

INTRODUCTION

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The present special issue of *CINÉMA & Cie* collects some of the papers presented during the XVIII International Film Studies Conference (Udine, 5-7 April 2011) which focused on the subject of the archive. As we have had occasion to write in the Call for Papers of the conference, “in the past few years many experiences in fine arts, cinema, philosophy have turned their attention towards the concept of the archive and in general towards practices of the paratactic juxtaposition of elements: as if a new experience of the historical time was emerging.”¹ Although such an approach is not without risk of becoming a *passepourtout*, the notion of the archive surely constitutes a chance for disciplines such as film and media studies for understanding and explaining the present transitions. Its historical *a priori*, and its relations with the foundational concepts of document and trace; transmission, preservation and memory; dispositif and governance are currently being revisited.² Much of the recent literature on “film archives in transition” has explored these and other key issues.³

The digital transition lends new pertinence to observations concerning the status of the document and the trace, prompts us to reconsider the identity of the (film) archive and its genealogical and social construction, invites us to read the discourses and the objects stored therein as *reservoirs* of moving images on which to build, and reassembles the threads of narratives, memories, communities, and traditions. The essays in this volume focus on three main fields of research: the field of early archival discourses and practices; the relation between the archive and its traces; the role of witnesses and political authorities regarding issues of memory, image and historical time.

The first section examines three foci and case studies, spanning the period from the first archival impulses at the beginning of the 20th century to the institutionalization of film culture during the 1930s. The archival practices of the early 20th century were marked by the positivist belief in the document and the modern belief in the indexical superiority of the medium. The idea of film as a reliable tool for recording and communicating a new semeiotics of the body (biological and cultural) and as a new encyclopedia of the visible was accompanied by the creation of film archives, functionally subordinated to the institutions they belonged. Archives served as atlases, reservoirs of evidences, databases of disciplines (historiography, pedagogy, ethnography, neurology), and as tools in the service of emerging new dimensions (the *everyday*) and of economic and political subjects.

In his contribution, Frank Kessler examines Boleslaw Matuszewski’s famous essay *Une nouvelle source de l’histoire* (1898), and some subsequent writings and proposals (Urban, Regnault, etc.) that shared Matuszewski’s paradigm and conceptual field. The film archive as conceived by

Matuszewski was based on the idea of film as “outil ou un témoin.” Fiction, as a clear reconstruction of reality, was excluded or marginalized, seen as a “détour.” Thus “pre-archival practices” or “counter-archives”⁴ are determined by a certain historical *a priori*, which leads Kessler to conclude that “la conception de l’archive cinématographique en tant que dépôt d’œuvres d’art, du Septième Art plus précisément, semble plutôt s’inscrire dans une autre histoire,” in another epistemological place.

Klaas de Zwaan describes and interprets the processes underlying the “pre-archival” practices during the second decade of the 20th century using the Netherlands Central Film Archive as a case study. The specific qualities of the medium that the practices and discourses of the period reveal – the film as “superior memory tool” and as a “non-lying medium” – met criteria of moral legitimacy, fulfilled an “encyclopedic desire” and helped further the consolidation of trade practices and the development of communal identities and propaganda strategies. The film – along with other visual media (print, photography) – worked as a descriptive and analytical tool and as a communicative and didactical aid. The apparatus produced visual media objects – slides, plates, films – useful for communicating other discourses (of science, propaganda, community) but also for archival purposes: as artifacts, they became an object of preservation in their time. In this sense, “a historical analysis of the uses of film as archival object [...] might therefore be illuminating in understanding the genealogy of the film archive.”

In his contribution, Malte Hagener examines the institutionalization of film culture in the 1920s and 1930s. Challenging traditional perspectives, Hagener argues that the transition from silent to sound must be considered a factor of relatively minor importance in explaining the birth of film archives in the 1930s. The emergence of a film history based on texts and documents led to a “standardisation and canonisation as invariably the same films were selected as worthy of storing, restoring and studying.” Hagener goes on to explore the “shared ground between the archives” that were built around 1935 (Berlin, London, New York, Paris), and identifies the “value and function of cinema,” “a broad-based public support,” and “the cooperation of the film industry” as the “driving forces” behind the success of these archives.

The second section outlines the archive and its traces, pursuing two paths: the first path situates the archival discourses and the traces in an “economic” context and describes how they are translated into a physical record. The second one interprets the archival traces as a prerequisite and a result of a pursuit that aims to rework the traces and to produce meaning (sense) from the “sensible:”⁵ thus, “documentary fiction” and “film-archive” can be understood as historical narratives, as a visual historiography. When juxtaposing historical reconstruction and remembrance with fictional creation and imagination we place ourselves firmly within the realm of a healthy relativism, not meaning to equate historiography with a fictional narrative, but instead being aware that truth, fiction and falsehood together help to realize history’s seisms and inscriptions.⁶

The trace is thus seen as an “epistemological presupposition” of the expression of the archive and of mnemotechnics, and as a requirement for the “productions of the historian’s practice [...] for historical practice.”⁷ Within this framework, the notion of the archive is based on a genealogical and discursive relationship, but also on an economical and practical one between trace, document and evidence. This concept of the *dispositif* places the work of the archive within an *economy of traces*.⁸

The essay by Malin Wahlberg draws on Ricœur and Rancière for an analysis of “documentary fiction,” using *The Black Power Mixtape* as a case study, and “suggests a reassessment of film as an art of record.” The trace is “an incentive for both historiography and imagination,” and as a material object “opens up to formal and cultural aspects of the moving image as archive memory.” The case study analysis shows that “the reuse of films [...] brings attention to the potential archive memory of television, [...] it exemplifies the poetic drive of documentary, the incentive [...] to select and enact the sequences, to transform the material into a significant trace of the past.”

The contribution by Enrico Terrone problematizes, against the backdrop of the contemporary digital era, some “distinctions dogmatiques:” “communication/enregistrement; médium/archive; véhicule/magasin; acte/objet; contenu/forme; critique/histoire.” The reversal of perspective makes it possible to question the “priorité de la communication sur l’enregistrement,” and to highlight, according to Derrida and Ferraris, “le rôle de médiation de l’objet matériel.” In an age where “le travail d’historien nécessite de la critique parce que les objets archivés continuent à circuler et à produire des effets” and “la critique nécessite de l’histoire parce que les film contemporaines sont itérés, archivés,” film criticism must rely on film history and vice versa, and film restoration and film philology seem to be an exact precedent of the “nouvelle discipline” that the author advocates: “Entre les deux extrêmes de la philologie et du *remix*, il y a donc de la place pour une discipline historico-critique.” Film restoration theory has in fact tried to bring together image and matter, film object and film as act/event/work, thereby grasping deep structural relationships between the philological method, restoration principles and remake’s theories, and between the analysis of archival traces and the reuse of found-footage for historiographical and artistic purposes. In this sense, the ongoing dialogue between film restoration theory and film theory since the late 1990s allows us to better conceptualize the present paradigm shift from film restoration theory to a theory of the archive, from aesthetics to economics.

The paper by Michele Guerra operates within the framework outlined by Terrone, situating the archival document within the social field and, drawing on Maurizio Ferraris, considering the document as a “social object,” as the result of a social act. Film is seen as an organized set of recorded acts and the trace as a mark; signatures and marks within the film attest to its identity as a document and social object. More specifically, Guerra argues, when directors such as Alina Marazzi and Werner Herzog provide amateur films with a structure and an artistic signature, they enlarge and remediate its “communicative circle.” This operation is almost archival in nature, since an archivist too, when incorporating a document into his collection, must reconstruct its social context, thus inscribing the object with his institutional authority.

Irini Stathi focuses on the archive’s narratives and how they are expressed in filmic narratives. The blurring of boundaries between narrative fiction and historiography in the postmodern age does not only trigger certain fears and evoke the ghosts of Derrida and of historians such as Ginzburg, but also allows us to see film as “a kind of historical archive.” The “film as archive” (Sokurov, Angelopoulos) is likened to psychic dynamics and deep structures of civilization, thus revealing a view of archives and film as organized places of historical memory and imagination. The film thus becomes a “postmodern historiography,” whose reading requires tools appropriate to those mnemotechnic paths, tools that are capable of making comprehensible the identity and the *a priori* of such combinations and “dispositions.” In this perspective, the reference to Renaissance cabinets and to *Wunderkammern* seems a plausible one.

The third section focuses on political subjects, communities, and minorities whose history and tradition is defined by evidence and testimony that are as much invented as preserved. This process begins with absences and silences; history and tradition are, in other words, manufactured by revisiting archives and finding or creating traces. Authorities, institutions, minorities, and witnesses govern and command, but also retrieve, build and share memories and socio-cultural transformations.

The section opens with Ron Makleff's contribution, who argues that "archives should also serve as a subject of historical analysis in themselves." Makleff, in his analysis of the historical origins of municipal archives in medieval Europe, specifically examines "the place of community in the archive," and the archive's role in the urban "textual community." Municipal archives were not only freely accessible but also translated important documents into vernacular languages. The "dual communal aspect of the urban archive" suggests it "as both muniment [...] and monument [...] respectively as a political resource holding documentary weapons to be unsheathed in defense of rights, on the one hand, and as a sacral symbol of urban independence and shared history, on the other." By examining the stratification of the historical *a priori* we may grasp traces that are hidden and buried beneath the archives' surface, for "the archive is of course shaped by the victors."

In a similar vein, Dunja Dogo reconstructs the invention of a revolutionary tradition culminating in the Bolshevik revolution, whose traces could be found preserved in the archives of the Tsarist era. This invention transformed the "Tsarist administrative documentation" from an "exclusive storage site" into an "institution for the production of history." The establishment and maintenance of a collective memory was based on apparatuses and individuals (intellectuals, filmmakers, screenwriters, historians), who, each in their own way, availed themselves of existing archival structures with the aim of creating a reservoir for the invention of traditions.

Giuliana Muscio's essay is devoted to minorities and subjects of history (the "silences of the archive"). Studying these silences – such as the cinema of Italian immigrants in the United States – means giving back to the object of study its status as a subject of history. The analysis of a case study, *Santa Lucia Luntana* (1931), reveals an archival work about the cultural transformations taking place in New York's Italian community. The film traces the paths of two generations of a Neapolitan immigrant family, depicting the dialectic between the construction and restoration of the community's socio-cultural identity by appealing to specific stylistic and narrative models. In this sense, fiction can be construed as a way of organizing the archival tensions of the period.

Valentina Cucca examines the tragedy of Argentina's dictatorship in order to analyze the "complex relationship between visual archive and social memory when the first one is missing" and how this affects the reworking of trauma. The absence of evidence, testimonies, and survivors spawns the creation of "surrogate archives," not least with the help of fictional products. Feature films, such as those by Marco Bechis, can be seen as part of an attempt at recreating such a "lost archive." They inscribe themselves into the memory of a social community; as such, they become objects worthy of preservation.

Marion Froger and Djemaa Maazouzi explore the relationship between "pratiques d'archives et mémoire de Pieds-noirs." They describe how the "revenants" in Algeria, both in public and in private, construct a collective memory and build a communal environment. Froger and Maazouzi examine this process by analyzing a heterogeneous corpus of documents (films, web, books).

This process “de remémoration et de narration du retour [...] passe par un dispositif double [...] un dispositif accessible aux publics” represented by the documents analyzed and a “dispositif qui fabrique du document mémoriel avec une adresse plus ou moins directe ou tacite à un tiers français et algérien de diverses natures.” These double processes and double relationships appear closely related to the twofold topological and etymological identity of the witness.⁹

Finally, such a subdivision identifies three axes – the identity and the historical origins of the archives; modes of transmitting and reworking documentary traces; the subjects, witnesses and authorities involved in the construction and governance of archives – as fundamental for understanding the genesis and historical transformation of the heritage apparatus.

Chronicling early conceptions of the archives and early archival practices means rethinking their historical *a priori* and identifying epistemological alternatives; it means reconstructing their genealogical dimension and then, at the end of the current transition, focusing on what we carry with us into new communicative and archival environments. Some archival practices and concepts will survive even if the digital era may sometimes obscure this fact. Revisiting the origins also means re-activating that sense of “astonishment” with regard to the medium (and archive), it means once again highlighting the potential inherent in their inception and their end, and revealing the space of possibility that accompanies periods of crisis, hybridization and transition.¹⁰ Reviewing traces and evidence means emphasizing the need and the duty of a philological, philosophical and political criticism of the objects and authorities of the archive.

- 1 The text continued noting that “the digital culture, for instance, along with the new possibilities of organization and recording of knowledge connected to it, opens up new perspectives of construction and access to knowledge based on modularity and a-hierarchical horizontality more than on a vertical discipline. Or in the field of the visual studies, a renewed attention to figures like Aby Warburg and Walter Benjamin testimony an intellectual sensibility focused on the relationship between image, memory and historical time.” Call for Papers, *The Archive. Memory, Cinema, Video and the Image of the Present*, XVIII International Film Studies Conference (Udine, 5-7 April 2011).
- 2 For the Italian language area see, among others, the following special issues: *Fata Morgana, Archivio*, no. 2, Pellegrini, Cosenza 2007; *Locus Solus, Memoria e immagini* (edited by Barbara Grespi), Mondadori, Milano 2009; *Comunicazioni sociali, Lasciare tracce, essere tracciati* (edited by Francesco Casetti), Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2010.
- 3 See Dan Nissen, Lisbeth Richter Larsen, Jesper Stub Johnsen (eds.), *Preserve then Show*, DFI, København 2002; Karen F. Gracy, *Film Preservation: Competing Definitions of Value, Use, and Practice*, Society of American Archivists, Chicago 2007; Paolo Cherchi Usai, David Francis, Alexander Horwath, Michael Loebenstein (eds.), *Film Curatorship – Archives, Museums, and the Digital Marketplace*, Filmmuseum, Wien 2008; Giovanna Fossati, *From Grain to Pixel. The Archival Life of Film in Transition*, University Amsterdam Press, Amsterdam 2009; Institut National du Patrimoine, *Recherche/Archives: numériser les images, et après?*, Archimages09, Actes du colloque des 18, 19 et 20 novembre 2009, electronic edition, Paris 2010; Caroline Frick, *Saving Cinema. The Politics of Preservation*, Oxford University Press, Chicago 2011.
- 4 For “Counter-Archive” – but also for the “Everyday” – see Paula Amad, *Counter-Archive. Film, the Everyday, and Albert Kahn’s Archives de la Planète*, Columbia University Press, New York 2010. See also Klaas de Zwaan’s essay in this volume.
- 5 See Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: the Distribution of the Sensible*, Continuum, New York 2004, and also *Film Fables*, Berg, Oxford-New York 2006.

- 6 See Carlo Ginzburg, *Il filo e le tracce. Vero, falso, finto*, Feltrinelli, Milano 2006.
- 7 Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1988, vol. III, p. 116.
- 8 The essential identity of the *dispositif* becomes matter, “*flesh*,” as traces, documents, and social objects are entrusted with the task of transmitting and communicating the tradition. See Louise Merzeau, “Du monument au document,” in *Les Cahiers de médiologie, La Confusion des monuments* (edited by Michel Melot), no. 7, 1999: “Chaque religion, idéologie ou doctrine dominante adopte une certaine économie des traces, qui fixe des pratiques et des significations, en ordonnant l’enregistrement, le stockage et la circulation des inscriptions. Point de convergence entre des croyances, des savoirs, des acteurs et des techniques, les traces témoignent ainsi d’une organisation du collectif par l’organisation de la matière,” p. 47. Agamben has highlighted the close link between *ontology* (being) and *economy* (action, praxis) in Christian theology committed to addressing and managing the aporias between the uniqueness of the divine and its historical and phenomenological multiplicity (the Trinity). Agamben observes that *oikonomia* was then translated into Latin as *dispositio*. See Giorgio Agamben, *What Is an Apparatus?*, in Id., *What Is an Apparatus? and Other Essays*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2009.
- 9 See Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz. The Witness and the Archive*, Zone Books, New York 1999, p. 17: “In Latin there are two words for ‘witness.’ The first word, *testis*, from which our word ‘testimony’ derives, etymologically signifies the person who, in a trial or lawsuit between two rival parties, is in the position of a third party (*terstis*). The second word, *superstes*, designates a person who has lived through something, who has experienced an event from beginning to end and can therefore bear witness to it [...] he is a survivor (*superstite*).”
- 10 See Tom Gunning, *Re-newing Old Technologies: Astonishment, Second Nature and the Uncanny in Technology from the Previous Turn-of-the-Century*, in David Thorburn, Henry Jenkins, Brad Seawell (eds.), *Rethinking Media Change: The Aesthetics of Transition*, MIT Press, Cambridge 2003, and Rosalind E. Krauss, “Reinventing the Medium,” in *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 25, no. 2, 1999.