yes, of course we're a teaching museum but we're other things too. I always thought that the mission of our department, PFA, was to be relevant to the campus, to serve the educational needs of faculty and students, but also our university is supported by taxpayers and the taxpayers are the community out there and therefore, we must serve our community. So,

I don't find that a problem, of serving two masters. I think that it's just the way it is and one should serve both. And the cinema brings them together.

08b-00:00:48

Meeker:

This is Martin Meeker interviewing Edith Kramer. This is tape number nine, session number eight, and I think I have one more question about audience broadly conceived. I can't remember exactly how the discussion was in your previous session with Kathy, but you were kind of talking about the relationship between recognizing audiences that already exist and fulfilling their needs, and then endeavoring to create new audiences. And so obviously, you've got, as you've just talked about, you have your film noir audience, the student audience, the genre, the people who are interested in different genres, or people who are interested in particular directors. Those audiences already exist, I mean you already have here, your Fellini crowd, you already have your film noir crowd, and I'm sure that over the course of a year or two, you want to make sure that you're giving something to those people.

08b-00:01:55

Kramer:

It's what we used to call balance, because by our nature, we are often showing a lot of very obscure work. Not obscure to the people who made it but obscure to our audiences. If you're showing films from Romania, why would anybody here necessarily know anything, but you have discovered these wonderful films and they happen to be coming from Romania, and you put together a series, and then you try to find the audience for those. You hope your regular audience will try, but you also know that people are a little bit reluctant to try what they don't know. So on the one hand, you want your audience to trust you, you want to build trust. If they've had good experiences here before and, if you give them a new diet, they'll go with you. Not everybody will, because people are people and they'll be at home and they'll say shall we go and try? How do you pronounce that title? Romanian film? I don't feel like going to a Romanian film, let's just stay home or let's watch something on Netflix. Somebody else saying Romanian film, I don't know anything about Romania, let's go. We liked the Hungarian series the last time we went. Then, you also say well, when you're preparing, are there any Romanians out there in the Bay Area, and you do your research to find out where Romanians congregate. Do they have a church, do they have social clubs, and you market.

Some groups, there will be large numbers. Is Fellini popular? Yes. But let me tell you, any Italian cinema does well at the archive, for as long as I've been at the archive and as far as I know, still to this day, because we have an enormous multigenerational population of Italian Americans in the Bay Area, and they have social clubs. Now they would have Facebook, they'd have social networking, but they come together. There's an Italian Cultural Institute in San Francisco and they represent a diverse Italian American population, and we always worked with them whenever we did—and we just expect to sell out for Italian films. You're tapping into a group that already exists and you're just steering them. I mean we do live in an essentially urban, highly

diverse area, and we can tap into that diversity and find the organizations, the social networking, for different groups, and that helps create specific audiences for specific films. So you have all of those different audiences based on the fact that we are in a very multicultural environment.

08b-00:05:28

Meeker:

When you were at PFA, do you remember any times that you felt like you or your colleagues were actively creating and shaping a particular audience, maybe around like a genre that people hadn't thought of a genre before, or that over the years then continued on?

08b-00:05:47

Kramer:

Well I think, before I came to work, Tom Luddy programmed film noir before people in a sense knew what it was.

08b-00:06:02

Meeker:

Oh really, wow.

08b-00:06:04

Kramer:

I mean, if you go back to the very early programs in the seventies, Tom—I shouldn't say that. There were writers on the subject certainly, but there was not this absolute, you know, craze for film noir, but you'll see in the programs, all these little black and white—I say little, they're not little in size, often not very long, but I mean modestly made, black and white films, which have the requisite elements of what people refer to as film noir. Femme fatale, dark in both ambience and in the cinematography, chiaroscuro lighting and stories that generally involve characters on the edge of society. Crime, perhaps, or unrequited love, fatalism, etc. Some people refer to it as existentialism in the movies.

Anyway, we built an audience for film noir. I think PFA did more than any other film theater or series in the Bay Area, to create a film noir audience. It was built, it was created. In the fifties, the Brattle Theater in Cambridge, MA, revived the dark films of the late 30's and 40's which influenced a generation of cinephiles and repertory cinema to come, and they in turn were probably influenced by the French filmmaker/critics rediscovering these American films.

08b-00:07:42

Meeker:

That's interesting. I was maybe expecting you to say something a little more esoteric, but that makes a lot of sense, that that audience had to get started somewhere.

08b-00:07:56

Kramer:

Somewhere, it has to get started, because you may start with some writers and some critics but not everybody is reading them. Most people are not reading film scholars. They might be more likely to read biographies, and a much smaller group are reading film theory, but that's very much within academic circles. So I think an archive or cinematheque or repertory house might create

an interest, create not a genre, but a fashion. I think Tom did this with the so-called New German Cinema programs at PFA.

08b-00:08:42

Meeker:

Did you ever have an agenda yourself, of trying to create an audience around something that you particular thought was important?

08b-00:08:53

Kramer:

Oh dear, I did try some not so successful things. Hmm, did I...? I mean, there are programs you do which tour. So for example, you might be doing a complete retrospective of Fellini, but you didn't create that, that was created someplace else and you joined in a tour, because we do that among our colleagues. Or it might have been initiated by the Italians, by the Italian Ministry of Culture, and it's great because they're putting the financial investment into these prints and you're joining on and you pay a certain amount, but because it's shared, it's affordable and it fits your mission. So many, many series are toured, but you can add to them, you can fiddle with them. You might get a series that somebody else starts but you might think hmm, that relates to something else, I'm going to extend it and I'm going to add these things, I'm going to make some comparisons, because that will make it even richer and do something like that. But we also originated tours, and signed on other venues across N. America to screen what we curated, not just to share costs but because we thought it was important to find a larger and broader audience; i.e., an Arab Cinema series, a retrospective of a lesser known director, or a history of Bay Area avant-garde film. But then we always had fun with thematic series, that's where we can be creative, even playful, and so we would come up with ideas and sometimes they worked and sometimes they didn't. I loved to do thematic series, and they're the hardest ones to do and to attract the audience first time around.

The last series I did for the archives, I actually designed it before I retired but then, because there was a grant associated with it and that was associated with a gallery exhibition, they wanted us to do the series at the same time as the gallery exhibition and the gallery exhibition wasn't going to happen until after I left. So I assumed, I mean I just turned over my notes to Kathy and said well, if you need me call me but I think, you know, we've discussed it, you can do this one, when it needs to be done. Actually, I left in 2005, and in 2006 they called me up and they said we're all too busy, can you please do the series because now it has to be done, and it has to be done this year, otherwise we lose the grant money. So I had to come back in and do the series and it wasn't as—it didn't work as well as I would have liked to. I think if I had been still working and done it, probably, I would have been perhaps integrating it better with everything else, but I was just sort of, I think I just had to sort of plop it down somehow. I don't know, maybe it's just because I was no longer working there, so I was a little disconnected or distanced.

08b-00:12:12

Meeker:

What was the series?

08b-00:12:14

Kramer:

The Mechanical Age. I had, for a long time, been wanting to do something on the machine, cinema as a machine, the machine age, the industrial revolution, which produces cinema, I mean cinema is an offshoot of it. And if you go through film history, the interesting obsession of films with machines, both as an aesthetic object, the delight in filming them. Filmmakers love to film machines and their rhythmic movements, and some of the great cinematography has been around machines. Thematically, subject wise, content wise, the obsession with the machine. I took it up to where the computer comes in, and is the computer viewed as a machine or not as a machine?

08b-00:13:07

Meeker:

2001, right?

08b-00:13:08

Kramer:

Yeah, and *Terminator*. Is it a computer, is it a machine, what is it? It's the ambivalence. And does the machine and this obsession with the machine, reflect a certain anxiety, as well as hope? It can be evil and destructive and suggest doom for the human race, or it can represent progress and hope and a good future. We're still ambivalent about it. We see the machine as friend, we see the machine as enemy. We're afraid that it will take over our humanity but we need it to help us, and that, I thought, I realized how, what a dominant theme it was in the history of cinema internationally, but then that the cinema itself was one of these machines. When I originally designed it, it was a huge series, it was very big, but then I reduced it.

08b-00:14:36

Meeker:

How many films were in that series, roughly?

08b-00:14:38

Kramer:

When I finally did it, it was all within one month. About 16 programs, including a few repeats, and some programs had multiple short films.

08b-00:14:50

Meeker:

Well that's in the record, so we don't have to test you on that.

08b-00:14:57

Kramer:

I started out with more than fifty films, I can assure you.

08b-00:15:00

Meeker:

Okay, that's a huge series. [chuckles]

08b-00:15:03

Kramer:

I could have gone on to a hundred films, not that I would ever do that many. I kept finding more and more films.

08b-00:15:07

Meeker:

Let's move on to a somewhat different topic, and again it's something that was mentioned in your conversations with Kathy, and that has to do with the

democratization of filmmaking. You had talked about it a little bit but not in too much detail, so I'm wondering, you know the democratization of filmmaking meaning?

08b-00:15:34

Kramer: The tools are not so expensive and almost anybody has access to tools.

08b-00:15:41

Meeker: Yes, and therefore, PFA is going to be getting a lot more submissions.

08b-00:15:49

Kramer: It's too much. You can't possibly look at all of it.

08b-00:15:53

Meeker: When did you first notice this starting to happen?

08b-00:15:56

Kramer: With VHS. Believe it or not, when I first started...

08b-00:16:01

Meeker: In the mid-eighties or something?

08b-00:16:03

Kramer: When I first started programming how did you choose a film, how did you watch it? It wasn't online, well, we didn't even have computers until the mid-eighties, so how did you choose a film? You had to go someplace to see it or somebody had to send you the film to look at, and/or you had to read about it. So you read every critical magazine of any worth. It could be the trade magazines like *Variety*, that handled international festivals and theatrical openings. It could be a British magazine like *Sight and Sound*, it could be a French magazine like *Cahiers du Cinema*, it could be an academic publication as *Film Quarterly*. In other words, you read an enormous amount of literature on the films that were being made around the world, and of course you did your historical readings, by country, by director, by genre, et cetera, any new book, any new scholarship that came out. So you had to read an enormous amount to be informed about the films that you hadn't already seen, and you had to view films by going to festivals or by asking people to actually send you 35mm and 16mm films, which meant paying for shipping and real time viewing during office hours, but you really didn't have the time. In fact, very little screening could take place during regular office hours. So on the one hand it was great when people started sending you VHS because you could take those home. You bought equipment for home viewing and you stayed up all night watching, and you could still put in a good working day.

08b-00:18:10

Meeker: You could fast forward easily.

08b-00:18:11

Kramer: You could, you could. Some people only watched five, ten minutes you know, and you think, I don't need to go any further. But there is an obligation to

view the entire film, certainly if you have requested a preview, and you are expected to tell the filmmaker your opinion. After VHS there were laser discs and then DVDs and now it's links online, streaming, DVDs are going out, and this has been a rapid change, but by making the tools inexpensive and accessible to anyone, it means everyone's a filmmaker and everyone's looking for a venue. They're not just looking for YouTube. Everybody dreams of the big theater. There is some sort of odd thing to that. In a sense, you're making for the small screen but everybody wants to see their film on the big screen, with a group of people. You can't get rid of that. So, it's impossible for curators, I mean just labor, time, to keep up with everything.

08b-00:19:42

Meeker:

How have you, though?

08b-00:19:44

Kramer:

You don't, you can't, it's impossible. You solicit things but you get stuff unsolicited. You still do your research and everything, you read and you talk to colleagues and we share information. You call up somebody and say, I just saw this film, you should take a look at it, and you do that, because another part of our job is to help filmmakers, to help the artist. So if you see something that you think is good, it's not just for yourself. You call your colleagues and they call their colleagues and the word gets out, and you let people know that they ought to take a look at this. So there's a kind of networking that goes on and that's international too, and of course email facilitates that. So we're all sharing ideas but there are thousands of works out there that probably you'll never see. You hope somebody will see them. There's only so much you can do.

08b-00:21:01

Meeker:

When you, yourself, watched films, with all these new filmmakers coming out, there must be some good ones, and you're going to have to trust your own instinct at some point, right? Did you, with the democratization of filmmaking, have to create maybe a new yardstick of discernment or something, to determine—

08b-00:21:23

Kramer:

Maybe I should have, I didn't. Well, it's true that you have a way of looking—in our profession, you have a way of looking at films and saying, you know, that's shot digitally, that's not shot digitally, because today, some people are still shooting on film and you can often detect, you should be able to detect the difference. But then some things are shot on film but they're edited digitally, so the final product might be digital, but then put back on film, so you get this— But there are certain things that digital can do that analog film cannot do, and vice versa. So there's a language we develop in describing the attributes of analog, as opposed to the attributes of digital, and how the filmmaker is using that.

08b-00:22:33

Meeker: What are those? What is that language?

08b-00:22:43

Kramer: In analog, there's grain and it moves, it's this stuff that moves. You could be totally absorbed in the film and not realizing, but there's surface movement, there's texture with analog. That's the nature of the beast and it gives a certain, I don't know, it gives a certain aesthetic. Well, it can be ignored in a way but good filmmakers understand that texture and that particular, shall we say energy of the surface. It also provides an illusion of depth. When you go to the digital, it's very clean, very smooth, and you don't see grain, and it's flatter. It's as if everything comes up to the surface, the front plane of your screen or monitor, as opposed to taking your eye back. I mean this is just, it's an inherent quality.

Now, preservation or restoration digital technicians are putting grain back, because they understand that when they're digitalizing, when they're going from film to digital, restoring older films, they have to be careful not to get rid—they have to put the grain back in. It's like don't go too clean because you've lost what was important to that originally analog work. New digital doesn't necessarily have to do that because people learn to accept the digital image, they accept the cleanness and the particular often cooler quality of light and color. It's different, it's just different, but you have to experience both. You have to look a lot at one and at the other, to be able to get that difference and understand the aesthetic possibilities of each.

The majority of people react first to content and unfortunately, a lot of writing is about content. If you read reviews of film, it's not about the film qualities or the digital quality, it's about the content. It's about the plot and the acting, and it's content above all.

08b-00:25:42

Meeker: Do you think that's overemphasized, the content?

08b-00:25:44

Kramer: Yes, because it's very hard to get people to talk about what makes a film really good.

08b-00:25:52

Meeker: What makes a film really good then, if it's not the content?

08b-00:25:57

Kramer: You know, think about it. How many stories are there?

08b-00:26:02

Meeker: What was it, Cecil B. DeMille said there's one.

08b-00:26:07

Kramer: Okay, you could look at a love story made by D.W. Griffith, you could look at a love story made by—

08b-00:26:19

Meeker: Robert Altman.

08b-00:26:21

Kramer: Robert Altman. You could look at a love story made by a contemporary filmmaker, I mean it's a love story. But what makes a film work? I would argue it's not the story, not the content. It is how that content is presented, and that's the aesthetics of the medium. With narrative film, you could be talking about the writing, you could be talking about the cinematography, you can be talking about the direction, you can be talking about the editing, you can be talking about the performances. You could be talking about, I can keep going. They all have their input and part to play and even though we give awards to directors and we give awards to writers and we give awards to cinematographers, a lot of that is, I think a little bit phony, because I think they're doing it as an offshoot of the content, as opposed to the other way around. I mean I think that because content has become the major element in people's discourse on film. I don't mean the academic or the very sophisticated critic, but most of the writing on film that most people, if they're inclined to read, is not dealing with film aesthetics or formal qualities, it's dealing with content. They're not telling you why this film works on you or doesn't work on you, or why this is a cliché. In fact, people no longer even recognize, unless it is pointed out to them, then they'll understand it's a cliché, but they won't immediately necessarily recognize cliché. But by the same token to be able to recognize what does work, and why, is as important.

08b-00:28:44

Meeker: Or maybe they don't care.

08b-00:28:45

Kramer: Possibly, and I guess that's what, I want, people to care! I love the medium and I want people to care. It's very difficult to make a good film. It's very, very hard. It's very difficult to write a good book. Anybody can write, but it's very difficult to write a good book. When I fly, I go into the bookstore in the airport and I buy something that's short, that I can read, that I could probably start reading as soon as we're up in the air and I'm done with when we land. It's my way to deal with a long-distance flight, because I don't sleep well. I don't really like long flights, so I just grab something that's short. It's my junk reading, basically, and I don't expect it to be literature, I don't expect it to be something I would, at the end of it, I would call up a friend and say you must read this book. I throw it away or I leave it on the plane for the next person to read, but it passed time, it took me through this period. It engaged me, it's a story, it was just content, a mystery, whatever, it was a plot and it had a beginning, middle and end, and if the end comes when we land I'm happy.

08b-00:30:36

Meeker: That's how a lot of people treat film.

08b-00:30:37

Kramer:

A lot of people treat film as only passing entertainment. I can't watch film that way anymore.

08b-00:30:50

Meeker:

Well, that's what I was just going to ask you.

08b-00:30:52

Kramer:

Friends are very sweet, they say let's go to the movies, and I want to be friendly but then I say, you know, I'm not a good companion in the movie theater because within ten minutes, I know whether I want to watch any more of this. You're going to sit there to the end, and I'm ready to leave. I can't leave if I've gone with you, especially if we're having dinner afterwards, it's rude, so I prefer to go to the films by myself.

08b-00:31:26

Meeker:

How is that, that you know within ten minutes?

08b-00:31:29

Kramer:

Ask anybody in my field. It's sort of embarrassing to admit that, and sometimes you're fooled, you hang in there, but generally, because in the first ten minutes, the filmmakers reveal what they don't know. The clichés are likely to crop up.

08b-00:32:01

Meeker:

Clichés in content and story or clichés in filmmaking?

08b-00:32:06

Kramer:

Clichés in filmmaking, and this could be in narrative, documentary, or avant-garde films. It could be an annoying soundtrack. It is not only the visuals. There's an interview loop that you're not going to see, so you're lucky. I'm elaborating on this for my interviewer, we take a film that we both know and the interviewer knows I don't like this film. So, I start ranting about the film and I'd say oh my God, I said within ten minutes I could see, the camera is just moving around, jumping around, and there's no reason, there's absolutely no—internally in this work, there's absolutely no reason for this camera to be doing this. Who cares what it's showing me here, what it's showing me there, but yet in another film, maybe that jumping around movement has a purpose, and you learn to recognize when there's a purpose and it's a meaningful gesture, or it's a meaningless gesture, it's just you know, already a cliché of a rapidly moving camera, that somebody else has done this many times over and this filmmaker says, I think I'll do this too. You just recognize that it's not working here. It comes right down to things are not working, they're not coming together and working with each other to produce a meaningful moment. There will be shots that, these could have been on the cutting room floor, that's what editing does, it takes out things, right? It takes the things that don't work out. Well, some things don't come out, you know, and they should come out, and maybe something has come out that should have stayed in or been rearranged and it left a gap.

There are spatial realities in film. It's the organization of figures or objects in space and movement through space, and sometimes you're looking at a film and you think wait a minute, that doesn't make any sense, the space is not continuous. You can't go from here to here, you've just gone through a wall. Of course in cinema, you can go through a wall when needed, but every film has its own internal logic. Today, there's a kind of rapid cutting, editing, in a lot of commercial film, and actually the space, if you look carefully, the space has no logic to it, and the filmmakers aren't bothering about that anymore because that fast rhythm has become a desired effect in itself, a fashionable style.

So if you have a filmmaker who dares to slow things down. Now, people who are used to fast cutting are miserable when faced with that, miserable, unless they give in to it and let it work on them. It doesn't always work of course but it's very interesting to see what happens there.

But all these are, you might say, they're both tools and stylistic ways of treating the content and of communicating the content. It's a language, just as in writing, different authors have a different way of using language, filmmakers have different ways of using it. There's a language in cinema and you learn the different ways of using that language. You can dumb it down and use the simplest language, what we call a formula, so that you could turn to somebody, you don't have to be terribly sophisticated, and say I know what's going to come next. You can even say, I know what kind of music is going to come next. I know when the music will get loud, I know when it will go—you know?

08b-00:37:44

Meeker:

There can be really obvious foreshadowing for instance.

08b-00:37:46

Kramer:

Right. So in that first five, ten minutes there's a lot of foreshadowing in films, an enormous amount. The formulas show themselves, you can see it right away. When you go to the movies, can you tell when the end is going to come in most cases?

08b-00:38:10

Meeker:

In most cases yes, I believe so.

08b-00:38:11

Kramer:

Why? What is it that tells you it's going to be the end?

08b-00:38:21

Meeker:

Well, I mean one, the plot resolves itself or is approaching being resolved.

08b-00:38:24

Kramer:

But how do you know it's resolving itself?

- 08b-00:38:28
Meeker: The surprise has happened, something has been revealed.
- 08b-00:38:33
Kramer: You know something has been revealed. It also happens on a visual level, and it happens on a sound level.
- 08b-00:38:43
Meeker: You feel it.
- 08b-00:38:44
Kramer: There are climaxes. Everything changes. The rhythms of editing, camera movements, for example, and the sound.
- 08b-00:38:50
Meeker: Sometimes directors now put false ones in.
- 08b-00:38:53
Kramer: Yeah, a false one, and people go oh, you know. Or you'll get a director who doesn't want to have an ending and leaves you hanging, and what's the main reaction of everybody? What happened, what happened, why wasn't there, you know, because they want it clean cut and because they've been conditioned that that's the way, that we keep to the formula. There is also the genuine difficulty in ending a film, and sometimes you feel that the filmmaker is not certain where to end, creating multiple endings in fact.
- 08b-00:39:20
Meeker: Or if they leave you hanging now, it's because part two is coming out next summer.
- 08b-00:39:24
Kramer: Well that's the other thing, yes. There's going to be a sequel, folks. You can tell.
- 08b-00:39:30
Meeker: You can tell.
- 08b-00:39:32
Kramer: So these are all formulas and you recognize them. If you're in the mood for, I call it my junk film diet, if I'm in the mood for mindless entertainment, I watch almost anything you know, but it's not easy for me to watch films with friends, as I say, in the theater, because I'm too demanding and I'm deconstructing the film as I'm watching it. I'm thinking, you should have done this instead of that, or why not do this, but that's, just training. That takes a lot of time, a lot of viewing in a life.
- 08b-00:40:42
Meeker: Well, it's similar to most kinds of discernment or connoisseurship. It's hard for somebody who knows a lot about wine and loves to drink wine, to have a glass of Two-Buck Chuck at a gallery opening— [laughs].

08b-00:41:02

Kramer:

Absolutely, and also that person says, “Who would invite me?” Well, I’ll give you an example: a friend of mine. I was in Paris and a good friend of mine, being a perfect host and wanting to please me, invited me to a five-star restaurant and ordered this unbelievably expensive tasting menu. Have you ever been through one of these experiences?

08b-00:41:30

Meeker:

Mm-hmm.

08b-00:41:31

Kramer:

It goes on forever. The maitre-d’ and the wine steward or sommelier and the waiter, hovered about us with each little presentation, explaining to us what it was, asking us if we appreciated it, and so on and so forth. I began to giggle at a certain point. My friend was looking at me like, “Shut up, Edith.” It was so pretentious for me and I could care less about these exquisite little tastes. I just wanted a good meal. I just wanted my meat and potatoes, you know or whatever. I don’t care. I just, I could not—this was endless and I never felt like I had a meal, and I thought, I think I have a decent palate but I don’t care, I really don’t care about this. So when it was all over and we got out in the street and we were both laughing, you know, because it was a bit pretentious, but he said, “I will never, ever take you to an expensive dinner again,” and I said, “I hope not, I’m not worth it, I’m not the person to take.”

I was once interviewed in Berkeley about my favorite place to eat, and I said Top Dog, and I was being honest. They have very good hotdogs and I like hotdogs. But, I like good food too, I like a good dinner, especially if someone else is cooking, but, I can eat very simple food. I’m not a gourmand.

08b-00:43:48

Meeker:

These kinds of questions, these are things that we actually talk about a lot in these kinds of interviews, because the idea of taste, of discernment, of determining what’s quality, by people who are experts, is very interesting to us because these are things that evolve and change over the years, and so some of the questions we ask in these kinds of interviews, particularly university history interviews, because scholars or artists or curators, this is part of your professional development, this is part of what you do, is trying to figure out what’s good and coming up with, in essence, a methodology to get there. It could be a more humanistic methodology, that’s a little more difficult to articulate. It could be a scientific one, where there’s double-blind clinical trials, that kind of stuff.

08b-00:44:50

Kramer:

It would be nice if it were easy to articulate my profession, and the people who can are the great writers and great teachers. They’re the people we ask our audience to read because they’re better than we are, at articulating that and writing it down. And they’re all different but they have a way of describing this ineffable experience, and we the programmers, we internalize, of course,

all of these years of viewing, some of it very difficult, very difficult to view, and patience, not turning off the film. Watching films without subtitles or translation. We watch a lot of films and we don't always have access to the dialogue. Well, what happens then? You're really looking at the visuals and you're really listening to whatever the soundtrack is, but you don't have the—you can guess at a lot but you know something, you can actually tell whether the film is doing a good job, even without the dialogue.

08b-00:46:13

Meeker:

Well you know if, when watching foreign language films that I don't know the language, I find that I still have to turn the volume up so I can hear the musicality of the speech.

08b-00:46:24

Kramer:

Yeah, because there is a musicality.

08b-00:46:27

Meeker:

It does, it helps.

08b-00:46:28

Kramer:

It helps, absolutely. I used to do programs once a year with the San Francisco International Film Festival. I don't mean I, I mean PFA did, but it was something that I initiated at one point on a regular basis. We had done it sort of haphazardly, off and on, and Tom did it, and then there came a point when I thought well, you know, it's almost impossible for us to do our regular series when the festival is going on, because our audience goes off to the festival, so we're losing money. We could just as well go dark and we'll all go to the San Francisco Film Festival. It's just really a problem. So I thought well, you know, you've got to join them.

08b-00:47:40

Meeker:

You can't beat them, right?

08b-00:47:40

Kramer:

You can't beat them, got to join them. So I proposed something but I thought, why would they want to do anything with us? I said, I have to make something that's really good for them. They use multiple theaters, because they don't have their own designated theater. So, we could be one of their multiple theaters, but they don't have to rent us. When they use the multiple theaters in San Francisco, they have to pay the theater owner to use that space and it's expensive. Guess what? You get our space free, you get our staff free. We're not charging you for a projectionist, I'm not charging you for my time or ushers time, theater manager's time. You'll know that the projection will be perfect, because we do a good job with that, we won't hurt any films, we'll be responsible. We'll help with the shipping, I mean we'll do our share of running back and forth, transportation of prints from theater to theater, and we'll give you half of the gate, 50 percent. That's a good deal, you can't lose.

That's the way I presented it and they saw the light and said you're right, we can't lose, we're gaining 50 percent of something that doesn't cost us anything. I said, there's only one straw in this. I said, we, PFA curators, will select from your selection, what we will show. Now, we're going to do far less. You have 125 films, we're only going to do about 35 films, because we don't have—we're doing night shows and weekend matinees, but we're not doing matinees during the week because our audience—students and faculty—are not likely to come, and also because the campus is using our theater during the day anyway for different things, as a classroom for various departments.

So, this started a long time ago, and the way the festival programs, they travel, they go to other festivals, they bring in screeners, preview tapes, and then in late November, December, January, they're in twenty-four-hour mode of viewing, in which they are just viewing hundreds of films. Also, they may want a film but the distributors or producers may not give it to them because they're in competition with other festivals around the world, and who gets this film first. Every festival wants premiers and they don't only want local premiers, they want national premiers, they want world premieres. I could care less whether it's a premier or not, it doesn't matter over here, whether it's a premier. It meant that I would have to view what they're viewing, so my Christmas holidays were twenty-four-hour kinds of viewings. New Year's Eve, New Year's Day, I'm viewing films, and I just have stacks of DVDs and you do it at home, and it's a marathon. At first it's torture and then you're sort of into this rhythm and you can do it. You eat in front of the TV set, but you just lock yourself in, day and night. You're up all night long, taking a snooze, view some more. But it's amazing, when you do this marathon, and maybe you look at 100 films, how clear the ones that you want to show are.

I remember introducing one of these festival films to the audience and saying, you know, it was one of those nights, non-stop viewing, it's three o'clock in the morning and I'm not sure what I'm looking at, and you don't even trust your intelligence at that point, to recognize anything, but you're still doing it, I said, and all of a sudden, a shot appears, the beginning of this film, and I sit up. I'm exhausted, but I sit up and take notice and I think to myself, this is going to be a Film! With a capital F, and that's how I presented the film to them. I said you just wait until that first shot and you'll know, and they did, the first shot came and they sat up in their seats and they knew exactly what I meant.

08b-00:53:00

Meeker:

That's cool, that's really interesting.

08b-00:53:03

Kramer:

They didn't know what the film was going to be about, they didn't have a story. There was no content. They saw a shot.

08b-00:53:12

Meeker:

Is there a particular film you're referring to here or is it something that happened several times?

08b-00:53:19

Kramer:

A Polish film, but it does often happen like this. It was a wonderful composition. You see something in the distance as part of a landscape and there's nothing much in the foreground, but your eye is taken to something in the very, very far distance and you think, what?

08b-00:54:00

Meeker:

And you get sucked in.

08b-00:54:00

Kramer:

And the important thing in that is that the filmmaker chose not to put something in your face. See, that's the decision, that's the choice made. He has a story to tell and the story involves something you see, but he's smart enough not to put that in the foreground or even the middle ground. He puts it so far away in the shot that you might miss it, but you don't miss it because of the way he's composed the shot, and the duration, he holds the shot and that's what makes the difference. The filmmaker's tools. So there are all kinds of things that the filmmaker does, if they're thinking and they're not just plugging in the usual formula, that make the difference and you say, now this is cinema, this is what it's all about.

Interview 9: December 4, 2014

10-00:00:14

Meeker:

This is Martin Meeker, interviewing Edith Kramer for the University of California university oral history project. This is interview session number nine, audio file number ten. So, let's get started. I want to start today and follow up on a few things that you had suggested you'd like to follow up on from our conversation on Monday. Let's begin.

10-00:00:44

Kramer:

Okay. Just a further explanation or development of the notion of grading your audience. I think what I—at least what I hope came through, what I was trying to say, is that in your attempt to create an educated viewer, I mean they may already be an educated viewer, but then to further it, to take it to the next level, it's like anything, you can learn. You can learn how to look at a film, you can learn how to read Shakespeare, I mean there are things that can be taught. Some things just are intuitive but you know that there are ways you can help people get more out of the material, ways of verbalizing, just the mere looking at a lot of material, looking over and over again. Most filmmakers of major works will say you have to see the film more than once; you're not going to see everything that I've done in one viewing.

A way of grading was to judge how your audience responded when people from the outside visited. So if you had a guest, it could be a scholar, it could be a writer, author. It could be a filmmaker. How do they carry on a conversation with that person. Your grading was, will they say intelligent things? Will they be perceptive enough to engage that guest, to make a conversation happen. That is one of the best ways in which you test how much your audience knows, what they've learned over time, and how quick they are to respond and pick up on what they've just seen and what's happening, and get into that conversation.

So the festival, because it was this intense viewing of a lot of films in a ten day period, with a lot of filmmakers in person—

10-00:03:19

Meeker:

This is the San Francisco International Film Festival.

10-00:03:21

Kramer:

Yeah. This was always a major annual test, because the filmmakers would give us feedback and they'd say oh, we love coming to PFA—as one of the theaters in the festival—because your audiences are so smart. I know, but we would get that feedback, because they're used to going from festival to festival and going into the mainstream theaters and they don't know who this audience is, it's just whoever came into the theater. But when they came to the PFA as one of the venues in the festival, it was, you might say, a specialized audience. It was our audience, and they noticed the difference, so we would get this feedback, and that was another part of the grading.

10-00:04:20

Meeker: You felt like you were doing your job.

10-00:04:22

Kramer: Well, you were very proud about it, and sometimes myself and other curators, we actually felt the urge and genuine need to congratulate our audience, because of the way in which they responded and the feedback they gave us, and that we learned from them. That was another way of grading them, that sense that they had not only learned what we had hoped they would learn or they had deepened their perception, but they gave us new insights in their feedback. That's about as good as it gets.

10-00:05:07

Meeker: Could I ask sort of a digression here?

10-00:05:08

Kramer: Sure.

10-00:05:09

Meeker: And this is something I've been wondering about, and it may be particularly relevant to the film festival, where people are coming to Berkeley, to PFA, to see a film very specifically in that environment, versus the film is being showed in commercial theaters that are rented for the occasion.

10-00:05:32

Kramer: Right.

10-00:05:33

Meeker: I'm guessing those commercial theaters operate in the same way they would for commercial films. So food and drink.

10-00:05:42

Kramer: Yeah, the festival, since they are four-walling, renting commercial theaters, they could say no food, but it's costly to rent and the concessions really belong to the theater who want to have that income. I'm pretty sure they allowed food in the theater even during the festival screenings. I can't remember actually. Some festivals don't, some festivals say no, but of course you're going out in the lobby and waiting between films and you're eating there, but you know concessions are really the money maker in theaters. It's an enormous amount of money that comes out of overpriced popcorn and coffee and whatever, sodas, that people have. There are many people who hate the fact that PFA doesn't allow it.

10-00:06:48

Meeker: How do you think that concessions impact the viewing experience?

10-00:06:54

Kramer: It impacts my viewing, so I'm spoiled. Obviously, when I was a kid, I went to commercial theaters, mainstream theaters, and I think I bought jujubes. Do they still have jujubes?

10-00:07:15

Meeker: They still exist.

10-00:07:16

Kramer: They'll take your fillings out, you know?

10-00:07:20

Meeker: But they last for a long time too. [laughs]

10-00:07:23

Kramer: You could work on it for about ninety minutes, so the film time. And Milk Duds, which also take your fillings out.

10-00:07:32

Meeker: They still have those too.

10-00:07:35

Kramer: This really dates me. They came in cardboard or paper, there was no plastic. Actually, that's relatively quiet. If you open up a little cardboard box in the theater it's very quiet, and if you put that on the floor it doesn't move on its own like a plastic bag. It doesn't just go crinkle, crinkle, crinkle, snap, snap, snap. It's quiet. Also, when you're chewing on those things they're very quiet. Popcorn is always noisy, right? Popcorn, the whole thing, it's noisy. I always dislike the sound of people chewing noisy things next to me because for me it interfered with the concentration. You get past it, I mean you get used to it, but I hate that distraction. I want to be completely in the film, not only with my eyes but with my ears, and I don't want—that's why I don't want people talking next to me, all that.

So, the archive and most museum cinematheques, not all of them, try to create that stillness in the environment so your focus is absolutely given over to the film visual and sound. But there are many people, especially younger generations, who say, I don't want to go to the PFA, they don't allow you to eat, they don't allow you to talk. There are people who think it's just elitist or snobby of us but, you know, we have a reason and that's the way we do it, and then the people who appreciate it really appreciate it. You make a choice. Do you want to have the archive experience which is, shall we say minimalist or stoic, I don't know, as opposed to the eating, crunching, and now you can pay more and drink and I assume party. I don't know why you don't just stay home. It's costly too. Listening to parents who take the whole family to the movies, by the time they get through paying for all the food, it's an enormously costly venture. I always thought the movies would be cheap, that it was this wonderful medium that could rise to compete with any fine work of art, but you didn't have to pay much money for it, you know, it was for everyone, it was a populist medium.

Different people react different ways but we developed an audience that felt the same way.

10-00:10:45

Meeker:

You had mentioned the other point, which was a follow-up on—

10-00:10:50

Kramer:

You had asked me about, were there any series I did that were picked up by others and became a kind of, I don't want to say fad, but became popular in film repertory. The first series that kind of took off that way—and again, I emphasize, it's not because of me. It could be accidental, coincidence, or something clicks and others pick it up—it was a series dedicated to the very wide screen, what we call CinemaScope. People speak of wide screen and then there's the extra wide, which is scope. There are various kinds of scope but the original scope, you basically have a very long rectangle, so that the width of the image on the screen is roughly two and a half times the height. It was developed by the entertainment industry, by Hollywood, in the fifties, to counter the small screen, television, and the notion again, of spectacle and if we give you this huge panoramic image, I mean the TV set can't give you that. It's another kind of immersion if you get this big, big, big screen. Now, in those days of course, theaters did have big screens. It's before the multiplexes, where the screens become smaller, they multiply and therefore become smaller, so that the companies can maximize the number of films playing in a given space at the same time. This was the time of the big screen and there was Cinerama too, there were the curved screens, which are now by the way, coming back, into television sets. Anyway, but there were always lots of jokes about wide screen and CinemaScope, super wide screen, and there's a joke attributed, I think to Fritz Lang, I hope I'm doing this correctly, that CinemaScope was good if you wanted to film a snake. [laughs] But if you had people talking in a room, why do this? But it was great for westerns.

10-00:13:57

Meeker:

The wide open spaces.

10-00:13:57

Kramer:

The wide open spaces. Sci Fi, going into space, *2001*, that floating to the *Blue Danube*, going waltzing into deep space, it's a wonderful effect. But what took me to doing a series dedicated to the best works in scope to date was this theater we had. It's not the theater we have now, which is basically a temporary space. It's one of the university's temporary buildings that will last forever. The theater in the museum, where our offices are, which was the original theater when the building was erected in the early seventies. It had been carefully designed by the founding director and his technical staff. To most people it was just a concrete walled space. They didn't realize how much thought had gone into its shape, et cetera. It was a trapezoid so that the walls narrowed as they went to the back where the booth was, the projection booth, and widened as it came to the screen. That's for acoustic reasons, it cuts down the reverberation. If you have parallel walls it's more difficult.

10-00:15:39

Meeker:

It bounces off them.

10-00:15:40
Kramer:

But if you do this, you can get a better acoustical, how do you say it, performance, for film sound. Film sound is different than live sound. There are of course other things. The concrete walls were textured, not painted over, nothing slick put on them, so the rough, natural, porous quality of the concrete was left as such, and that absorbs sounds just like fabric, the upholstery on the seats, the carpets on the floor, all that is meant to absorb sound. And then of course if you put bodies in they absorb sound. So it's very different to watch a film with a few people in the theater than watch it with a full theater. The same would be true with music or anything else. So there are special things done for the acoustics.

The sight lines, meaning if you're the viewer seated in any row, front, middle, back, wherever, sides, center, that you should have uninterrupted sight line to a point on the screen. So your line of vision should not be blocked by the head in front of you. So you space the seats in such a way so that you're really sort of looking in between the people in front of you, but also you rake the seats so that each row presumably has the best possible viewing. So you judge a film theater on its sight lines; sight lines determined by the height of the screen from the floor, height from bottom to top of the screen, its width, and so on and so forth.

Now there's an interesting thing about CinemaScope, to get the maximum effect, that I learned in that theater. When we did CinemaScope there, it was so much better than when I saw it in the typical theater downtown.

10-00:17:59
Meeker:

I'm sorry, but the theater there was set up in dimensions, to accommodate CinemaScope, correct?

10-00:18:05
Kramer:

The screen, what you do is you have masking. You have a screen and then you have masking that moves in for the different formats of film. So when you're doing CinemaScope, the masking moves to the furthest reaches of the screen.

10-00:18:21
Meeker:

And then does it also kind of shrink it down to provide the right ratio?

10-00:18:23
Kramer:

Well, we unfortunately, we only had movable side masking, we didn't have movable top and bottom, but we had—they were fixed, but we had designed it in such a way so that with different lenses and aperture plates, we could always get the film frame to fit between top and bottom, I mean this took a lot of thought. Probably in the new theater, we will have movable masking, top and bottom, as well as sides. Some theaters don't even have movable, don't even have masking any more, they have done away with masking, because

they just use one format. But we had five different formats that we used for different films from different periods.

Anyway, so I had realized that the seats, the rows, the way they were in relationship to the screen, that when we went to the full width of the screen, even the far rows, the far side rows, were contained within the boundaries of that screen.

Now in most theaters, even with the wide screen, the seats go beyond it, so if you're sitting on the side, you're outside the screen, even at its biggest. Now, if you can imagine what it is to be contained within the wide screen, it's a totally different effect. You're in that landscape, you're in that panorama, and the impact is amazing. I had observed this and then I kept comparing it to other people's theaters and I said, why did they take the seats beyond the screen or why didn't they take the screen to the full width of the seats, because if you want to do CinemaScope, it's much more impactful that way. So, it was because of the extraordinary impact of a CinemaScope film in that space, I thought I'm going to do a series just on CinemaScope. It was international, Japanese films, Italian films, American films, French films, Chinese films, it covered the world and I had such a treasure trove of films to bring in. Well, it was hugely successful! People just went wild about it, and I talked to them about how that screen is working and suggested that they go to their neighborhood theater and make a comparison. The proportions of our theater were fantastic.

So, that's what inspired me to do the series. All of a sudden, everybody was doing CinemaScope series, from New York to San Francisco, at the Castro, its giant screen was very effective. They weren't imitating me, again like I said, they had different reasons, I'm sure, to do it, and for the next few years, I mean for several years, endless tributes to CinemaScope, and people kept asking for it over and over again.

10-00:22:08

Meeker:

What do you think some of the most successful films that you showed in that series were, for that series in and of itself?

10-00:22:14

Kramer:

They were all good. They were chosen not only because they were made in CinemaScope, because they used it. It was how to use the wide screen; I mean that was the point.

10-00:22:25

Meeker:

It wasn't just that they happened to be CinemaScope, it was—

10-00:22:27

Kramer:

No, no, no. It goes back to what I'm talking about in deconstructing films. How does the artist use his or her tools? This is the medium. You have an idea for a film, you are conceiving a film, there's a script, there's a story, and

you have to decide how you're going to visualize that. It can be a documentary or an entirely formalist work as well. You make a choice. Now, when CinemaScope is a popular device, okay then everything gets made that way, and some of it works and some of it doesn't work, because it's, you know, as Fritz Lang said, it's fine if you're filming a snake. And you see, you see these films which are just people talking in a relatively contained space and you think, why bother? You've lost the intimacy. Why not have a smaller format? Now, everything is sort of standard wide, not necessarily scope but a standard wide, and it doesn't work for everything. There are films that are intimate and they'd actually probably look a lot better with the squarer format. But again, this is another way—it's another tool that you have for the visual composition.

And as I said, people kept asking for us to do it over again, because you can find films, and to this day, there's a festival in Bologna. It's a wonderful festival, it's devoted to the past film history, and the artistic director, who sadly just passed away, Peter von Bagh, would do special CinemaScope screenings every summer, because there was a theater that had been designed for CinemaScope. It was a theater from the fifties in Bologna, and it had this huge, huge screen, and it curved, and the sight lines were perfect for it. He would find archival prints of the original CinemaScope with quadraphonic sound and maybe present one or two films each year like that. It would be just a treat for everybody to go in and see the films presented that way.

So that was one series. The other one was a totally different thing. Filmmakers, I've always found that, and colleagues always agree, that filmmakers are foodies. They like to eat well, they talk about food, but throughout the history of cinema there are food scenes, eating scenes, a lot of eating scenes, and in the very first films made, you have a documentary *Feeding the Baby*, I mean food enters right away. Then if you think about it, the slapstick comedy with food fights, pies, right?

10-00:25:51
Meeker:

Yeah.

10-00:25:52
Kramer:

And the importance of pie throwing scenes in slapstick comedy, the laughter that comes and the way you build on this kind of physical comedy. Food as a missile, that you're throwing and hurling at people. Sliding on a banana peel, you know, so on and so forth. So there's all this comedy built around food. But there are these key setups with eating scenes in which a drama unfolds, and you can go through the history of film and again, it's international, and you can see how it's a plot device. It's a dramatic advice. It could be comic, it could be very serious, it can be a dysfunctional family examined through the dinner scene. You have Buñuel, who turns it into something truly surrealistic and mad, you know, or you can have somebody who uses it as just another aspect of the sensuous in cinema, like *Babette's Feast*, in which food is

presented to you in such a luxuriant image, you want to almost reach out and touch it. There are lots of films where the lighting and the textures of food itself, you can almost smell it, feel it. It's as lush an element for the cameraman, the lighting, as if you were doing fabrics, velvets and satins. It has that same ability to give you a tactile, sensuous experience. There is a contemporary expression, food porn.

So I decided to do a kind of romp through history, film history. I think we called it something like "Edible Cinema," but it was food in cinema, and I tried it and again, it was international and it was historical, and I went in all different ways. It was a summer series and I decided to make it even more fun, and we had a café, and they weren't usually open for dinner because nobody came, but I said, "Why don't you do a series of dinners to go with the films, and we'll announce that." So for example, if we're showing *Tampopo*, which is Japanese noodles, you do a noodle dinner, Ramen, you do something around noodles.

10-00:29:07

Meeker:

Did they make *Cailles en Sarcophage* from *Babette's Feast*?

10-00:29:12

Kramer:

Well, she tried something for *Babette's Feast*, but we chose different films: The novels, the detective novels that feature the character Nero Wolfe. Nero Wolfe is this very overweight detective who can't move from his home. He has his own chef, whose name is Fritz, and he has an assistant who does all his legwork, and in the writing of the mystery, it's Rex Stout who's the author. Frankly, half the book is probably the description of breakfast, lunch and dinner. There are these wonderful meals which interrupt the progress of the detection but are absolutely necessary to Nero Wolfe; he can't possibly solve his crimes without eating and eating well. He's a gourmand. So, Rex Stout then did the *Nero Wolfe Cookbook*. Well, there were two films made on Nero Wolfe, nothing very special as films, little black and white, low budget films, so I showed those, and I suggested that we do a Nero Wolfe dinner. But that, for some reason or another, the café wasn't able to do that one, and a friend of mine had a restaurant in Berkeley at the time, *Augusta*, and I said to her, "Would you do a Nero Wolfe dinner? Just do one meal and what I'm going to do is have a little contest, a little trivia quiz, and the person who wins the trivia quiz gets dinner for two on the night you do the Nero Wolfe dinner." So she did it. She picked the recipe out of the book and that was what they cooked that night.

The other thing that Nero Wolfe did was raise orchids, so we had orchids on the table and a couple won and had their dinner there. Maybe I did more than one couple, I can't remember now, but this was sort of fun. So we had the dinners to match different films, different foods of different nations, and those were advertised in my friend's restaurant for the Rex Stout, Nero Wolfe

dinners, and it made it a package. Okay, enough of that. How did this take off?

I noticed, not too long after, that some other people were doing some food things. Many people called me and said that sounded like fun, colleagues asked me, was it a success? I said yeah, we had a lot of fun, everybody enjoyed it.

10-00:32:26

Meeker:

But as far as selling tickets, was it a success in that way?

10-00:32:29

Kramer:

Yeah, some films more than others, but people thought it was fun and they chatted about it. In other words, there was a kind of word of mouth—no pun intended— and people had a good time.

10-00:32:37

Meeker:

Well especially in this area, because there is such a foodie scene, right?

10-00:32:40

Kramer:

Yeah, and it was less foodie then than it is now, I mean this is years ago.

10-00:32:46

Meeker:

Was this in the nineties then?

10-00:32:48

Kramer:

It must have been in the nineties, I think, yeah. But, we weren't the Gourmet Ghetto we are called now. Chez Panisse existed of course, and Alice Waters has favorite films, the Pagnol films. The restaurant is named for a Pagnol character. And so we did the Pagnol films of course, the cooking of Provence. A friend and colleague, Gary Meyer, formerly of Landmark Theaters and the UC Theater in Berkeley, as well as Telluride Film Festival, now has an online publication on film and food, called EatDrinkFilm.

At any rate, one day I get a phone call, a gentleman calls and says he's from a television station and it's a very well-known cable station. He says, "I understand you did something about food in cinema," and I said, "Yes." He said, "Can you tell me about this?" I said, "There's a printed program and it's free, it's online, our programs are all online." He said, "Oh, really?" And I said, "Yeah, you just go onto our website and it's there," and I said, "But why?" He said, "We were thinking of doing this as a television special. Is everything online?" I said, "Everything we did. Of course when I did the research and the planning, I had many more films and thoughts, but there's only so many programs I can do, so I have to select and finally give it a gestalt." I think I said in passing, "in my notes," and they said, "Oh, would you send us your notes?" And at that point I suddenly thought wait a minute, this is a television producer I'm talking to, this is a major television. I said, "Are you asking me to be a consultant for you?" Oh, oh, no, no, no, we're going to do it ourselves. I said, "Terrific, go for it." [He said] "But you'll

send us your notes?” I said, “Well, if you would like the...” And it isn’t for myself. If you would like the archive to have a role, we can work with you, but our administration requires that if we do outside curating for, especially a profit making organization, that then there is a fee that has to be paid to the archive and it’s set by our administration. Which is true. At which point not interested, he hung up. So, they did do it and I remember tuning into it when they did it, and they had experts, they had a panel of all these people yakking away. It was okay.

10-00:35:58
Meeker:

Yeah.

10-00:36:00
Kramer:

I always laughed at that, you know that they wanted our notes, they wanted everything, but they wanted it for free. They certainly had to pay these guests and they had to pay for the clips. They didn’t show whole films, they showed clips, but you have to pay for that and that’s costly. Maybe they showed whole films at some point, I don’t know, I didn’t watch the whole series—so, that’s a case where something—

10-00:36:33
Meeker:

Has influence but doesn’t necessarily come back in a particularly positive way. Can I ask if you showed *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover*?

10-00:36:46
Kramer:

Yes we did, we did, yes.

10-00:36:48
Meeker:

What meal would you pair with that?

10-00:36:50
Kramer:

I don’t know if we did a meal from that. We didn’t exactly have a cannibal dinner. There were other films with cannibalism. We didn’t do dinner with every film because the restaurant couldn’t be open that often. They put more work into it than they probably got back because our audience, a lot of them, probably don’t go out to eat much and even so, eating early at the café and then going to the film, it had to be early, they had to eat at five-thirty, so some people did participate, but a lot of our audience, you know, don’t have much expendable cash and the dinner hour was an issue.

10-00:37:40
Meeker:

Well, and it’s hard for the restaurant, I imagine, to put together a separate menu.

10-00:37:43
Kramer:

It was always very hard. They could not get enough steady clientele for the evening hours. We very much wanted them to be open. I hope when they’re in the new building and they have a café, and being downtown, you know, that it could be like a walk in eating place, whether you’re visiting the museum, going to the theater or not, and then dinner and a show becomes also very

natural and comfortable. You need walk in business. It's difficult for restaurants. I've worked in the restaurant business, I know what that's like. So, anyway, let's go on.

10-00:38:27

Meeker:

That's great, that actually is exactly the kind of information I was looking for when I asked that question, so I appreciate you coming back with that.

10-00:38:3

Kramer:

At first, I'd forgotten all about those. See, sometimes things like that you just, somebody has to ask and then you think oh wait a minutes, yeah. I did a similarly involved series on fashion and cinema, the symbiotic relationship between the two industries, and invited the audience to dress for the films which they did with great enthusiasm; that also became popular with other programmers. [Note: The anecdote about the TV station is another case of false memory; in fact, this was in response to the fashion series, "The Way We Wore," not the "edible Cinema" series.]

[break in audio]

10-00:39:04

Meeker:

What I want to do now is get a sense from you, about the relationship between the PFA and campus, including administration, faculty members, students, et cetera. In our pre-interviews, you had mentioned a particular faculty member early on who was impactful, in PFA.

10-00:39:45

Kramer:

Albert Johnson?

10-00:39:46

Meeker:

Yeah. Apparently, his story hasn't really been recorded.

10-00:39:50

Kramer:

No. Well, I mention it because of the nice exhibition your curators did, and the interviewing with key African American professors and the establishment of the department. Of course, he goes back very early here and he taught film through African American studies.

10-00:40:07

Meeker:

Okay, so the person we're talking about is Albert Johnson, and can you tell me a little bit about him and his role on campus.

10-00:40:19

Kramer:

I'm trying to think of when I first met him. I first met him several years before I came to Berkeley. I came to San Francisco the end of '66, 1966. The San Francisco International Film Festival was already in existence. It was held in the fall in those days. They used the Palace of Fine Arts for their theater. The artistic director was Albert Johnson.

So, the fall of '67, I've been here almost a year, and I'm working in film but I'm working with the avant-garde filmmakers in San Francisco and Bay Area. I'm the manager of Canyon Cinema, a filmmakers' cooperative, and I'm living and working in San Francisco. The archive hasn't opened yet, although there are screenings on campus that are—where the name first appears, but I think they start in '68 or '69, sometime around then. So this is before the archive and I naturally want to go to the San Francisco Film Festival. If you go during the day it's free. At night, everybody gets dressed up and you pay a lot and you see the twenty-five or thirty films selected.

It was a small festival. It was more like the New York Film Festival; a limited number of films, new films from around the world and the directors in person, or the screenwriters or actors, in person. Albert presented retrospectives of filmmakers, of major filmmakers, during the day, and would have the people in person, and then you would see maybe two or three complete films. You got there in the morning and you just sat there all day long and it was free. Some press were there and people who didn't have jobs or who could take off from their jobs, and the nature of my job was that I could structure my time to allow for this. So there was a kind of core group—it wasn't a large audience. There would be more in the afternoon, but we'd get there at nine o'clock and it would be freezing. You're cold and we'd come there with our thermoses of coffee and our sandwiches, because we were in for the duration, and it was really like going to school.

Albert was an incredible host for people we'd only read about, heard about, seen the film, never thought we'd ever meet. I mean, he had Jacques Tati there live on stage, unbelievable. He had famous cinematographers like James Wong Howe and yes, he had famous actors. All these people sadly have died. He had Cassavetes. It was quite amazing, the people he introduced there, and he was a brilliant host. He could get them to talk and be relaxed. First he'd show you clips and then you would get whole films, so you were there all day. I couldn't afford to go to the night screenings. Anyway, so I think my second year at the festival, there I am again, with the same people and they're showing the complete four-hour version of the Russian Soviet *War and Peace*, and the director, Bondarchuk, is there, and Albert made a point of getting to know the regulars. He came up to me, introduced himself, he said, "Would you like to meet the director?" He took me backstage, there was a greenroom, there were some hors d'oeuvres, and introduced me to Mr. Bondarchuk, there was an interpreter and from that moment on, Albert included me in everything. He taught me how to do film clips.

But when I eventually came over to Berkeley, when the archive was established, the archive opened in '71, Tom, who had gone to school at Berkeley, knew Albert, and I think Albert was doing film shows for the Committee for Arts and Lectures, now Cal Performances. So, Albert was involved with the Committee for Arts and Lectures, and he was bringing directors and films to Wheeler Auditorium. Sheldon Renan and Tom brought

him into the regular programming of the archive, so that he became an early contributor. That evolved into him holding his—he started teaching film courses in African American studies and there were two basic courses, one each semester. In the fall semester, he taught Third World Cinema and in the spring semester he taught Images of Minorities in Cinema, primarily in American cinema. These courses naturally fit into the curriculum of African American studies and it was a partnership with PFA. He requested the films he wanted to show and we paid to rent the films and present them in our theater. His students at that time, in the beginning, they paid a reduced rate, it was like a lab fee, and it was open to the public, so it was a mixture of his students and the public. His courses were always over enrolled, there was a long waiting list to get into his courses.

But his other specialty was the musical, and that had nothing to do with the African American studies. But Tom, and later myself, always would invite him to do musical film history, some aspect of it, single programs, but also whole series, because he was an authority on the history of the musical, and part of that goes back to his own upbringing. He had been raised in Harlem and his mother had been a dancer in the Cotton Club, and through her, in his childhood, he had been introduced to major performers: jazz musicians, popular singers, comics, song and dance men. He knew the Nicholas Brothers. So he had a kind of personal history as well as the academic knowledge, and then finally, Albert could sing and dance, and one of the things that endeared him to every audience, young and old, when he was doing the musical, he'd be talking about a particular film, about the director, about the choreographer, et cetera, about the dancer, and all of a sudden you'd hear music coming into the theater and Albert would sing a song from the film and dance, soft-shoe style. Mostly he sang. He couldn't do too much dancing because there was carpet, but he could dance. This was always, even if you'd seen it before, a special moment. You never knew exactly when it would be, but he had it all staged.

10-00:50:14
Meeker:

Mapped out.

10-00:50:15
Kramer:

Mapped out. So he was a rather extraordinary guy and he traveled extensively. In the summer, he was sent, by the State Department—what did they call it, the U.S. Information Agency? Everybody assumes that's the CIA probably, but anyway, they send Americans abroad, they're cultural ambassadors. He was sent to Africa, different countries in Africa. He was sent to the Middle East, he was sent to India, he was sent to Japan, sometimes Europe, but he was basically, "Our man in Havana". He was our man in, you know, the countries where the U.S. wanted to show American culture was wonderful and everything and of course, you know, ignoring our racist history, to show well, we have an educated African American who is talking to you about black cinema, the history of black cinema, African American cinema, in the U.S., as

well as third world cinema, and the musical, very popular in India and Egypt, he could do all of this. So he was a welcomed guest in countries, whatever the politics of the period; it didn't matter because Albert could go anywhere. In fact, he was frequently invited to Moscow and to Prague. The Russians loved the fact that a black man was bringing cinema there, I mean they feted him. I think they thought he was another Paul Robeson, you know?

But here we were, with Cold War politics, and Albert was the most perfect, extraordinary ambassador of American culture. All the Soviet directors knew him, from the different republics, it wasn't just Moscow. The so-called Eastern Bloc, the Hungarians, the Czechs, the Poles, all knew him.

10-00:52:39

Meeker:

Do you know much about his background other than he was raised in Harlem and he had this Cotton Club connection?

10-00:52:45

Kramer:

I think he did some graduate work in England. I can't remember whether it was Oxford or Cambridge. I know he wrote for British periodicals too—*Sight and Sound* at one point. I know during World War II he was in the Navy. No one knew his age. Tom was closer to guessing it than anybody, because I think he had seen his passport at one time, but he never talked about his age and when he died suddenly, his age came out and nobody had put two and two together to realize, wait a minute, this guy has been here for a long time, he cannot be—he looked like he was always in his forties. He was about seventy-four when he died and no one had a clue.

10-00:53:41

Meeker:

When did he pass away, roughly?

10-00:53:45

Kramer:

I've forgotten the date, I'd have to look it up again.

10-00:53:47

Meeker:

Was it in the seventies or eighties?

10-00:53:48

Kramer:

No, no, no, I think it was in the nineties.

10-00:53:50

Meeker:

More recently. In the nineties, okay.

10-00:54:06

Kramer:

Yes, 1998. But his letters, everything is here at the Bancroft. You have his collection.

10-00:54:10

Meeker:

Okay. I think that this exhibit that was done was based on the oral history project that we did.

10-00:54:19

Kramer:

He had died, I think, when you started the oral history project. What year did you start the project?

10-00:54:24

Meeker:

Oh, that wasn't started until 2002 or '03, I think.

10-00:54:28

Kramer:

He was already dead

10-00:54:31

Meeker:

Maybe it started around 2000. No, it was probably 2002.

10-00:54:38

Kramer:

You just missed him.

10-00:54:40

Meeker:

But he also hadn't been recognized, because we've been keeping a list of people. I think one of the things is that the list is mostly focused on tenured faculty, and I don't know if he was.

10-00:54:54

Kramer:

He was a lecturer, but he was a lecturer here like a lifetime, and his classes were the highest enrolled classes in his department. And he became a member of *Film Quarterly's* founding board of advisors in 1958. He was an extraordinary figure.

10-00:55:04

Meeker:

Well maybe you can tell me a little bit about—and I don't know how to formulate this question exactly, but about the status of film studies on campus.

10-00:55:17

Kramer:

Oh, there were other faculty who were equally important to film studies and PFA

10-00:55:19

Meeker:

And were they tenured?

10-00:55:23

Kramer:

In the 70's and early '80's, there were tenured faculty that were equally important but there was no film department as yet. So in English there was William Nestruck, an English literature professor. Then in the French department, French literature, was Bertrand Augst, who also taught in Comp Literature. He's retired. Unfortunately, Nestruck passed away while he was teaching. Both of them were tenured faculty. In Rhetoric, Seymour Chatman. Then there was [Hubert] Dreyfus in Philosophy—he taught a course on existentialism, cinema and existentialism. I'm going to forget some people. Carol Clover in Rhetoric and Scandinavian Studies; Dick Hutson in English Lit, Gavriel Moses in Italian, later Anton Kaes in German. These were among the seminal film faculty, all tenured, but there were non-tenured lecturers like Marilyn Fabe who were essential to the development of film studies.

10-00:56:40

Meeker:

Leon Litwack, did he play a role? Leon Litwack, in history?

10-00:56:48

Kramer:

Well in history, he always used certain films in his course that dealt with, I think—I forget which course it was, the one that dealt with the sixties.

10-00:57:03

Meeker:

Well, he had his big U.S. history course.

10-00:57:05

Kramer:

He had the big history course but then he also had one that was—but I think he did some films on civil rights movement. So he had certain films that he showed, for example on Vietnam—*Hearts and Minds*. But I was distinguishing faculty who taught cinema courses from those who used cinema in their courses.

10-00:57:25

Meeker:

How was it that these people used the collections, I guess because maybe one thing, to step back is, you know I know that the library has their own media resource center, or whatever it's called, that I know a lot of professors use. When I've taught here, I've sent students down there and borrowed some, I think materials. PFA is very different and since 1971, has been a very separate archival collection. How is it that professors can use the materials in their own collections or in their own classes?

10-00:58:05

Kramer:

It's not going to them, they're coming to us, because we're not talking digital, we're not talking videotape. So, when the archive was established, they were very, I think enthusiastic, because they were already interested in film, and you have two forces with the same goals coming together and mutually benefiting. So the archive offered the faculty a real theatrical environment, a place to look at film history, international film history, and to get both 16mm and 35mm prints of things that they didn't have access to, couldn't afford. They didn't have budgets for this, film rental and shipping. Most of them didn't have much in the way of budgets and the archive could say, bring us your students, we'll design programs that fit your syllabus. It's a partnership, and Tom and Sheldon started that with certain faculty, and also wanted the faculty to become in a sense, guest curators. What would they like to see, what would they like to—they could provide ideas, we could provide the venue and the films, but also, we could suggest things to them. We could invite filmmakers and have them go and talk to the class. It was a give and take. And we have a proper Movie Theater, not a classroom, in which to exhibit the films.

These faculty members dreamed of creating a real film department, but the university wasn't particularly interested in that. First of all, the story I used to hear through the faculty—well, UCLA has a theater department which includes film, and people can go to UCLA if they're interested in studying

film. That's a major part of the UC system, they are already budgeted, they're near Hollywood. Why should Berkeley have this? I mean, it was "unnecessary." So there was always, you know, it was a budgetary issue because it's expensive.

And then I think it was Nestruck who managed to create what was called the Group Major in Film, so that students could actually put together enough film course credits, and you could write your thesis on a film subject. At first it was just undergraduate, and then came the demand for graduate students.

Over the years it evolved until really, I think it was after I retired, it finally became a Film Department and now it's Film and Media, because by the time it became a film department, you had the digital. So it had to embrace the more recent technology, and it had to embrace things like video gaming and the internet. It went beyond film.

10-01:02:32
Meeker:

When you were heading up Pacific Film Archive, PFA, were you called upon to work with the faculty members to try to legitimize film studies on campus?

10-01:03:15
Kramer:

In a way. I wouldn't say I was called upon, but there were occasions when I was asked to help support an initiative. But I think my relationships with key faculty members and my friendship with them, part of it was that we've got the same goal. I want to legitimize, you know, the importance of what the archive does in programming and collecting and preserving, et cetera, I mean all our goals as a film archive, and you want to legitimize film studies as an academic discipline. We've got the same goals, so we worked together.

Now, they had certain interests that I couldn't necessarily support, but these are economic decisions. So there were sometimes places where you had to compromise and give and take, because they would say, "Edith, why can't you do this?" And I'd say, "Well frankly, this costs this, this, this and this, and without extra support, whether it's a grant or you chipping in, my hands are tied." This is what my budget allows. I will wiggle and dance around in as many ways I can to fit this in, but I do run up against real budgetary issues, and obviously they do, they have budgets. So it's not like everything is possible, but between both of us, we can get a lot done, a lot more than without each other, and we'll both be happy.

Also, the schedule of the theater, meaning when we can get into the theater, didn't always match the schedule of the classes. It's amazing, to find out for example, that the faculty says, I didn't ask for this schedule, that's what was given to me. I didn't want my course to be taught at this time, on this day, in this room, that there's a whole scheduling apparatus that is not necessarily consulting with individual faculty as to when that course is going to be taught, in what room and so on and so forth. They would have to fight to get a room

that you could get dark, I mean simple things like that, to have a designated film room. Just getting shades on windows, it's very basic, simple stuff, so the more we could offer them the theater, oh. But someone has to pay for our projectionist. Our projectionists get paid the same as a union projectionist. They don't have to be in the union but we match union wages. This is not—I mean sometimes the faculty would say, we could send a student into the booth. Excuse me, no, this student is not going into our booth and handling this equipment. You have to be trained on this equipment. This is not a portable classroom Bell & Howell. And a lot of films do get damaged in classroom projection.

10-01:06:51

Meeker: It's not a VHS.

10-01:06:51

Kramer: It's not a VHS. So, there always had to be a give and take and an understanding, and each of us wanted the most we could get, you know, and you compromise. We needed each other, I think.

10-01:07:07

Meeker: So you have, say advocates of film studies, both at PFA and amongst the faculty, but then film studies, I think I would guess, was probably not a department on campus, not only because there was one at UCLA, and not only because it was budgetary consideration, but because I found Berkeley to be intellectually very conservative, and this comes in relation to some areas that I study.

10-01:07:45

Kramer: When did you come here?

10-01:07:47

Meeker: I think I first taught a class in 2000, or was it 2001, anyway, so about fifteen years. One of my areas of study is the history of sexuality and the campus is terrible in that, frankly.

10-01:08:06

Kramer: Really?

10-01:08:07

Meeker: Awful.

10-01:08:08

Kramer: I thought all of that stuff happened in the sixties. That's very interesting. See, I don't even know that.

10-01:08:15

Meeker: Not to run off on this digression, but I wonder if there are powers that be on campus that simply didn't think that film studies reached the intellectual legitimacy that they were looking for.

10-01:08:26

Kramer:

Oh, of course. Oh yeah, but we're used to that. People in my field are very used to that. Film Studies in universities and film curatorial departments in museums was uncommon when I began my career. When I worked at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, they hired me. I didn't go begging there. They invited me to come and do a program, but later, they asked me to defend the program being in the museum. I wrote a bad letter, you know, kind of a nasty letter at the time, saying wait a minute, you hired me, you invited me to come and set up a film program. Now you're asking me to defend the role of a film program in a museum.

10-01:09:11

Meeker:

It doesn't need defending.

10-01:09:13

Kramer:

Who's crazy here? But on the other hand, I would remind them of their history. I said if you looked at the history of the SFMOMA, one of the things that put it on the map in the late 1940s and '50s was the fact that the director of the museum, Frank Stauffacher, a filmmaker himself, established a film program, Art and Cinema, known internationally. Now granted, it was short lived because he died young, but that was a major accomplishment of SFMOMA, and it was, you know, talked about in the same breath as MoMA in New York, which had established a film department in the thirties. He did it in the late forties. So, you know, it was ignoring that history.

My generation, whatever job we had in this strange field, were always in the role of legitimizing. We spent most of our career trying to prove that it was a legitimate area of study in academe and as a curatorial department in a museum. And then all of a sudden, at the end of our respective careers, my generation, suddenly there are film departments everywhere and people are actually teaching, getting tenure. Film historians, film theorists, it was a whole new thing, and no longer have to—theoretically, we no longer have to legitimize. Then we became fundraisers. [laughs]

10-01:10:57

Meeker:

We'll get to the fundraising in the little bit.

10-01:10:58

Kramer:

That was our career.

10-01:11:00

Meeker:

When you were in the process of legitimizing, I'm wondering what kind of pushback or what kind of challenges were you faced with?

10-01:11:13

Kramer:

There were pushbacks within the museum.

10-01:11:17

Meeker:

What were they saying?

10-01:11:20

Kramer: That we were expendable.

10-01:11:22

Meeker: Why? Were they giving you a reason?

10-01:11:23

Kramer: Why not? There weren't really good reasons. We were seen as something added, extra, not integral to the original mandate of the museum.

10-01:11:27

Meeker: Good reasons or not, what were they—do you recall what they were saying to you about why you were expendable?

10-01:11:33

Kramer: There were always things like, you know it's expensive, you always need—we always did need more. Why do you need to be part of the museum? Why couldn't you be part—I mean there were discussions like well maybe you could belong to another part of the university, maybe you could be separate from. There were people who talked like that. You're created as a department of the museum, but then you're museum and UC staff, and that's a complicated thing. The museum is not independent of the university, it answers to the chancellor through a board of trustees. It has a rather unique structure. Some university museums are different but that's the way we're set up.

When the museum opened in its present building, the archive suddenly appeared as a new curatorial department, and with its own name! Now, it would have been entirely possible at that time, for the university to cancel that—they could have, but the director of the museum at the time wanted it. I think he was genuinely excited by what it brought to the museum's program. Now, later, when he left and was replaced by another director who was not a film person or didn't have any particular interest in film, we had to legitimize ourselves for him. That role ended up being more mine because Tom was about to leave. I mean it started with Tom having to argue for the archive, but then Tom left and then it fell to me, as acting director, until the new director came in, Lynda Myles, and so in a sense you had to—I don't want to say educate, because a director is a very educated person, but you had to demonstrate that what you were doing was as legitimate as any other museum exhibition or collection. Partly, the way to do that was to show how highly regarded you were internationally. It works, it helps. Tom and Sheldon had put the archive on the map globally, before there was the question of should it continue to exist. Tom had to fight the university. His immediate boss, the director of the museum, was all for him, but Tom had a hard time with the university because the university came down hard, that we were too ambitious, our funding unsecured, budgetary issues, and Tom had a very difficult time getting university administrators to accept his vision. I hope you get to talk to him. I think at one time he felt, if he could find a way to separate

the archive and find somebody else to be a patron, if there were a way, it would be more viable, and that it was endlessly fighting what you felt was a very conservative university. And of course there wasn't yet a film department, there wasn't even really the group major, so you didn't have a lot of faculty to come to your assistance, so it had to develop. And PFA was more than an exhibition program; it was also a collection, a library and study center.

So, that legitimizing was passed on to me and I had, one, two, three... three directors to work under, and with each director, explaining why we're here, what we do, how we're involved with the campus, our history. You had to start all over again. Every director has their own vision. They also inherit the problems from the previous administration, mostly it's budgetary. It's always fundraising, directors are endlessly fundraising. Then we had the whammy of being told that the building was unsafe, and the theater was the most vulnerable space. I mean all these things kept happening. We had sort of one crisis after another.

I think I was very fortunate in that the three directors I worked under ultimately became supportive of what we did, that they believed in us; not without issues over, shall we say how we related to the rest of the museum. More and more, the administration wanted our programmatic work to be tied more tightly to that of the gallery curators, and to a certain extent we could do things together, but we were in different time zones, because we were programming on a month to month basis and they're programming a year or two out. A gallery show, once it opens, it's up three months at least, before it changes, and we're changing daily, twice daily. You have different deadline issues. People would say, well why can't you just program a year out? Well, nothing would appear. The fact is, it's the nature of the film thing, if you said to somebody, I want to program your film a year from now, I mean they're not going to commit. There's no commitment. Come that period of time, you wouldn't necessarily have the film.

10-01:18:40

Meeker:

Particularly because there are going to be new releases.

10-01:18:45

Kramer:

Well, we're not even talking about mainstream cinema, we are not concerned about new film releases, we're talking about locating and getting film prints from around the world, representing the whole history of the cinema. We don't even know if there will be a print then. It's a completely different world. The complexity, comprehensiveness, depth and variety of our program would be difficult to maintain with very long advance deadlines.

10-01:18:58

Meeker:

Has that remained the same as far as the calendaring of film series?

10-01:19:05
Kramer:

We had to go from monthly to doing two months at a time. And consider two and a half months, for summer, especially. Again, costs, because the fewer publications you put out, the less the printing costs, the paper costs, all of that. Even when you're doing desktop publishing. In the beginning, PFA had its own calendar, separate from the museum's calendar, and at calendar publication time, I was there all night long with the general manager, and we were pasting galley strips, gluing them to a board. I'd sleep on a cot overnight in the museum so that eight o'clock in the morning, I could take the boards to a printer. You had typeset galleys, you know? It was fun, it was manual, nothing was digital. Then PFA calendar was merged with the museum's calendar and when we went into the digital world, we could do it in-house, except for printing the final paper. But paper is still expensive and you have photographs and that's expensive to print, and so on and so forth. We used to not only mail them to people who were members and therefore are paying for that, but we would distribute them free all over the Bay Area, huge runs. We would take them to every bookstore or café, other theaters, and then that kept getting cut back, cut back, cut back. I watched it. And then, even before I retired, we had had to go to fewer issues.

10-01:20:51
Meeker:

What was the run when you retired?

10-01:20:53
Kramer:

I can't remember, I've forgotten. I'd have to ask what the run was. In the beginning it was huge, huge. The more the merrier. We had to change the format many times, adjust number of pages, size of pages, number of photos.

But yeah, I think whenever the budget got tight, everyone took a look at us again. It was sort of like all eyes turned. Well, can we afford the archive? We always had to defend the program notes, the space they occupied in the calendar; our notes were unique in our field, for quality of writing, informative and entertaining, and were admired, consulted and imitated by colleagues, nationally and internationally.

10-01:21:26
Meeker:

And when all eyes were turning to you, it's the museum making that determination. I guess the question is, to what extent is it the leaders of the museum looking at you with a scalpel or a hatchet?

10-01:21:40
Kramer:

I think it happened at both levels.

10-01:21:42
Meeker:

And also at the university level.

10-01:21:43
Kramer:

As I say, I think the administration of the museum, with each change, learned to accept us and feel good about us. If we got good press and if people said

nice things, why wouldn't they feel good? I think all of the curators always felt we have to work harder at good word of mouth, because we will always have to legitimize ourselves, that we will spend our lives legitimizing ourselves. We were always vulnerable. I think we always felt that we would be vulnerable, so you always have to make sure that not just the immediate community but nationally and internationally, there's good word of mouth, and our grantsmanship is good.

We developed very good grantsmanship, raising money that's specifically for film. We cultivated certain donors who had film interests and we were able to get very, very generous annual funds, sometimes more than what the rest of the museum might be getting. We had stronger admission income as well. So in a sense, we established ourselves in the fundraising field, as at least competitive with the rest of the museum. So it wasn't as if we were shirking that responsibility. We tried to carry our load in an equitable way, but you felt to survive, you had to be very good at fundraising. You had to always be bringing in good word of mouth, praise, so that your own administration would say happily, and here's the archive, we have this department and it's something that distinguishes us as a museum.

Some curators, fellow curators, probably didn't feel that we were as legitimate as they were. I know that sometimes there were feelings, but there's often competition in museums between even—you know, you can have competition in a museum between the painting department and the sculpture department, I mean that goes on.

Now, beyond the museum walls, to the larger campus, the issue there is often broken down into what are the students and faculty saying, because the museum got, what do you call it, reg fees? The students vote, I mean the students have a say in the reg fees, and you get evaluated. We worked very hard on our work with students. So on the whole, we worked very hard to get good student feedback and we came out very high. However, sometimes we came out higher than the rest of the museum and that caused issues.

10-01:26:04

Meeker:

You mean as far as a percentage of the funds, of the reg fees they wanted to give you?

10-01:26:07

Kramer:

No, it was just like when the reviews came in, there was more talk about PFA than there was about the museum side. You didn't want that. You might be proud that you got good feedback, but you didn't want that to be put on the table, because then you were in a very difficult position. It has to be we, not you know, separatism. So I think there was always this thing about PFA versus, museum versus I have always thought it would have been different if we didn't have our own name. There were things people would say, like we're the "jewel in the crown," that kind of thing, which didn't do us any good.

When that sort of stuff got said on campus, that made life harder. It didn't make life easier. I think that very early on, PFA acquired its own brand, and was seen separately from the museum, and neither the university or museum were comfortable with that.

10-01:27:10

Meeker: That's interesting.

10-01:27:13

Kramer: But it did come up. It did come up in the campus. There were people high up on campus on one side, who thought, that's in fact, that's the way they thought, that we had made ourselves more relevant to faculty and curriculum. On the other hand there were others who said that we were upstarts separatists, that we were too radical, too independent. We were not conservative. For one thing, the archive had a reputation for being just the opposite of conservative. During the Cold War, we had Soviet directors here with their KGB people. We brought filmmakers from Cuba. We had to fight to get them visas. We brought filmmakers from Iran.

10-01:28:24

Meeker: Have you brought Palestinian filmmakers?

10-01:28:27

Kramer: Oh yes, of course, yes. You tell me where there's a trouble spot, we brought films and filmmakers, and sometimes there were confrontations in the theater, in front of the theater.

10-01:28:42

Meeker: Really?

10-01:28:44

Kramer: Oh, yes.

10-01:28:45

Meeker: What are some examples of that?

10-01:28:48

Kramer: Well, you have different communities and there were times when I would have to alert campus police that there's going to be a picket or a protest, in front of the theater, by this organization, because they feel it's wrong for us to be showing this film, and they're going to try to shut us down. I'd say, so you know, do you want to—I'd always alert them, that's the rule of thumb, and they would ask me, "Do you think there's going to be violence?" I'd say, "I don't know." But I said, "This is a hot issue and I know there are going to be very conservative people here and there are going to be very radical people, and people in between, and tempers are going to rage. I don't know. I don't want anybody getting hurt. We believe in free speech, we believe in people, but I don't want anybody getting hurt, and of course I don't want any damage to the theater and I don't want anybody to destroy a film." So you have to take extra security and sometimes the police said "Well, we're going to send a

presence,” and other times they just gave us an emergency number to call and they said, “Okay, we’re on the alert, we know that we might get”—and you teach your staff what to do, how to make this call, and they’re prepared, they know when police have to come out. In most cases, we were able to handle it ourselves.

10-01:30:22

Meeker:

Were there ever any filmmakers or issues or films that you deemed too hot to handle?

10-01:30:28

Kramer:

No.

10-01:30:29

Meeker:

Never?

10-01:30:31

Kramer:

We knew they were hot but we handled them. I think being in Berkeley, you’re very fortunate. We did films made in Vietnam during the Vietnam War. This was after the war, but we brought films made in Vietnam. Now, we did this series in collaboration with UCLA. UCLA had a huge, huge problem. The resident Vietnamese population were very upset, I mean death threats came to the curators, and because we have a very large Vietnamese population just south of us, in the Fremont area I think it is, we anticipated, when the series came up here, that we were going to get threats and that we might get actually people coming. That was a case where we alerted the campus that we were doing this, and we told them what had happened at UCLA and that things would happen. We did get some letters, nasty letters and things like that, but that’s fortunately— Again, there were enough people in Berkeley who wanted to see. I mean after all, the people who were anti-Vietnam War came out of course, to see. You had both elements here.

I remember when Tom did the first PRC films we got here, and you had Chinese residents of an older generation who had fled. We had a Taiwanese community and they were upset. We had shown the photographer, Robert Frank’s films many times over the years. He didn’t make a lot of films but he’s considered a very cutting edge filmmaker and best known of course, for his still photographs, shown in museums internationally, that our museum had exhibited. He had made a film with the Rolling Stones, the title of which is *Cocksucker Blues*. After he made it and first showed it, and it had shown here after it was made, there was legal action and he couldn’t show the—the film couldn’t be distributed or shown any more.

Time went by and we did another Robert Frank show at the museum and we decided to do a complete film retrospective. I said to Robert, “Are we going to be able to show the film?” Things had evolved over the years. He said, “There’s still problems legally but if I’m there at the screening we can show it.” So he said, you know, set it to my schedule. We were in Wheeler

Auditorium because we figured we would get—because the film had been held back for a long period, there would be enough people who would want to come. We thought Robert Frank was well known enough, we could rent Wheeler. The place was packed, there's a line of people trying to get in, we're sold out. There was one student who dressed up in coveralls and had a mop, and pretended he was working for the janitorial services so he could get in. We caught him but we were so amused by that, you know we let him stay.

At any rate, we're packed and I go up on stage. Robert is in the greenroom ready to come out and I'm doing an introduction and I'm talking about the photographs and the museum, I'm promoting that. I'm thanking the grants that came through, the usual stuff you do in an introduction. And I said, "And tonight, we're really happy that Robert Frank agreed to be with us because otherwise, you would not be able to see *Cocksucker Blues*." At which point the audience starts cheering and I'm thinking, what are they cheering about? Somebody said to me, "Edith, you're up on stage and you said cocksucker blues in public, in Wheeler Auditorium." I said, "Well that's the title of the film." They said, "You said cocksucker blues." I got a standing ovation for saying "cocksucker blues" twice.

10-01:35:40

Meeker:

I don't think it's the blues part, I think it's the cocksucker part.

10-01:35:42

Kramer:

I think you're right.

10-01:35:47

Meeker:

Films about politics sometimes are very controversial, right?

10-01:35:50

Kramer:

Yeah, they always are.

10-01:35:52

Meeker:

Those are in some way easy to show because on the campus it's almost like you get extra points.

10-00:35:58

Kramer:

We've got somebody for everything here. We've got a protest group for every issue.

10-01:36:05

Meeker:

It's almost like if you don't get a protest group you're not doing something right.

10-01:36:10

Kramer:

Yes and no. It's hard on staff. It's not fun managing crowds, it's not fun managing angry people. There may be things I miss. I don't miss mob anger. That is not good.

- 10-01:36:30
Meeker: All right, so I'm being glib in saying that, but what I'm trying to get at is in many ways, political dissent is acceptable on a campus, particularly like Berkeley.
- 10-01:36:40
Kramer: Berkeley especially.
- 10-01:36:40
Meeker: People may not like it but people expect it, and I suspect that there's even—I wouldn't be surprised if PFA got some legitimacy by bringing some of these—
- 10-01:36:48
Kramer: Yes. Oh yeah, people knew you could come here and do what you couldn't do elsewhere. We were able, from the beginning of PFA, we were able to show controversial films, meaning that the films, where and how they were made could be controversial, the subjects, the content could be controversial. The people who made them and where they came from could be controversial.
- 10-01:37:16
Meeker: Well let me put a few out there then. What about films with—America is really happy with violence, so what about films that have really graphic sexual content?
- 10-01:37:27
Kramer: We did pornography. We have pornography in our collection, intentionally so.
- 10-01:37:29
Meeker: You do?
- 10-01:37:30
Kramer: Yeah.
- 10-01:37:31
Meeker: I didn't know that.
- 10-01:37:37
Kramer: Linda Williams did a course on—it was on pornography in a sense, but it was more specifically on—I mean, she's done a course on pornography, but she did this one course with the archive. I'm trying to remember what she called it, oh darn, I'd have to look that up. [*Cinema and the Sex Act*] It was basically when, the code—
- 10-01:38:04
Meeker: Pre-code films.
- 10-01:38:05
Kramer: Hollywood cinema had pre-code, then there was the code, and then it was when the code was ended. The course was when the code broke and from that to the present. We had done a lot of pre-code films, that's a very popular

genre. That's another one, I think Tom started, that became—well, not started, I mean early years of the archive, we did a lot of pre-code, and that became enormously popular. Again, zeitgeist or whatever, but we certainly made it very popular through the archive in the Bay Area, pre-code.

So, because the course had to look at how the code broke and then what came after it, and how people pushed sexuality in films and how far they went and so forth. She wanted to include some contemporary pornography. It's easy to go back and do early stag, the stag films, that's very easy to do, you can get those very easily. She wanted me to get a print of either *Deep Throat* or *Behind the Green Door*, so I went to the Mitchell Brothers company, I got a 35 print, their only one. It was *Behind the Green Door*. And they were very reluctant to loan the print, so it took a lot of convincing, secrecy and security for the print.

10-01:39:29

Meeker:

Yeah, that's the Mitchell Brothers.

10-01:39:31

Kramer:

So I did it and we were sold out and it was mostly a female audience.

10-01:39:37

Meeker:

Really. Huh.

10-01:39:40

Kramer:

We talked about this didn't we?

10-01:39:42

Meeker:

No, we didn't talk about, no. Maybe with Kathy or somebody else.

10-01:39:50

Kramer:

I was very interested in the fact that it was largely a female audience. There were a few guys there. What I discovered was when the film came out, a lot of women at that time would have liked to have seen it, but they were embarrassed to go to a pornography theater, because that's someplace they didn't feel comfortable. When these things came out on video and digital, it meant going to a segregated area of a video store, the adult film section, and they felt uncomfortable going there, because there would be guys there who maybe, you know, would look at you or make suggestions. So, they felt they didn't have a space where they could examine this themselves, and we legitimized a place where they could feel safe to come and see the films, and they came out.

10-01:41:06

Meeker:

Interesting, because as it turns out, *Behind the Green Door* is actually shown at Cannes. It got a rousing reception there and it kind of started out in some ways, as an art film. Then it became sort of definition of hardcore pornography, and now, thirty, forty years later, it's back as an art film again.

10-01:41:32

Kramer:

Deep Throat was an international success. It went beyond the grind house. But it goes back into the grind house, it comes out, it goes back, but it's also the time and place that made a difference. So yes, Linda Williams and I, when we talked about it, I said do you think we have to say anything, she said or I said, "I'm not going to say anything, I'm going to just see what happens." I don't even know if the university will notice at this point, what we show, and if somebody brings it to their attention and they're worried, they'll call us up.

10-01:42:17

Meeker:

Did you ever get any calls like that, from the administration?

10-01:42:20

Kramer:

No.

10-01:42:20

Meeker:

Never?

10-01:42:21

Kramer:

Never.

10-01:42:22

Meeker:

That's amazing.

10-01:42:23

Kramer:

The only thing I was really concerned about, that there might be any violence, that anybody could possibly get injured because of reactions, and that you know, that we could keep it peaceful. Yelling is allowed, that's okay you can yell, but try to not disrupt somebody else, so on and so forth. Do we have time for a story?

10-01:42:57

Meeker:

Yeah, go for it.

10-01:43:00

Kramer:

We worked with colleagues around the country to do almost every year, contemporary Iranian cinema, and because of the embargoes and everything, you had to have this sort of network. Films might come into Canada and then come down to Chicago, and then go to L.A., and then come back up here and then go back to Chicago and Boston. There were a group of us working together to figure a way, I mean it was really difficult, and even more difficult to get a filmmaker into the country, to apply for a visa, and so on and so forth. The government made it hard. I'm sure they still do, yes they do, still.

At any rate, there is a very large resident population of Iranians in the Bay Area, but they're multiple generations. There are people who came here because of the Shah. In other words, they ran from the Shah. There are people who—and they settled in and they had children. Then there are people who escaped Khomeini, and then they have children. There are people who have gone back and come back out, and so you have a really broad spectrum of

feelings about regimes and culture, and you have very radical elements and you have very conservative elements in this community, and it's a kind of, in a relatively short period of time there's quite a history there of relationships and politics. It's quite fascinating. I have friends in the older generation, in the middle generation and the younger generation.

One thing, when we would show this week of, ten days of contemporary Iranian cinema, we'd be sold out. It was hard for anybody who wasn't Iranian to get into the theater. It was as if everybody called up their friends and relatives, the entire extended family, and they came as an extended family. It seemed like a wonderful social gathering. They came and they talked and they greeted each other. It was an annual event. They drove from Sacramento to come down here, they came up from Palo Alto and Fremont. I mean, it was an amazing gathering. You'd see the same faces but you'd see more kids, you know, that had been born, and so on and so forth. It was something really wonderful, that the films brought all these people together, and it was so important for them to have this contact with their culture. They missed their country, regardless of the reason they left, and their politics. They so missed their culture and cinema has a long, very important history in Iran. They've had good filmmakers for many generations.

So, at any rate, one of these series is coming up and I get a phone call in the office from a young man who is part of this community who is one of the regulars at PFA, he comes to every film, practically. He loves cinema and he's very smart, he always comes to the Iranian films. He says, "Edith, I need to warn you, there's going to be a protest for this group of films." And I said, "Oh, really, a protest by whom?" He said well, I'm going to be one of the people protesting, there's a group of us, he said, "Because we are very upset that the films you are showing, these are the films that have been produced by the state. They are funding these films and you know the situation for filmmakers in Iran, the lack of free speech. They've imprisoned certain filmmakers, not letting certain filmmakers—

So, almost every one of the films you're showing is actually funded through the state. Well, it's almost impossible to make an independent film in Iran. Anyway he said, "We've decided that it would be better if you didn't show these films, even if we all want to see the films," he said, "Because as long as they're funded by the state, we're really supporting the state." I said, "Well, I see your point. What do you want me to do?" By the way, this was an issue way back when we showed films made under the Soviet Union. He said, "Well, we just wanted to warn you that we're going to be picketing outside the theater," and I said, "Of course." Now, I said, "I am going to have to say to you, don't get into any fights. We won't tolerate any kind of violence or fights with people going into the theater, or vice versa." If they want to start something, don't you react. I said and I will have to alert the campus police, that they be on alert that there is going to be this protest, just so that they're—let's keep tempers quiet. He said, "Well, you know, there might be shouting

and yelling and there could be..." I said, "Well then, I'll be out there and we just, let's see how it plays out. You just try to keep your cool and I'll try to keep the audience cool." And I said, "Thank you for alerting me, I really appreciate that."

So came the night, crowds coming into the theater and the protestors, there are only four people, but with big signs and they're standing there. Immediately, the people going into the theater, the older generation, turn on the protestors and say how dare you, and they start getting very aggressive. So I went out there and I stood with the protestors. I was the fifth, because my audience recognized me, and I said, "It's okay, they can have their say, free speech. They have their point of view, you go on in and enjoy the films." "Well, Edith, you know, we can kick them out of here." "No, they're allowed here." [laughter] So, I had to protect them. We didn't have to call the police.

10-01:50:24
Meeker:

That's a great story.

10-01:50:26
Kramer:

But that's only in Berkeley, I mean that's so Berkeley to me. I have to add another part, the best part of this story: one of the protestors challenged me why I didn't show his film, an independent Iranian film. I told him I didn't know his film and asked why he hadn't shown it to me, immediately after which he gave me a DVD. Well I took the DVD home, watched it that night, and loved the film. I told him we would show it; we made him and ourselves an exhibition quality Betacam from his DVD; I told colleagues about the film; in particular, the then artistic director of Tribeca Film Festival in NY, who selected it for competition, and it won a cash award; I think Michael Moore was one of the jurors.

10-01:50:32
Meeker:

Well, it's also recognition that you are engaging in activity that could be seen as controversial or is seen as controversial by different segments, and you recognize that and you figure out that you've got to have both ways. You've got to kind of acknowledge people. You have to facilitate free speech but you also have to acknowledge that that's going to piss people off.

[break in audio]

10-01:51:26
Kramer:

Every now and then we would get offered what they call a benefit screening. It means a major studio is opening a new film in the immediate future and they like to test the waters a little bit with a university audience or maybe a museum audience. They're sort of looking to get a little advance word, but they also, I don't know, corporate charity, and often it was something—

10-01:52:05
Meeker:

They can write it off.

10-01:52:05

Kramer:

Often it was something we asked for. We would go to local filmmakers, like Mr. Coppola, or Lucas Films, and ask would they do it, and they were very nice and they would often offer us something. One of our trustees knew some people in Hollywood at a major studio and said oh, this is a perfect film for Berkeley. Sometimes a benefit film would be offered by a major Hollywood studio because they thought that Berkeley offered the perfect targeted audience. But benefit screenings always posed the problem that we could screen film in advance; in essence we were taking the gamble that the film would be worth the special ticket price. In one case, the film was a major disappointment; in another case, the film caused a political protest which angered the audience, the film director and studio, and embarrassed me. There's nothing like public humiliation to put you in your place. There are lots of embarrassing things that happen to you when you work with the public.

[Portion of interview deleted in editing]

Interview 10: December 17, 2014

11-00:00:10

Meeker: December 17, 2014. This is Martin Meeker, interviewing Edith Kramer. We are now on interview ten and I think that we'll probably be able to wrap up today.

11-00:00:28

Kramer: You've had enough. [laughs]

11-00:00:29

Meeker: Well, I've got just a handful of areas that I would like to cover. Is there anything that you wanted to start out with or should I just get started?

11-00:00:38

Kramer: No, you start out.

11-00:00:40

Meeker: One of the big projects that you undertook while being director of the Pacific Film Archive was improving the storage and preservation of the collection. I'm wondering if you can maybe give me a sense of what the status of it was when you arrived there. Say when you arrived to be director, because I know you had been before that.

11-00:01:10

Kramer: Yeah. Is it okay if I go back earlier?

11-00:01:13

Meeker: However you'd like to frame it, please do.

11-00:01:17

Kramer: I think it's important to know that when the archive began, officially began, late sixties, early seventies, even before the museum was constructed, the term archive—it didn't say film exhibition, it said archive, and you assume, if you use the word archive, you've got a collection, it sort of goes without saying. Well, we didn't have a collection, so who starts an archive without a collection? In the history of archives, libraries, you know, there's generally a collection first, whether it's private or public, and it becomes an archive.

So, our founder, Sheldon Renan, was quite aware of the fact that he had given a title to something that didn't have a collection, and he knew that he had to have a collection, and he did in fact establish a collection right at the beginning. I mean, he went and searched for—you could say, he went in search of a collection, he got it, and then we had a substantial body of films.

So we started right out, with a collection of Japanese films and some avant-garde films and some, you know, odd bits and pieces of a film history, a feature film here, a short film there, international, no particular focus, but a major collection, a large quantity of 35mm films representing two major

Japanese films studios; their equivalent of say what our MGM, Warner Brothers, would be, Shochiku and Daiei, and smaller numbers of films from another studio, Nikkatsu. Some from—a few from Toho, a few from Toei but predominantly Shochiku and Daiei. And how Sheldon acquired this collection was not to buy it, not even to get it donated. In fact it wasn't ours, it was a deposit. I don't know, does the Bancroft have deposits as opposed to things they own?

11-00:03:59

Meeker:

Yes.

11-00:04:00

Kramer:

So, this was a substantial deposit, meaning we have no ownership of the physical property or rights. We're basically providing free storage, with permission to use the films in our own program or for research, scholars coming to the archive. The way he negotiated this was the fact that these films were no longer viable for theatrical projection, they were older. Nobody cared any longer about showing them publicly, seeing them. You would have to be a scholar who wanted to look at them.

The reason these prints were in the U.S. was because at one point, and even up to the first few years that I was living in the Bay Area, there were Japanese language movie theaters. There was one on Union Street in San Francisco. There was another one in what some people refer to as Japantown. I don't know if it was on Post, but somewhere not far from Fillmore, not far from where the Kabuki Center is now.

And these theaters were exclusively for the screening of Japanese produced films, but with English titles. And the reason these theaters existed, and they existed in L.A. and they existed in New York, and I think they might have existed somewhere in Texas, is because of local Japanese American populations. These theaters existed before World War II; obviously during World War II, there weren't films going back and forth, and of course California had interned its Japanese residents. I should say Japanese American residents. So, after the war, there were these storage facilities in Los Angeles, just big warehouses where Hollywood companies and other film companies simply store their prints, and these studios still had offices, because they had resumed activities representing Japanese postwar production, but in these storage facilities, they were paying for a lot of square footage to house all these older prints. So, Sheldon simply proposed to them that they deposit them at the archive and give us access and voila, instant collection, and as it turned out, an extremely valuable collection. Over the years, negotiations proceeded so that the actual ownership of these films would gradually be passed over to PFA. Not the copyright but physical property ownership, so much like a library, where you own the books but not the copyright. Now you could say we had an archive.

Okay, but in the initial mission statements of the Pacific Film Archives, in addition to exhibiting the history of cinema from around the world, having a film study center where people could have access to literature, as well as looking and studying films individually or in small groups, we would collect and preserve. So the language “preserve”: well, there are many ways to look at preservation. We weren’t really doing anything, unless you count ownership or possession. Possession is a form of preservation in the sense that okay, the films are not being thrown out, they’re not being discarded, and films do get discarded, I mean with regularity in those days. So, we were preserving to the extent that we were preventing these films from being thrown out, but we weren’t really doing anything else. We didn’t even have what you would call passive preservation today, which is temperature, humidity controlled storage, in such a way that you prevent deterioration of the film material. In those days, we thought it was only nitrate cellulose that deteriorated, and of course it was flammable as well, so very dangerous. We were to find out in more recent years, really quite recently when you think of it in terms of the history of cinema, that acetate film, so-called safety film, also deteriorates. And so all the change from nitrate film production to safety film, was under the assumption that acetate film was stable. So, passive preservation requires temperature control.

Now, even before I left the archive in 1981, we literally had films underfoot. The theater in the museum, our original theater the risers were wood and underneath those risers was film storage. Films were lining the corridors between, and in our offices. There was, originally, I think a site somewhere out in Richmond, a warehouse that the university owned and various departments had stuff stored there, so films were thrown in there. It was not clean storage; it had no temperature, humidity control, nothing. Then, at one point we were kicked out of there because I think the university gave up that storage. I don’t know if they were renting or if they owned it but they gave it up, and everybody, every department was told they had to move, and we were assigned storage under the garage of Zellerbach, where the fumes poured in. Not only was it not clean but black soot built up over everything that was in there, and so fine, you know and it could get in the film, it would go through the cans. So, we kept moving films.

When I came back in 1983, I already knew, from two years before, that somebody was going to have to address this issue. I mean, how could we—and we were not even members of FIAF, the International Federation of Film Archives—but how could we call ourselves an archive? I didn’t know that much about the specifications for temperature and humidity control. I just knew that you had to do something cool, dry, stable, and that you can’t have it dirty, I knew that. And, along with storage, you had to have cataloging. The difference between cataloging and inventory, and I knew when I left, that we didn’t have a complete inventory. I mean, you could not say with absolute conviction, that we had something or we didn’t have something. There were various lists typed up, in binders. And card files with whatever information we

had discovered, but not all of it verified. We didn't have computers then of course, to easily—well, I shouldn't say easily, it's not easy, but to kind of have one central place to put all that data in. We did have, however, a full catalog of the Daiei films, published in book form, thanks to a grant that allowed us to bring in an expert bi-lingual film historian of Japanese cinema, Audie Bock.

11-00:12:55

Meeker:

Had you ever toured any real film preservation facilities, so you knew what that would look like?

11-00:13:03

Kramer:

I had visited colleagues, not a great deal, before my first round at the archive, but I'd been in contact with them. I had visited MoMA [Museum of Modern Art] in New York even before they had their brand new, state of the art storage building. That took years to build. I had visited UCLA they were basically leasing storage, which wasn't temperature controlled, and they had nitrate there but they didn't have temperature control. And the year before I became director, I had visited the French national film archives among others. I discovered that all around the world, there were archives, some with and more without what then, at that time, was considered state of the art, which had cost them an enormous amount of money and everybody talked about and envied. There was always a press release and notification in the trade journals about the fact that this archive now had—So it was an issue internationally.

There are countries where their climate is such that, you know, it's humid, it's hot. That's a disaster for film material, absolute disaster. It would be the same for still photographs. It's like forget it, you're not going to save anything. So we were lucky that we lived in a relatively temperate climate with a stable range, that it rarely got very hot here. It would have been okay if it got cold or colder, but we are damp, that's a problem. We're not really dry in the Bay Area, even with our drought.

So, I knew enough to know we were in trouble. I knew that when I left, but I didn't know I was going to come back, so it wasn't my responsibility. When I came back, things were just worse because we had more films, so the problem had just magnified. So I thought, on returning, that the exhibition program was fine, it was doing okay. Good curators, a good program, we were fine in that area, continue as is, but that in terms of new directions, collection policy acquisitions and care of collection, fundraising, we had to deal with that. So that became a kind of major issue for me, and it took a long time to find the appropriate donor, at the same time convincing the administration that we had to focus on it, because you can't just go after an amount of money for a project, unless everybody's behind it. So you have to educate yourself and everybody else. I knew that there could be a great advantage to us, both in our own international presence, in our ability to borrow rare prints of films that we normally wouldn't have access to, if we became a member of the International

Federation of Film Archives. Well, you can't become a member until you apply, but then a full member has to come and inspect your vaults. I knew colleagues who were members, I mean we were known because of our exhibition program, and they kept saying, why don't you join, why don't you join? I said well, I would be embarrassed to have one of you come and inspect our vaults, they're not appropriate for membership. I resisted because I thought until I can get these vaults into some sort of respectable condition, I don't dare invite anybody to look at it. It would be like having a restaurant and asking the board to come pass on your kitchen when it was dirty.

11-00:17:46

Meeker: Infested.

11-00:17:47

Kramer: Infested. You know that's the way I felt. But then finally, as time passed, and it took so long to get going on any kind of plan and fundraising possibility, and also identifying space, because the two have to go together. I mean where were we going to have these vaults? Not in the basement of Zellerbach.

11-00:18:16

Meeker: Where did you select, or where was the—

11-00:18:19

Kramer: Well the thing was, we had to get space from the university and the university was not—they had a long list of departments that needed space. Almost every department has storage problems. They could be in the humanities, in the sciences, and some have enormous storage issues. So, we didn't—we weren't an academic department, so we were virtually under the radar, not on a list. It was like being on an organ donor list, I mean you don't qualify, and so how do you get on that list? Well, I discovered—in fact, our general manager figured this out—if you have money to spend you get on the list. In other words, if you have a donor who will pay for it, you jump right up there on the list. So the two go together.

11-00:19:20

Meeker: How did you find a donor?

11-00:19:23

Kramer: We had had, ever since the early years of the archive, a donor who helped the archives start, who was always giving money for small projects, and over the years I thought to myself, this is a wonderful person who understands and loves our mission. He's a film collector himself, he's keeping his films in our less than ideal storage, and so I don't have to explain what we do or why we do it from the beginning. He has enough money, he has many charitable projects He can afford a costly endeavor and I thought he seemed like the ideal person to approach. I didn't know whether he would do—the best of all circumstances, whether he'd do it all by himself. Maybe he could do part and then we raise from others, because there's a theory in fundraising that if you

have a major donor, that sort of starts money coming in from others. It's a kind of kick-starter, something like that.

11-00:21:10

Meeker: Seed funding or something.

11-00:21:11

Kramer: Seed funding. So I thought, he could at least be a seed funder, but I understood too, that from my own director, that you need to cultivate people. You don't just go and ask them, you have to cultivate them, and I felt that the cultivation already existed, was partially there. It was friendly, on good terms, but in a way, we had been nickel and diming him. We'd ask for a thousand dollars here, and a plane ticket for somebody here, and it was really, a lot of little asks, rather than defining a major gift, I think is what you call it.

11-00:22:07

Meeker: There's always a concern about donor fatigue, you know, asking people too many times.

11-00:22:12

Kramer: Right. I didn't know that much about donor fatigue but I could imagine the annoyance of constantly being asked for a little bit here and a little bit there. It would sort of sound like you were somebody on the street corner asking for spare change, and we have plenty of people on the street asking—but I felt like that's what we were doing, asking for spare change. So, with the help of senior administration, their agreement to proceed in that direction and development department that could draft a boilerplate "ask." I then went over the language, based on how I understood this person. I explained everything and we presented it to him.

11-00:23:20

Meeker: How was that done? Was there like a formal meeting that was convened?

11-00:23:23

Kramer: I met with him and said essentially, I want to present you with a major proposal, and this is what it's about, but it will be all written up with a budget, something like that. So be prepared, you're going to get this in the mail. That's the way we initiated it. There was a naming opportunity. Rolled into it was a renovation of our theater too, a much needed renovation. We didn't know at that point of course, that the building would be condemned. If we had known, everything would have changed.

11-00:24:09

Meeker: Sure.

11-00:24:10

Kramer: It would have been a totally different story. We had no idea that that would come down the pipe. So, but I also knew that he's not someone who makes quick decisions. The proposal sat in his office for a long time and, you know, when do you bug somebody, excuse me, have you had a chance to read it? So

there were periodic points at which I had to call him up or talk to his assistant and say, we really would like him to, if he has any questions. He might wonder about something, we're flexible, we can adjust if he thinks something needs to be adjusted, but we need to know if he's considering it. We didn't even know if he was considering it.

So this dragged on for a long time and I was the one who had to keep bugging him. In the meantime, because of common interests and friendship, he had invited me to come to a ranch he owned, to go on a roundup. He owned a cattle ranch in Nevada, near Elko. I love horses and I've never been on a roundup, and it had always been a fantasy when I was a kid, that someday, I would go out west and I'd see real cowboys and I'd go on a roundup.

11-00:25:54
Meeker:

They exist!

11-00:25:57
Kramer:

He had real cowboys and they had a roundup. Anyway, at one point I agreed to go for a weekend, and my staff said well, are you going to say anything? I said, "Yes, I'm going to use this occasion to make a final push, yes or no, I need a yes or no," and that's what happened. I was in the saddle for nine hours and I rode up next to him as we were going after some calves, I turned to him and I said, "Is it a yes or a no? Unfortunately, I can't wait any longer, my administration says we can't delay. We have to know, is this a direction we should be going in or not? So just tell me, yes or no, and if you say no, that's no problem, we'll be friends, I'll go on another roundup. Don't worry, we'll continue to be friends, you don't owe us anything." And I think the other thing I said was, "But I'd rather you be the donor than somebody else, because you understand, and I'd rather have your name than us go after somebody else, because you have supported us from the beginning and everybody who has worked here is grateful to you. So, you deserve to have your name." He sort of mumbled something and we finished the roundup, we came down off the mountain, steaks were being grilled. . And he said, "He had a private plane and he said he was flying to Europe after dinner, and I could take a regular plane home the next day, somebody would drive me to the airport. Call my office when you get back, I will have left word that it's okay."

I came home and I said to the administration, "We're okay, we did it." So, that led to getting the space, and it was Marchant. It was a former Smith-Corona factory on San Pablo Avenue, that the university bought, and subsequently sold. Was the Bancroft in there?

11-00:29:04
Meeker:

No.

11-00:29:05
Kramer:

You were someplace before you moved to Richmond [Marchant].

11-00:29:07

Meeker:

Gosh, I don't actually know, I wasn't here then, but it would have been the University of California Printing Service was there for a while, because I did some work there.

11-00:29:17

Kramer:

There were a whole bunch of departments in Marchant. We shared our storage space, that we had paid for! We shared with animal skins from some science department. They were just hung like, you know, wardrobe, like when you go into a cleaners. There were racks and racks, but they were animal skins. I don't know if it was the zoology or biology department or what it was. But the temperature was never sufficiently stable. It wasn't cold enough. We had continual difficulties with the air conditioning unit. Humidity was not so bad; the temperature variations were within a range that wasn't disastrous but not good enough, and also, we had learned much more about temperature, because in a relatively short period of time, the regulations for appropriate temperature control (had changed). Much more stringent temperature controls were needed by the time we moved into the space.

So, you know, we had spent a considerable amount of money for this. It was certainly an improvement over Zellerbach, and we had all our films more or less in one place. We didn't have full cataloging. We had a renovated theater that had actually been against all fire regulations, all of those films that were stored under the seats. The risers were no longer wood, they were concrete, major changes were made.

11-00:31:21

Meeker:

What sort of budget are we talking about?

11-00:31:25

Kramer:

Well, I raised \$1 million, so that's what we had to spend, but the money came in as pledges, so it took six years to have the full—but we were able to move forward. So we basically borrowed money from the university and paid it back.

11-00:31:41

Meeker:

And you haven't mentioned this person's name, so I'm guessing they never put their name on the project?

11-00:31:46

Kramer:

They did put their name, not on the vaults, but on that theater, and then of course the theater disappeared. It was George Gund III, who died about two years ago. I am glad that I was able to show him photographs of the newest film vaults in Richmond, which may have never happened if not for his funding of Marchant, which made the University take notice.

11-00:31:59

Meeker:

What was his interest in film?

11-00:32:03

Kramer:

He'd always, from the time we knew him, he loved cinema, collected, even did some distribution of films. He had a particular interest in Eastern European and Russian cinema and was one of the—he was president of the board of the San Francisco International Film Festival. He had homes in many parts of the United States, but he made a home here in San Francisco. His family is originally from Cleveland and it's a large family. One of his sisters, Agnes, was head of the board of trustees of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. He has a younger sister also important supporter of our museum, who lives here in Berkeley. Oh, he was also a sportsman and he owned the Sharks hockey team with one of his brothers. He also owned a basketball team. I'm going to forget, like the Warriors—

11-00:33:23

Meeker:

The local basketball team?

11-00:33:24

Kramer:

No, but I'm not very good on sports. I know the hockey team, the Sharks. The basketball team was the Cleveland Cavaliers.

11-00:33:32

Meeker:

That's good.

11-00:33:38

Kramer:

He had many areas of philanthropy, but he had a very personal interest in cinema and he had very discerning tastes in cinema.

11-00:33:49

Meeker:

Did you ever get a sense of where that came from?

11-00:33:53

Kramer:

I think his own education, interests. He was a phenomenal man, really. When I went to the memorial service, one of his, I think it was his niece, who gave the major eulogy. Basically, it was a story of his life, but it was very extraordinary because she was able to include everybody who was in—we were in Grace Cathedral, which is not small, and we were packed in there, and there were people from many different professions athletes, cowboys, ranchers, museum directors, curators, festival directors, filmmakers, etc., and all ages. In a way, all of us had a piece of his life and when she gave this bio, from the time he was a child, his many interests, his sort of global life, because he did, he lived all over the world, most of the time, hours, put into being on a plane. You know, an avid fisherman, he would fly all over the world to go fishing, but at the same time, he was recruiting players for a hockey team or attending the Berlin Film Festival or the Karlovy Vary Film Festival in what was then Czechoslovakia. A very progressive person in terms of ranching and conservation, you know the whole issue in the west, of private and public lands. There are ranchers who are very strong conservationists and, I think he was very much in the forefront of being a conservationist rancher. Oh, and cowboy poetry, that was another thing he supported.

- 11-00:36:32
Meeker: Sounds like an interesting guy.
- 11-00:36:36
Kramer: He's a big supporter of—there's a museum, in Washington, D.C., it's dedicated to the American Indian. The National Museum of the American Indian He collected western art, the famous paintings and drawings.
- 11-00:36:52
Meeker: Remington.
- 11-00:36:53
Kramer: Remingtons and Native American art.
- 11-00:36:58
Meeker: Fascinating. So, this facility is not built but you moved into it, and I imagine that along with this, then you moved from your previous inventory, to a more thorough system of cataloging the collection.
- 11-00:37:18
Kramer: Well, we had already started to do proper cataloging, but we don't have a dedicated permanent position, we don't have a staff position, so it was always bits and pieces of other people's time, like Nancy Goldman, our librarian and her staff. She knew how to do the cataloging. Or Mona Nagai, our collections manager, and her staff. Basically it was Nancy, through grants, who sort of fit cataloging in as a granted position. So as long as you kept getting grants, you could get cataloging done, but when the grant expires, that person loses their job, the cataloging ceases. You know how that is, right?
- 11-00:38:16
Meeker: I do here [at the Bancroft Library], yes.
- 11-00:38:17
Kramer: So that, during my tenure, I mean that's the way we proceeded and many things were partially cataloged, but full cataloging is a whole other thing, it is ongoing work. First of all, you have to view, you have to inspect and view the work. I used to joke with the other curators in the museum and I'd say hey, you can catalog a painting in a few minutes, when you come right down to it, a painting on the wall, I mean you see it, it's there.
- 11-00:38:55
Meeker: Or even a book.
- 11-00:39:00
Kramer: The average feature film takes ninety minutes to watch. You multiply that times the number of films.
- 11-00:39:16
Meeker: How large was the collection when you became the director?

11-00:39:27

Kramer:

[break in audio] When I left in 1981, we had about 3,500. When I came back in '83, I think there were about 5,000, and when I retired in 2003, but I actually left October, 2005. By then, we had at least 10,000 or so films.

11-00:40:10

Meeker:

So it doubled during the period of time you were the director. Cataloging is actually pretty interesting and there's a fairly set list of metadata that go into, say, cataloging a book, and those have been fairly well known for a good period of time. I wonder if you noticed any innovations in metadata around film that were being cataloged and collected during your period of time?

11-00:40:46

Kramer:

Unfortunately, I'm not the one to ask. That, you could find out from Nancy, because I delegated all the cataloging to her expertise. When I became director, even though I had to make, I'd say policy decisions, or I had to say this is where we're going to try to put more effort and this is where, you know, try to make the thrust of fundraising. At the same time, I'm responsible for supervising all areas, I am a full time exhibition programmer, and it's kind of a juggling act. Everything always needed constant fundraising, everything, and then the new issues. What a shock when I walk into a meeting with the rest of the museum staff and I hear that the theater is to be closed because the building is unsafe. We're all going to be continuing to work in the building but the theater can't operate as a theater. And then like okay, we're not going to have an exhibition program? Well, is there an alternative? And running around with our general manager, Stephen Gong, looking for viable space that could be turned into a theater, on the university campus or in city of Berkeley, and finding there was none. We were saved by the fact that Wurster Hall, the College of Environmental Design, had the same earthquake problems, I mean what do you call it?

11-00:42:44

Meeker:

Seismic?

11-00:42:45

Kramer:

Seismic issues, as our museum, except they, being an academic department, could get money through the state, through the university, to retrofit, but while they were retrofitting, they had to move all of their teaching operations elsewhere. Their dean Harrison Fraker came up with a brilliant idea of a temporary building like the modular boxes used for warehouses and identified, a marching band practice area, what do you call it?

11-00:43:27

Meeker:

The field?

11-00:43:28

Kramer:

The practice field and soccer field, and not far from Wurster, not far from the museum. He said to me, "Edith, you know we're going to put up this thing, we'll get it built in a very short amount of time, and we need an auditorium

because we need a big lecture hall. So, what if we offer that to you for your theater? You take charge of the interior, we'll build the shell. You create it as a theater, with as many seats as you can in it, and in the evening it becomes your theater. In the daytime, we have classes in there." I mean, it was a gift and basically an answer to our prayer, and it went up within a year. Again, we borrowed the money from the university to outfit it, paid them back, and so we had a theater.

11-00:44:53

Meeker: And that's that one that you're still in?

11-00:44:55

Kramer: That's the one we're still in, a temporary building, on architecture's loan, and of course it became a temporary building for other departments because as you know, the retrofitting goes on and on and on and on, building by building, across the campus, and every building that gets retrofitted has to move its functions elsewhere. So, a parade of departments move in and out of that structure.

11-00:45:25

Meeker: But the archive itself stayed in the museum space, correct?

11-00:45:28

Kramer: Yeah.

11-00:45:29

Meeker: Was there ever any idea to move that?

11-00:45:32

Kramer: No. It was only the theater that could move.

11-00:45:41

Meeker: What happened to the collection itself during that period of time?

11-00:45:46

Kramer: Let's see, the collection was at Marchant until only a few years ago, long after I left. When the university sold Marchant and we were warned—I think we were given something like a three-year warning, and it may have been that that warning—I was aware that they were going to sell that building about the time I was leaving and I remember saying to the administration, you've got to get ready, now's the time to start planning, you've got to start thinking ahead. First of all, the university—and the Bancroft was in the same position, because I remember talking to—I'm so bad on names. He's not here any longer I don't think, but I was talking to somebody who was in charge of the Bancroft.

11-00:46:38

Meeker: Charles Faulhaber?

11-00:46:42

Kramer:

No, it was somebody else, because he asked me about storage, because they have some films. He came to me because they were going to get a unit out in Richmond before us, so they knew about this. So they were going to have to relocate their photographs, still photographs, and their film.

11-00:47:03

Meeker:

Jack von Euw?

11-00:47:04

Kramer:

Yes.

11-00:47:05

Meeker:

He's still here.

11-00:47:07

Kramer:

Oh, okay. I thought maybe he'd retired. So, I gave him experts in film storage to talk to. They had a small film collection. But also, I said I couldn't speak to the issues of still photographs, but I thought they would be similar, and who to talk to about temperature control for their negatives and such. But it was he who told me that there was this property in Richmond, where modular units were going to be built, and I remember saying to staff okay, they're going to kick us out of Marchant. We aren't going to be the only ones being kicked out, but they have to be obligated to find us other storage, they can't just put us out on the street. They own this collection, it's the university's, aside from the fact of all the money we put into it, so find out if that's a place that we can go. It's a little far. I mean it's not outrageous but we have to drive to the vaults anyway, it's a little further out, but if we're going to build from scratch, then what you want to do is get in there right away and figure out what you're going to need. Not only space for what you have but space to grow. Get the best possible climate situation you can, security, et cetera. So in a way, this is an opportunity. And I counted on our investment in Marchant to give us some clout when it came time to move.

So I remember having these discussions, but it didn't happen until very recently, and Richmond is where we are, and we have beautiful storage there. And credit has to go to Mona Nagai, our collection curator, for managing this project. We've got clean space; we've got a big space with room to grow. We've got a secure space with improvements that are extraordinary, but the temperature control is still not cold enough. It's stable, it's chilly but—and so the next thing was, there was still some space within our space, that you could close off and seal and make what is called cold storage, which is very cold. So I think as of sometime in the beginning of 2014, through a grant that Mona wrote, we now have the amount, so now we will have cold storage. That will be for films that have been preserved, negatives, originals, preservation elements.

So that brings you to preservation that's active, as opposed to passive, the storage is passive. Active preservation, which we began doing even before we had storage, is where you actually take the film elements and you address the need to strike new negatives, new positives, create what you call preservation masters, which are not used for screening, they are your reference for making future prints. So, because we have a special collection of avant-garde, American avant-garde, we decided essentially to concentrate active preservation in that area. There are very few archives in the United States addressing this and since we have accumulated a fairly good size collection, especially of Bay Area artists, that's where we focused. It also comes within a possible financial range. If you're Library of Congress or UCLA or George Eastman House, you can be spending \$35,000 and above on one feature film, to preserve it. Preservation, full preservation, is unbelievably expensive, and digital doesn't make it any cheaper.

11-00:52:19

Meeker:

Speaking of building something from scratch, I think I'd like to go back and ask you a little bit more about the building of the new theater when basically, you're giving, by architecture and urban design, that department, an empty box that you are to fill.

11-00:52:36

Kramer:

It was just, you know, what do you call it, post and lintel. It looked like an Erector Set. Concrete floor, steel posts, girders, metal roof.

11-00:52:42

Meeker:

What is it that you wanted to put into it? How did you determine what goes into it? Were there staff meetings to kind of come up with an idea, a wish list?

11-00:52:51

Kramer:

No, no.

11-00:52:54

Meeker:

How did it happen?

11-00:52:55

Kramer:

We kind of knew—you learn a lot, in film exhibition, what works and what doesn't work in a theater, and architects, even if they're hired to design theaters, are not the best designers of theaters. Projectionists are usually the best people to design the theater because projectionists and some exhibition curators, they understand sight lines, you don't have a pole in front of the screen.

11-00:53:30

Meeker:

[laughs]

11-00:53:31

Kramer:

Laugh, that can happen. You don't want a head in front of you. You have to have a line of sight that's between heads, you know? Do you have a flat floor or a high rake or a partial rake? There are different ways of doing it but each

way has accommodations in terms of how high the screen is, how high it is from the floor. Where is your booth? The beam of light coming from the projector, it has to be able to hit the center of the screen, but you have two projectors, and so they're coming at an angle. So you have to adjust things so that you don't have what they call keystoneing, and you end up with a trapezoidal image. You want a perfectly rectangular image, centered, and you don't want it too high and you don't want it too low. Everything is adjusted to sight. There's a kind of, I would say it's a relativity. Depending on how large the theater is and how the seating is arranged and the rake and where the booth is, all sorts of adjustments are made in order to get the desired effect of where the image appears on the screen and where that screen is in relationship to your eye, you the viewer. That's just one area.

The other major area is how dark is the space. When you turn off the lights to project the film, it should be really dark, and guess what? Fire marshals tell you to put exit signs. Well, don't have your exits next to the screen, because those exit signs are required to be at a certain luminosity and they throw light on the screen. It destroys the whole idea of the film as the light in the dark, so you have to think, where am I going to put the, exit places, and nobody thinks of that in architecture, they just say oh yeah, you need two exits, so there will be one there and then one there, and they put them right next to the screen.

Okay, what are disability issues? There's a minimum number of wheelchair places. Well, we always wanted to have more than the minimum because we're a university and Berkeley, we're supposed to provide the best access possible. So, can we get extra wheelchair seats? Most theaters grudgingly give the wheelchair access, and they either put it right up front, where nobody wants to sit, whether they're in a wheelchair or not, or only at the back, and some people need to sit further forward. So, are there any options? Can we arrange it so that we can have some wheelchair spaces in the middle, some at the back, and some closer to the front, depending on what that person needs. Very often, someone who comes to the show who's in a wheelchair, comes with a companion, so there has to be adjacent seating that's reserved for the companion. And there are safety issues for all your audience, lights to guide them to their seats, but which do not disturb the darkness of the room. All of these things have to be considered.

Sound? What are you going to do about treatment for the ceiling, the walls, the floor? Are you going to have—you know that the upholstered seats and carpeting, if you have carpeting on the floor, will absorb some sound, but you have to treat the walls, and when you erect one of these modular things, you end up with sheetrock. It's like don't put paint on that sheetrock that has a hard, glossy surface. You're going to be bouncing sound all over the place. Can you afford to put fabric, is there something else you can put on the walls, because otherwise you're going to have this terrible reverberation. So there are endless things to consider, but the people who know this are the projectionists, who I mean, I'm not necessarily saying the projectionists today

who are doing digital. I mean the old fashioned projectionists. Also how to prevent sound leaks from outside entering the theater space; that is an important issue.

As it turned out, our theater manager, Dennis Love, took charge. He and I communicated about our ideas but it was his baby from start to finish. He worked with the projectionist and professional theater designers, but he had to explain and say no, these are the basics we need. And then there's a budget to keep to. When we opened, we opened before all the seats were in because the seats weren't delivered in time. We had people sitting on, you know those little folding white chairs they put out for outdoor graduation?

11-00:59:31

Meeker:

Yeah.

11-00:59:36

Kramer:

Half the theater had the new seats and the other half of the theater had the folding white chairs. People were so sweet, but it was just laughable. We felt like we were in a tent. The front steps hadn't been finished, so there was yellow tape, you know, careful when you go up here. It looked like a construction site. The projection booth wasn't yet enclosed so a curtain with holes for projection was rigged. We opened, the film was on the screen, but the theater wasn't finished, and over the next few months they finally finished it and finally, the last seat went in. It was being trucked across the United States and I don't know what happened, but X number of chairs arrived but it wasn't enough, and then wait for the next. It was a kind of comedy of errors, but I think buildings are like that. People say they're open and then there's always last minute stuff to do, nothing is really quite finished.

So, it was fun, but Dennis Love has to take credit for whatever you call it, when you have a contractor project manager. Unofficially, he was our contractor, and he made everything happen correctly and he knew that you needed our projectionist and theater designers. I had had the experience, with the first renovation of the old theater, and I was told not to meddle, there was an architect. I meddled, because I walked into that theater and the architect was instructing that we would have the speakers here and here, and I said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "Well, the speakers will be on either side of the screen, exterior." I said, "No, this is not a PA system, this is a film sound system. The speakers are behind the screen," and he said, "Well, how can you hear it?" I said, "Because the screen is a sieve with very, very little holes in it. It's not this kind of screen." He thought there was going to be a pull-down screen. I said, "No, it's a permanent screen, it's gigantic, and it's made of a flexible material that is full of holes, and behind that is your entire speaker system." Stereophonic, with the woofers and all of that, because film sound comes from what's on the screen, not from out here. He did not know that it wasn't a PA system, and I had to kick and scream, because also, he had not left any space behind the screen. He had built a wall there. I said, no, it's

got to—there's a whole bunch of equipment that goes back there. There's a whole room behind the screen.

11-01:02:51

Meeker:

So when the new theater opened, do you feel like that you got everything out of that project that you needed?

11-01:02:58

Kramer:

No. Actually, the budget, we ran through the budget and there was no more money, and we weren't able to get the full acoustical treatment that we needed. So, it was less than ideal and my successor, Susan Oxtoby—I think a new person that comes in, will identify and say good God, this needs to be done, you know? Susan came in and said, "Oh, this sound is terrible," and she raised money and finished the acoustical surfacing of the walls and greatly improved that. And I am certain that our staff and audience will miss this theater when they first move into the new one next year.

11-01:03:37

Meeker:

I want to talk a little bit about staffing, and since you've been talking about the importance of a projectionist, maybe we can start there. In previous sessions, you had mentioned—I can't remember if it was when you were first going into a theater or something along those lines, but you said that the first person you always wanted to meet was the projectionist.

11-01:04:05

Kramer:

As a curator, as a programmer.

11-01:04:07

Meeker:

Oh, as a programmer. Can you explain why this is to a non-specialist? I think a lot of non-specialists like myself think that you just kind of reel the film in and press play and go out and have a cigarette.

11-01:04:23

Kramer:

Of course in a sense, that's what it is now. We joke that the popcorn guy presses a button. In fact, that sort of can be what it is, but he can't fix anything if it goes wrong. Well, we do have to distinguish between analog and digital, and so up until recently, projection, whether it was 35mm or 16mm or even a small gauge like eight or super eight, these are mechanical, it's mechanical equipment and there's an operator. What happens is that the film you are going to show at any given time goes to the booth, we refer to it as the booth, the projection booth, and the projectionist inspects it, to find out if it is in good order, because films that go through distributors are shown multiple times and they can come to you in good order or they can come to you with rips and tears or broken sprockets. The projectionist has to do a hand inspection, make repairs if necessary, before the film show starts. And then he or she is responsible for keeping the equipment in good order, clean, because if any dirt gets into the gate of the projector, it will not only look like something up on the screen but it will scratch the surface of the emulsion, and that's permanent damage. So, he has to make sure his equipment is clean. He

has to maintain it just like a car. It gets serviced, it has oil and parts and gears, and replace gears and fix all the multiple parts.

I remember, at least once a year, I think it was around Christmas holiday time, the projectionist would be stripping down the projectors and cleaning all their inside parts and rebuilding them, like some guy out in the backyard working on his car, you know, taking the engine out and whatever and doing all of that under the hood. Nobody goes under the hood any more in their cars. You don't touch it.

11-01:07:04

Meeker:

Like projectors.

11-01:07:06

Kramer:

Like a digital projector, there's nothing you can do if it breaks down. The technician from the company that sold you the equipment comes in and you get a whole new part or a whole new projector, but you pay for it. Our 35 projectors are the same projectors in the booth at the archive since 1971. That's better than a car, right, if you think of the mileage. The same projectors, different parts.

So your projectionist is in charge of the equipment, making sure it operates correctly and is maintained correctly, and knows how to fix things that might go wrong during the screening. A lamp can go out. Well, you can replace a lamp, but you have to have a spare. A projectionist tells you when you need to order, budget, to have spare bulbs. They're very expensive, very expensive, so you don't just have a lot of spare bulbs like you do at home, I mean these are very, very different kinds of bulbs. The projectionist tells you when you need to order more equipment, that's his area.

So, you need the projectionist for that, as well as for the proper projection of the actual film, keeping focus, making seamless changeovers, and to warn you ahead of time if there's going to be a problem with the projection, so that you can communicate that to the audience or if necessary, make a substitution. So it's a partnership. I mean, you don't have a good show if your projectionist is not at the top of his game, her game, and if you don't have a good relationship with them, they're not going to be well motivated. If they don't think you're supportive of them, got their back, because they're very sensitive. They know and you know that there is an art to projection. If a show doesn't go well, they take it to heart. They want to know that you're supportive, that they warned you, they told you, they alerted you. You need to be the buffer between them and the audience. They want to perform to the best of their capacity. They take pride in their work and they need to be acknowledged. They're not seen by the audience but they need to be acknowledged, because you don't have a show without them.

11-01:10:11

Meeker:

How many projectionists did you typically have on staff?

11-01:10:14

Kramer: Two.

11-01:10:15

Meeker: And these were full-time positions?

11-01:10:19

Kramer: Yes. So, from the time I started programming 35mm in my early programming, in 16mm film, I did the projection. But then I got a job where there was a trained projectionist—35mm and theatrical 16 equipment—and you get to know your projectionist and sometimes you have arguments—discussions, really. Sometimes, the projectionist recommends something and you say I don't know, I sort of like it better like that but that's okay, as long as there's respect.

11-01:11:21

Meeker: What would an argument be about, I'm curious.

11-01:11:24

Kramer: Oh, the speed we're going to run a film at. Silent films were run at variable speeds, you can control that. You know how sometimes, when you look at silent films, everybody's running around like...? That's not the way they were intended to be. Sometimes there was deliberate speeded up action for comic effect or, you know, like a chase scene. Sometimes that was deliberate, but most people moved at a normal speed. So you have to—it's trial and error because they didn't necessarily document. In other words, with some films there's data that has come down through history, that says that this film is meant to be projected at eighteen frames per second, or this film was meant to be projected at twenty frames per second. It depends. You have to know what it was shot at and what the director intended the projection speed to be, because there's the speed you shoot it at and then there's the projection speed, which might be determined by the theater owner. By the time the film gets to the theater, they don't listen necessarily, to what the director wanted, the theater has decided what speed. And if they had a double bill and the films are too long, or a triple bill, they'd speed it up. So there are enormous variations in the history of film projection, as to what speeds silent films are shot at, and meant to be shown at. So, in the archive, we tried to find a reasonably correct speed for each film, it differs with each film.

And so you project a reel and I would be up there, or other curators, depending on if it's their show. We'd be up there in the booth with the projectionist and we'd do trial and everything, and oh, what do you think? Looks pretty good. Oh, there's this area, you know, that looks a little fast, that looks a little sluggish. It's terrible if it's too slow and it's not so good if it's too fast, but the projectionist has eyes that I don't have. They look at things like smoke coming up out of an ashtray or a cloud moving in the sky, I mean their eyes are so beautifully tuned. So you can have a discussion around that.

11-01:13:50

Meeker:

It's interesting, this idea of chase scenes, for comedic effect they go faster. I always thought that that would have been built into the film itself, but it sounds like that's actually a role that the projectionist can play in adding their own take on it.

11-01:14:04

Kramer:

It's built into the film, in the sense that the film can be shot variably. But the curator, the projectionist, the theater manager, etc. can choose the speed at time of projection. With the coming of sound on film, everything is twenty-four frames per second and you can't change without distorting the sound. Well, in the U.S., sound arrives in 1927 or so, but it doesn't become the only way to produce films until several years later, and the U.S. is ahead of other countries. Japan, they were still making silent films in 1934, even though the sound technology exists, but they don't convert their whole production. So, you have staggered conversions across the world and different speeds at different times in different countries, so you have to study and try out to determine a reasonably accurate speed. My colleagues and I always pay attention to the speed at which silent films are presented today, in theaters, on TV, on DVDs, because it's often erroneous.

11-01:15:38

Meeker:

So, a more general question about staffing. I'm thinking about the period of time that you were director. Are there any important additions or transformations in the nature of the staff, the positions?

11-01:15:55

Kramer:

Well, we recognized—let's see, you know I'm going to get—I always have my first time at the archive and my second time at the archive, and I have to remember which one I did which in, because I do get the two careers confused.

11-01:16:06

Meeker:

Okay, okay.

11-01:16:08

Kramer:

I do.

11-01:16:10

Meeker:

No, that's understandable, that makes sense.

11-01:16:12

Kramer:

There's a two-year gap and then, you know, between one career, one life at the archive and then a second life at the archive.

11-01:16:20

Meeker:

Well, in some ways it doesn't really matter, because we're trying to document the whole history.

11-01:16:23
Kramer:

At some point, I recognized that we were going to be probably programming video, video tape, not digital. And I should mention that the museum very early on was not only showing but commissioning video art works for the galleries. The artists that had been working in film are turning to analog video because it's less expensive for them, the avant-garde artists. The Bay Area is a particularly important center for that and we need to be able to do that, and we're not quite sure how to do it, whether we will do it on monitors, because for some artists, they want the monitors, for other artists, they want the screen. You get a different kind of image quality in the projection on the screen than you do on the monitor, so there's all this kind of artistic, aesthetic discussion, along with the technological discussion going on within the art community, within the film community. To be prepared for that, there's no one solution at that point, you have to be flexible. So I start bringing in guest video curators to do video shows, because I don't have the technical knowledge. I use people in the community who are advanced already in video technology, and they help me. They set up equipment per show, depending on what the artist needs.

We make some expenditures on some very expensive, very large monitors. At one point we divide the theater up into quadrants, so we have four seating areas and four monitors that are linked up to run simultaneously, because people have to be near the monitors. And then with others, we'd project onto the screen, but we don't have a very good projector. So eventually it evolves, and maybe that's—I think it's in my directorship period, not in my just curatorship period. I think I finally thought enough of this piecemeal, we're in for the long haul, and I hire a video curator, Steve Seid, who's about to retire now.

Of course, it did continue to evolve and then he becomes the expert on the equipment. He becomes, in a sense another—he's a curator and a projectionist because he's the expert on the video equipment, and he has to keep up with that. And then we go from analog to digital and this gets very expensive, and then there's more fundraising. And there's built-in obsolescence, just like in computers, which we don't have in mechanical equipment. We're facing budgetary issues that we never had to deal with before because our equipment is going to last only five years. I mean, this is unheard of. So, the ballgame changes.

But then the video curator is also doing film, because the boundaries disappear. So, a position that starts out specializing in video, ends up embracing both film and video. Many positions often, as technology evolves, also have to fold in new, shall we say jobs? They kind of get swallowed up, because you just can't go out and hire people for everything. There's a learning curve with the job description and the personnel rules. You're not supposed to go beyond the job description, but there's a creepy thing that happens, it creeps and spills, and the next thing you know, people are being reclassified because suddenly they're doing things that were never in their job

description, but because also, the work evolves, the technology impacts people's jobs. Every one of us, when we got computers, we had to pick up skills we didn't have, but we also weren't able to pick up all the skills we needed, so we had to have IT people. That's new staffing. Then, you have to have more IT people because keeping up with just maintaining everybody's computer, and some people are doing much more advanced things with their computers than others. The people who are cataloging in the computer, that is very different than the maintenance for me and my email, you know. So everything changes with the introduction of technological changes.

11-01:22:18

Meeker:

Another of the big changes that you've talked about before is the growth of PFA, the need to do evermore fundraising. Did you ever hire a development staff person?

11-01:22:38

Kramer:

No. The museum has a development office. Most museums do because they're endlessly fundraising. Now, we make use of that development staff for grant writing. Well, I had to make use of the development staff when I made the ask from a major donor because I'm not allowed to do that on my own.

11-01:23:16

Meeker:

Yes, I know that from here.

11-01:23:17

Kramer:

That's a no-no. It's not your money, it's not your little fief. No, it's the museum, it's the university, there are all sorts of levels of approval and control. You don't just do that. So, in writing, say that proposal, the boilerplate would be written by the development staff. Then I go into the narrative and the fine language, because I speak the film language, and I would say we don't need to explain this to the donor, he or she will understand that, so we can just jump to this and say this. I absolutely needed the (development) department of the museum to first of all, they have to approve it, copies have to go to the university, it goes through sponsored projects, and we're writing NEA grants, we're writing NEH grants, as well as cultivating donors. They're not easy to write and basically the curators, we give the content, the substance and the narrative. A boilerplate is created for us by experienced development people who know all the tricks of that trade. We used to call it grantsmanship. I mean we learn it too but that's what they do and do it very well, and then you go in and say for this particular ask, this is the language we should be using. That's another kind of partnership because we're asked, as curators, to serve on juries for the NEA and NEH, so we know what it's like at the other end, getting these grants. Does the jury read the whole grant?

11-01:25:32

Meeker:

Yeah.

11-01:25:33

Kramer:

What catches their eye, what kind of language is clear? What kind of language is pretentious and full of bullshit?

11-01:25:42

Meeker:

Hyperbole.

11-01:25:43

Kramer:

You know, an organization making claims that others in the field will know are false claims. You can't write a grant and say you're the only, the best in the western world. Development people are good at the superlative language and hyperbole but you know who you are and you don't want to make claims that will come back at you and make you feel ridiculous, and you certainly won't get the grant. It's a partnership, but thank God for the development people who write those boilerplates because you don't have the time, you're doing other things. You don't have the time to spend doing all of that. You need somebody to take some of that work off of you. And then come the reports and the reports can be really awful, because it's not only gathering statistics a year out or two years out or four years out, depending on how long the grant is, but there's a narrative, proving you did what you said you were going to do, and you need to write that narrative. You need feedback from the people who are using the program you funded. You need letters of recommendation. You need people saying oh, thank goodness for that program, it was essential to my research or my book couldn't have been published without the blah-blah-blah, whatever, but you have to gather all of that, write a narrative, all the statistics, and show where every dollar went, and that takes a group of people doing it.

11-01:27:50

Meeker:

Again, on fundraising. I want to quote something you said early, in the Kathy Geritz phase of the interview, and you said, "What was hard for me was, when we entered that period of grant-writing, there were so many grants being offered for doing things we didn't want to do. That was the hardest thing for me, the pressure to do that, because I kept thinking we're getting away from our mission, we're getting away from our mission." You mentioned one grant, I think by the Lila Wallace Foundation, and I don't know if you want to talk about that grant in particular, but I'm wondering if you can just talk about, in general.

11-01:28:26

Kramer:

That was just one example. I mean we did it, we did it, but it was not something we would normally—it was a program we would not normally have done or considered important to do.

11-01:28:38

Meeker:

What was it, do you recall?

11-01:28:42

Kramer:

I may have gotten it confused with another grant. There were so many grants at that period. We had an excellent deputy director of the museum who really knew how to raise money for the museum. She had her fingers out there in the world of foundations. This is another area for the development staff, researching foundation grants. These were not so much individual donors, these were foundations, that you could interpret this description guideline as some way, we could design a project that would fit, but it's sort of that thing of wagging the tail, you know?

11-01:29:43

Meeker:

The tail that wags the dog.

11-01:29:44

Kramer:

Exactly. And when does it fit? It was a really intense period, I mean she was great at getting money in, but some of the grants worked much better for the museum gallery exhibitions. They didn't apply that easily to what we did, so we had to scramble. I remember all of us brainstorming in sessions; if we did this do you think—would we have to push this program aside? What I saw was, we were chasing the money and then fitting exhibition to the money, as opposed to saying this is the exhibition we deem important for us to do, now how can we raise the necessary funds to do it. So it's the tail wagging the dog.

11-01:30:57

Meeker:

Did you come up with a process then, that allowed you to make the right decisions when it came down to making these difficult decisions?

11-01:31:06

Kramer:

Who knows if you made the right decisions? Ultimately, you have to make a decision. Sometimes in retrospect, you wish you had done something differently.

11-01:31:15

Meeker:

I'm asking this because this situation is not unique to PFA. And it's not also not just unique to film presenting. I think it's about the nonprofit sector in general.

11-01:31:29

Kramer:

I think it is.

11-01:31:31

Meeker:

I'm just wondering what kind of insight you might have from being presented with this, recognizing what was happening and then having to respond to it in some fashion.

11-01:31:42

Kramer:

Well, I talked about it. I didn't keep it to myself, I talked about it to everybody. I talked about it to our wonderful deputy director and director and they understood, but it was sort of like this is our necessity now, there are crises in funding and it's not business as usual. It became a discussion with

colleagues. I started talking about it. We were now in FIAF, and I would talk about this to colleagues in archives around the world, because for example, our form of funding is very different than say what existed in Europe. Europe is now finding they have to do things like this. They're appalled. My European colleagues are now finding, like in France, what do you mean we are not going to be budgeted and funded by the government? We are going to have to go out and get private funders?

11-01:32:53

Meeker:

And they think it's beneath them, to have to do that.

11-01:32:55

Kramer:

They don't even know how to do it, you know, it's a whole other—and they actually are asking Americans, okay, so how do you do it? I remember explaining to somebody in France, who was head of a major institution, "Our salaries aren't guaranteed." He said, "What are you talking about?" I said well, every year there's a budget that our institution—I don't mean the archive, that the museum has. That budget comes from the university and there can be some pretty lean years, and there is X amount of salary and benefits money, but salaries go up. You can't say, well we don't have money to pay a cost of living increase. If the university says this year it's a cost of living increase, then it's across the board in everybody's salary. Well, but that hasn't been budgeted. You have to actually go out and raise the money for your salaries and if you don't have enough, then positions have to be eliminated. In France, you work in essentially, a civil system where you're all functionaries. There's no question that your position is salaried, guaranteed. You can't lose your position unless you do something criminal, and even then it's kind of hard.

The way they lose positions, if they're at a certain level when the government changes, that government puts in other people at the top positions and the top goes. I mean that happens with government changes. The other people, they're just civil servants. That's changing in a lot of countries now because of financial crises.

11-01:35:17

Meeker:

How do you think this financing mechanism for PFA influenced the kind of programming that was done?

11-01:35:27

Kramer:

Well, you have a budget and you have to try to raise money through admissions, you have to make decisions. Is this the time where we raise admissions? You hate raising admissions, but are we going to have to look at upping the admission. We have endless meetings about admission cost. Do we raise the admission in all categories or only in certain? Do we keep the seniors and the UC students at the same rate, but only raise the general public? Do we raise membership and if you raise, by how much? Look at what the theaters are charging. We always try to be less than what the commercial theaters

would charge, so if they're raising their rates, we could creep up a little bit, as long as we keep underneath them, that kind of thing. So, you make decisions about admissions.

Meanwhile, shipping costs go up, so we're going to have to watch very carefully, our shipping costs. We're going to have to reduce the number of international shipments, or rob Peter to pay Paul. Essentially, it was kind of rob Peter to pay Paul. We'll reduce the number of international guests we invite. We'll reduce the number of national guests we invite. We will not put people up in this hotel, they will have to be in that hotel. I mean, everything, you go over every line item to see. We used to look at the budget and say okay, 10 percent reduction, line item, line item, this is where, and in some you can say, I can do more than 10 percent here, so can I have 5 percent there. You play that game and how it washes, and then you do a review at three months, you do another review at six months, because always the threat over you is somebody might lose a job. That's the biggest threat, so you adjust.

You cut back on the number of programs. How to cut back on the number of exhibition programs without anybody noticing, that was always the mantra. Don't make it look like you're closing shop. It would be like going into a store and you think, the shelves are empty, they're going out of business. You see the signs, right? They're not restocking. Well, people can tell, when they look at the program, what is all this? How come they're not open on Mondays? You give it a, it's okay, hardly anybody wants to go out to the movies on Mondays. We're just concentrating our efforts on better days. You can spin it all kinds of ways. You change the paper of the publication; you go from a monthly publication to a bimonthly publication. Everything gets snipped at, pared down, but you do rob Peter to pay Paul. You've set that budget and then all during the year, you're looking at it and you come together, like a curator would come to me and say, we really want to do this program, and say it's a good program, a great program, we should do it, but it's going to involve this. I say well, okay, let's see what that costs. I know a place we can cut in another program, go for it, we'll just cut back someplace else, it will come out in the wash. Those are the kinds of decisions you make, because that's a better program. This other one you were thinking of doing, we can forget about that one and make adjustments. But, yeah, you're constantly watching the bottom line.

11-01:40:07
Meeker:

I have mostly exhausted my questions. I have a few sort of final questions, unless there's anything else you would like to cover. One, and this is a quote that you said, I think in one of your Kathy Geritz interviews, and I suspect you said it somewhat glibly, but I still want to ask you to comment on it. You said, "Lucky I wasn't fired many times." What do you mean by that, can you unpack that a little bit?

11-01:40:37

Kramer:

I have spoken. I'm not the most—I don't know how say it, discrete is not the right word, I can be discrete, I can keep secrets.

11-01:40:48

Meeker:

Politic?

11-01:40:52

Kramer:

What is it? I sometimes will say something before reflecting; no, the word I want is “argumentative.” I had really nice relationships with the directors. There were one, two, three —I worked under, I would say three and a half directors, because there was a period when we didn't have a director and I was sort of working under interim acting directors. So, I was very used to having to kind of meet a new director who might have a different vision, and explain what we did, why we did it, what our history was, what we'd like to continue to do. Every new director, and this is not unique to a museum, would have a new vision and would see areas they might want to change, or priorities. So, I always felt it was my role to defend PFA in a way, to explain it, defend it, and make our successes be their successes, that if we got commendation, if we got money in our fundraising efforts, if we got praise, that it was their praise. In other words, they were in charge of an institution that brought them good news. If we misbehaved, if we did something really bad and got slammed for it, that would be an embarrassment to them. If you're a director of an institution, all parts need to perform well and if they don't, it's your job to fix it. So, essentially my approach was, you know, explain, defend. Defending, I could be kicking and screaming. I might lose, but I was going to defend, and I made no bones about that and I didn't hide my feelings when I thought decisions were being made that were not in our best interests. I felt that I was working not just for our best interests, but for the best interests of the museum, but if it were perceived that I was only working for the best interests of the archive, the argument was if the archive is at its best, it is a feather in the cap of the museum. As a result, I sometimes was in strong disagreement and I always thought, what's the worst that can happen? I could get fired for disagreeing. It's not a bad thing. If I were to be fired for that, I wouldn't feel ashamed. If I were to be fired for doing a poor job, I would be ashamed, but if someone wanted to demote me, fire me, punish me, for trying to do a good job and explaining and arguing about the way to do it, then so be it, and sometimes, I was very, very stubborn.

11-01:45:06

Meeker:

Do you have any final thoughts, anything that you would like to leave us with, or maybe what you just said was good.

11-01:45:13

Kramer:

I think I was very lucky to have had different, but understanding, directors, who were assets in the long run, for my own work. They helped me. We may have had the arguments, but I think I am very lucky, because we had good relationships. Most directors last at least ten years, so let's put it this way, I

had ten good years and more under some, under each director, and we have all remained—those that are alive, we have remained good friends and I value that, and I think having a good working relationship with your superiors and your fellow colleagues is really nice. It's something that you walk away with when you retire or leave, that's a feel good thing.

So, I think I'm very lucky. I had an interesting job, it wasn't always easy, it sometimes wore me out. I didn't achieve all the things I wanted to achieve, I made some bad mistakes, and I wasn't as prepared as I should have been in knowledge, for some of the things for which I had responsibility, someone else probably could have done a much better job, but I don't have very many regrets. I had a good long run and I'm very pleased that the people who have carried on after me or have succeeded me in positions have done a fabulous job. I couldn't have wanted it any different.

Kathy asked me an interesting question in, I think the last session, something about while you're working, to think about how it will carry on without you. That was always in my mind; at some point I won't be here, people need to be prepared to be able to do everything without me. The best directors are the ones who are not missed, I believe in that. If you've done your job right, it goes on without you, it doesn't miss a beat. Did that cover it?

11-01:48:39

Meeker: I think so.

[End of Interview]