

The Market vs. The Museum

Alexander Horwath

Open Forum

The Market vs the Museum est une réaction à chaud proposée aux participants de l'Open Forum qui ouvrait le 61e congrès de la FIAF, le 10 juin dernier. Ce texte, qui a immédiatement suscité de nombreuses réactions, se présentait comme un commentaire en marge de l'atelier de la Commission technique du mercredi précédent.

L'auteur rappelle qu'il a préparé ce texte dans un esprit polémique et avec l'espoir de susciter un débat. Qui plus est, il rappelle que Nicola Mazzanti, l'un des membres de la Commission technique qui est pris à parti dans ce texte, avait lui-même souhaité qu'on réagisse aux propositions de la Commission. Mais au-delà des questions immédiatement soulevées par l'atelier de la Commission, c'est plus largement le rôle des archivistes dans la société que l'auteur voudrait voir clarifier par ses collègues, conservateurs et directeurs de musées, archivistes et responsables de la programmation.

Selon l'auteur, nous faisons

The following statement was given during the "Open Forum" session on Friday, 10 June 2005, during the 61st FIAF Congress in Ljubljana. It was written on the spur of the moment, as a somewhat unguarded reaction to the presentations and debates on Wednesday.

Since the first comments following my statement were extremely "controversial" and wide-ranging, I would like to stress again what I expressed when introducing it last Friday: that I was speaking in the spirit of the polemic, to stir up debate; that it was probably an "improper" thing to do (considering the diplomatic nature of most FIAF proceedings), but that I felt it to be necessary all the same. For reasons of brevity, I didn't touch on many important issues relating to this topic. Also, I am well aware that the oppositional paths which are evoked in the latter part of this text cannot in any way do justice to the panoramic variety of institutional models that are represented in FIAF. But just as most utopian visions of "our digital future" have never (and will never) really become a reality, my own "dystopian vision" is very much a stark and admittedly unsubtle projection of certain visible details onto a wider and darker horizon, hopefully never to be realized.

Since he is the only (living) archive person mentioned by name, I should also add that Nicola Mazzanti – who was sadly no longer present on Friday – is no stranger to polemic himself, so I took the freedom to respond to his "invitation". I do, however, look forward to continuing this debate in a more extended and less pointed fashion. In the end, I am most interested to find out which image we – the members of the FIAF community – have (and want to have) of ourselves; and what our perceived role in society is, as curators and museum directors, programmers and archivists, and "techies", "politicos", and "passeurs".

I have not revised the text since Friday, but I have tried to straighten out some bad English (of which there is still certainly enough).

Alexander Horwath, 13 June 2005

Thank you for the opportunity to be polemical and to give you some observations and critical remarks about what I perceive to be not just a shift, but a "neo-liberal turn" in film archive and film museum politics. We are currently witnessing this turn or are ourselves part of it – and I think there are good reasons to oppose it as far as one can.

My examples do, in some way, relate to the workshop of the Technical Commission on Wednesday morning, but the language, rhetoric, and ideology which were partly expressed there are in no way singular

actuellement face à un véritable « tournant néo-libéral » dans les politiques des archives du film, un tournant auquel, croit-il, nous devons nous opposer autant que faire se peut.

Si c'est l'atelier de la Commission technique qui motive cette réaction, le vocabulaire utilisé et l'idéologie dominante ce jour-là ne sont pas des cas uniques. À première vue, il s'agit d'un débat sur *Numérique vs Film* et sur la question *Qu'est-ce que le film?* Sans entrer dans le vif du sujet, l'auteur croit néanmoins pouvoir affirmer que derrière le libellé *Numérique vs Film* se cache l'opposition très réelle *Marché vs Musée* et que derrière la question *Qu'est-ce que le film?* on peut facilement trouver *Qu'est-ce que le musée?*

L'auteur appuie son argumentation sur trois termes qui ont récemment fait leur apparition massivement dans notre vocabulaire : *contenu*, *accès* et *utilisateur*. Innocents en soi, ces trois mots n'en sont pas moins utilisés pour instituer une logique de marché au détriment des fonctions critique et politique de tout musée.

Contenu (c'est-à-dire nos collections) remplace *artefacts*, un peu comme *produit* remplace film dans le vocabulaire de l'industrie hollywoodienne.

Accès (c'est-à-dire la manière dont nos collections sont présentées au public), dans le langage néo-libéral, veut dire essentiellement *consommation* – nos collections devenant autant de banques d'images.

Utilisateur (c'est-à-dire celui ou celle qui est en contact avec nos institutions et nos collections), dans ce nouveau langage, désigne le fournisseur qui s'intéresse à nos collections ou le consommateur qui navigue dans nos banques d'images.

Si on se fie à l'idée du travail des archives du film dans l'avenir, tel qu'on pouvait en déduire en écoutant Nicola Mazzanti, on en conclut que plus personne n'a besoin de programmes ou de présentations éducatives ; comme dans le marché, tout doit être fait pour rejoindre le consommateur... Or pour l'auteur, le musée est un outil critique, éthique et

cases. I have heard them over and over – and more and more vehemently – on many platforms and in many contexts over the past few years. I think that it is necessary to look at this rhetoric more closely, in relation to the unique abilities of the museum as well as so-called “market realities”.

On the surface, this is a debate or controversy about *Digital vs. Film* and about the question *What is Film?* I do not want to engage in this debate here, even though it is far from clear, and is getting increasingly unclear every day. In our context, I think that the *Digital vs. Film* opposition only cloaks the real opposition, namely *The Market vs. The Museum*, and that behind the question *What is Film?* one may find the question *What is the Museum?*

I would like to name just three examples of this shift – three terms which, parallel to the development of Digital rhetoric, have massively entered our language: *content*, *access*, and *user*. Of course, all three are very innocent terms, and they signify a number of positive things – for instance, certain democratic, anti-elitist forms of behaviour, and the “opening” of formerly “closed” institutions. I would, however, like to draw your attention to the way in which these terms are also being used to install a market logic at the cost of the critical and political functions of the museum.

Firstly: *content* – in other words, our collections. This rhetoric doesn't say *artefacts*, but *content*, much like the Hollywood industry uses the word *product* for films. In this sense, *content* is a combative term to somehow get rid of the material artefact with which every content is irrevocably joined. This use of the word *content* desires a kind of “free flow” of content, much like the “free flow of capital” in contemporary finance capitalism.

Secondly: *access*, meaning the way in which archive and museum collections are being presented to the public and are enriching public knowledge. The way *access* is being used in the neo-liberal rhetoric, it mainly means *consumption*. Not creating and curating various forms of engagement with the artefact, but turning the collections into image-banks for intermediary dealers and end-consumers.

Thirdly: the *user*, meaning the person who comes in contact with our institutions and our collections. By *user*, market-style rhetoric does not really mean the interested citizen who is met at eye-level by the museum and who in turn is called upon to meet the artefacts and collections at eye-level. Quite the opposite – in this rhetoric, *user* stands for the disinterested consumer, or the overly-interested intermediary dealer or “provider”. The consumer plugs into our image-banks to graze on them like a cow grazes on a meadow, whereas the intermediary dealer or provider plugs in and grazes on our image-banks like corporate raiders graze on various smaller businesses, inhaling them in the process.

The ideology which lies in this specific terminology was best expressed on Wednesday morning when Nicola Mazzanti presented his vision of the future work of film archives and museums: nobody needs programmes or educational presentations anymore, nobody needs exhibitions curated with a specific knowledge, from a specific position.

politique qui est en opposition directe avec toute idéologie dominante à un moment donné. Qui plus est, le musée est un lieu où l'on respecte les artefacts et les personnes qui souhaitent s'en approcher.

Le discours néo-libéral, il va sans dire, propose une définition bien différente du musée. On y invoque volontiers le musée traditionnel, poussiéreux et qui sent le renfermé, et on taxe ses défenseurs de « conservateurs » ou de « naïfs ». Ce qui permet d'opposer le monde brillant et léger de la libre circulation du numérique au monde pesant, poussiéreux et vieillot du film et du musée. Ce en quoi l'argumentation en cause rejoint celle pratiquée sur les terrains sociaux et politiques – le terme *numérique*, dans un certain contexte culturel, n'étant pas sans faire penser à l'usage de l'expression *Forces du marché* utilisé comme instrument de darwinisme social.

En conclusion, l'auteur se demande si nous ne trouvons pas désormais, au sein de la FIAF, face à deux écoles de pensées, à deux types d'institutions, l'héritage de Iris Barry, Henri Langlois et Jacques Ledoux étant identifié, dans un musée du cinéma-cinémathèque, comme outil critique et éthique. La question de la conservation et de l'archivage, qui a dominé nos préoccupations au cours des dernières décennies, a peut-être ouvert la porte à des institutions qui veulent mettre en retrait cet aspect musée pour devenir davantage des banques d'images, gérant des dépôts intouchables. En face, on trouverait des archives qui demeureraient des « musées critiques », avec des collections vivantes et bâties poétiquement, des endroits de réflexion sur les œuvres.

All forms of making-the-artefacts-public, of communicating them, of passing them on, will be “user-driven” – just like the market usually is (or, rather, seems to be). In this vision, the museum is either obsolete or it becomes something like a “server of the world”, fulfilling every conceivable need. The user creates his or her own programme, just as it is done everywhere else on the audio-visual market. We are therefore speaking of *content-on-demand*.

At this point I should make clear that, in my book, a museum is a very different kind of place and space, a different kind of social practice. The museum is a critical, ethical, and political tool, which stands in direct opposition to whatever social mood or climate or ideology is hegemonic at a given time. The museum does so in many ways. For instance, by simply reminding the visitor of previous and alternative forms of social and cultural organization; and thereby reminding him or her that the current social and cultural climate is not the only one imaginable. That the dominant forms are never “natural”, but historical and man-made. Furthermore, the museum is a different kind of social practice because it offers unlevelled, unaligned *difference per se* through the material shape of its artefacts; it offers specific and accountable viewpoints and arguments about culture and society through curated programmes and exhibitions, by communicating with the visitor from an identifiable and transparent position.

The museum, as I understand it, is also a space in which one can find respect. Respect both for the artefacts that are collected, preserved, and exhibited, and for the person who views them in order to engage with them. The museum collection, finally, is not an image-bank created by chance, but an active and poetic process, which should be presented just as actively and poetically.

All of this, by the way, does not prohibit a museum from fulfilling additional services to commercial or non-commercial users – e.g., to make a Digi-Beta of a film in the collection, to create a data-stream of certain of its holdings, or to sell a clip to television – if it chooses to do so and is in a legal position to do so. It's just that this is definitely not the *main* social function and mandate of a museum.

The neo-liberal rhetoric attempts to paint the museum in a very different light. Since the Market always needs to portray itself and the unrestrained flow of capital and content as the most natural and desirable of all things, every space or tool which functions as a critical reminder of alternative options must be presented as an obstacle. This is where the image of the “dusty” and “musty” old museum comes in, an image that was used quite frequently on Wednesday to convey the contrast between the bright and light world of free-flow Digital on the one hand, and the heavy, dusty, old-fashioned world of Film and the Museum on the other.

In addition, any supporter of the Museum as an ethical or critical tool is swiftly deemed to be “conservative” or “naïve”. Along these lines, one would actually think that the term *Archive* should evoke even stronger images of dustiness and mustiness. At least, that used to be the prevalent image of archives among large parts of the population. But the *New Archive*, in neo-liberal terminology, is not at all dusty and

The Market vs the Museum es una provocación lanzada por Horwath el 10 de junio pasado en el Open Forum, que clausuró el 61º congreso de la FIAF. El escrito comentaba el taller de la Comisión técnica del miércoles anterior y logró suscitar inmediatamente numerosas reacciones.

El autor explica que había redactado el texto con espíritu polémico para provocar una discusión y recuerda además que Nicola Mazzanti, miembro de la Comisión técnica, había invitado a los participantes a debatir las propuestas elaboradas por el taller de la Comisión. Pero, más allá de los problemas inmediatos planteados por éste, Horwath solicita a sus colegas, conservadores y directores de museos, archiveros y responsables de programación, una reflexión sobre el papel de los archiveros en la sociedad, en una perspectiva más amplia.

Según Horwath, nos hallamos actualmente ante un verdadero «viraje neoliberal» en la política de los archivos de cine, al cual, según él, es necesario oponerse en la medida posible.

Aunque el taller de la Comisión técnica haya sido el detonante de la reacción, el léxico utilizado y la ideología predominantes no representan una excepción. A simple vista, se trata de una discusión sobre la oposición entre digitalización y película y sobre qué es una película. Sin adentrarse demasiado en el tema, el autor está convencido de que detrás del título *Digitalización vs. Película* se oculta una oposición muy real, la de *Mercado vs. Museo*, y que, a su vez, detrás de la pregunta *¿Qué es una película?* se percibe sin duda otra: *¿Qué es el museo?*

La argumentación está sustentada en tres términos que últimamente han invadido en forma masiva nuestro lenguaje: *contenido*, *acceso* y *usuario*. Aunque en sí mismos sean inocentes, los tres términos han sido utilizados para poner en marcha una lógica de mercado que menoscaba las funciones crítica y política del museo.

La palabra *contenido* (es decir, nuestras colecciones) reemplaza a *objetos*, de la misma manera que la palabra *producto* desplaza a *película* en el lenguaje de la industria de Hollywood.

El *acceso* (es decir, la forma en que nuestras colecciones son presentadas al público), en el lenguaje neoliberal, significa esencialmente *consumo*, de tal manera que nuestras colecciones resultan consideradas como bancos de imágenes.

musty – because it is the image-bank, the valuable asset, the bright and shiny server of the world.

By painting the dusty old Museum as conservative, and as an obstacle to the New Archives' swift conversion into the servers of the world, and by painting dusty old Film as an obstacle to the Digital regime, neo-liberal rhetoric functions exactly the same way as it does in the social and political arena: Whatever rules and regulations the social state has implemented to protect the rights of workers and employees, or the solidarity between generations, or fair access to health services, and so on – all these rights and regulations, and the groups which represent them (such as unions), are now being painted as “backwards”, “conservative”, “defensive”, and “naive”, and as obstacles to the free reign of the so-called market forces which one is supposed to join offensively. As an ideological tool of Cultural Darwinism, the current use of the term *Digital* in a certain cultural context mirrors the use of *Market Forces* as a tool of Social Darwinism. The *free flow* which is invoked by both terms attempts to separate itself from – and get rid of – material objects and the material relations from which they both derive.

I would also briefly like to point out that the neo-liberal rhetoric of *Digital* often comes with a rather specific tone and aesthetic of presentation which seem to give it credibility because they are so wonderfully ironic, and, you know, *seen-it-all, know-it-all*. A certain sarcasm or cynicism that is even likely to resort to parodies of the bad English spoken by others. As an homage to its preferred presentation tool, I would like to call this type of speaking *Powerpoint Speak*. It borders on a kind of postmodern propaganda language, because both technologically and in terms of visual aesthetics and intonation, this Powerpoint Speak leaves very little room for reflection, pause, eye- and ear-level communication, and critical understanding.

I feel that we are in the middle of a process which might actually show that FIAF contains two very different types of thinking, or even consists of two very different types of organizations. As far as I understand the history and the identity of FIAF, the idea of the film museum, the cinemathèque, as a critical and ethical tool stands very much at the centre. At least that seems to be the legacy of people like Iris Barry, Henri Langlois, or Jacques Ledoux.

In the past two decades, the questions of archiving, conservation, and preservation have become much more prominent than they used to be, and rightfully so. But we might now find ourselves at a moment in time when the newly professionalized archive leaves behind the idea of the museum as a critical tool and turns into a digital image-bank, riding on top of perfectly managed cold-storage facilities for untouchable nitrate and acetate films.

At the end of such a process, this kind of archive would be fully aligned with and affirmed by the market, and would therefore represent a kind of nothingness. In political terms, it would be the actual conservative – or better, neo-conservative – place.

The other type of organization would be an archive which is also a “critical museum”; a confrontation of concrete artefacts and social

El *usuario* (es decir, quien está en contacto con nuestras instituciones y colecciones) designa, en este nuevo lenguaje, al proveedor que tiene interés por nuestras colecciones o el consumidor que navega en nuestros bancos de imágenes.

Si se sigue la idea del trabajo futuro de los archivos de cine que se puede deducir de las palabras con que Nicola Mazzanti presenta su propuesta, se llega a la conclusión de que ya nadie necesita programas o presentaciones educativas y, como en el mercado, el objetivo sería llegar al consumidor... Para el autor, en cambio, el museo es un instrumento crítico, ético y político, que se opone frontalmente a cualquier ideología por predominante que sea en un momento dado. Es más, el museo es un lugar en el que se respetan los objetos de colección y quienes desean acercarse a ellos.

Es obvio que el discurso neoliberal propone una definición muy distinta del museo tradicional: lo evoca como un lugar polvoriento, que huele a rancio y tacha a sus defensores de «conservadores» o «ingenuos», oponiendo así el mundo brillante y leve de la libre circulación de lo digital al mundo pesado y anticuado de la película y el museo. Esta argumentación es similar a la que se practica en los ámbitos sociales y políticos y, en algunos contextos culturales, el término *digital* no puede dejar de recordar la expresión *fuerzas del mercado*, usada como instrumento de darwinismo social.

En conclusión, el autor se pregunta si, en la FIAF, no nos encontramos ya ante dos escuelas de pensamiento o dos tipos de instituciones y si la herencia de Iris Barry, Henri Langlois y Jacques Ledoux no se identifica con el museo del cine-cinematoteca, como instrumento crítico y ético.

El problema de la conservación y el archivaje, que ha dominado nuestras preocupaciones durante las últimas décadas, quizás ha abierto las puertas a instituciones que desean desplazar este aspecto hacia la retaguardia, para transformar el museo en banco de imágenes, gestor de depósitos intocables. Ante los nuevos archivos, concebidos ideológicamente como bancos de películas, perduran aún algunas cinematecas que conservan su función de museos críticos y custodian colecciones vivas elaboradas poéticamente.

practices; an actively and poetically constructed collection; a place in which curatorial thinking and work can be felt and argued with. It would stand counter to the ideology of the market.

I must admit that the latter type of organization will probably bring a lot of grief – the grief of having to endure, engage with, and survive current cultural politics, which run on the fetish of the Digital and Digitisation. On this point, however, I would like to quote William Faulkner, by way of Jean-Luc Godard: *Between grief and nothingness, I will take grief.*



Alexander Horwath,
Director of the
Österreichisches
Filmmuseum in Vienna

Response to Alexander Horwath

Nicola Mazzanti

Open Forum

I would like to thank the Journal for publishing this exchange of ideas between Alexander and me, but most of all, I warmly want to thank Alexander Horwath for his passion, and for having taken the time to open a public discussion on these topics, a debate I wish had started long ago, and which I hope will continue in coming issues of the Journal with other contributions.

Dear Alexander,

First, let me say that I have mixed feelings in starting this discussion with you. In fact, I tend to sympathize, and – more often than not – to agree with what you write, besides having a deep appreciation for the present and past activities of the Filmmuseum in Vienna. So, on the one hand it feels somehow strange to be brought to highlight the points of disagreement between us, rather than the common feelings. But on the other hand I realized that I very much prefer to disagree and have a frank, open, and eventually provocative discussion with somebody I respect and like, rather than to agree with those with whom I have little in common. So, finally, here I am.

I also count on the fact that we will continue this dialogue on other occasions, and in more depth than what is possible here and now, where space is limited.

For the sake of clarity, let's start from my presentation at the Technical Commission Workshop.

First of all, I was not referring to *filmmuseums*, but more generally to *film archives*. And this to me – as I will discuss later – makes a whole lot of difference.

Then, I do not think I ever said that “*nobody needs programmes or educational presentations anymore, nobody needs exhibitions curated with a specific knowledge, from a specific position*”.

What I tried to say was that in the overall context of film archives, *if and/or when Digital is used*, I expect to witness *more* “access on demand” *in parallel* with the current access strategies in *film archives*, which are mostly limited to what we can call “programming”, or what you refer to as “*museum activities and function*”. And I must insist on the words “*more*” and “*in parallel*”.

I also added (and here, I agree, I resorted to some degree of provocation) that I hoped archives would not limit their access strategies to streaming videos or DVDs, because I am deeply convinced that this would be just a faster way to kill “cinema” and ultimately for the archives to commit a sort of institutional suicide, by denying the very reason of their existence.

Absent de l'Open Forum du 10 juin, Nicola Mazzanti nous a proposé de répondre à Alexander Horvath, avec l'accord préalable de ce dernier.

Bien qu'en accord avec la plupart des remarques de son collègue viennois, l'auteur veut néanmoins tenter de répondre aux points de désaccords soulevés par ce dernier, en insistant d'abord sur le fait que ses critiques s'adressaient d'abord aux « archives du film » et non pas aux « filmmuseums » - une distinction qui n'est pas que formelle.

Essentiellement, ce que l'auteur tenait à dire, c'est que, une fois les outils du numérique mis à notre disposition, il serait normal d'imaginer des possibilités d'accès aux collections plus souples et parallèles aux projections publiques traditionnelles. Il faut multiplier les stratégies et les approches d'accès aux collections, incluant la projection sur grand écran (tant que ce sera possible), mais sans nous priver, quand cela est possible, voire même avantageux, de la projection numérique. Et c'est la responsabilité des archives du film de décider (après études et tests appropriés) quand, et dans quelles conditions, la projection numérique peut être proposée comme « simulation acceptable » d'une projection de cinéma. Et, d'ajouter l'auteur, il faudra encore beaucoup de tests et de nombreuses discussions avant d'atteindre cette étape.

Le caractère muséal de l'activité d'un certain nombre de cinémathèques vient assurément compliquer la question : si pour certaines institutions, les activités muséales sont au cœur de leur activité, pour la plupart, ces activités co-habitent, souvent dans un rapport dialectique, avec beaucoup d'autres activités – sans mentionner que plusieurs archives du film, et parmi les plus grandes, n'ont aucune activité muséale.

Pour l'auteur, l'accès élargi aux collections (« access on demand », ne s'oppose pas à l'activité muséale (de programmation critique, notamment), mais devrait au contraire en être indissociable. Et les outils numériques désormais à notre disposition ne pourraient-ils pas constituer autant de façons de faciliter l'accès à nos collections, pour les chercheurs, comme pour le public cinéphile en général?

What I advocate is that archives look into different access strategies and modes, which include film projection (as long as it is possible) in the first place, but also include digital projection, whenever appropriate, possible, and advantageous (more on that later). Archives should definitely ascertain (by carrying out research and tests) to which extent, in which occasions, and by using which technologies and techniques, digital projection can be considered “*an acceptable simulation of a film projection*”. I am the first to say that we need a significant amount of testing and discussions before defining all the terms of this equation: *acceptable, simulation, film projection*, and *digital projection*. We can probably start, I suggested, by accepting the fact that, more often than not, whenever we reproduce a film by a different technique or in a different technological context (e.g., tinted and toned or Technicolor film today, or a modern projection system for a film from the 1930s), we produce something that I would define as a “*representation*”, if not a “*simulation*”, which comes short of an “*authentic reproduction*”, as we too often pretend to do. (I think this is another discussion which is way overdue. We should start it someday, and the sooner the better. But here I am afraid it is beyond the point.)

As I said earlier, I do believe that the distinction between *film archives* and *film museums* is not just nominalistic, but rather an important one, because it defines a context and an object of discussion, and I am afraid that we are not really talking about the same thing. After all, as you reminded us, words are important, “*nomina sunt res*”.

Evidently, I agree that *film museums* exist, although I must say I am not completely comfortable with the idea that a certain notion of “museum” (as we know it from other contexts and disciplines) can be automatically transferred to “*film museums*”. This, for a number of considerations, has to do with the essence of the materials to be “exhibited”, and with the difficulty of comparing deeply different ways of displaying and experiencing artefacts and films. (While I can admit that *some* films are artefacts, I am not comfortable with the concept that *all* films are artefacts, or better, *just* artefacts. But this is another discourse, and besides, I think it is beyond the point.)

But apart from this, I think the central issue here is that what we can call “museology” is still (or *just*) one of the several functions that complex organizations as film archives have. And the weight of this function against others evidently differs from one archive to another. There are institutions for which this function is at the core of their history and identity (as is the case for the Österreichisches Filmmuseum), but it is correct to say that in most archives this function coexists with others, with which it often has a complex dialectical relation (the never fully resolved chiasm of conservation-exhibition). Even worse, this museum function is not even present in many Archives, and what is even more interesting is that most of these “*non-museum Archives*” are also those having the largest collections.

My point here is that while I can agree (at least on a rather general level) with your idea that a *certain approach* to film access is potentially dangerous for the museological function of a Film Archive, I must say that these considerations are only relevant for some archives, or at least for only one part of film archives' function and role.

Now, this does not mean that film museums (or film archives' museological function) are irrelevant or useless (nor that they will be so in the future). On the contrary, we all agree (at least the two of us) that they provide a very relevant, irreplaceable service to the public, scholars, and the so-called field in general, in contributing to debate, and in circulating and highlighting ideas, areas of research, "*viewpoints and arguments about culture and society through curated programmes and exhibitions*".

But on the other hand, I must admit that I am not fully comfortable with your implicit undermining of the role and function of what I termed "access on demand", or, as we used to say, research (and here, once and for all, I must confess my guilt of having used words too often used by our common enemy, but I must say in my defence that the lack of serious debate on these subjects within archives results in an impoverished "counter-vocabulary"); in other words, the "*library function*" as opposed – but not in contradiction – to the "*museum function*".

Unfortunately, as many (film) archival Institutions call themselves "archives" or "libraries", this must relate to the way they see themselves, or the way they prioritize their many functions. And when we think of the common, basic concepts of "*archive*" and "*library*", it is difficult to deny that their first "*raison d'être*" lies, in fact, in allowing research and unorganized, unmediated access by favouring, supporting, and helping researchers, scholars, and (with some limitations and rules which still do not negate their basic functions) the general public, whenever they seek access to documents, works, texts, and/or information about them (i.e., cataloguing information).

I do not think we can seriously disagree about this, and about the fact that ideas, views, and interpretations which are offered and spread by film *museums* do not grow on trees, but rather stem out of a cultural, historical, aesthetical discussion, and research that it is fed by the work of scholars and researchers with access to primary sources – in other words, who have been allowed *access on demand* to film collections. I do not think I need to mention seminal work, such as that of Heide Schlüpmann on German silents, or the generation of studies which resulted from the enlarged, undifferentiated, unmediated access opportunity created by the Nederlands Filmmuseum's campaign of preservation in the 1990s, because I am sure we all know what I am referring to. It is undeniable that in the past quarter of a century the most important impulses to film historiography and interpretation originated by the unprecedented possibilities to study primary sources.

Apart from these considerations, we should not forget that many archives – actually many *large* archives – do not have a *museological* function at all, and the only form of access they could provide is "access on demand". And even if they do have a regular activity of programming and "*curated, mediated access*", the sheer dimensions and variety of their collections are such that this function alone would not be sufficient to allow a significant study and knowledge of their holdings – not to mention what I would define "enjoyment" of their collections by a general public that is not necessarily carrying out research. In essence, to find solutions for providing access for this type of public is of strategic importance for film archives if they want to

Nicola Mazzanti, ausente en el *Open Forum* del 10 de junio, hizo llegar la propuesta de responder a la ponencia de Alexander Horwath, a lo cual éste accedió.

Mazzanti, si bien coincidiera en general con su colega vienés, se propone replicar a las discrepancias destacadas por éste último, insistiendo en primer lugar en el hecho de que sus críticas apunten principalmente a «los archivos cinematográficos» y no a «los museos de cine», pues es una distinción que no implica consideraciones sólo de orden formal.

Lo que el autor enfatiza es que, disponiendo ya de instrumentos digitales, sería lógico imaginar otras posibilidades de acceso a las colecciones, más flexibles y paralelas a las exhibiciones tradicionales. Se trata, pues, de multiplicar las estrategias y concepciones de acceso a las colecciones, incluyendo la proyección en pantalla grande (mientras sea posible), sin privarnos por ello, sobre todo en el caso de que sea factible o incluso ventajoso, de proyecciones digitales.

Incumbe a los archivos cinematográficos el hecho de decidir, en base a estudios y ensayos adecuados, las ocasiones y condiciones en que una proyección digital pueda reemplazar, como «simulación aceptable» a una proyección cinematográfica. Además el autor precisa que aún deben ser enfrentados múltiples ensayos y discusiones antes de llegar a esa etapa.

El carácter museal de las actividades de algunas cinematecas, sea o no preponderante, complica el debate. En algunas instituciones el museo constituye el núcleo de sus actividades. En cambio hay cinematecas cuyas actividades museales conviven con otras numerosas y distintas, a menudo en una relación dialéctica; sin olvidar que muchas cinematecas, incluso las más grandes, no cuentan con actividad museal alguna.

Para el autor, el acceso amplio a las colecciones («access on demand»), no se opone a la actividad museal, y tampoco a la programación crítica, sino más bien las dos modalidades de

“build” a new audience for their collections, as well as to reaffirm their role in contemporary society.

Clearly, I am not proposing that this *library* function – “access on demand” – is in opposition to the *museum* function. On the contrary, I see them not only as two facets of the role archives should play, but as two aspects which are so inherently interrelated and interdependent that one could not exist without the other. I am deeply convinced that the film archives’ *system* as a whole – if not each individual archive – should be able to fulfil both these functions, and that it would be a serious mistake to prioritize or undermine one against the other.

Now, having said this, I think it is also undeniable that in general terms archives fail to fulfil the function of providing “*library-type*”, unmediated, research-oriented access.

They fail to do so for a complex number of reasons: they are not used to doing so, and for historical reasons they do not see this as a priority; this would require resources (human, logistical, and ultimately budgetary) that archives often lack; and, finally, the “environment” which made it possible in the past has largely disappeared. Here I refer to that vast and differentiated network that made it easy to access 16mm prints, to rent projection equipment, to use cineclubs and repertory cinemas – in other words, that infrastructure (mostly not directly connected with archives) which allowed organizations not primarily devoted to film programming to organize screenings in the context of schools, universities, cultural centres, or even privately, easily and at affordable cost.

What we are witnessing today is in fact a landscape of devastation due to a growing complexity in providing and obtaining “access on demand”, in carrying out research, or in utilizing archival films for cultural, educational, or pure enjoyment purposes. The result is the impossibility of feeding and breeding a florid, vivid, and differentiated discourse on film history and aesthetics. As a consequence, this ends up being impoverished by the necessity of resorting exclusively to the “corpus” of commercially available DVDs. This, I think, is the really unfortunate triumph of a “*liberal*”, commercially driven wave, which threatens to overtake and overwhelm archives and to make their role growingly “marginal” in the years to come.

Also, this creates a perverted, self-perpetrating, and self-feeding circle: the complexity of accessing film collections reduces the request for access (and, objectively, also contributes to the decrease in audiences for film archives’ theatres – the famous “*museological activity*” – which we are witnessing everywhere); this reduced demand then justifies a further reduction in the film projections on offer (both as part of programming and for research and educational purposes), which in turn encourages the use of other sources (mainly commercial DVDs) and a decrease in the use of archives’ collections, which then further depresses requests, and so on, in a vicious circle which we do not seem to be able to break.

In reality, this perverted dynamic has very little to do with the advent of “Digital”, for the simple fact that it had started long before Digital even existed.

acceso deberían ser complementarias e inscindibles. Plantea por último si los distintos instrumentos digitales a nuestra disposición no constituyan otras maneras más de facilitar el acceso a las colecciones tanto a investigadores como al público cinéfilo en general.

So, as I tried to make clear in my presentation, I am asking myself if the opportunities that seem to be offered by some digital technologies could not help to break this “vicious circle” by creating the conditions for archives to change and improve their access strategies, reducing the costs and complexity of opening up their collections to other archives (for their own programming and exhibition activities), allowing easier ways for researchers and for an enlarged public to access their collections, and for their holdings to become available for research in a wide range of disciplines.

In short, I am advocating that archives look into the issue of how digital projection (and not, as I stated earlier, *just* DVDs and web streaming, which to me are obviously insufficient to represent the complexity of the film experience) could be used, in parallel with other delivery and programming strategies, to reinforce and reconfirm the many roles archives should play, including the functions of *museum* and *library*. Frankly, it looks to me as if this is a major opportunity for archives to regain a role in providing, encouraging, and supporting research and education practices based on experiencing film projection, or a high quality simulation of it, i.e., to provide more and better “access on demand”.

In conclusion, I would like to *steal* your quotation of Faulkner via Godard, and agree with it – how could I not?

Yes, “*between grief and nothingness, I will take grief*” – and that’s exactly what I am doing, and advocating. Between the nothingness which is looming above film archives, that nothingness produced by the threat of marginalization, I prefer the grief brought to us by Digital, the grief of getting our hands dirty with its mud, of exploring new paths knowing they might fail, for the simple reason that we dare to admit that the old models are not sufficient anymore.

In other words, I prefer the grief brought by the risk of failure, to the nothingness of inertia.

Cordially, as always,
Nicola Mazzanti