

Competences needed infilm and audiovisual archiving

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Our institutions are permanently confronted with the necessity of defining competences, skills and the levels of experience required in the work environment of the European film archives.

For example, we are facing the digital challenge in almost every sector of our daily work-life,
The change in consumer-preferences,
the demand for transparency, access, use and re-use of collections,
the question regarding the future of traditional cinema,
the intensified debate with copyright owners and holders,
the challenge of digital rights management,
the confrontation with formerly unknown exploitation measures –

this is not yet an exhaustive list, but merely a selection of essential factors which require continual interrogation and definition of our institutional identity.

To make it clear: No changes have occurred to the classical tasks of collecting, cataloguing, conserving, restoring, and presenting – but entirely transformed are the aspects of HOW to perform these tasks in a digital world.

Collecting, preserving and providing access to digital materials has become an essential problem of the film archives. These digital media create a new “Media Environment” and thus the question arises: How, and towards what, will the film archives work in the future? Dan Nissen, head of the Danish Film Institute, has asked in this context: “*Are film archives to become institutions, which in the future will be dealing with a long gone media connected with a certain way of experiencing this media, and a certain carrier of narrative?*”

I may add: Should archives therefore only focus on classic cinema and its presentation in a traditional theatrical environment? Many of the eminent personalities of the European film archives just after WWII deeply focused on presentation, while they gathered together the great collections. Henri Langlois in France, Jacques Ledoux in Belgium, Freddy Buache in Switzerland, Fernand Jung in Luxembourg, Peter Konlechner and Peter Kubelka in Vienna or Gerd Lamprecht and Wilhelm Lavies in Germany – all of them were collectors with a passion for cinema, they collected film and related materials mainly in order to exhibit, to publish and to show. Restoration was a privilege reserved for the master pieces, and was undertaken without the development of a philological basis.

In retrospect Enno Patalas has described this carefree attitude. He turned his back on it in the 1990s, when a young generation of film restorers and -historians began to develop the philological basis from within their practices. Similarly, from *within* the archives arose a re-orientation towards film beyond the “master pieces”: the 1978 FIAF Congress in Brighton marked the turn of attention towards early film, formerly classified as marginal: the necessity and value of its preservation and exploration was recognized.

Thus the archives do have a tradition of re-defining their task - mostly sealed in complex *internal* processes of collections-analysis –proceeding towards a set of instruments and techniques which proved of long-term validity.

But for the last 10 years the challenges brought with persistence to the archives, are mainly of *external* nature.

In the first half of the 1990s the “Project Lumière” of the newly founded Association des Cinémathèques Européennes (ACE) was still able to receive funding from the MEDIA program of the European Commission: for a joint, large-scale, analogue restoration project, which resulted in publication of a wonderful catalogue, and a tour of the restored films through festivals and cinemas. After that, funding was available exclusively for the digital environment, for databases, for access to digitized works, for research into e-Cinema or for the development of new internet-platforms for so-called digital content. This funding policy of the European Commission could be neglected as driven by political and economic interests, if it didn't mirror the general expectation and attitude of the society. The promise of the internet, to provide all information at immediate mouse-click, the wide spread expectation of the users, these information would produce an implicitly truth, the continually growing demand for images – be it from private sector or industry – the loss of the status of Cinema as a natural focal point for socialization linked to an increasing ‘privatization’ of film consumer habits – all these are challenges which the publicly funded film archives are unable to ignore. Unless they define themselves as a traditional museum for traditional analogue film.

For most archives this is an impossibility, since they are charged with a public mission. Assuming that the collections – be they film or non-film materials – are a kind of point of origin for the spectrum of archival tasks, then the questions of WHY and HOW resurface – so far unanswered within the community of European film archives. The script, only existent in a laptop, the photos only available on the PR department's server, the production correspondence only stored in emails, the director's making-off commentary track on a DVD, the film existing only on Beta SP... What to collect, how to conserve, when to restore?

And how to cope with the multitude of formats now prevailing in all areas of collection activities? Photos of a director on paper, slide, .tif. Texts on paper, micro film, .pdf. Original films on 35mm acetate, obsolete video formats such as U-Matic, new ones as Beta-SP, HD. Where are the catalogues and the meta data, all-encompassing, searchable,

connecting the materials? While these connections are needed by users, researchers, students, programmers, festival directors. Where is this information made public, those materials and the data, how are they accessible, how exchangeable, and in what kind of picture of the European moving image heritage do they culminate?

In order to create at least a basis for answering these questions, the ACE members are working on procedures for standardizing in film cataloguing, indexing and description (CEN). And they are currently creating a digital Union Catalogue of the holdings of film archives (MIDAS) with – at the moment – 16 participating European archives. This focus on information, on standards in cataloguing, on interoperability of our data bases, on identification and on multilinguality may seem far removed from the daily operations in a film archive. Yet this is the condition for us – as it is for libraries – to get presence in a world dominated by visibility.

The debate, whether the archives are subordinating themselves blindly to the digital challenge and thus being traitors to their cultural identity, was carried out in public by Alexander Horvarth and Nicola Mazzanti. This question arises daily, as we are operating with terminology such as “asset management” or “content”, “use” and “re-use”. But it should not be overlooked that we often assign such new vocabulary to our traditional tasks, in order to reach our audiences in the digital world. And to be heard by our funding agencies.

Let us not fool ourselves. In regard to technology, we cannot be *avant-garde*; this is privilege and function of the industry. In regard to visibility of our holdings, *beyond* our cinemas, our hands are all-to-often bound; this is privilege of rights-owners, whose archives generally are better developed than public sector archives – since the collections embody *monetary* value for them. For us they have *cultural* value.

And yet the archives are forced to behave like rights-owners, harvesting their collections for films in public domain or for orphan works; meanwhile they publish more DVDs than books, do accept collections only if rights are implied (for example a license for free for screening in the own premises or the right for non-commercial distribution).

Be this justified in the desire to present their collections, or be it justified in the powerful need to generate larger income for the cost- and labour-intensive film archive: what do these considerations imply for the collecting policies, the care of the holdings, for cataloguing, publishing? When the archives, at this point, turn to non-fiction film pre-1945, or to amateur film, or to industrial- or advertising film – what does this signify for the work *inside* the archives, and film historiography *outside*?

Legal issues, funding policy, fund raising, publication strategies, observation of developments in the digital area, internal and external networking – and then: reflection of these factors, their comparison with the self-definition, the design of an integral policy of the archive – these are by now ‘classical’ management tasks in a film archive.

Apart from management, and connected to it, there is curator-ship. What is the mark of a good curator? Familiarity with the collection, profound film historical knowledge, profound knowledge of rights issues and familiarity with digital developments.

He or she should be able to discuss some of the fundamental questions mentioned before on a basis of ethical, philological and technological knowledge. He or she must define the focal points for the collecting policy, for acquisitions, trades, the expansion of collections, for analogue or digital restoration activities, for dvd production, film distribution and exhibition practices. The curator must stand up for the interests of the film archive within the institutional context, must fight for budgets and staff, must continually advance his/her level of education, and that of the staff, has to know film labs, their strengths and pricing, must be competent at budgeting and controlling, at negotiation.

And finally: the restorer, expert of the material, with a preference for traditional ‘celluloid’ and driven by the desire to restore, in contact and exchange with experts and specialists of other archives, with specialized labs and with the companies producing equipment for digital restoration. The restorer is educated in the history of film technology, in the historical presentation practices as well as in general film history, is also active in creating documentation for future reference, actively taking an influence on cataloguing: an individual, maybe individualistic, sometimes a kind of nerd – which is meant as a compliment.

These are three sections – manager, curator, restorer – they can overlap, although each has its own specific spectrum of core competences.

Under the assumption that the history of film and of film-technology, that ethics and philology of archival work, knowledge of the complex rights situation - that these jointly create a pool of core competences, under *this* assumption it is easy to imagine an expanded course of master studies – A two years course, offering after one year of education in these core subjects an additional specialization taught in a second year.

At the end the graduate should be able to perform his/her work at different levels of responsibilities, ranging from simple staff member to Head of Department, to Curator or Head of the Collections.

Consequently, the Film and Media Archivist must be knowledgeable, to various levels and extents in:

Film and Media theory and history
Film and Media technological history
Principles and functions of conservation, museology, restoration etc.

Notions of current technologies applied in digital, video and film production
Notions on Film and Media industry, its structure, organization, economics
Principles and functions of archival Institutions (including applicable legislation)
Basics of Archival Organizations' administration and management
Theory of Conservation of analog records' Collections
Practice of Conservation of analog records' Collections
Theory of Restoration of original records
Practice of Restoration of original records
Theory and Practice of Data Conservation and Recovery
Notions of copyright legislation and management
Basic Principles of Information Sciences
Information Sciences as applied to Film and Media, including current standards
Information Technology as applied to digital content conservation, metadata and access

Do the archives find staff thus trained?

This question was tackled by the archives ten years ago when they founded Archimedia, a training program for students and young professionals. It was a forum for acquiring or deepening knowledge on specialized subjects such as „Programming“, „Restoration“, „Management“, and also an important networking opportunity. As a training program at various places, it was lacking a permanent structure and a comprehensive approach, and was finished after EU funding had ended. It has left an awareness of painful need amongst ACE members.

Temporary training and on-the-location training are proving increasingly insufficient in face of the complexity of the tasks. But do the tasks influence what is currently taught and learned at European Universities? Are our needs and demands – identical to those of commercial sector archives - being met? With few exceptions, I personally tend towards denying this question. If we are a market for the graduates, then we don't know enough about what is offered – in spite of the fact that we provide an overview over university level education on our ACE website.

For this reason we have gladly accepted the offer of the University of Lisbon to directly involve us in defining a new curriculum for film archivists – and therefore I am delighted to take part in today's start of an exchange, which will hopefully go successfully further in the future.

And you alone can now judge, if those skills which I have roughly outlined, truly correlate with the skills you are currently teaching, or learning. I am eager to get deeper into our exchange on this.

Pour citer cet article

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