DAVID HOFFMAN MOMA HISTORY INTERVIEWS

INTERVIEW WITH:	**EILEEN BOWSER (EB)**
INTERVIEWERS:	**CARL COLBY (CC); RUTH CUMMINGS (RC)**
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EB: I started just working part time in various departments my first year, then there was an opening in the Film Department in the following year. I've been in this department about 29 years.

CC: So you've seen a lot of changes occur?

EB: Yes, indeed. I think I've been here longer than anyone else, including, to my shock, I realized the other day, our founder, Iris Barry, who I always think of as the great old days of the Department, and then I realize I've been here much longer than that.

CC: Did you know her?

EB: I met her once, but she had already retired when I joined the Department. I began working with Richard Griffith, who succeeded her.

CC: So how exactly did the bridge go? Was it Iris Barry, Richard—?

EB: Iris Barry, Richard Griffith became curator. There never was a director in his time, he was just the curator.

CC: And Margareta [Akermark] worked with him?

EB: Yes, and she was in the circulation department and also worked as—what was her title? Assistant Director or something like that. Then as director we had Willard van Dyke who came; he brought in Donald Ritchie as curator, who didn't stay very long. And when he left we had Ted Perry, and during that time I became a curator and Adrienne Mancia became a curator.

RC: At that time, your position was somewhat unique. I know that curators of film at the Cinémathèque in Paris existed, and so forth, but how was your experience of getting involved here? Did you know of the Museum for a long time?

EB: I was trained as an art history major. Of course, in my day, there weren't any film courses anyway, but I wasn't particularly involved with film; it was history of art. And I applied to all of the art museums in New York when I arrived, and the Museum was the first place to have an opening. So it was by chance that I fell into film. As I said, there was an opening as secretary to the curator, Richard Griffith, after I had been here about a year. And it was really under him that I learned everything I know about film and became something of a specialist. But my education has all been within the film archive. And I still think it's the best education one can get, because the films and the materials are here. It's better than a university can offer.

RC: Oh sure.

CC: You're the Chief Archivist?

EB: That's right. I am in charge of the collection itself. Adrienne Mancia is in charge of the programming, exhibition area.

CC: So you actually look after the prints themselves and the negatives.

EB: That's right.

CC: And you're a lot more aware of what's here and what's not here than most anyone else?

EB: I'm responsible for acquiring the films, storing them, cataloguing them, preserving them, and then making them accessible to users.

CC: So you make the judgments as to what to purchase, too?

EB: Yes.

RC: Do you come across the same type of criticism as, let's say, the visual arts departments do from artists, from filmmakers who say, "Hey, you're not showing our films."

EB: I think there was such a criticism in the time of Richard Griffith, when really the independent film movement in this country was just beginning, and perhaps the Film Department was a little bit slow to respond to that. But I think that was soon overcome, and I don't really hear that any more. I think we do pretty well [and] keep up with what's going on and we do purchase and show a lot of independent, avant-garde work.

CC: What you don't purchase you show anyway.

EB: Yes.

RC: So you've really maintained a leading edge, then, in the area of film.

EB: This was done very early by Iris Barry, who collected all the avant-garde work of the twenties that she could from France.

CC: Would you say you're keeping up the momentum of [INAUDIBLE: 0:04:25] 20 years ago?

EB: Being contemporary?

CC: Well, not just contemporary but in terms of being able to buy things and getting things from studios, or getting things from private collectors?

EB: Yes, I think it's increasing. It's a new generation in the studios and it becomes a little easier for them to understand what we're doing. Archives have been around long enough that they begin to see the advantages, so we don't have as much difficulty as they did in the beginning. We still have some, of course, and money's always in short supply.

CC: I guess it's also tough because they still look at a lot of their old films as being profitable, so if they give them to you, then it's like giving it away; right?

EB: Well, they have that illusion, of course; it's not. By giving it to us they're protected.

CC: Do they have their own archives?

EB: Very often films that we have acquired, the owners have often had to come back to us years later to get copies, because they no longer had any material.

CC: What about United Artists or MGM's library or—? They bought United Artists—or Fox or any—?

EB: MGM was the one—the first company to really begin to open up a program to preserve the films, but even that was rather late, and a lot of films had been lost by then.

CC: So it's pretty sketchy?

EB: And these days, I'm sure they do a much better job, but it was just too late for many of them when they discovered [them], and in a lot of cases they had to go back to archives. For years, of course, there wasn't that value in the backlog, not until the sale of the backlog to television, that they began to really have some interest in the older films. But I think it has gradually changed their attitude a lot to what film archives have been doing.

CC: So you depend a lot on direct donations by studios, or by independents?

EB: Mostly we depend on donations. We have no regular budget for film acquisition, but we do get occasional money from individuals and we get grants from foundations or, [the] National Endowment for the Arts has had a program for the living American artists, and all those means we've used. We're not only getting from the studios, we're getting them from private collectors, we're getting them from other archives.

RC: Are there a great many private collectors of film right now? Has that expanded since the Museum's championing?

EB: I think there always have been. It's through the private collectors that a lot of films survived.

CC: Do have any particular stories you could tell about some remarkable—?

RC: Saves of film?

CC: Saving something out of a trash can or something of that sort?

EB: There used to be a lot of stories about the early days. Mr. [Bill] Jamison went around and really did find things from garbage cans and so on. These days people tend to call us up and say, 'Well, we're cleaning out somebody's attic or

barn and we found this film and we don't know if it has any value.' It still happens.

RC: Have you found some spectacular things that way?

EB: Yes; I have a difficult time thinking of specific films in that connection.

CC: When a studio goes bankrupt or is sold to somebody else, I guess sometimes it's difficult to keep track, or when the films are all locked tight up in someone's estate, so it's hard to get.

EB: Sometimes people have films left in a storage house but haven't paid the bills and have disappeared. And sometimes those have been turned over to us. Of course, we get such films without any rights, and it's our task to clear the rights. But our first mission is to preserve the film, and then we can worry about clearing the rights when we have somewhere to do something like show it.

CC: So you'd say a few stories form the old days about rescuing, that you can't really think of any? Because we were thinking that might make a nice little sequence in the film that we're planning. It's not as if we're going to do something on every department; it's more a remembrance of the past, bringing it up to the present, and then little anecdotes told about each department. Or we might want to say—someone like in the Photography Department, John Szarkowski, would maybe show us something about photographs and an exhibit he's doing.

EB: Sure.

CC: If you were to tell us a particular story of a particular save, or getting the rights to show a little bit of that film.

RC: We know that people have come here, I mean, famous directors who are really famous. Were you ever in contact with [Martin] Scorsese or Lillian Gish?

EB: Yes, when they—[we were their] first contact, especially with today's young directors, a lot of them were—grew up in our auditorium; it was where they got their film education, and Scorsese's certainly one of those.

RC: Sure.

EB: And Francis Ford Coppola, also. As soon as the rights to *The Conversation* came back to him, he promptly gave us some prints, and then asked MGM [to] please allow us to have the two *Godfather*s, which they did do. So they really have an interest in the archives. Stanley Kubrick's another one who grew up in our auditorium, and he saw to it that we received not only 35 millimeter prints of all his films for our showing in the auditorium, but when I told him about our Film Study Center where researchers and students look at films on 16 mm, we also got 16 mm copies for that purpose.

RC: So it sounds like there's a great loyalty to the place that's done good turns to...

EB: Mm-hm. I think it's the new generation of directors who really do know their film heritage. And it shows in their work. Nevertheless, let's not forget, to go back either. Charles Laughton, who when he directed, the only film he ever directed, *Night of the Hunter*, he first came here and he looked at films directed by D. W. Griffith in our projection room, and I'm sure it must be there that he decided to cast Lillian Gish in her fantastic performance in *Night of the Hunter*. So yes, this kind of inter-relationship has been going on probably ever since our beginnings.

CC: What about European—? You promote European filmmakers also.

EB: We consider ourselves an international collection. It has been from the beginning. There were times when we had to concentrate a lot on American film because there were not other active archives preserving film. It's certainly every country's duty, first of all, to protect their own cultural heritage. But these days we do have—the Library of Congress, for example, has become very active in saving American film and it's their mission, so we feel that we can begin to redress the balance a little and are trying now to again flesh out our international collections.

RC: If you had a blank check, what are the areas that you would see are focuses for the collection? Filling in gaps, or would you like money to show current films, or—?

EB: I would like to fill in gaps which exist in all areas. Now we're doing Rediscovering French Cinema [*Rediscovering French Film, Part I*], and I'm making notes every day about good copies of certain French classics that we don't have but would

like to have in the collection. We did go through the collection a few years ago and pinpoint some of those gaps, and I have what I call "The Want List," and have been working away at it and made good headway, although we're far from where we should be.

RC: How are the Trustees that work with you in support of what it is that you want? Do you have conflicts with certain areas, or are they overall—?

EB: We have a trustee Film Committee which is excellent and very helpful indeed. And I can't say we've had any conflicts. They're not only helping us with acquisitions, but also with the preservation, which is our priority here.

RC: Because we've heard stories sometimes of curators in the visual arts saying oh, they really wanted this painting but they couldn't get quite past the Trustee Committee.

EB: That doesn't happen in film, and I must say, in the past, one reason it doesn't happen is that it takes time to look at a film. You can look at a painting and it can be fast in front of your eyes, and you say, I don't like it or I do, but with film, I've never found a trustee yet that would sit down and look at everything we wanted to acquire.

RC: Aha. [Laughing]

EB: That's a very practical reason. But I won't say there aren't trustees who aren't very knowledgeable about film because several of them are—excellent [INAUDIBLE: 0:14:00] I can talk to them.

CC: What's the greatest disappointment about the Department in your mind? Is it really true that 50 percent of the things that you already have in stock now are in danger of disintegrating? And is it a very, very terrible situation?

EB: Yes, indeed, and that's—I think [what is] much more urgent for us than it is with the other departments is preservation.

CC: Well why would you say it?

EB: Because the deterioration is much more drastic of those made before 1950, [they] were made on nitrate stock, which deteriorates just through time. Its rate

of deterioration depends on how well it was processed to begin with, like with a photograph, but also conditions of storage space.

CC: So we're in danger of losing lots of sound pictures, too as well?

EB: That's right because films were still being made on nitrate up to 1950.

CC: How many films would you say are in the collection now and how many are let's say imminent danger, in say, the next year or the next few years?

EB: We have about 8,000 titles here.

CC: Altogether?

EB: Yes. And I'm not sure that I can estimate very easily how much of that is still on nitrate, but of the nitrate, we have protected slightly more than half. The thing is that the money it costs us to do this, we now have to save five or 10 times as much, because the costs have escalated so much for laboratory work.

CC: What does it cost let's say to make a new 35 negative; is that what you have to do?

EB: Yes.

CC: How much would that cost, let's say, for a feature?

EB: Okay, well, when we have to make a negative, then we also have to make an answer print, or we don't know what is the quality until we've properly preserved it. So these days it can cost us $4,000 or $5,000 to make—

CC: To make one print?

EB: To make all of the materials—to be sure that the film is properly preserved.

CC: Is there any way that a film laboratory could take let's say a tax deduction, or could that be a tax-deductible gift, if they were doing that for you?

EB: I don't think film laboratories generally are in that kind of a position to make tax deductions. They do preservation work for us and for the other archives, but it's not a profitable business, and if each of those laboratories didn't have other kinds of businesses: one is a stock shot house, another one deals primarily with the industry—they wouldn't be able to do our work. Our work helps them in some

ways because they have the necessary equipment that enables them to do the jobs that are commercial.

CC: So you'd say, what, out of 8,000 titles, maybe 200? Or 1,000? Or 100? About how many films are in sudden danger?

EB: Are in danger? Maybe a quarter of them.

CC: About 2,000 films?

EB: Yes.

CC: All the way from little one-reelers to 1940 film noir films?

EB: I'm speaking only of nitrate now. I didn't finish that because after that period, we have color becoming dominant in the industry, and the Technicolor prints are quite stable but once Eastmancolor came in the early fifties, those colors are fading rapidly.

CC: The Eastmancolor ones?

EB: Yes. And we'll address those, especially the early Eastman Kodak films. Some of them aren't even worth saving, but...

RC: Is Kodak involved through your insistence at all in trying to figure out how to preserve these?

EB: Yes, Kodak has done a lot of work in recent years to make more permanent color stock. The type of stock technically, that they make, Eastmancolor, as opposed to Technicolor, is certainly—it's got dyes; they certainly will fade, but they have been producing stocks in very recent years that are much more long-lasting that will not fade so quickly. And I believe they're still working on this problem.

RC: So do you think that the fact of the Museum having a film department, making it museum-quality art, spurred the industry to consider preservation?

EB: No, I don't think so. The one thing that really got Kodak to react after years of the archives worrying about color fading was Scorsese's campaign. That, I think, really moved them, because it really got public attention.

CC: He's been a real champion of that.

EB: Yes, he's done a marvelous job with that, and we're terribly grateful to him.

RC: Interest that evolved from the Museum, so that's a connection.

EB: Yes, yes.

CC: So there are color pictures that are in trouble and also—?

EB: Yes.

CC: So it's not just something that could be done; that would be terrific. But if nobody does anything, nobody contributes to this, it actually starts deteriorating before your very eyes.

EB: With color, we're where we were with nitrate film when we began. Now's the time when they're going to look back and criticize us for not saving it.

CC: Transferring it over?

EB: Well, we have—

CC: Is it the negative that deteriorates as much as the prints?

EB: The negative is at a slower rate than the positive. One reason that we have had such fast fading color stocks is that, as far as the industry is concerned, the life of the print is one or two years out there anyway, so why do they worry about [it] when it's going to fade, when it comes to a projection print. But in fact that's what the archives very often end up with is a used projection print.

CC: Maybe they should work it out so that they give you at least one good print.

EB: We're hoping very much by education, by constant publicity, to get the companies to consider spending just those few extra pennies, if not on all prints, at least on a print to be deposited in an archive. That seems to me essential. If nothing else, the copyright print that's deposited in the Library of Congress must be on a low-fade stock.

CC: Who are your helpers, as institutions; Library of Congress? Eastman House?

EB: Yes, we work with the George Eastman House, with the Library of Congress, the American Film Institute.

CC: USC?

EB: It's UCLA that has the major archive on the west coast.

CC: Anybody else?

EB: Well, and the National Archives, which also has an audio-visual section. Those are the major ones. There are a number of smaller ones, but these are the ones that are really working.

RC: And how about internationally?

EB: And internationally, of course we were founders of the International Federation of Film Archives, which now has about 75 members and observers in all continents. It's a very important and active organization.

CC: It's been a good cross-fertilization, too, with Moscow and everyone else.

EB: It's the only international organization I know of that is truly international because it reaches across all political barriers and also is truly active. There's nothing figurehead about it.

CC: Do you go to a lot of conferences?

EB: I'm very active in the FIAF, and for many years I was head of the documentation commission, and I've been on the executive committee for many years, and served as a vice president as well.

CC: So whatever political problems, you're still talking to Czechs and Poles and Russians and—?

EB: By all means. We sit down at the table together as fellow workers, and East Germany sits down with West Germany. It's wonderful.

RC: Does the Museum serve as an ambassador? Is the Museum weighed more than other institutions in this organization? And do people look to the Modern as a leader?

EB: Well yes, there's no doubt, because we're one of the founding members and because of the long time we have been active, and the Museum lends a great prestige in this field; no doubt about it.

CC: So compared, even, to Eastman House and all of the other archives, AFI, et cetera, are you one of the very, very top ones, or are you the biggest, or—?

EB: We're not the biggest by any means, but I think all those archives you mentioned would acknowledge that we're the most prestigious.

CC: An excellent collection.

EB: That we have collected the most important films, and in terms of the best [INAUDIBLE: 0:22:54].

CC: What about the Library of Congress? Wouldn't they have a phenomenal collection if they have—? And I've made films, too, I've given them copies because I have to and actually, I don't mind because I know that it'll be somewhere. Don't they have now quite a substantial collection, or does it only go back so far?

EB: I imagine they're one of the largest in the world at this point.

CC: Because everybody who makes a film has to send—

EB: But the point is that they didn't keep films for so many years that were submitted for copyright. They have a very interesting collection from the beginning to about 1912 called the Print Collection, because in the early days, the copyright people gave in copies on paper like photographs. And then after that law was changed, they could take in nitrate. But Congress never awarded them enough money for them to really build an archive, so they didn't keep them. And [it was] in the forties only [that] they began gradually to keep a few, and each year since then it's increased and increased until now they keep a very large proportion of what's copyrighted. So in the last few years they've grown enormously, and the American Film Institute has made it their task to try to fill in the gaps in between 1912 and the forties with whatever they could find and they're doing a very good job of scouring the private collectors [INAUDIIBLE: 0:24:15].

CC: Is it sort of funny sometimes that, let's say, the French would have terrific prints of American films of the forties, and you might have let's say good documentaries or experimental things of the surrealist period that the French don't have? Is there often that kind of thing going on?

EB: Oh yes, indeed, because we were founded so early and we swept through Europe collecting materials, and some of those archives weren't founded even till

after the war, and so they did have to come back to us for materials. And some of those were sent to us deliberately to protect them during the War.

RC: Do you have any stories of Alfred accompanying Iris on these scavenging for film trips? Was he involved or was he just really a supporter of the whole [thing]?

EB: It was his conception, certainly, to begin with. The whole Museum of Modern Art, after all, was a product of the modern art movement of the twenties. And if you look at that in the twenties, you'll see that film was, at that time, very much discovered to be a modern art form. So Alfred always had in his mind to have a department of film, but he didn't really find the support for it for some years. And then he got Iris Barry on the staff. I think she was in the Library; so many people did—and there was a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to start it.

RC: But you're saying that in the beginning there really wasn't the money around, so she came as a labor of love like a lot of people?

EB: I believe so, yes.

RC: It was just a pittance, what she was getting. But she sure kicked it off and—was there then a period when the Department really took off? When was its heyday when it really kicked in, if it was slow in the beginning? How many years was it a struggle, would you say, before—?

EB: I would say it's always a struggle and it's still a struggle. She acquired a lot of films in her first two or three years, but not because she had the money to do it, but simply because she got donations. And in some ways, in some areas, it was easier because people didn't think the old films had any value.

RC: Did you know her then?

EB: No, no. I've only met her once when she had to come back here to renew her passport, and she was here about three days.

RC: Well it seems like the early founders in all the departments were really special people, and by hook or by crook they came together and really did wonderfully. Do you have any stories, or, what was her reputation? Do you know any personal traits?

EB: Oh yes, I've heard that she was quite a formidable woman—that the staff went in fear and trembling to her office. I don't know. But they also admired her very much, of course.

CC: Is it also true that if—? Let's say, if out of your own collection things are in great danger of disintegrating and that's why you have a very important mission, is it also true that you could say that just irregardless, about half the films that ever were made in America have just been now lost altogether?

EB: Well, the estimates are that half of the films made before 1950 are lost forever.

CC: And that would include—because it's funny, I think a lot of people who don't know silent film, and they think of it as just something—you know, who've never really seen *Broken Blossoms* or they think it's just some sort of old rinky-dink thing, they don't see it as it being a great art form in and of itself. But it really starts to make sense to them when you start telling them that a lot of good sound pictures—and I don't know who would have made them, but maybe RKO or [INAUDIBLE: 0:27:42]. I'm sure there must be some [INAUDIBLE: 0:27:45] movies that are now gone or whatever because of that mismanagement.

EB: Most anybody's filmography that goes back far enough will have big gaps in it.

CC: It's also pretty extraordinary to look at something like John Ford's biography or King Vidor's or anyone, where you look at it and there are a lot of pictures that you would recognize. But then the further you go back, there are scores of pictures—someone like John Ford would have directed perhaps, what; 80 films? And nowadays you look at someone like Scorsese; he's working hard but it's pretty remarkable to see

EB: Yes, the pace certainly came down from what it was when you go back to the early teens, and the people were making a film a week.

CC: You're pretty heartened then by the response of not only the new generation of studios but also the filmmakers and the film-going public now, that they are interested in older pictures, foreign pictures.

EB: Oh yes, we certainly notice the difference. Lately there's been a rediscovery of the film even before Griffith, the so-called primitive era. FIAF, the International Federation, did an important symposium in 1978 in Brighton, England, just on

those films, where we brought them together from all over the world—everything in the archives that existed from that period. And a lot of historians on this side of the Atlantic and that, sat down and looked at them and produced important papers. And at the time we really felt—well, this is simply for specialists, but the more these films get out to a general audience, the more we find people are vitally interested and amused and entertained by them.

CC: Like the early history of photography, too, a lot of people are extremely curious as to—it's a record of the times.

EB: I think enough time has elapsed, you know? You always look back at the previous generation's work, in film, at least. I don't know about the other art forms, but because film is so much a popular entertainment form, that people feel sort of embarrassed by them and think, oh, isn't that funny; how strange I was moved by that. But then another generation goes by, and you look at it, and you make great discoveries, and you think, no, that was a very good film. And I think that's changing now and people are going to be able to see the whole silent period, not as something from the antique, but as something very vital and alive, and an art form in its own right. It was Iris Barry who said, "The films don't change; we do." And they had such an experience with a famous Ernst Lubitsch silent film sophisticated comedy, *The Marriage Circle*, that when they first founded the [Film] Library they brought that because it had a reputation. They looked at it and they said, "Oh, that isn't any good," and they put it on the shelf. Then another staff member some years later, brought it out, looked at it, and it was a great rediscovery, suddenly, this film. And now it's known as one of the classic films of the silent period. I think we go through that all the time, and so, I think that all films have to be saved. Even down here in the Museum, we're supposed to be selecting works of art, but I think that the selection process can't take less than two generations going by because we can't really objectively judge.

CC: It's also difficult to—I've always found that looking at, let's say, German culture in the 1920s and thirties before the war, you can look at expressionist paintings and you can look at George Grosz and of course read political facts et cetera, but if you haven't seen [F.W.] Murnau's pictures or you haven't seen—if you don't know much about German pictures at that time, you miss—imagine not knowing,

not having seen any Fritz Lang movies or a Leni Riefenstahl picture—you don't really get an appreciation for that culture. It'd be like looking at America without ever seeing any of its movies. You could pick up on a number of things but you'd certainly miss a huge area of understanding.

EB: That's certainly true of our entire century, because our culture is recorded into so many images.

CC: I think people just take it for granted, too, [because] it so entertained them. I remember watching *Little Caesar* on television once, and my mother going, "Ach, what are you watching *that* for? It's an old movie." But she liked it a lot, she remembered it when it came out. Or not when it came out, but she had seen it. And it's all so familiar you don't ever think it's going to go away. But there are still lots of things to learn from it.

EB: And a lot of times, getting back to preservation, people think because they've seen a film on television, of course it's preserved. It's not preserved unless there's the master material sitting in an archive somewhere. Some of the most important classics can still be endangered just because you wear out films from using them, and that's the whole difference. With a painting on the wall, you can—sure, there's some problem with deterioration, but at least people can look at it, and look at it, and look at it. That's not true of a film copy. If you look at it, it's going to get worn out.

CC: Also when you look at something like [André] Derain or [Henri] Matisse or [Yves] Tanguy, we're lucky if we can see 50 or 60 examples of the person's work. But someone like Josef von Sternberg, people think, "Oh yes, Marlene Dietrich." Well they don't realize he made *Underworld*, he made pictures without her, and he made pictures that many people think to be far superior than the later ones. And if you don't get to see all that at once—and also, I think you do something by having the music there. A lot of people, when they see a silent movie, I think they think of it as being a silent movie because they don't ever get the accompaniment. They don't hear the piano or the orchestra.

EB: They don't realize there was always sound. That certainly is part of our mission and any of the film archives, to try to present the work as nearly as possible as it was originally seen.

CC: Let me ask you about the expansion and how the new museum is going to serve your needs, or maybe there are some gaps; how is it going to do for you? What do you think?

EB: Well, our department is quite happy about the additional space. We sometimes say we have the farthest to come of all the departments—we were so short of space. We've got pretty good space now. And we have our extra gallery, which is the new screening room, the new Roy and Niuta Titus Theater II, which is a delight. I'm very happy with how that was designed. Of course, we don't really have extra exhibition space until it's finished, and we have our old, larger auditorium back as well. But then we should be able to do some much more interesting programs and I'm sure this is a common complaint around the Museum. Of course, if you're going to have extra exhibitions, you need more staff to be able to do it. You can't do it with the same old staff.

RC: Now, speaking of staff, I was curious how you'd describe the time when you came to the Museum. We thought of it, from the beginning, let's say, as maybe a family. Then it expanded into a club. Then at some point it became an institution because it just kept expanding. What are the changes that you've felt?

EB: Well I have the sense since the days even before I arrived that the Museum was small enough that you knew everybody in every department, and at least had some idea of what they were about. Now it really is quite impossible to do that.

CC: Even when you came in let's say '53, '54?

EB: Yes, even then which was again, a kind of herd of expansion.

CC: About how many people were [there]?

EB: When it got to about 200.

CC: [INAUDIBLE: 0:35:13] you got to know him.

EB: Well, yes, but then, I didn't have so much direct contact as with other members of the Department, and not as much as I would like. Even now, there simply isn't time, and I would like to see us do more across the media exhibitions.

CC: I was just thinking about that—that's a good idea.

EB: And we have such riches for that. Occasionally we've gotten together with Photography to do something, but the one time in my memory, when it was all-museum, was the *Art of the Twenties* show that we did for our anniversary show. And I really enjoyed that, and I did the film part of it, doing my best to relate what was going on with film in the twenties with what was going on in the other areas. It was extremely interesting for me.

RC: That would be great to see each decade represented that way.

CC: Also, even areas, like Germany, [with] German expressionism. I'm sure your show would be just as popular as anyone else's. Even something on the South Seas, I mean you could be showing *Tabu* and all sorts of—

EB: It's difficult to do because everybody is so busy with their own exhibition plans, and [working on them] years in advance, and so on. You have to have some overriding sensibility, and in that case we had Mr. [Bill] Lieberman who organized that Twenties show.

CC: So he really did across—? He was one of the people who was responsible for that cross-fertilization.

EB: Yes, and really the only part he didn't do [much]—although of course he approved what I did—was on the film exhibit, because he's not an expert in that area.

CC: We liked him because he was interested in that.

EB: He was very much respected, I think, by everyone.

RC: We had the pleasure of speaking to him; he's wonderful.

CC: He's a wonderful person.

RC: A big view.

EB: Yes; yes.

RC: What about currently? Are there people or is there still a feeling of the original spirit that's now in the Museum, or has it kind of—? It got on the right track and now you're just on a track, that you keep going at what you're doing?

CC: Like your department. We met Mary Lea Bandy. She's a real champion of film, and she's a real rabble rouser. And I would think, maybe we would sort of answer in our own way—she said that she's very happy because it is expanding. It had lots of problems but—you probably don't feel as much in a doldrum as other departments might.

EB: I've felt the sense of enthusiasm from the day I walked in the door. That hasn't really abandoned us, no.

CC: What were you doing when you first came in? What was the assignment at that time? What kind of shows were being put on in let's say '54; and not downstairs but in the auditorium?

EB: Well, my first task as secretary to the curator was to do research for the Samuel Goldwyn show, which was the first big producer show we did. And he sent me to look through the trade periodicals to find out everything I could about Samuel Goldwyn.

CC: Was he alive then, Samuel Goldwyn?

EB: Yes, and I was just delighted that I discovered the great joys of the trade periodicals and research. It was marvelous.

CC: So you put together sort of a whole filmography?

EB: I did this whole big packet of information for him, and then he wrote a brochure from it for the show.

CC: That's funny because now, things like the New Yorker Cinemas—just a few months ago there was a Samuel Goldwyn festival at the Regency.

EB: I'm sure we have much influence on what the repertory cinemas do.

CC: You think you're somewhat half responsible for repertory cinemas cropping up now?

EB: Well, in this general sense, the Film Department itself was responsible in its first years for making people aware that old films were worth looking at, worth saving. Because it just wasn't going on in this country then. Films were in distribution, [and then] they went out of distribution, and that was the end of it. And except for

a handful of people, there wasn't that interest. And her [Iris Barry] first thing she did—we didn't even then have our own theater, because this building wasn't built yet. And every contract to acquire a film was a distribution contract, and those films went out over the whole country, and all the books on film history were based on those films that she collected. That's why I think now we're on a new direction in film history which I hope we're at least instrumental though we can't be as influential as she was. By going back, re-examining the film history from the beginning, there are thousands more films to [INAUDIBLE: 0:39:59] to be studied than there were then. And the films that weren't written about, they weren't the films that she could make available. So I think now we're on the verge of a whole new film history.

CC: Someone let's say like a Pauline Kael writing in the *New Yorker* and writing about old pictures, those little capsule things for instance, in a way, The Museum of Modern Art indirectly gave birth to them. She actually ran an archive, didn't she, in San Francisco?

EB: She ran a film theater.[1]

CC: So it's almost half responsible for this idea.

EB: I'm sure it had some influence at least.

CC: What would be your capsule argument against videotape collecting. Let's say, if you went and took your whole collection and just ran it onto tape, I'm sure it'd be—it's expensive but it's not terribly expensive. But is it that you would end up with a piece of tape that obviously could suddenly stretch and then that's destroyed and you don't have a real record?

EB: Of course, that's true, tape is not the stablest, but I would have to object anyway to the film image being seen on video. It's not the same image at all. We're supposed to be collecting films as works of art. You wouldn't put a reproduction of a painting on the wall downstairs in substitution for the image, and that, to me, is the equivalent between a video copy of a film. Nothing against video for itself. When works are done on video, fine.

RC: And you also collect video pieces now, isn't that right?

[1] The Cinema Guild Theater, Berkeley.

EB: Yes, we do. It's not my responsibility—we can't call it a department yet but Barbara London's work [is being] in charge of video; she selects the video and she organizes the video exhibitions. However, they do come to us for storage cataloguing. And we have a lot of other art video that comes our way, more by chance, or because something was done about film on video. We're not actively collecting television.

CC: I think what you said though is a good argument against it, because, for even one of the people on our staff, we were talking and he said, "God, I don't understand why they don't just transfer it on tape." Well, that would be fine for a little study purposes or for small purposes, but one of your tasks is to project films and for people to see them in the way they originally were seen. I was watching something at someone's house the other day on television, and of course, because it was on TV and it was a 35 millimeter picture, Burt Reynolds' face was cut off, you could only see his nose. And if you're going to do that to film, look at a Cinemascope picture; what's going to happen to *Reds* or one of these, a format like that?

EB: They scan that; you don't get the whole thing.

CC: And then something—well like Sergio Leone pictures and the whole thing is all cut off.

EB: I have to keep an open mind about this, first, because technology is changing rapidly. I saw a film put on disc the other day which was 10 times improvement over the videotape we had to compare it with. We saw it on the monitor and the resolution was really quite good. We saw it on video—being projection and it was impossible again, the projection aspect. But so far, from what I've been able to see, I don't find any possible substitute for the film image.

CC: Why do you think people like Coppola have some ambivalence towards—? I, myself, I'm not an old fogey or anything, but I'm always curious that someone like Coppola and even Hal Ashby, when he did *Being There*, they cut it on video and then they used—he actually gave copies of all the video rushes, the dailies, to USC, or whatever, and then they cut their own version of *Being There*. But I think that they like to play. They have the money to edit that way and they can see dissolves at the beginning of *Apocalypse Now.*

EB: It's a wonderful tool, I'm sure. It's [INAUDIBLE: 0:44:04] for making the work [INAUDIBLE: 0:44:07].

CC: Sure. I think that he—Coppola must have gotten a lot of—well, he almost confused the whole issue because it became now very much a certainly more technological artist rather than—

EB: Yes, well, since the film he made on it wasn't a very great critical success, it called into question what he was talking about.

CC: Well, most people think who don't have all that sort of thing, that they're just making something sort of cheap, and they're not—that's not true. A lot of terrific pictures can still be made on an upright moviola.

EB: It's a tool, that's all. [INAUDIBLE: 0:44:41] shows the abilities of the people making it.

CC: So, if you come up with any particular stories. I mean, what we'd like to do is—we're going to have, god knows, it could be 35 people in the film, talking. And it's not all about the past. It starts very intimately, really. We're going to start with Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, Alfred Barr, and you know the original group, and then expand and tell more than just a history of the Museum but a social intellectual history of New York in that time. Then as it expands out, we hope to be able to get people like Sol Lewitt and Robert Motherwell or Bob Hughes and people like that to begin to comment. And even in the Film Department, or Photography, but particularly Film, we were thinking it may be possible or it may be terrific to have someone like Lillian Gish or someone on the outside speak about the Museum, and they could be somebody you don't expect. Someone like Lillian Gish would be terrific.

EB: She's one of our great supporters; I know that she would do it.

CC: Or someone like Scorsese or someone who seems to be—who really, I think, would surprise the audience by being there, suddenly, in debate or giving their imprimatur to it.

RC: They too are connected to this Museum, which has had such a far reaching influence. This is part of the reason for the film is to remind people, because we

take for granted how many things in just our day-to-day lives have, along the way, some connection to this Museum, setting standards and—

CC: The Film Department really makes it a very specific—well, it makes it very public. I think people, they could watch it and they could think, 'Well, I'm out in Houston; what do I care about the New York Museum, especially all these old people who are dead now, Iris Barry and blah blah blah.' But then suddenly if Martin Scorsese is on the screen proselytizing about how we ought to preserve so-and-so, and then you recognize a few people, and you being to think, 'Well, this affects me, too.'

EB: Yes I think especially because I wouldn't want to see a picture only of—

CC: Painting and sculpture?

EB: —this past. I would like if you used someone like Lillian Gish [INAUDIBLE: 0:46:54] of the current generation so that when we look at like a place where we [INAUDIBLE: 0:47:00]

RC: Since you know so many of the people, are there any people in particular who really—? Obviously we know some people, [who] we've heard, are articulate about this, and so, do you have any suggestions of good people outside the Museum?

EB: Yes. Coppola, Eastwood, certainly. I don't suppose [INAUDIBLE: 0:47:18] but Stan Brakhage [tape break at 0:47:20]. That's something new that's changed. It used to be only actresses or actors the general public would know, but they know the directors now.

CC: Clint Eastwood, too, would be so funny, everyone expecting to be—and what does he have to do? We'd like to set off that kind of explosion in their head, that you'd suddenly see Richard Oldenburg on screen, and then, let's say, Elizabeth Shaw or Eddie Warburg, and then suddenly there's Clint Eastwood.

EB: Clint Eastwood, you know, really was taken with what we were doing and gave us that benefit, *Foxfire*, last spring, which brought in $100,000 for our film preservation fund. So that's marvelous. It never happened before in our film benefits. Things are changing.

CC: And maybe if you could think of—actually, probably, two things at once really—think of any particular stories that do amplify that "we saved" whatever. As you could see, that could make a nice little story.

EB: And a piece of film that can be shown that's—sure, I can give you lots of stories about finding a piece of film I think are often jokes[?]

CC: Yes, if there's anything maybe that you—it doesn't have to be too elaborate like a tinted version of *Broken Blossoms*, but just something that would look special on screen but also—

EB: My favorite stories about—well, I didn't find any films but I love it. [Laughing]

CC: Where you didn't find any?

EB: [Laughing] Yes. Somebody wrote me that one of the old studios, a Fox studio in Fort Lee, New Jersey, was full of film cans, in the basement. It had gone through different hands and become manufacturing. The owner was an old lady out in California that never heard of The Museum of Modern Art, and I had to write letters and provide all kinds of documentation before she would have trusted us. And finally, [she] sent me the key to go in there. And there was no electricity in the building, so there we were with a flashlight and a couple of our people, and went into this completely dark building. We found the windows were busted, and there was absolutely nothing there. But in this dark basement without any lights and rats scurrying around and so on, there were these different cubicles that had been dressing rooms, and over one of them was, in chalk, a skull and crossbones and the word "Theda." It had to have been Theda Bara, the original vamp's, dressing room, who worked for Fox back in the teens. [INAUDIBLE: 0:49:50] expedition.

CC: Strange.

RC: Like an archeologist.

CC: I mean if you really think about it too, the Biograph studios and all that, if anybody had just put one inside. It's so easy to think of nowadays, but—I like that story, too. [Laughter]

RC: Yes, that's wonderful. You've really been helpful.

END OF INTERVIEW at 0:50:14