

Book Review: Subject Access to Films and Videos. 2nd ed. By Sheila S. Intner, David P. Miller, Andrea Leigh, and Bobby Ferguson

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BOOK REVIEW

Subject Access to Films & Videos. 2d ed. By Sheila S. Intner, David P. Miller, Andrea Leigh, and Bobby Ferguson. Santa Barbara: Libraries Unlimited, 2011. 246p. \$50.00 paperback (ISBN 978-1-59158-937-2).

Subject analysis of pictorial materials has challenged catalogers for decades; subject access to moving images is particularly problematic. A full understanding of film or video content can require viewing in real time. Content is often multi-layered and moving image materials, by necessity often shelved by format, are often not classed by discipline. Thus, depth of indexing is a perennial problem. OCLC video cataloging records demonstrate that fundamental principles of specificity and co-extensivity have been difficult to apply, perhaps more so because the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) were originally developed for textual materials and are based on literary warrant. “Of-ness” and “aboutness,” issues for any pictorial materials, apply to moving images as well. Genre and form headings, critical points of access for films and video, are currently ill-defined and can introduce redundancies or even conflicts with standard form subdivisions assigned in accordance with LCSH. Additional access points, truly neither genre nor form, can be of equal importance, such as mode of distribution (local access cable programs, theatrical shorts), country of publication, original language, fictitious characters, time slot (prime time television programs), or audience (Children’s programming). The line between topical subject headings and genre/form terms is often blurred, and practices have changed significantly over time.

Subject Access to Films & Videos addresses some of these issues. Like the first edition of the same name (Soldier Creek Press, 1992), the main body of the work is a compilation of Library of Congress headings “pertaining directly to materials in the media group that catalogers call moving image materials.” Genre-form headings are integrated into the list. As before, the headings list is preceded by chapters on general principles, genre/form headings, and collection development; this second edition adds a chapter on metadata for subject access as well. While the current edition lacks the separate bibliographies for collection development and subject access to films and video, the individual chapters are generously footnoted.

Sheila Intner’s opening chapter on principles and practice covers numerous topics, including ‘Basic Terminology’ (synonymous terms by which these materials are known: movies, moving pictures, talkies, etc.) and ‘Underlying Assumptions.’ The intended audience for this book is unstated, but the underlying assumptions are at the most basic level: libraries will purchase moving image materials; LCSH can be assigned to moving image materials; bibliographic records for moving images and books can be merged in an OPAC; tools and methods are equally applicable to films and videos, and so forth. The section ‘How LC does it’ is essentially a distillation of instruction sheet H2230 in the Library of Congress *Subject Headings Manual*. This chapter would benefit from a more cohesive organization, a clear outline of the many thorny issues specific to film and video, and fewer references to past practices.

The second chapter, David Miller’s “Genre/Form Headings: From the Margins to the Center,” expertly summarizes the development of genre/form vocabularies, as well as current and emerging best practices, focusing on instruction sheet H1913 in the Library of Congress *Subject Headings Manual* and referencing new proposals to handle geographical, ethnicity, and language aspects of moving image materials. Although policies in this area are in flux, Miller deftly tackles this moving target, outlining emerging discussions and controversies, helping readers distinguish between substance and ephemeral details, and pointing them to online documentation for updates.

Andrea Leigh’s chapter on “Metadata for Subject Access” covers a wide range of topics, from individual schemas (Dublin Core, PBcore) to folksonomies and social networking sites. It also fills some gaps left by the first chapter on principles and practice. Particularly useful are discussions of precoordinated LCSH headings and browse displays, as well as issues of subjectivity and authorial intent. While these principles are broadly applicable to all library resources, and not particularly “metadata-specific,” they lay valuable groundwork and provide context. Leigh also addresses subject analysis issues which are unique to moving image materials, such as the “ofness” vs. “aboutness” question and resultant double-indexing.

The heart of the book, compiled by Bobby Ferguson, is its last 200 hundred pages, a subset of LCSH “descriptors representing topics pertinent to the worlds of film and video alone.” An underlying assumption stated early on in the book is that LCSH can, and by inference should, be assigned to moving image resources. Therefore, subject analysis of film and video demands familiarity with all of LCSH, and not just a subset. Moreover, the list is puzzling in its inclusion of many terms which would seldom if ever be assigned to film and video, such as Kodak instant camera; Video compression; headings for video games (a form otherwise omitted from the book), names of individual theaters; and phrase headings of the type ‘[*topic*] in motion pictures.’ The list also includes genre/form terms and broad terms which happen to include media concepts in their reference structure (Library shelving, Minorities; Oceanography). This list might serve a subject-specific library housing print materials relating to film and video, but it does not help readers provide subject access to the films and videos themselves.

In summary, the book would have benefited from greater organization. More examples illuminating some of the trickier subject analysis scenarios would have been useful. David Miller’s thoughtful discussion of genre/form headings and the rich content of Leigh’s metadata chapter are the strengths of the book. Readers seeking a thorough and well-organized treatment of subject cataloging principles might wish to consult Martha Yee’s *Moving Image Cataloging: How to Create and How to Use a Moving Image Catalog*.—Jane Johnson Otto (jjotto@rul.rutgers.edu), Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, Piscataway, New Jersey.