



## Introduction: “Out of the Dark Stacks and into the Light: Re-viewing the Moving Image Archive for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”

Volume 4, no. 1

Guest edited by Sophie Cook, Rachel Webb Jekanowski, and Papagena Robbins

The archive, as a concept and a physical repository of historical traces and material fragments, holds a central place within contemporary film and media studies. The archive is not only a location for historical research; it also functions as a source of images and materials to be mined by filmmakers and media artists. For decades, film scholarship regarded the archive as a repository, in which a humanities scholar or historian could access the past by delving into the boxes and stacks of files held within. Studies of documentary film and avant-garde found footage cinema, in particular, focused on the film archive as a source of artistic and historiographical materials. After the archival turn in Anglo-American film and cultural studies scholarship in the 1990s, film and media scholars increasingly approach the archive as an object of critical study in its own right. Increasingly, the moving image archive is both mined and theorized to revise histories of film theory, production, and circulation, especially in post-colonial and transnational film scholarship. As such, the archive becomes as much a site of hermeneutical struggle, privileged access, contested histories, and loss as it is a site of creative inspiration and cultural preservation.

With the transnational and global turn in film scholarship, a greater analysis of the circulation and display of archival materials and moving images is necessary to understand how archival access might impact the current assessment of global and local shifts. Accordingly, this issue of *Synoptique* is dedicated to exploring both the *sites* of moving image archival preservation and display (such as art galleries, institutional archives, private collections, and the World Wide Web), as well as the socio-political, historical, and creative circulatory *networks* that connect them. This issue seeks to inquire into the myriad ways in which archive studies—and the scholars and practitioners who drive the discipline—have transitioned away from the traditional library

stacks and institutional repositories in favor of exploring different technologies and spaces of material preservation and knowledge exchange.

For many of the scholars included within this issue, the catalyst for this inquiry is the emergence of the digital and the World Wide Web. The adoption of digital modes of collection, organization, preservation and media-making by archivists and artists is not the only seismic shift to shape the study of moving image archives in the twenty-first century, however. As several of the articles in this issue show, the emergence of New Historicism and queer and post-colonial modes of historiography in the twentieth century have also intersected with experimental filmmaking practices (such as the interactive documentary or the digital database) to create fertile grounds for new investigations of the archive. The five articles and extensive interview included in this volume, as well as the non-peer review exhibition and book reviews, span a variety of different filmmaking modes and historiographical practices, critically engaging with theories of the archive and archives across Anglophone and Francophone scholarship. Concurrently, each text also addresses the interplay between historiography and the archive, as well as the ways in which filmmakers turn to the archive to meditate upon and challenge narratives of the past.

In this issue's opening article, "A Shared Pain: Archival footage and history as immanent cause in *In the Year of the Pig*," Benedict Stork proposes that one might frame the relationship between documentary cinema and historiography in terms of immanent causality. Stork defines an immanent cause approach to history as: "the expression of the painful necessity of over-determination and the coincidence of past, present, and future made differentially evident in particular assemblages of contingent events and forces" (this issue, 19). Drawing heavily upon Frederic Jameson's *The Political Unconscious* (1982), where he characterizes history as pain, as well as Bill Nichols and Michael Renov's prominent documentary film theories, Stork argues that Emile de Antonio's compilation documentary *In the Year of the Pig* (1968) presents history as a force irreducible to linear causality. Stork offers a close textual reading of de

Antonio's archival images, proposing that de Antonio challenges the idea of historical teleology, pushing us to question the ways in which we witness and narrate the past.

Lauren Pilcher undertakes a similar host of questions around the narration of history in "Querying Queerness in the Film Archive, Tracing the Ephemeral *Anders als die Andern* (*Different from the Others*) (1919)." In it, Pilcher addresses the excavation and restoration of the censored film *Anders als die Andern* from German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld's personal archive. One of the first feature length films to boldly depict homosexuality, she approaches this film as a queer material trace of Weimar-era homosexual culture, arguing that its restoration and later exhibition during the 1990s in Germany and the United States propels a reconsideration of dominant archiving practices. Instead, the film's unique history and cultural significance within European and North American gay cultures encourages us to reconsider alternative or queer forms of archiving that more appropriately represent the unruly process of writing history.

Like Stork and Pilcher, Myriam Tremblay-Sher is similarly concerned with the intertwining of historiography and archive studies, albeit through a national lens, in "Engaging History: *Nuit et brouillard*'s Cinematic Mediation on the Archive." Tremblay-Sher turns to Alain Resnais' unprecedented 1955 short documentary depicting the Auschwitz and Majdanek camps to question the ways in which his use of documentary photographs from French national archives ten years after the Allied liberation of the concentration camps challenged French postwar national discourses about France's participation in the Holocaust. Studying the film's production, exhibition and early censorship in France, as well as the film's formal strategies and Resnais' own navigation of archival research, she traces how the film's critical modes of historical mediation potentially offer new ways of understanding this traumatic history while engaging with ongoing scholarly debates over the limits of documentary cinema's truth claims. At the same time, Tremblay-Sher theorizes the cinematic archive's role in national processes of remembrance, memorialization, and historiography.

Shifting discussions of the moving image archive from historiographical processes to the actual technologies of archiving, Rémy Besson's article "Archives visuelles et documentaire interactif : Vers un nouveau mode de médiation du passé ?" focuses on the intersection of new digital media forms and the rise of online database collections. Besson looks at the emerging genre of the web-based interactive documentary, and he argues that this new mode of aesthetic and technological mediation between the past and present repositions the historical status of photographic and filmic documents. Specifically, he analyses how Katerina Cizek's interactive documentary *A Short History of the Highrise* (2013), coproduced by the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) and *The New York Times*, offers a reimagining of the role of the archivist and historian in the digital age.

Finally, Souad Azizi's article "Casa Cité-ciné : Images de Casablanca dans le cinema (Maroc)" adopts a distinctly different disciplinary approach than the other the articles in this issue. Drawing upon visual anthropology, colonial theory, and film scholarship on cinema's relationship to the city, Azizi presents a portrait of Casablanca as a perversely European architectural and cultural site through the city's historical depictions in Moroccan film and international cinemas. She argues that Casablanca's colonial past and cosmopolitan atmosphere positions the city as a privileged space to explore the country's social and cultural contradictions as it emerged into global society. By focusing on the historical articulations of urbanity, modernity, and nation in Morocco, we, the guest editors, contend that Azizi's study of the cinematic city of Casablanca can be understood as a cultural archive of the ways in which filmmakers worked through these contradictions within Moroccan society over the past thirty years.

While each author distinguishes their approach to the moving image archive and the technologies that create them through a unique theoretical framework—positioning the archive alternatively as a concept, practice, and physical repository for future generations of scholars and artists—the five articles together offer a glimpse into the wide number of approaches and disciplinary intersections that characterize archive studies today. The interview, exhibition reports, and book reviews that constitute the

non-peer reviewed section of this journal issue likewise trace a complex web of disciplinary intersections surrounding the moving image archive.

The two exhibition reports, for instance, each adopt a different mode of scholarly writing to explore a collection of issues around the exhibition and dissemination of archival images in contemporary artistic practice. In his report, “Where Have the Good Old Naughty Days Gone? Curating an Exhibition on Moving-Image Pornography,” Troy Bordun discusses the gallery exhibition entitled “Stags, Sexploitation, and Hard Core: Moving-Image Pornography up to 1972” he curated in August 2014, in Peterborough, Ontario. Bordun narrates some of the difficulties he encountered in accessing and exhibiting pornographic materials for the show, and he reflects upon what he describes as the “missing archive” of moving images that have constituted this visual and sensual history of desire. Bordun also speaks to his decision to program digital pornographic films, and the surprising complexity of studying and publically exhibiting pornography in our digital media-saturated, porn-on-demand age.

Unlike Bordun’s integration of first person reflections and critical reportage, Agnès Peller offers a more lyrical meditation upon poet Kenneth Goldsmith’s web-based archive of avant-garde cinema in her report “UbuWeb de Kenneth Goldsmith: une archive issue du web de documents.” This article, which emerged out of her Master’s thesis for Université de Paris 3-Sorbone Nouvelle on UbuWeb and the digital humanities, is concerned with the ways in which online databases and digital archives have changed the collection and exhibition of film documents. Focusing on the open-access, non-commercial website UbuWeb, founded by Goldsmith in 1996, she argues that this digital archive, by making accessible ephemeral avant-garde materials and experimenting with artistic form, helps to negotiate forms of curatorship and spaces of the avant-garde in the digital age. While not an ‘exhibition’ in the conventional sense, Peller’s critical approach to UbuWeb nevertheless presents the site as an artistic gesture of curatorial practice (parallel to the American experimental cinematic and literary scenes from which Goldsmith emerged as an artist) as much as it is an archival one. By bringing these two reports together, this issue seeks to explore how contemporary artists and practitioners

have turned to the film archive for inspiration, while simultaneously transforming the archive itself into different, more accessible sites of knowledge organization, preservation, and display.

No discussion of moving image archives in the 21<sup>st</sup> century would be complete without a consultation with one of today's most innovative media theorists, Rick Prelinger, whose theory is inspired by and also influences his archivist and filmmaking practices.

Prelinger has been a prominent voice that has helped to identify, reevaluate, and defend the collection, preservation, and dissemination of orphan and ephemeral films for several decades now. Sophie Cook, Beatriz Bartolomé Herrera, and Papagena Robbins caught up with Prelinger through an exchange of emails from Quebec to California, culminating in an extensive interview in which Prelinger elaborates on the trajectory of his collecting efforts, his most recent filmography, and his ideas about archival preservation, open access, and the social role of moving image archival materials.

*Synoptique* issue 4.1 concludes with five book reviews covering several recent scholarly publications in English, French, and German theorizing film archives, archival and ephemeral film, and the writing of media history. The first two book reviews seek to engage with archival practices across international registers. Annaëlle Winand review of Giusy Pisano's edited collection *L'archive-forme. Création, mémoire, histoire* (2014), for instance, offers a collection of French-language articles on aesthetic, historical and sociological studies of archives, which emerged from the 8<sup>th</sup> annual conference of the Association française des enseignants et chercheurs en cinéma et audiovisuel in 2012. In "Celebrating 50 years of film archiving," Philipp Dominik Keidl reviews *Edition Lamprecht* (2013) and *Fünfzig Jahre Österreichisches Filmmuseum 1964-2014* (2014), two German-language histories of archives in Germany and Austria, and traces the cultural importance of these institutions within European archival practice. The following two book reviews then turn to the question of aesthetic strategies in the use of archival and ephemeral imagery. Rachel Webb Jekanowski's review "Experiences of Pastness" evaluates Jaimie Baron's *The Archive Effect: Found footage and the audiovisual*

*experience of history* (2014), a study of how filmmakers appropriate archival and found sound and images in their films to create an “archive effect,” provoking in spectators a feeling of the past. In “Amateur Filmmaking,” Enrique Fibla Gutierrez looks at Laura Rascaroli, Gwenda Young, and Barry Monahan’s edited collection of essays on neglected nonprofessional traditions within film history *Amateur Filmmaking: The Home Movie, the Archive, the Web* (2014), and the role that filmmakers sometimes play as informal “archivists” in creating amateur and found footage films. Lastly, Alex Lussier-Craig shifts the conversation to the question of media history in “Know-Show.” Reviewing Lisa Gitelman’s latest book *Paper Knowledge: Toward a Media History of Documents* (2014), Lussier-Craig argues that the history and ontology of the print document can be reconceptualized in light of contemporary digital texts, and the digital modes of collection and access. Spanning three continents and multiple traditions, these assorted book reviews present a mosaic of the lively state of archive studies today within the discipline of film and media.

Sophie Cook, Rachel Webb Jekanowski, and Papagena Robbins are doctoral students in the Film and Moving Image Studies Program at Concordia University.