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Digital Tools in Local Cinema History

The local cinema history research is an integral part of the broader strand of cinema studies, the New Cinema History, emphasizing the phenomena surrounding the film screenings more than the films themselves. By focusing on the films' circulation, exhibition and consumption, scientists want to bring to attention the social dimension of the medium and its effects on the everyday life of ordinary people in different historical periods and geographical spaces. The volume of scientific work within New Cinema History has been growing every year, absorbing yet new tools, methods and approaches to the research questions from other fields of study such as history, archaeology, literature studies, social sciences, economy, etc. Eventually, the tools and methods of digital humanities also found their way and are slowly proliferating in this research strand.

Although the humanities do not usually engage with hard data but rather understand society, culture and history in their ambiguous manner, the advantages of implementing digital tools in research soon became evident. It has become more and more common for a user to search through online databases storing big data or browse digital archives filled with digitized archival materials and audiovisual content on film distribution, programming, exhibition and cinematic experiences. The so-called digital turn has allowed access to archival materials irrespective of the user's location. It facilitated the researcher with a wide variety of new tools for gathering and analyzing data as well as visualizing and presenting their research results to an international audience. The local cinema history has gotten an opportunity to be looked at from transnational and intercultural perspectives, bringing new methods and approaches to the local research questions.

This thematic issue wants to bring forward the use of digital tools in cinema history study rather than the specific results of the research. It does not seek to bring a complex "how to" guide but rather to support the scientists in their endeavours to approach historical questions by using computational technologies. Studies in this collection acknowl-

edge the presence and importance of digital tools in local cinema history. The authors actively work with specific digital tools and reflect on their use identifying the crucial difficulties they bring to the research. On the other hand, they also recognize the advantages for which it is worth to try overcome the obstacles.

The study by Karina Prytt introduces her research on the local cinema business in Warsaw in the 1910s. This research builds on the work done by pioneers in spatializing cinema history, such as Robert C. Allen, Jeffrey Klenotic and Richard Maltby, who opened up a debate on the importance of geographical space in historical research.¹⁾ Prytt demonstrates the possibilities that the mapping software QGIS brings to the research of local cinema history. Simple visualization of the cinemas' positions in the geographical space of historical Warsaw introduces a new perspective on the organization of the city cinema network. The further spatial analysis sheds light on the possible socio-demographic structure of the cinema audiences, patterns of the local film production and the life and work interests of businessman and film producer Mordechai A. Tovbin. The spatial perspective brought a unique opportunity to explore the geographic dimension of archival materials that would otherwise stay untraceable.

'Uncovering the hidden' is also the focus of the study authored by Agata Frymus, who advocates the use of spatial visualization on the micro level by focusing on individuals and narrativizing their personal histories through maps. Frymus juxtaposes the methods of spatial visualization and analysis predominantly used in the New Cinema History to the approaches that yet need to be fully explored. The author reflects on the possible use of free open-access mapping tools in microhistory research. Drawing on the previous work on African American audiences, she stresses the asset of spatialization of personal cinema memories to film culture and cinema history.

Discussing the use of digital tools should not be restrained only to the talk about their possibilities and benefits. It is equally, if not even more, crucial for a scientist to know about the challenges and obstacles it carries with itself. In her study on Anna Hofman-Uddgren, Ingrid Stigsdotter argues for reconsidering the Swedish filmmaker's contribution to early cinema. The author uses the archive of digitized newspaper collections as the main source of information on the reception of Hofman-Uddgren's work. It is the thorough reflection on working with the digital archive of the National Library of Sweden, though, that makes this study a valuable contribution to the technical knowledge of the use of digital databases within New Cinema History.

Highly analytical and technological is also the study by Michael Aronson, Gabriele Hayden, and Elizabeth Peterson. This team has undertaken an arduous but crucial task to map the accessible online databases with cinema history content. With the increasing interest in comparative research and the rising number of new scientific digital archives, the call for a platform that would unite and organize these online projects should become imperious. The authors propose a structured review of the identified online databases and

1) Their academic projects on cinema history have resulted in the first extensive map databases within New Cinema History: *Going to the Show* (unfortunately no longer accessible); *Mapping Movies*, accessed September 25, 2022, <http://www.mappingmovies.com/>; *Australian Cinemas Map*, accessed September 25, 2022, <http://auscinemas.flinders.edu.au/>.

compare their usability and interoperability for possible comparative research. This study might help navigate researchers that look for digitized sources on cinema history. By opening up about the process of building their own database, the authors offer a chance to look behind the interface of the final website.

Interview with the lead researchers of the cross-national research project *European Cinema Audiences*, Daniela Treveri Gennari, Lies Van de Vijver, and Pierluigi Ercole, complements the issue with insights on the processes that stand behind designing and building an online database within the digital humanities. The authors open up about challenges that a cross-national and comparative perspective brings to the research, such as standardization and categorization of the data for analytical purposes. Still, they also present the scale of application of both the project's tools and database content, stressing not only its asset to research but also its pedagogical potential.

Clearly, this thematic issue can not encompass the wide variety of digital tools that are being applied in local cinema history research. The presented studies, however, contribute to the discussion on the use and usefulness of some of them and bring forward the methodological challenges one might face when deciding on computer-assisted research.