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Instant Access, Acceleration, Abundance: Cinema Moves Online? ¹

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In 2012, I edited, with my Australian friend Stuart Cunningham, a book called *Digital Disruption: Cinema Moves On-line* (2012). Friends had warned us that, given the unprecedented acceleration of developments on the Internet, our text would be obsolete already on the day of publication. And indeed, for this past year there have been numerous situations that have made me to repeatedly come back and revisit some of the issues that preoccupied me when I worked on the introduction for the book. Unlike back then, when my attention was on the far reaching economic and copyright implications of cinema moving on-line, here I will mainly explore the implications that the move on-line has on cinephile access and scholarship.

The **instant on-line access** to cinematic material gained in recent years leads to significant shifts in the study of film. Previously obscure film rarities now come within reach; various unseen treasures of the celluloid era and distant images rooted in the cultures of their faraway lands are now only a click away. The wealth of cinematic databases, the multitude of diaspora-driven web-vaults, the proliferating amount of feature and documentary footage made available by enterprising YouTube-channel owners, and the fresh material streamed by film festival web-sites, all profoundly change the landscape for the study of film. What can we make out of it?

I will open with three anecdotes of situations that took place during this past year, illustrating a status quo that was not there just a few years back.

Anecdote one. In the winter of 2012 I was examining a thesis, dealing with the comparative exploration of Soviet and Cuban cinema from the 1970s and 1980s. Reading the text about a week before the viva, I realized that whilst I knew all of the Soviet films, I had not seen several of the Cuban films discussed in the text. I had hoped that the films would have been included on DVD screeners alongside the thesis. But they were not. Panicking that there was very little time left, I e-mailed the supervisor and asked him to act promptly to ensure that I am sent, as soon as possible, copies of the three or four films in question as I did not feel confident assessing the thesis without knowing the films. It was all on a very short notice and I was doubtful if the student could react soon enough, but had no other recourse.

The supervisor got back to me later that day to say that all these films, as well as many more, are available on a web site, which caters to the Cuban diaspora. He gave me directions as to access, and indeed by the next day I had already seen Pastor Vega's *Retrato de Teresa /Portrait of Teresa* (1979) and Humberto Solas' *Cecilia* (1982). The site, like so many others that we know of related to the different film traditions each one of us is focusing on, had been established to serve primarily those interested in the diaspora who want to keep up with Cuban cinema. In this case, however, it gave me instant access for the scholarly use of rare material for what proved to be a meaningful comparative exercise.

In the second example, a research student arrived from Thailand for a visiting

period. Her work was on various films featuring Thai star Mitr Chabancha. Again, I felt that to be able to meaningfully supervise, I would need to see at least some of the films with the actor, a towering figure comparable in stature and fame to Indian megastar Amitabh Bachchan. Yet Chabancha's 14-year long career had been cut short with his death in 1970, when, at the age of 36, he suffered an accident during the filming of his 266th film. I did not think I would ever get to see more than photographs of the actor, yet the student was able to point me to various sites that carried full films or excerpts of the films in which he had starred, like the infamous *Insee Thong/ Golden Eagle* (1970) and others. Later on in the year, I was able to view a number of other Thai films made in the late 1950s and early 1960s by Thai director Rattana Pestonji – *Chuaifah Din Salai/Forever Yours* (1955), *Rongraem Narok/ Country Hotel*(1957), and *Black Silk/Prae Dum* (1961) – on the Asian Studies in video database (<http://www.asiapacificfilms.com/>), which also carries a range of rarely available films from Iran (Dariush Mehrjui), India (Mrinal Sen; Budhadeb Dasgupta), Philippines (Nick Deocampo), or the Korean *Military Train/ Gun-yong-yeolcha* from 1938 (dir. Seo Gwang Je). It would have taken me a considerable detective effort if I wanted to see these films just a few years back, and I would most likely not have succeeded in finding all of them. With very little effort, however, I was now able to increase my knowledge of areas where I do not have expertise, to an extent that allows me to function relatively competently and give meaningful supervisory advice, as well as to use my existing knowledge to make suggestions for comparisons.

The third example, which happens to be my favorite, took place just about two months ago. In an effort to fill up major gaps in my knowledge of Arab cinema, I discovered that

the Egyptian classic *Al momia/ The Night of Counting the Years* (1960, Shadi Abdel Salam) is now online on YouTube, albeit not subtitled. Minutes after I started watching it, however, I realized that this film's aesthetics was strangely familiar to me, so I strained to figure out what was this film reminding me so strongly of. I thought of the Polish epics of Jerzy Kawalerowicz, who, indeed, had made a film called *Pharaoh* in 1966. But whilst the mise-en-scene and the sets could easily be correlated – after all, both films take place amidst the background of pyramids and barren desert mounds of sand – it was not *Pharaoh* that *Al Momia* looked like. Still, the reference to Kawalerowicz persisted, and I was soon able to realize that *Al Momia* resembled strongly another film of the director, his 1961 *Mother Joan of Angels (Matka Joanna od aniolów)*. But even if, as a specialist, I felt that my suspicion of a strong influence from Kawalerowicz to this Egyptian film was sound and well grounded, what proof was there that this indeed was the case? The Wikipedia entry on director Shadi Abdel Salam, which I accessed next, offered a good confirmation. It stated that around 1965 the director had ‘worked as a historical consultant and supervisor of the decoration, costumes and accessories sections of the Polish film *Pharaoh*, directed by **Kavelorovitch**’ [sic].²

Within 20 min or so, I had discovered evidence of major line of influencing between the cinemas of non-Western nations, a comparison between little known and rarely seen yet recognized cinematic masterpieces that most certainly merits further study, as I will observe later on in this presentation. This discovery, which I would hope to see some of my students take further, would not have been possible without the instantaneity of integrated access to the sources of information that played a role in my 20-minute long research.

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I could go on with a much longer list of examples, but will stop here in order to be able to make the points that these instances made me think about. My examples are intentionally eclectic, and further examples will keep in line with this heterogeneity. The main claim is that currently we are dealing with an unprecedented and profoundly transformed landscape of availability of rare cinematic texts online, one that has never existed before, one that was not in existence even a year ago, and one that is getting richer by the day, a landscape that evolves in an extraordinarily accelerated manner in a combination of paid and free channels. I should stress again that here I am not looking on matters of monetizing nor 'the long tail'. It is a trend that remains unrecognised as it is concerning mainly non-Hollywood cinema. Yet, for cinephiles and for people engaged with the study of non-mainstream cinematic material, it has got great implications.

Areas of study that are profoundly transformed by the availability of this material include mainly non-mainstream cinema areas.

First, on-line there is currently a true abundance of material related to silent cinema³, animation, documentary⁴, historical⁵, scientific and industrial film, and newsreels, and it gets richer all the time. Those who work with these types of films have seen enormous transformations in the course of the past few years and enjoy an unprecedented comparative access to ever-evolving material.

Second, there is unprecedented online access to the most recent offerings of current world cinema. This aspect is not in the centre of my attention here, yet I ought to mention examples such as FestivalScope, the service that makes available hundreds of

current festival films available on-line to all those who pay the annual subscription fee of 70 Euro, thus enabling those who cannot make it to the festivals to still keep up with the circuit. Or the example with the short film festival in Clermont-Ferrand which makes a database of 6,000 titles (submitted to yet not necessarily selected for showing by the festival) available to those who take part in the event, thus enabling programmers of other short festivals from around the world to program their events without necessarily touring the circuit.⁶

Third, there is growing and already unmatched wealth of material on-line of what I tentatively call ‘peripheral cinemas’, all these traditions which are of niche interest, be it national or thematic. Examples here could include the entire output of Romanian cinema from the onset through to rarely seen yet remarkably raw and satisfying films from the 1990s, just preceding the much better known New Wave, or a wealth of Soviet historical features available in full with subtitles, from Dovzhenko’s *Aerograd* (1935), set in the far East and dealing with a potential Japanese conspiracy, to Mikhail Chiaurelli’s *Battle of Berlin* (1949), showing a rare and highly controversial cinematic interpretation of Stalin. Knowing these texts was, until recently, the domain of experts specialized in the respective national or thematic traditions. Due to the instant access, now anyone who is interested in viewing this material, can access it – resulting in an untapped potential exposure that has the potential to open up many interesting developments (like the one I described in my example with *Al Momia*). Due to YouTube and other sites, peripheral cinema is now much more visible than it was ever before, and so is the access to what is classified as ‘obscure’ material.⁷ I expect that we will see more and more of this material come on-line whereas the release of the same on DVD or other commercially available

forms will likely to stall and remain limited. ⁸

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Now, I have noticed that whenever I make the claim that never before have we had such abundance of rare cinematic material on our fingertips, I immediately get a skeptical reaction. So let me address the skeptics, whose concerns I acknowledge but to whom I would like to propose an alternative angle in response. Several kinds of objections are usually made:

One objection is that a huge number of material is still available in archives only and not likely to ever be available in any other way.⁹ Indeed, this is true, but a lot that was previously not available is already there, and it is largely up to us to call the glass half full or half empty. Besides that I can immediately counter this objection with numerous examples, my general answer to this is: You would have noticed that most examples I am giving here relate to cinematic material that has not been shot originally in digital in the first place but which must have been digitized before made available on-line. And, like these, more and more will be digitized and will come on-line in time. Many of the films that I have had the chance to view on-line are not even available on DVD nor will they ever be made available, because producing a DVD is a commercial enterprise that requires investment, which in turn requires existing market and recoupment (none of which is viable with this type of niche material). ¹⁰I speculate that more and more of this type of rare material is likely to come on-line in time, and it will not take very long.

It is also true that, given the current technological developments, archives lose

their grip over the moving image: until recently, the archive could control who and how had access to what, when, and at what cost, the newly emerging situation where a multitude of films can be accessed in a situation of free exchange without the control of the archive. The free exchange of films on the internet is, in fact, undermining the workings of regulated archives, as they often are dependent on revenues from licensing or procuring materials.¹¹ One good example is the situation with on-line vaults of African cinema that are being developed in collaboration with African TV stations, such as M-Net and Plan Images, as a result of which rare films ‘may largely bypass the DVD revolution and instead become available to audiences for a first time via internet streaming’, without ever having been available in traditional archival settings. Having quoted this example, African film specialist David Murphy remarks that ‘although the internet may be an inherently unstable, ephemeral phenomenon and thus an anathema to the goals of long-term preservation inherent within the conception of the official archive, it is permitting access to African film in ways that the official archive has thus far found impossible to replicate’ (Murphy, 2012).

The second objection is that **material appears on-line as easily as it disappears**.¹² Indeed, this happens a lot, and I can myself quote a number of examples when something previously available has been withdrawn without any warning. For example, my favourite and brilliantly funny short *A 8944 km de Cannes* by Brazilian director Walter Salles (2007) has been withdrawn from all web-sites on request from the film’s producer, the Cannes Film Festival which commissioned this short alongside another thirty shorts from famous director on occasion of its 60th anniversary. The result is that this hilarious three-minute film, which is probably the best thing Walter Salles has

ever made, remains unknown and unavailable, as it can only be seen on the DVD omnibus collection *Chacun son cinema* that has only been released for a very limited run even in France. The film is not even available at Cannes' festival's web-site – neither for a fee nor for free.¹³

However, the important thing is that for something to be made available on-line means it has already been digitized, and therefore even if it disappears from wherever you encountered it, it is somewhere out there and it is available. It is not really lost and, in fact, it is less lost than material that is on Super8 or BetaMax, or on any of those other multiple obsolete formats whose terrible ordeal and agony we have witnessed in the past decades. Bottom line is that once it exists digitally, you can download it and store it.¹⁴ Or, if the owner of copyright has made it available (as one would expect would be the case if material is withdrawn, it ought to be for reasons of not impeding the commercial exploitation), it will be possible to get it through one of the paid vaults. In any case, it won't disappear fully.¹⁵

I am leaving aside here the extensive debate on the matter of plundering and posting material on-line without any respect to copyright holders.¹⁶ Smaller arthouse film distributors may have paid for the acquisition rights to the distribution of a particular film but this does not protect them from the danger that their material would be pirated and made available on-line for free. In that they are much more vulnerable than the bigger players, as they do not have the resources to monitor the frequent abuse of material that keeps popping on-line all the time, for free streaming or even downloads online. And very little protection besides their own efforts to ask sites to take material down is available to filmmakers who have undertaken to distribute their own material.¹⁷

Last but not least, skeptics say that **they prefer to see a film in conditions in which it is meant to be seen, in a theatre and with an audience.** So do I. But when the choice is between seeing a film in perfect condition or not seeing it at all, I choose to see it, in whatever conditions available. For example, I recently had the chance to realize that many films that were cornerstone for my film education in Bulgaria and that I have indeed seen in a theatre in black and white, like Antonioni's *Blow-Up* (1966) or Peckinpah's *Straw Dogs* (1971), were actually made in color. So, in such situation, do I declare my viewing experience invalid in spite that these films have made a great impression on me? When faced with the choice to disavow my underprivileged background/origins or be proud that even in lesser conditions I have been able to have cinephile formation, I certainly would choose the latter? This is not to say that my choice is to see films on-line; not at all. The truth, however, is that film can be seen on any size of screen, even if imperfectly. ¹⁸

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And now, in conclusion, I would like to move on to outlining several of the main implications that the instant availability of such wealth of cinematic material on-line has for us as film scholars.

As Sundance and Tribeca's Geoff Gilmore has noted, people view film in new ways. Current developments mean that the dominant mode of experiencing may turn away from the mode of a collectively experienced art. More and more watching happens in isolation, on an individual screen, be it in the context of streaming or DVD viewing. The move away from being an event that presupposes going to a theatre and viewing

films alongside others as part of an audience is just a trend for now, and one can argue how prevalent it is; yet viewing in isolation and discussing communally on-line is becoming a recognizable pattern that may soon become the norm.

One consequence is what I call **a lifestyle change**. It is no longer necessary to be based in a large metropolitan centre in order to keep informed about cinema. Advanced students of cinema still do, but do not need to, congregate in cities. It is possible to view, enjoy and study cinema from a multiplicity of locations. I live in a remote Scottish fishing village and indeed would not be able to see a number of the films that I now see if it was not for the possibility to see them on DVD or online. Influential blogger Girish Shambu is based in provincial Buffalo, upstate New York. And such examples can easily be enhanced with more... The reality is that, to keep up with film, it is no longer imperative to seek to base oneself in a cosmopolitan urban location.¹⁹ The availability of material on-line has made travel less important – it is no longer of huge importance to visit the archive if one can see most of the material on-line; it is no longer essential to attend the festival... To refer back to my three examples, it is not only the availability but also the instantaneity and the accelerated access to material that makes all the difference: we are now not only able to see what we want to see in a location which is remote and which, due to its remoteness, is by default under-resourced, but to also see it without any delay. The move on-line also comes along with a concurrent change in the cinophile discussion space, a context in which groups of cinophiles more and more congregate on-line, be it at various truly diverse forums and communities, or alongside the actual material or its referencing on sites like the IMDb or YouTube.²⁰

The new realities of disjointed viewing, instantaneity of access to abundant

material, coupled with often spatially disjointed viewing (as viewers rarely come together in the space of a theatre but rather watch from a multiplicity of locations) and on-line discussion in the context of on-line forums, rises the question what, if anything, can scholars do by way of public service in this new viewing environment. The material is out there, indeed, but not the knowledge.

Twenty years ago, when I was living in Ottawa, the Canadian capital, there was Beechwood Video, a shop specialized in non-mainstream material (It advertised with the catch line: *Come See What Hollywood Is Not Producing...*). Films I was able to rent there were instrumental in rounding up my own film education and contributed to my gradual transformation from a directionless overqualified immigrant to Canada into a niche specialist of East European cinema which the bigger American academic market could absorb a year or two later. But my original edification had taken place in a context where I already knew a lot, both about film and many other aspects of the culture, history and politics. Unlike me, most of the visitors to Beechwood Video had no idea what to rent, and most frequently would end up checking out nothing more adventurous than *Repo Man* (1984, Alex Cox) or *Strictly Ballroom* (Bal Luhrmann, 1992) and never even came to learn of masterworks like Polish *The Interrogation* (Ryszard Bugajski, 1981) or Brazilian *Xica da Silva* (Carlos Diegues, 1976).

So, I wonder, can people like us do something to assist the aspiring visitors to the Internet's huge video shop in making their choices more informed and imaginative? Our role as media researchers change: we become more like curators and guides; we no longer help students find out about cinema, but mostly assist them in connecting, comparing, and making things meaningful in relation to history, aesthetics, and politics.

A more extended public engagement for those knowledgeable about cinema still seems to be far from the norm, yet I believe that some small efforts, such as writing annotations of films on YouTube or the IMDb, linking writing to IMDb entries, lobbying with filmmakers and distributors on the matter of the availability of their films, help with linking information on Wikipedia or correcting and expanding entries, making material available on blogs are all worthwhile efforts. Further, it may be worthwhile for us to consider organising material in YouTube channels (still the domain of amateurs), engage in providing related recommendations (especially as the IMDb has drastically failed in recent years in its efforts to provide a meaningful working recommendations algorithm and it is now clear that this may be one area where our film knowledge may come of direct use). With these developments, our own collective history changes – or, rather, these images, having now become more available and accessible, become a fully-fledged part of the collective history; the relationship between film and history, and ultimately the status of images in the wider context of digital heritage, acquires new meanings. This is why there are things we could do in being more vocal in the critique of the existing generic conventions (and insist on diversifying the absurd classification categories that sites like Lovefilm or Netflix still operate with, namely ‘foreign’; ‘drama’; ‘family’; ‘comedy’ and so on). And, last but not least, the new online abundance of material just begs for various situations where more of us would put knowledge to use and get engaged in curation, be it for traditional or virtual film festivals or events.

My favourite implication of this new situation of instant accessibility, however, is the possibilities that are opening up for comparative study. There is no more excuse to not know of other cinemas and traditions and of the films that colleagues are telling you

about when you talk of your work. Comparative work is made easier²¹, and this is especially true for projects that concern peripheral interactions (such as, for example, Latin American and Eastern European leftist documentary from the 1970s). Ambitiously complex multi-faceted studies, such as tracing the post-utopian discourse evolving in the cinemas of countries that come out of their own specific totalitarian periods, become imaginable and manageable.

The instant accessibility of a multiplicity of films on-line also facilitates stylistic juxtapositions and aesthetic investigations of influencing in cinema. For a long time a domain of art historians²² or preserved only for film scholars with privileged access enabling the reproduction of comparative illustrative material, such investigations become much easier nowadays. I attempted such comparative work a decade in my study of Emir Kusturica's films. It took me as much time finding and securing the films that I felt I needed to look at in order to establish the sources of Kusturica's collages as it took to actually view them and match the scenes; if I were to go through this same exercise again today, the time for searching and securing copies would cost much less, it would take much less time and it would not need to include viewing taking place on two continents, as it did back then. Moreover, if I had the opportunity to illustrate my findings, I would not need to operate within the extremely limiting spectrum of available stills from a movie, but could either extract a series of image captures or, even better, display the relevant film clips side by side in the context of a critical write up dissecting the influences and the resulting string of 'homages'. I could make my point much more powerfully and persuasively. In a way, we have a situation that is diametrically juxtaposed to Raymond Bellour's claim from his essay 'The Unattainable Text' that 'the

text of the film is unattainable because it is unquotable' (1975: 20). Not only is the text of the film attainable but, in a multimedia context, it even becomes quotable.

In conclusion, I believe that the situation of people who are interested in non-mainstream cinema (is this 'cinephiles'?) has never been so good. It is a much more open and democratic environment today than it has ever been. As we are yet to see a study or perhaps a comprehensive record of this abundance, we do not really know what and how much is out there. I can only hope that, when we find out for sure, it will turn out to be even more than what I celebrated here today.

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Notes:

¹ All references to web-sources in the text correct as of 5 May 2013. I would like to acknowledge good feedback received to this text by Prof. Patricia Pisters (Amsterdam), the editorial collective at *Cineaste* (New York), and by colleagues who took part in the symposium 'Dynamics of World Cinema' at the University of Navarra, Pamplona, Spain in May 2013.

² Indeed, this remark in the Wikipedia entry (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shadi_Abdel_Salam) does not link to anything as Kawalerowicz's name is misspelled (Kavelorovitch) so it cannot be linked. (However, this is one example where a simple scholarly intervention could change the status quo and establish an important and overlooked connection).

³ I had planned to see Segundo de Chomon's films at the Paris Cinematheque in November 2012, but was ill and could not go to the theatre. However, I was able to see the films simultaneously with the theatrical screening whilst in bed in my hotel room, watching them on-line on YouTube

where they have been available since 21 January 2011 at a channel maintained by the Canada-based Silent Film House.

⁴ From current films such as the remarkable *Nostalgia de la luz/ Nostalgia for the Light* (Chile, 2010, dir. Patricio Guzmán), which is freely available on-line (www.teledocumentales.com/nostalgia-de-la-luz/) or *Five Broken Cameras* (2011, dir. Emad Burnat and Guy Davidi) and Wang Bing's *Three Sisters* (China, 2012), both available on the professional database FestivalScope, to classics such as Patricio Guzman's own *Battle of Chile* (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hNEFjXTe6Vk>) or Yuris Podnieks *End of Empire* (USSR, 1991) available on YouTube (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nIL6mX868G4&playnext=1&list=PLi_mwnU8sNemkkrLHFfnpNuaq0YCXGV6G).

⁵ Like the Colonial Film Database (<http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk>), or material from the Pathe and other archives of newsreels available through the Imperial War Museum.

⁶ And I am not even going here into examples where pirated current material can be easily accessed by those in the know —usually members of the younger age group – who, like my 18 year-old son, know how and where to find almost any film they feel interest in and for whom people like Kim Dotcom or Megaupload are generational role models.

⁷ A few years ago, on request from doctoral students working with such obscure niche material, we had to organise training sessions on matters of accessing BitTorrent and cyberlocker sites. This no longer seems to be necessary as most of the material that they sought to access through the BitTorrent communities (such as 'Torrentovka' in the former Baltic republics of the Soviet Union, which was giving access to rare Soviet films) are not readily available.

⁸ I have had the opportunity to observe a similar situation related to scholarly information related to this material. Back in 1999 when I worked on editing an update to what became the *BFI Companion to Russian and East European Cinema* (2000) and was determined to add a number of entries on important filmmakers and actors who had not been included on the original list. Whilst no existing encyclopedias or printed sources were making much mention of such major figures of cinema in the region like the Lithuanian actor Donatas Banionis, the Yugoslav director Živojin Pavlović, or the Czech screenwriter Ester Krumbachová, online sources were more likely to provide information, even if still limited at the time. The situation has profoundly changed since, with the print sources often having remained limited and scantily under-researched whilst the on-line sources have proliferated, have seen ongoing updates and now provide abundant information and detail not only on these figures but on matters of much lesser visibility. Whilst I still caution my students to be careful when referencing from Wikipedia, I no longer prohibit the use of this source (as many college professors were doing until recently, and some still do) and even expect it.

⁹ This critique was made by one of our PhD students from Uruguay during a conference on political documentary in April 2013. To my astonishment, however, another student who attended the same event and who works on early Balkan cinema, called me a few days later to say that whilst attending the event she seemed to agree with the Uruguayan friend, but that she has since

been able to find most of her material online, on YouTube, including rarely seen work by Brothers Manaki from 1905, the 1912 feature *Independenta Romaniei/The Independence of Romania* (dir. Aristide Demetriade) and the 1911 feature from Serbia, *Karadjordje*, both with English subtitles. This material was not there just a year ago, and in fact the Romanian film had just been made available in February 2013. It has been mounted by a German-based Cinema History Channel, established in January 2013. I should also mention here that the work of numerous activists who currently have projects to digitize the content of archives – like Mark Cousins who works with the Albanian film archive in Tirana, funded by Scorsese’s World Film Foundation – leads to a constantly changing and evolving availability of early cinema material.

¹⁰ For example, *Makedonska krvava svadba/Macedonian Blood Wedding* (1967; Yugoslavia, Trajče Popov; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qFFYqy6PPNw&list=PLE9E5AC1BD1BD3C19>), so rare that I can barely locate a simple still image of the film on the Internet.

¹¹ This remark is triggered by commentary made by Drubek-Mayer, drawing on Boris Groys, in her contribution to the *Archival Film Festivals* volume (2013, note 5). In an essay which looks into the architectural designs of buildings that house television archives, American scholar Lynn Spigel also makes important comments related to the ‘myth of accessibility’ by comparing these archives to on-line archival spaces, such as YouTube (Spigel, 2010).

¹² In a piece that immediately touches on this increased flexibility and responsiveness or platforms in empowering IP holders as revealed in Amazon’s practice to simply withdraw a flawed book at the slightest sign of possible trouble (so that even those who purchased it lose it from their Kindle devices), Internet guru Jonathan Zittrain (2013), remarks that ‘Anyone with claims of copyright infringement, defamation, plagiarism or obscenity now has a powerful new tool to compel the full or partial retraction or alteration of a book’; ‘Purchasing and downloading a book on to your e-reader won’t necessarily protect it from disappearing’ Texts are still ‘all-too-controllable’. To Zittrain, however, this maneuvering around possible copyright injunctions is more of a concern as he sees it not so much as protection of copyrights but rather as an infringement of user rights as it allows for a specific form of censorship.

¹³ Another example relates to the Chinese documentary *Bumming in Beijing* (Wu Wengguang, 1990) which I viewed in April 2013 with English subtitles in full on YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3unKrg8HwR4>). To my astonishment, when preparing for this presentation about three weeks later, I could no longer find it and learned that the account from which it was mounted has been suspended due to copyright infringement. The result is that this classical text of the new Chinese documentary movement is no longer available to the few committed cinephiles who would like to see it. I would not mind to see the film for a fee, but it is simply not available from anywhere. In such cases, the removal of the film from YouTube may have served to protect the rights of the copyrights holders but in effect it is shutting off the film from its handful of potential viewers and effectively shutting off the possibility that this handful may ever grow numerically. In such situation, I think it would be worthwhile that those scholars who may have access to the filmmakers and their producers and distributors to consider solicitation for non-removal, as an act of public activism, or lobby for making the films available in distribution at reasonable pricing.

¹⁴ The person who posted Tony Gatlif's film *Latcho Drom* on YouTube, for example, did so along with the following note: 'It is very very hard to find this film in the United States. So I found it, and decided to share it with you!' (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-B4aom3IaBQ>).

¹⁵ One of the user comments on the site displaying the cinematographic masterpiece *I am Cuba* (1964, Ussr/Cuba, Mikhail Kalatozov; a film that has been seen by 20000 for the 9 months it has been available so far on YouTube; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QS2A2NSUOEw>) reads: 'I hope this never gets taken down.' Given the fact that the film is available on DVD in commercial release and on MUBI, it may get taken down. Yet at the same time another cinematic gem, Kalatozov's *Jim Shavante/Salt for Svanetia* classic from 1930 (made available on YouTube in 2010; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eOzTO1vhJ-M>; broken down in parts), will probably not disappear as it has got no realistic commercial potential. This was the situation on visiting YpuTube on 13 May 2013. And indeed, on checking again a few months later, on 19 August 2013, *I am Cuba* has been taken down and YouTube is displaying a note saying 'This video is no longer available due to a copyright claim by Milestone Film & Video'. *The Salt of Svanetia* is still available for viewing, as one could have expected.

¹⁶ One can generally say that high profile public figures like legal expert Laurence Lessig (2005) and Chris Anderson (2009) are regarded as proponents of the 'free' approach and lead the discourse on 'information wants to be free' and 'new business models' whereas people like Andrew Keen (2009) and Robert Levine (2011) are the leaders of the critical opposition. Australian scholar Ramon Lobato (2012) speaks of 'six faces of piracy' and invites a contextual analysis of the everyday ethics of piracy. He has suggested that the matter of piracy can only be understood and properly tackled if one understands the context in which it is practiced – it could be seen as theft, but it can also be seen as an attempt to free enterprise, as practicing free speech, as authorship, as resistance, or as access (2012, pp. 69-95).

¹⁷ Often the situation with rare films is that they are not available for distribution. Sometimes, however, the matter is prohibitive pricing. Here is an example: At my (relatively affluent) University, we are in process of acquiring the films of Indian social documentarian Anand Pathwardhan for the library, at a cost of about £500 per DVD. The overall expense for getting the six films comes to about £3000, and we cannot possibly regard it as anything else but prohibitive as the annual departmental library budget is about £10,000. So, no matter that my colleagues and I would much rather acquire the films than seek to view them for free and encourage others to do so, it is not realistic to spend 30% of the annual budget to acquire six films that are not likely to be core teaching material. As things stand, we are still to see if we will purchase the films. Turning to YouTube, it is not particularly difficult to see most of Pathwardhan's films (either in full or in key excerpts), such as *Zameer Ke Bandi/ Prisoners of conscience* (1978); *Hamara Sharar/ Bombay Our City* (1985), *Ram Ke Naam/ In the Name of God* (1992); *Pitr, Putr aur Dharmayuddha/ Father, Son and Holy War* (1995). On the one hand the director is trying to sustain his operation by attaching an excessively high price tag to his work, on the other, his copyright is grossly neglected by those who make the work free on the Internet for the initiated few who want to see it.

¹⁸ One of the reasons for which we see the abolishment of subsequent windows of distribution and the frequent simultaneous release of film material via a variety of channels is the impossibility to combat the speed with which material is pirated and posted on-line. An

interesting twist to this came up in a conversation with the directors of the Udine Far East Fest Thomas Bertacche and Sabrina Baracetti in April 2013 when I asked them if they are worried about piracy? After all, they screen a selection of 60 highly desirable new films, which are of significant interest to crowds of fans who cannot attend the festival. No, they said, even though we watch for people with cameras, material does not get pirated from here; by the time the festival takes place in April, all these films are already out there on the Internet...

¹⁹ Just a few years ago someone I know and who was passionate about what he called ‘serious film’ moved from Bangalore in India to Paris, in order to be closer to the object of his interest; very little has been heard from him since and he was much more active and present when he was based in his remote location than he is now, from the alleged centrality of his Parisian headquarters.

²⁰ The possibilities that this opens up for the study of reception are not in my focus, but I ought to mention that a host of exciting opportunities do open up in this area solely due to the move of cinema on-line, such as to study the comments of users on the imdb or YouTube or in the various on-line discussion forums.

²¹ A recent example of such comparison for me was when, writing an essay on Rossellini’s *Stromboli* (1950), for example, I was able to access instantly a copy of Luchino Visconti’s *La terra trema* (1948) and check out the related scenes of tuna fishing.

²² Like the investigation into the Italian influences on Manet’s work which resulted in the display of some drawings copying elements of Italian Renaissance paintings next to finished work of the painter where these elements have been re-worked and integrated as part of the exhibition *Manet Return to Venice* at Palazzo Ducale in Venice, Italy (April-August 2013).