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THE IMMEDIACY OF ARCHIVING, OR: THE LIFE CYCLE OF FILMS



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Thank you for the opportunity to speak at this conference. In the next 10 minutes, as a case study, I will try to give you an impression of the profile and tasks of the institution that I represent, the Deutsches Filminstitut, or German Film Institute, in the City of Frankfurt, Germany.

KEY POINTS

// (Public) archives and (commercial) film industry: A complicated, but fruitful relationship

// Database work as critical infrastructure

// Immediacy of archiving



Key points of my intervention will be

First: the complex, but potentially fruitful relationship between the film industry and the public archive;

Second: the benefits of filmographic database work;

and third: the urgency of the idea that film archiving is not a retrospective task, but one that has to be implemented in the present.

I want to start by presenting the profile, scope and manifold activities of the Deutsches Filminstitut via the following trailer: It is a short piece that will introduce you to the various departments, archives, festivals and other activities of the institution. You will see that the activities of the Deutsches Filminstitut are modeled to encompass the **entire life cycle of films**.

[Trailer: <https://www.dff.film/en/video/trailer-dff/>]

INSTITUTIONAL SETUP

// **National task**

// **Public-private partnership**

// **Industry involvement**



It is important to know that despite being named the GERMAN film institute, we are not THE German film institute and archive. In fact, there is no such thing as ONE central film archival institution in our country. Instead, the task of taking care of the national film heritage is divided amongst basically three film archives and/or cinematheques, one of which is ours. With different profiles, and with different modes of funding, our activities add up to a comprehensive approach towards preserving films and fostering film culture.

(It is also an important fact that although we have a special focus on German film history, our general approach is explicitly international. In our definition, the film culture of any given country is not made up of the

domestic film production alone, but of any filmic work that has ever been released, seen and discussed by its people.)

Thus, the German Film Institute is not a State institution, but essentially a non-profit, **public-private partnership** (organized along the complex and at times idiosyncratic rules of a German specialty, the "Vereinsrecht", which is the law applying to so-called associations). In a nutshell, our structure allows us to act independently, while still maintaining ties to public institutions and acting in the public interest. We do depend on public funding to a substantial degree, but generate more than half of our budget through self-generated income – admission fees for our museum and cinema, renting out our spaces, providing services to other film heritage institutions – or through third-party funding.

Already at the moment of the founding of the German Film Institute in the late 1940s, the film industry was an **important partner, strategically integrated** in its structure. In the first years, the Institute, which concentrated on the retrospective documentation of German film history and statistical information about the contemporary film production alike, even worked under the umbrella of the Head Organization of the German Film Industry. Up until today, industry organizations, actual production companies and individual filmmakers belong to our stakeholders, next to public administrative bodies (on federal, regional and local levels). While the latter provide by far the major share of our financial funds, the industry players, as members of the Board of Administration, are still involved in the setting of the overall strategic aims of our institution.

The reason why I stress the German Film Institute's connection to the film industry is because, at first glance, it might seem: odd. The natural relationship between public-type film archives and commercial film industry would rather be expected to be one of mutual suspicion and distrust.

Film collections like ours, which in many ways can be regarded as cabinets of wonder in their own right, have grown and developed largely randomly.

ARCHIVES AND FILM INDUSTRY



**// ARBITRARY EVOLVMENT OF
COLLECTIONS**

// UNCERTAIN ORIGINS

// UNCLEAR RIGHTS STATUS

Not having a legal deposit for films in place, contemporary German film archives did not accumulate their collections systematically. Instead, the collections usually grew over time through donations, acquisitions, loans, or estates inherited to the archives by filmmakers, a process steered by individual interests and the opportunity of the moment as much as by overarching institutional strategies. Commonly, those collections did (and do) historically evolve without the explicit approval of the rights holders involved. To put it bluntly: The vast majority of film archives (in Germany and across the globe) have witnessed incidents of copyright transgression in their past, effected by individuals working in film labs, at distribution companies, and, of course, the film archives themselves.

Thus, it is not wonder that film archives tend to be perceived as dark, closed-off spaces, guarding their holdings and keeping their knowledge mainly to themselves. By necessity, film archives have always had the fear of disclosing too much. Of handing out their inventories freely. In other words, of being asked to explain the origins of what they hold.

This is certainly not the concept of a modern archive. And, I may say, not the reality of the present situation either. On the part of the archives, there has been a notable shift towards transparency and the imperative to provide access. On the part of the industry, there has been a growing understanding, and thus acceptance, of the archive and its mission. The basis for this process is mutual benefit.

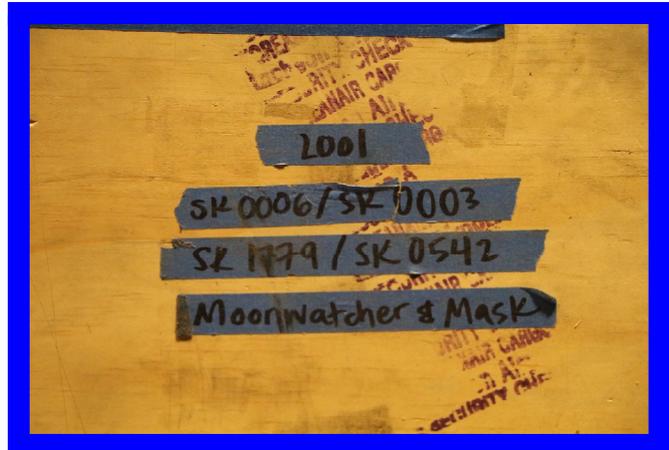
So let's take a closer look at why it works: What exactly are the mutual benefits to be enjoyed by both industry bodies and the archive?

MUTUAL BENEFITS

A: DISTRIBUTION CONTRACTS

**B: ARCHIVAL INFRASTRUCTURE
AND PROFESSIONAL
COMPETENCE**

C: INDIVIDUAL FILMMAKERS



Let me refer more closely to the nature of the ties and active alliances of the Deutsches Filminstitut with the German film industry.

First, we negotiate contracts with production companies, distributors and right holders concerning the theatrical distribution of their back catalogues. (Our most important partner in this regard is the German production and film licensing company KINEOS, which under its former name KIRCH accumulated legal titles to mainly, but not exclusively, German films from the post-1940s on a very large scale.) While many of those titles have no immediate commercial value to the companies at this moment – with the television market drastically having lost interest in “old” films a decade or so ago –, we, through our specific approach towards film history and the alternative audiences that we have access to, are able to create a small, but persisting market for these films. The revenues are split between the licensing company and us, thus allowing both partners to benefit directly.

Secondly, we offer our archival space, infrastructure and professional competence to a number of prominent film production companies that are still actively operating on the market. (Among them is the “CCC” by famous producer Artur Brauner, and “X-FILME” headed amongst others by the director Tom Tykwer.) In these “active” archives, the companies continuously deposit their films and film-related material of each completed production, including scripts, photos, budget files, contracts, props, etc. We offer professional preservation standards and guarantee immediate access to their archival objects on an on-demand basis. Our reason for doing this is simple: By taking in these archival objects

continuously, we ensure that they will be archived at all, assembled in a central location, there to be studied by future generations.

The third example is a variation of the one before: We collaborate with individual filmmakers also. The preservation conditions of private film archiving in Germany are decidedly heterogeneous, and sub-standard storage is rather the rule than the exception in the private sector. Out of a shortcoming of funding, out of lacking ties with an archive, or out of other reasons, filmmakers often store their original works and related artifacts – that we perceive as treasures – on their attics, under their roofs, in their cellars, exposed to changing temperatures and unstable humidity. By offering established filmmakers to partner with us, and by planting the idea of the archive in the minds of young emerging professionals, we aim to keep pushing the film archival standards small steps ahead.

THE ARCHIVE'S PROMISE

**// CONVEY GENERAL
UNDERSTANDING OF FILM**

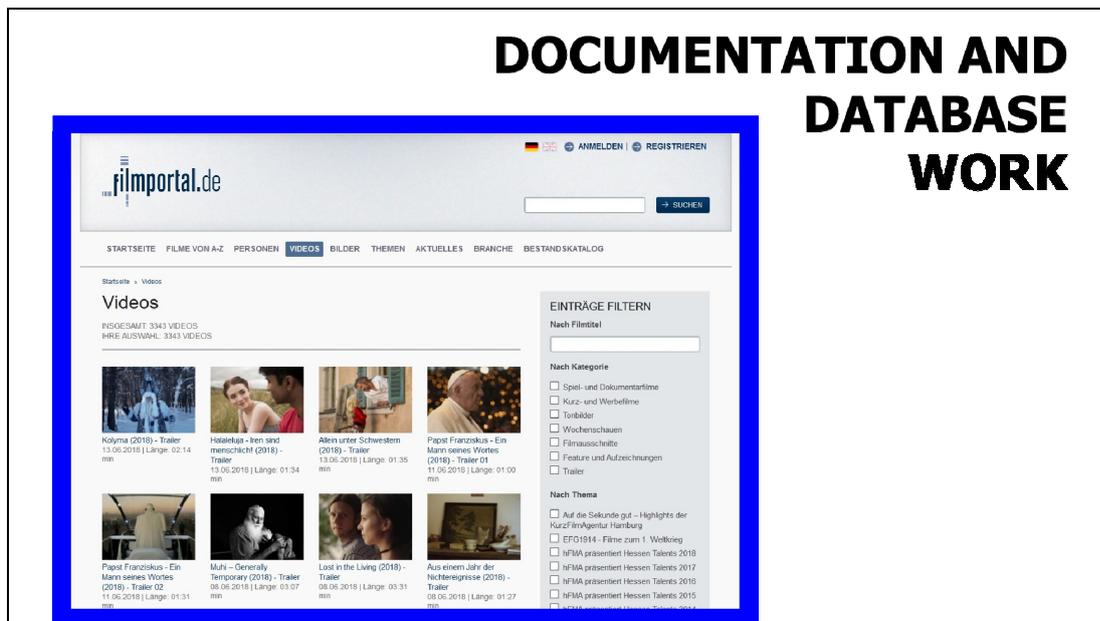
// PROMOTE CINEPHILIA

// CREATE AUDIENCES



All in all, what the archive, understood as an active institution that combines the preservation of films with awareness-raising educational and/or entertaining activities, can offer is the following: It can create a general understanding and acknowledgement of film, as an art form and a popular medium alike. It can promote cinephilia, or a passion for film, across all levels of society, which is a precondition for a thriving film culture. In other words, it can create the cinema audiences – or: the subscribers of streaming services, if you wish – of the future.

DOCUMENTATION AND DATABASE WORK



I want to end my brief presentation by referring to a specialty of the German Film Institute, its database and filmographic work. The key asset in this regard is the online platform [filmportal.de](http://www.filmportal.de) (www.filmportal.de). The task and mission of this portal is to meticulously document every single feature film that has ever been produced in Germany: Today, filmographic data for more than 100,000 films is assembled on this platform, complemented by photos, videos and other documents. Of those 100,000 films that make up German film history, only a portion has survived until today as actual film copies. But in order to know what you are lacking, you must at first know that it ever was there. And knowing what you lack is better than not knowing that such films ever existed in the first place.

Over the past years, the importance of centrally documenting the creative output of individual filmmakers and production companies has found its way and stuck with into the industry: The German Film Academy, which is a key organization of German filmmakers, strongly encourages their members to use the platform to document their individual careers.

I want to close the cycle by referring back to the beginning of my presentation: In our understanding, for a film heritage institution to work successfully and to find resonance within society, it must look at the entire life cycle of films. Be it in analogue or digital form: Films run through more stages of life than their initial release on contemporary markets. The films, in a variety of forms and formats, find their ways into private bookshelves, on hard-disks, in commercial and in public archives.

THE LIFE CYCLE OF FILMS



// TRACES IN PUBLIC MEMORY

// COME TO NEW LIFE

// COMMERCIAL VALUE

They leave traces in public memory, are remembered, re-consulted and referred to by later generations. They may come to new life, even to unexpected attention through re-releases and scholarly re-evaluation. They may have commercial value that was not to be anticipated in the first place.

To enable this recurrent cycle of life, the idea of the film archive is mandatory. And it is important to acknowledge the fact that

Archiving always starts today.

**ARCHIVING
STARTS
TODAY**

