

Accidental Archivism: Shaping Cinema's Futures with Remnants of the Past

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ACCIDENTAL

ARCHIVISM

STEFANIE SCHULTE STRATHAUS

VINZENZ HEDIGER

**CONFIGURATIONS
OF FILM**

ACC

Accidental Archivism

"The serendipitous genesis of the great archives of Arsenal in Berlin is a pure delight to explore. This volume records how a wealth of visual history accumulated as if by accident to form a fascinating whole which is so much more than its parts: a fragmented and recomposed visual archive of memories of the world in the second half of the twentieth century. A feast for any historian, artist and cinephile."

—**Bénédicte Savoy**, Collège de France/TU Berlin

"Accidental archivism, creative spaces and the reaches of technology: the mix is a world of communication and artistic possibilities. Perhaps, equally significant, the mix does transform the cinema's public into that quintessential wayfarer who takes a backward glance o'er travelled roads to better see the road ahead."

—**Hyginus Ekwuazi**, University of Ibadan, founding rector of the National Film Institute, Jos

"A lively, hugely ambitious and generative collection, that is at once both reflective and provocative, offering a state of play and a call to action for those engaging with archives today. From manifestos to interviews, global case studies to personal accounts, this expansive collection of works expertly places in dialogue curators, artists, archivists and scholars (and the many that fall in between)."

—**Tom Rice**, University of St. Andrews

Accidental Archivism: Shaping Cinema's Futures with Remnants of the Past

Edited by

Stefanie Schulte Strathaus

and Vinzenz Hediger



meson press

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Configurations of Film: Series Foreword

Scalable across a variety of formats and standardized in view of global circulation, the moving image has always been both an image of movement and an image on the move. Over the last three decades, digital production technologies, communication networks and distribution platforms have taken the scalability and mobility of film to a new level. Beyond the classical *dispositif* of the cinema, new forms and knowledges of cinema and film have emerged, challenging the established approaches to the study of film. The conceptual framework of index, *dispositif* and canon, which defined cinema as photochemical image technology with a privileged bond to reality, a site of public projection, and a set of works from auteurs from specific national origins, can no longer account for the current multitude of moving images and the trajectories of their global movements. The term “post-cinema condition,” which was first proposed by film theorists more than a decade ago to describe the new cultural and technological order of moving images, retained an almost melancholic attachment to that which the cinema no longer was. Moving beyond such attachments, the concept of “configurations of film” aims to account for moving images in terms of their operations, forms and formats, locations and infrastructures, expanding the field of cinematic knowledges beyond the arts and the aesthetic, while retaining a focus on film as privileged site for the production of cultural meaning, for social action and for political conflict.

The series “Configurations of Film” presents pointed interventions in this field of debate by emerging and established international scholars associated with the DFG-funded Graduate Research Training Program (Graduiertenkolleg) “Konfigurationen des Films” at Goethe University Frankfurt. The contributions to the series aim to explore and expand our understanding of configurations of film in both a contemporary and historical perspective, combining film and media theory with media history to address key problems in the development of new analytical frameworks for the moving image on the move.

Capillary, Migratory, Projective: Inventing Cinema's Past So That It May Have a Future.

An Introduction

Stefanie Schulte Strathaus and Vinzenz Hediger

Cinema did not always have a future.

Louis Lumière—according to the history of cinema as it is now told one of the inventors of the medium together with his brother Auguste—famously declared that cinema was “an invention without any future” in 1895. Lumière spoke as an industrialist and a businessman. He was wrong on the economics, but he had a philosophical point. To have a future, that is, a shared realm of possibility, one needs to have a past, a set of shared experiences. At the beginning, and for quite some time, cinema didn't have a past. A first attempt at a history of cinema was published in France in 1914, a sign of an incipient historical consciousness. But at least in the film industry thinking about the past was not encouraged, certainly not in Hollywood. Devoting attention to old films would shift the audience's focus away from new films, studios feared. For the industry the future and the past of cinema were restricted to the latest film—the one currently showing, or soon coming, and the fleeting memories it left in the viewer's mind. Film history in that sense could not exceed the horizons of protention and retention, the immediate future and past of phenomenological consciousness.

In the 1920s and 1930s film clubs, cinematheques, and archives began to pry this narrow temporal window open. By collecting films deemed economically worthless and discarded by their producers in the transition to sound and projecting them out of tune with the cycles of commercial distribution, these usually self-appointed custodians of the moving image turned cinema from commerce into art. In the process they gave it a past, because, at least in Europe and since Giorgio Vasari's *Vite*, to be

- 14 an artist means to be, potentially, a figure in the history of art. But the custodians of cinema and their disciples also emphatically connected the cinema's past to its future. The cinematheque was not just a temple of cinematic art, but an academy for cinema's future practitioners.

Arsenal—Institute for Film and Video Art got its start in West Berlin in 1963 under the name Freunde der Deutschen Kinemathek (eng. *Friends of the German Cinematheque*). In the early 1960s the first generation of temple-trained artists began to shape cinema's destiny as an art form (a generation also known under a name which was projected, like the concepts of revolution and human rights, from France onto the rest of the world, as the "new wave"). From the beginning Arsenal was part of the network of institutions and practitioners who shaped cinema's future by projecting versions of its past. But Arsenal was different from the cinematheques and archives of the early 1930s and even those of the 1950s. Perhaps most importantly Arsenal, not unlike the Österreichisches Filmmuseum or the Anthology Film Archives, founded in 1964 and 1970 respectively, was not a national film archive or national museum.

This meant that Arsenal was not bound by a mission of preserving film as part of a national heritage. By implication this also meant that it was not bound by a notion of cinema as a canon of great works by great, mostly male directors from a limited number of great film nations (typically these included France, Germany, Russia, the US, Italy, and to a certain extent Japan, with occasional add-ons from Central Europe and Scandinavia, and a razor-thin sliver of the cinemas of India, mostly arthouse films from West Bengal). Instead, Arsenal became the "home of independent cinema," the "Zuhause" of films from almost all the new cinemas that sprung up around the world after 1960. Arsenal started collecting to build a pool of films for its own programs and for distribution to other independent cinemas. Rather than by intent the archive grew by historical accident. Among other things the Arsenal archive served as a hiding place and safe exile

for films threatened by censorship and suppression in their countries of origin. Arsenal further became the destination of film libraries and estates that fell through the cracks of the collection policies of the big heritage archives, and the home of orphaned collections like the Red Army films, which the Soviets abandoned when they left Berlin in the early 1990s.

In the wake of the political turmoil of the late 1960s, which had led to the cancelation of the Berlinale in 1970, the Arsenal team, Erika and Ulrich Gregor, together with Gero Gandert, Heiner Roß, and Manfred Salzgeber, established the International Forum of Young Cinema as an independent part of the Berlin International Film Festival in 1971 with Ulrich Gregor as speaker and from 1980 to 2001 as director.

Over the next decades Arsenal and Forum in concert explored a space of cinematic possibility beyond the Eurocentric canon and redefined cinema in the process. Starting in 2006, the Forum Expanded, co-founded by Stefanie Schulte Strathaus and Anselm Franke, created an interface between cinema and the art world and further expanded the framework of Arsenal's original cinematic explorations.

In this same spirit, over the last fifteen years large-scale curatorial and conservation projects evolving around Arsenal's steadily growing archive like "Living Archive—Archive Work as a Contemporary Artistic and Curatorial Practice" and "Archive außer sich" have contributed to a rethinking of the possibilities of archives as laboratories of cinema's futures in a global perspective. Archival Assembly, a biennial festival launched in 2021 and organized by Arsenal, provides a platform for the continuation of this work.

On the occasion of Arsenal's 60th anniversary, "Accidental Archivism" takes stock of the ways in which artists, curators, scholars, and archivists have used this multifaceted space of experimentation (as well as other similar and cognate spaces) to re-invent cinematic pasts to shape cinema's future.

16 One of the common traits of their projects is that not much goes according to plan. The laboratory that Arsenal, Forum, and Forum Expanded have built has become a space not of fixed plans and grand symbolic gestures but of chance encounters and archival accidents. With remarkable frequency artists, curators, and scholars have turned into accidental archivists, to cite the term Didi Cheeka used to describe his transformation from off-Nollywood filmmaker and film society activist into a preserver of Nigeria's post-independence celluloid heritage. And with similar frequency these accidental archivists have already been, or have become, activists for the cause of the films and repositories that ended up in their custodianship by chance. The often life-altering encounters of the accidental archivists show, among other things, and on a personal as well as conceptual level, that cinema is more than a succession of great works: a string of productive stumbles.

Together these encounters have contributed to expanding the possibilities of cinema not least by including more of what Eric de Kuyper, in an essay written in 1994, at the halfway point between the founding of Arsenal and today, described as "the vast domain of cinema as non-art" (1994, 107). This vast domain includes fragments, orphan films, science, educational, and other utility films, but also a growing body of video and digital native works, in particular activist films and videos.

Activist repositories are particularly significant. They are born from conflict, usually between a more or less informal opposition group and a larger, more solid state apparatus. As a result they remain highly precarious, both institutionally and materially. They also highlight how much the work of accidental archivists is shaped by the affordances, but also the limitations and pitfalls, of the digital media ecology.

The moving image has always been an image on the move, and cinema has long since ceased to be bound to celluloid and the brick-and-mortar context of projection. The promise of digital infrastructures and formats is that of unlimited access to moving

images, anywhere, anytime. But the reality of the new, digital configurations of film is that of a new form of ephemerality and material and institutional precarity, and of new thresholds and barriers to films' visibility. And it is not just films that are scattered about platforms and digital niches, but audiences as well. Cinema's audience has always been the most democratic of publics, and by that virtue, an epitome of democracy. Equal, diverse, and inclusive, the public of cinema has the makings of a political force, however ephemeral. In a post-pandemic world the challenge is to relocate and harness this political force. Because when it comes to cinema's future, the audience, as Gaby Babić, Karola Gramann, and Heide Schlüpmann write in this volume, are the archive.

The question, then, is what kind of an assembly the archival assembly of accidental archivists/activists can and should be.

One insight offered by the contributions to this volume is that accidental archivism involves a new form of criticism, and with it a different form of film historiography. When the *Cahiers* critics wrote a manifesto in 1969 proposing that a film's meaning was somehow connected to the technology and economics of its production and distribution, Paris was still the capital of film culture, and their discovery changed the course of cinema studies.¹ Their work has since been further refined in various places around the world. In that spirit, the accidental archivist is very much someone who will not separate questions of aesthetics from questions of the politics and affordances of what now (but some will perhaps say: still) is called "infrastructure." The accidental archivist is also someone who will not focus primarily on single authors and their artistic accomplishments. Rather, they will understand cinema as a distributed practice that involves artists, often in multiples, but also curators, archivists—accidental or otherwise. It is a practice that requires a historiography of film

1 See Daniel Fairfax's (2021a; 2021b) comprehensive history of the *Cahiers* post-1968.

- 18 that is capillary, migratory, and projective. And the accidental archivist-activist will be someone who will not just enlighten the audience about the artistic success of a given work or film and recite a historical litany of great achievements, but who will explain, by working them through with the audience, the value of productive stumbles.

This book, in addition to being a celebration of Arsenal's legacy and future, and to the networks it has built, is a contribution to such a form of criticism, and such a historiography.

The book brings together essays that speak to each other in a variety of ways. The order in which we present them is one of several options to put them in sequence. But any point of entry into this collection is as good as any other, and the trajectory we propose is only one of several, which will make sense to the reader after they have read the entire of the volume. The book opens with a prologue, two essays by the editors. The remainder is structured in seven sections, an interlude, and an epilogue.

Prologue

Stefanie Schulte Strathaus opens the prologue with her essay "An Incomplete Series of Archive Incidents. Or: Trust the Archive," which surveys the multi-faceted archival and curatorial projects of the Arsenal and the Forum over the last two decades. She shows that archives hold some of the most important answers for those who want to think about the future directions of cinema. In "Digital Scavenging and the Limits of the Archive: Excavating the Lagos on the Internet" Vinzenz Hediger asks how digital infrastructures shape critical archival practices in a case study of what he proposes to call "scrap films," fragments of amateur films shot by oil engineers in Lagos, Nigeria.

I Never Wanted to Be an Archivist: Accidental Archivism and Biographical Turning Points

The first section brings together a series of essays that discuss how unplanned detours through the archive shape artistic practices and film historiographies. In “Accidental Archivism—A Necessary Accident” Didi Cheeka connects his search for the analog film heritage of Nigeria to the obfuscated memory of the Biafra war. Cheeka proposes a dialectics of the archive in which the opening of the archive turns film into a memorial site and lays the groundwork for a new politics of memory. In “Accidental Encounters, Incidental Care, Shared Archival Practices” Sonia Campanini asks what exactly constitutes an archival accident. Addressing the coming challenges of preserving Nigeria’s video heritage, she advocates for the creation of networks of care and archiving that evolve independently of the established national institutional frameworks and cultural policies. In “Situatedness: Accidental Archaeology of When and What” Ala Younis discusses Rachid Benhadj’s 1980 film *Rakem 49 (Number 49)*, in which an Algerian family arrives for a picnic on the site of their future home and encounters objects from their future lives on this site. Younis takes the film as the starting point for an archaeology of power relations in the contemporary Arab world in which accidental encounters create an opening for revolutionary change. In “Seeing Again: *Nuit et brouillard—Nacht und Nebel—Night and Fog*” Tobias Hering reports on a screening of the East and West German versions of Alain Resnais’s seminal film about the Nazi camps at the Oberhausen festival to disentangle the rhizomatic binds that connect each film print to different layers of the past and the present. A seemingly obvious programming choice thus opens up the space for a capillary historiography suggested by the materiality of the film itself. In “Against Forgetfulness, Against Monumentalization: Round and Around (2020)” Hieyoon Kim focuses on a recent documentary by artists Jang Minseung and Jung Jae Il. Commissioned by the National Film Archive the

- 20 film commemorates the 1980 Gwangju uprising, a key moment in South Korea's transition to democracy. Archivists by the accident of commission, the artists brought together archival footage with contemporary views of the memorial sites and ambient music to create an affective encounter with history.

New Archival Spaces and Places of Cinema

The second section brings together essays on archival sites beyond heritage institutions and across urban and other landscapes. In "Transnational Archival Practice as a Necessity in Cinema Practice: The Film Series *The Invitees* at Sinema Trans-topia and the Rediscovery of *Kara Kafa*" Can Sungu discusses the film programs of Sinema Transtopia and the rediscovery of *Kara Kafa*, a film shot in 1979 by a Turkish team in Duisburg, Cologne, and Berlin as a model for a curatorial practice and film historiography of migrant cinema that moves beyond the frameworks of national heritage to reflect the complexity of multi-sited and multi-language biographies and filmographies. In "'Can't You See Them?—Film them.'" Asja Makarević, a film scholar and long-time curator of the Sarajevo Film Festival, talks to artist *Clarissa Thieme* about her long-standing artistic collaboration with Hamdija Kresevljakovic Video Arhiv Sarajevo, a collection of video testimonies of the siege of Sarajevo 1991-1996. Thieme discusses how this archive transcends the context of its origin and speaks to and through her work as an artist. In "Action-based Archivism" Alexandra Schneider talks with Mareike Bernien, Madhushree Dutta, and Merle Kröger about their work as documentary filmmakers and cultural activists. The conversation focuses on how artists become archivists and revolves around a set of online archives that have come out of projects engaging a cultural space between Germany and India. In "Navigating/Activating: Working with Harun Farocki's Estate" Volker Pantenburg draws on Suely Rolnik's concept of the poetic force of the archive to highlight the multiplicity of potential discoveries and connections in the legacy of an individual artist, in the networks of

which he was part, and in the city in which he lived and worked. In “Pirated *Lubunca* Films: Lambdaistanbul’s Counter-archival Practices” Sema Çakmak delves into the screening practices of a queer underground film festival in Istanbul. She traces program histories, revisits localities, and talks to programmers and audiences to evoke the ephemeral and precarious experience of queer festival culture in Turkey’s metropolis. In “Forgetting the Cinema of Transgression by Looking for Its Traces” Marie-Sophie Beckmann recounts the challenge of mapping 1980s marginal film cultures in New York’s East Village and Lower East Side. Focusing on the work of Nick Zedd, Beckmann emphasizes the resistance to reconstruction of what she calls fluid practices and unruly objects. In “On Transnationality and Archive Practice: A Chronicle of the Rafla Collection” Tamer El Said chronicles the discovery of a private collection of amateur films and reduction prints, which was compiled by Madgy Rafla, a jeweler in Cairo’s Heliopolis neighborhood. Kept by Rafla’s family in their bedroom, the collection contains unique footage of Egypt from the 1920s through the 1960s and points to the importance of private film collections as repositories of cultural and political memory, and all-too neglected part of film history.

New Cinephilias: Beyond the Manspreading Machine

The third section brings together essays which revisit the concept and practices of cinephilia from an accidental archivist vantage point. In “Afterword, Three Years Later: For a New Cinephilia” film critic Girish Shambu takes stock of the impact his manifesto “For a New Cinephilia,” which offered a critique of the inherent biases of auteurist approaches and set the debate about the largely male-dominated canon of classical cinephilia on a new course. In “Kinothek Asta Nielsen: Fugitive Archives” Gaby Babić, Karola Gramann and Heide Schlüpmann, the curators of the Kinothek Asta Nielsen e.V. and “Remake,” a feminist film

22 festival in Frankfurt, talk about the movement of their work as curators away from mainstream cinema and back to the space of the cinema. Advocating for the transformative power of public screenings of seemingly marginal films, they insist that the ultimate repository of film history and cinematic knowledge is the audience. In “From Singular to Plural” scholar and curator Erika Balsom, who redefined the histories of feminist filmmaking with the 2022 show “No Master Territories: Feminist World Making and the Moving Image” co-curated with Hila Peleg, defends the complexities of archives against the abstraction at play in the notion of “the archive” and acknowledges the multiple lives lived by moving images in and outside of archives and heritage institutions. In “My Little Lady Digs: Vaginal Davis on ‘Rising Stars, Falling Stars’” scholar and curator Marc Siegel and artist Vaginal Davis review more than fifteen years of Davis’ work as a curator on the prowl in the Arsenal archive and her uniquely glamorous way of shining a light on (re)discovered traces of early queer and feminist cinema. In “We Have Always Been Fabulous: *Fragments of an Unfinished Manifesto*” Mohammad Shawky Hassan unravels the layers of Egyptian cinema’s queer archive, from crossdressing scenes in the 1950s to allusions to homosexual desires in more recent films. He proposes to use Esteban Muñoz’s concept of disidentification to move beyond straight tools to build a queer archive. In “On Decay: Reflections on Working with Neglected Films” Lisabona Rahman and Julita Pratiwi discuss the work of Kelas Liarsip, an activist research collective that conserves the informal film heritage and the memory of women’s work in Indonesia’s Nusantara archipelago. Working with decaying films, the group turned to archiving by accident, exploring the tension between material loss and memory.

Interlude

In the interlude, “The Arsenal in Berlin,” Ulrich Gregor, one of the founders, offers a vision for a curatorial platform that transcends the established paradigms of the auteur/nation canon of the first

generation of heritage institutions—a mission statement that has lost nothing of its productive power.

Cinékinships: Creating New Networks of Film Culture

The fourth section brings together essays which think of accidental archivism as a relational practice connecting people, sites, and objects with institutions, but most importantly with each other. In “The Eloquence of Odradek: Hussein Shariffe’s Exilic Film Objects” Erica Carter traces the trajectories of filmmaker and artist Hussein Shariffe from London to Sudan to exile in Egypt. Carter discusses the challenges of making his last, unfinished film and other parts of his work come alive in a digital database of documents and fragments. In “Cinema-ye Azad: The Lost History of the Iranian Independent Cinema Collective” Hadi Alipanah reviews the small-gauge filmmaking movement that emerged out of commissioned film work at the margins of the film industry in pre-revolutionary Iran. Dispersed and suppressed by the post-revolutionary government, the Independent Cinema Collective contributes an important element to a broader understanding of the global moment of small-gauge filmmaking in the 1970s, which is only now coming into the focus of curatorial and archival practices. In “Collaborative Dialogues and Calcutta’s Super 8 Film Movement” Amrita Biswas shifts our attention to India as she reconstructs the history of Kolkata’s amateur filmmaking networks in the 1970s and 1980s. Biswas discusses the multi-layered investigative challenge of tracing an ephemeral film practice through dispersed archival fragments of films and other documents. In “The Pyramid Used to be a Mountain” Almudena Escobar López discusses the work of the Colectivo los Ingrávidos, an activist film collective from Tehuacán in Mexico, formed in opposition to both the dominant political parties and the commercial film industry. Documenting political protests and interweaving activist with archival work, the Colectivo traces

24 contemporary political conflict to the enduring violent legacies of colonization. In “Destabilizing the Official Film Archive from Within: S.N.S. Sastry’s *And I Make Short Films*” Ritika Kaushik takes a misplaced film from the Arsenal archive as the starting point for a reflection on how S.N.S. Sastry used his position with the government’s Film Division to engage in a filmmaking practice that remixed and reappropriated footage from various sources, and which provides a model for the official archive’s transformation into a dynamic entity which challenges the monolithic histories of the Indian nation state. In “A Festival Under Fire” Shai Heredia reflects on her twenty years of experience as the founder and curator of the Experimenta film festival in India. At a juncture when the pandemic has thrown the failings of the current Hindu nationalist government of India into sharp relief, opening the 2023 edition of the festival with a government film from the 1960s, which offered a defense of secular democracy, illustrated the political potential of reviving the long-neglected “vast domain of cinema as non-art” to create new avenues for a political historiography of and through film.

The Vast Domain of Unseen Films: Mapping the Cinema We Never Knew

The fifth section brings together essays which speculate about potential archives and open up a future for those not yet secured. In “An Archive of the Future, An Archive for the Past” Constanze Ruhm engages in historical fabulation to expand the feminist film archive into the eighteenth century, an illustration of the productive force of the archival imagination. In “The Non-Human Archive” Veena Hariharan follows in the footpaths of a lone canine who—as Delhi dogs do—showed up out of nowhere in the photographic record of the Delhi Dunbar procession in 1903. Focusing on the accidents of animal vestiges in the human archive, Hariharan advocates for histories in which the non-human in the animal-human relationship becomes the event

rather the accident, starting with the mycological study of the bio-deteriorated image in the film archive. In “Found or Lost? Turkey’s Vulnerable Film and Video Heritage” Özge Çelikaslan discusses the precarious trajectories of activist film and video archives in Turkey since the 1970s and argues for an approach that offsets the archives’ vulnerability with new forms of archival activism. In “Pleasure in/of the Archive: Porn Workshops at the Schwules Museum” Nils Meyn draws on his work as an accidental steward and archivist of the Berlin Gay Museum’s porn video collections to discuss the way in which VHS collections as personalized legacies of queer sexual biographies speak to the vagaries of queer memorial practices. In “Cross-Fading Archives, Resurfacing Infrastructures: The Cinema Historian as Accidental Archivist and Activist” Simone Venturini takes a recent research project as his point of departure to show that even in consolidated archives accidents, which reveal the “grain of the archive,” that is, unexpected nodes and layers of connections, play a formative role for research agendas. In “Flotsam and Jetsam” filmmaker and scholar Mila Turajlić delves into the archives of “Filmske Novosti,” the official newsreel agency of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which also served as the personal film service of president Tito. Taking the last surviving cameraman of “Filmske Novosti,” Stevan Labudović, as her guide, Mila Turajlić focuses on the naval travels of Tito and the records of the Algerian war to distinguish between different types of cinematic maritime debris, flotsam and jetsam.

Lost Platforms: Accidental Archivism and the Overpromise of Technology

The sixth section brings together essays which connect the promise of digital access to stories of collecting and loss. In “Unexpected, Contingent, Accidental: Cinema in the Contemporary Digital Archive” Ravi Vasudevan focuses on video in India in the 1980s to propose the concept of the contingent

26 archive. He traces the trajectories of accidental finds on the internet and connects the infrastructural affordances of digital platforms to the activities of the collector as a complex media entity as theorized in recent work by Indian scholar Ravikant. In “Film Heritage at the Curb” Philipp Dominik Keidl addresses the fate of fan collections of movie artefacts. Repositories of objects which derive their value from intimate histories of desire and admiration, these collections fall through the cracks of the collection prerogatives of heritage institutions and often literally end up on the curb. Lost with them is an important part of the archive of the audience, a personal knowledge of film. In “Don Quixote in the Archive: Or, Making Sense of Film Heritage in the Age of Overabundance” Francesco Pitassio engages in a metahistorical reflection and takes a recent European project as the point of reference to think about the problem that in film, too, there is more history than anyone can usefully remember—particularly in the age of digital access. In “Babylon’13—as it is” the Kyiv-based video collective Babylon’13 reviews the emergence of its online repository of videographic records of Ukraine’s struggle for democracy since 2013. Collating the work of a network of videographers covering the entirety of the country, Babylon’13 is itself a thoroughly democratic entity, a “cinema of civil society” with distributed agency rather than hierarchical authorship structures.

Trajectories of Restitution

The seventh section brings together essays that connect the question of accidental archivism to the current debate about decolonization and restitution. In “Ejo Lobi: Reimagining a Future Past” Petna Ndaliko Katondolo proposes a cosmological literacy of time, in which the confluence and congruence of yesterday and tomorrow go hand in hand with an understanding of the relation of past and future that connects the visible to the invisible as a plant is connected to its root. In this cosmology, Ejo-Lobi is the concept that opens a link to reconnect time and enact human

stories which make sense for the living. In "An Accidental Virtual Archive of Colonialism" Grazia Ingravalle recounts her discovery of films that document the unfulfilled colonial fantasies at work in interwar Poland and connected to Polish settlements in Brazil. An online presentation leads to unexpected readings and connections that call into question established readings of the colonial imagination. In "African Film Heritage: The Case for Restitution" Nicholas Pernecky expands on the current debate about the restitution of material artefacts stored away in European and American museums to their areas of origin across the Global South to provide the outlines for a policy of restitution of film works held in archives in the Global North and difficult or impossible to access for scholars, filmmaker, and educators from the Global South. In "Accessing the Nigerian Film Archive: Tensions and Questions" Añulika Agina and Didi Cheeka engage in a controversial debate about the current state of film archiving in Nigeria. Zooming in on the defects of post-colonial governance Agina argues for a distribution of labor between Global North and South in securing access to Africa's film heritage, while Cheeka argues for archival autonomy and full restitution. In "Remnants of the Central Film Library and the Rethinking of Ghana's Audio-Visual Heritage" Rebecca Ohene-Asah combines the perspectives of a heritage scholar and filmmaker to discuss the precarious state of non-fiction film holdings in the country's national film archives and makes the case for the importance of preserving educational and other utility films as part of the post-colonial film heritage. In "Phenomena of Ukrainian Cinema: Director's Cut by Ukrainian Film Archive" Olena Goncharuk and Mariia Glazunova recount how the Dovzhenko Centre in Kyiv emerged out of the Revolution of Dignity in 2014. If decolonization usually involves moving beyond the framework of the nation state, establishing a national film archive for the first time in Ukraine's history marks a departure from the tenets of Soviet and Russian imperialism and its legacies. In "Fragments of Our Memories: On the Incompleteness of Broken Nostalgia" Lynhan Balabat-Helbock and Laura Kloeckner weigh the charge of living

- 28 in and with archives of objects related to the racist histories of German colonialism. Drawing on their experience with the project “Colonial Neighbors,” which Savvy Contemporary developed as part of *Archive außer sich*, they reflect on the blockages that keep contemporary Germany from acknowledging the country’s past.

Epilogue

The volume closes with an epilogue, a longer essay on one of the projects that got this project of accidental archivism underway. In “Cine-Animism: *The Return of Amílcar Cabral* and Many Returns” Filipa César offers a multi-voiced engagement with the first film produced by filmmakers in Guinea Bissau after the war of liberation from Portugal in 1974. The film documents how the remains of revolutionary leader Amílcar Cabral, who had been assassinated in Conakry in 1973, were returned to Guinea Bissau in 1976. Responding to the film’s pace and form César’s essay is a séance about the impossibilities and limitations of transcribing the ciné-animism of post-colonial cinema in the established modes of archiving. With her text César exemplifies the necessity of inventing new ones.

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PROLOGUE

An Incomplete Series of Archive Incidents, Or: Trust the Archive

Stefanie Schulte Strathaus

Was Suddenly There

I hadn't been in Berlin very long, maybe two years, since right after the Wall came down. It was a time when anything was possible, so together with a couple of friends I opened a small cinema in Kreuzberg. We managed to get a portable 16mm projector, which for some reason or another was temporarily kept in my shared apartment.

Alongside my studies, I earned some money in the Arsenal film archive. I sent film prints to other cinemas. The first thing I learned was how to weigh films for shipment. Films had weight.

That's why I chose the short ones, in the lighter 16mm format, to take back home with me occasionally and watch them there. My film education began with experimental and underground films. Most of them had come to the Arsenal because of Alf Bold, a passionate collector. One day I took home a film canister with nothing written on it. I had noticed it long before, because it lay hidden between the others and no one seemed interested in it. I

- 34 put the film in the projector and saw Tilda Swinton riding a bike. I watched her travel along the Berlin Wall, discovering a city that I had never seen before.

I began to research it and someone mentioned to me that Cynthia Beatt had once shot such a film with her film Tilda. I didn't know her at the time, although she had also once worked at the Arsenal, so I called her up. She was overjoyed, she thought her film *Cycling the Frame* was lost. This was my first encounter with an important category in the then quite rudimentary database: WPD: *War plötzlich da* (eng. *was suddenly there*).

Curating as an Archival Practice (1)

Shortly after the creation of the Arsenal Cinema in 1970, Alf Bold began programming along with Erika und Ulrich Gregor. He can be considered one of the first to have developed a clear, curatorial signature. "Alf's art was his programming," wrote the film critic Amy Taubin on his AIDS-related death in August 1993. In order to get his hands on the experimental films that he wanted to show—sometimes very spontaneously—he used his networks and collected prints, including the films by the queer New York underground icon Jack Smith. In 2009, 20 years after Smith's death, one of the administrators of the estate, Jerry Tartaglia, decided to bequest Smith's entire film work to the Arsenal due to this history of friendship. But Smith had used most of his films in live performances, cutting and recutting them while playing music from his record collection. How should one show and archive such material, when he himself was no longer there? The question was expanded in the form of a two-part festival called *LIVE FILM! JACK SMITH! Five Flaming Days in a Rented World*.¹ In the first part 50 people (including friends and colleagues of Smith's such as Mario Montez, Tony Conrad, and Penny Arcade) were

1 *LIVE FILM! JACK SMITH! Five Flaming Days in a Rented World* was a cooperation with HAU—Hebbel am Ufer (September 2009), curated by Susanne Sachsse, Stefanie Schulte Strathaus, and Marc Siegel.

invited to look at the material together, sharing their comments with each other as preparation for the second part, in which they produced their own works to create a new presence and thus a new framework for remembering the work of Jack Smith.

Curating as an Archival Practice (2)

The association Friends of the German Cinematheque (today: Arsenal—Institute for Film and Video Art) was founded in 1963 and began as a purely voluntary operation. In an attempt to continue the Berlin International Film Festival, which had fallen into difficulties, they were given the opportunity to establish and run the International Forum of New Cinema within the Berlin Film Festival.² The first Forum took place in July 1971. The focus was on films that countered hegemonic discourses, that contributed to developing a new aesthetic, and/or that provided testimony of social and political developments. Many of the films came from countries with cinematographies that were still unfamiliar internationally. From our perspective today, the most enduring idea was to keep the films in Berlin after the Forum and make them available for distribution. To this end, prints with German subtitles were made in most cases, of which many are today the only existing copies of the films. Considerable informational material was produced, not only on the films themselves, but also on the geopolitical context. The extensive audience discussions after the screenings were recorded. Over the decades this led to an archive of independent, resistant film that is unique in the world.

2 The International Forum of New Film is often shortened to Forum. Today it is called the Berlinale Forum.

When Film Prints Grow Old, the Category of Heritage Comes to Light

The films were shown in many places in Germany and world-wide. This has left traces on the prints, to which came aging processes such as vinegar syndrome. It became important to ensure their continued existence. A key function in the distribution of resources for archiving, digitizing, and restoring film material is the category of heritage. As a rule, this privileges a strict definition of the concept, one that sees cultural heritage as national heritage, thus drawing the politics of film culture into the framework of the nation state. Film, however, has entered history as a reproducible medium. To whose cultural legacy does a film print belong? Is it necessarily the production background of the film that governs the heritage, or couldn't it also be its history of reception? What role do different language versions play, that is, subtitled prints? Couldn't the term cultural heritage also be based on the concept of responsibility through use?

What Has Happened to This Film?

Film scholar Nicole Wolf had often heard about the film *Kya hua is shahar ko?* (eng. *What Has Happened to This City?*; Forum 1988) by Deepa Dhanraj, but only after many years did she find a print of it—with German subtitles—at the Arsenal when doing research for an exhibition. Through her we found out that the Arsenal print was the only print in existence and was therefore very valuable. The collaboration led to the possibility of the film being restored, returned to India, and released as a DVD. This all led to a new public engagement with the film. In this context Deepa started talking about other films that had been created in collaboration with the film collective Yugantar, which had been founded in 1980. In her description of how they came to be—the political climate, the collaborative film work, the development of the political in the film, the understanding of feminist politics, the particular

kind of public discussion that the films generated—they seemed to materialize again, even if the film material itself was at that time just on the verge of permanent decomposition. The Arsenal began to digitize these films as well. *Kya hua is shahar ko?* has since been a different film.

Films Can Become Friends

In September 2013 Harun Farocki came to the Arsenal office at Potsdamer Platz. Along with him was a friend of his who was carrying an old, obviously heavy leather suitcase. Harun presented him as Ruchir Joshi, a writer from India, who had shot a handful of films in the 1980s and 90s, about music, about cinema, about Kolkata. For years they had been lying in an attic in London, which was now being cleared out. Harun had suggested the Arsenal as a fitting new home for his films. Ruchir was delighted to hear that they would now be held, not only alongside those of Harun, but also in the same place as the films by an old friend, Deepa Dhanraj.

It Takes a Village to Raise an Archive

Among the things we have learned from Jerry Tartaglia, Nicole Wolf, Deepa Dhanraj, Harun Farocki, Ruchir Joshi, and many others is this: Everyone that enters the space of the archive is an archivist, for they don't take anything away, they only add something that gives life to what was already there. Over a period of two years 38 curators, filmmakers, artists, film scholars, and other researchers were invited to develop new work from the archival holdings at the Arsenal. The concept of the project *Living Archive—Archive Work as a Contemporary Artistic and Curatorial Practice* (2011–2013) was based on the idea that projects that uncover a need for action in their archival research can be deliberately initiated in order to discursively connect research, preservation, and publication in the context of contemporary

38 practice. “Let a hundred Living Archives bloom!” is the title that participant Madeleine Bernstorff later gave her sub-project.

The Question Is Not What We Do With the Archive, but What the Archive Does With Us

The 38+ participants (those who were teachers brought along their students) were initially faced with a big problem when they entered the archive: where to start? Sometimes at random they took up loose threads and started working with films that they had previously known little or nothing about. The film scholar became a performer, the silent film pianist became an installation artist, the filmmaker became a host at the archive. After two years the Arsenal Archive was not what it once had been. It was alive. It quickly grew out of its old, remote location in Spandau and it became necessary to move. In 2015 the Archive moved into the silent green Kulturquartier in Wedding, a former crematorium under a preservation order. In 2025 the offices will follow, then in 2026 the cinema.

Archive is Cinema in the Spectators’ Heads

At the close of his Living Archive Residency the artist Mohammed A. Gawad from Cairo used a blue thread to tie together all the film rolls he had viewed during his stay in the summer of 2015. For several days no one could enter the archive. There was a piece of paper in front of the door, reading: “The thread allows the dweller to dive in / free fall / fast forward / go forth / forge a way through the narratives past, towards the eye of the temporal storm. A place where new time could be formulated / new relations could be forged.”

The Arsenal Archive is Nothing More and Nothing Less Than a Speck in an Archival Landscape

In 2011 Living Archive participant Filipa César found a 16mm print of the film *Acto dos feitos da Guiné* by the Portuguese filmmaker Fernando Matos Silva, which had been premiered at the Berlinale Forum in 1981. The story of the liberation struggle in Guinea-Bissau contains archival material that she already knew: images of statues that can also be seen in Flora Gomes's *Mortu Nega* (Portugal 1988) and Chris Marker's *Sans Soleil* (France 1983). Together with Flora and the filmmaker Sana N'Hada she had previously visited an abandoned archive with unedited film and sound material from the period of militant cinema in Guinea-Bissau. It belonged to the National Film institute INCA, which had been founded after independence in the mid-1970s. The material was to be brought to the Arsenal to be digitized there. A military coup in 2012 increased the time pressure. Later on, Filipa looked back at a change in perspective that this had created: "We had one week to organise the archive material in Bissau for the digitisation in Berlin. We would often stick several film fragments together on one reel, and because of the rush sometimes these reels ended up wrong-sided or upside-down. So they got digitised that way, and it was how we watched some of them for the first time, upside-down or backwards or both" (César and Younis 2017). Over many years Filipa invested production funds that she got as an artist in further digitization work, and the results found their way into her films and performances, thus contributing to the rescue of the archive. Flora und Sana commented on the silent material live in numerous screenings. In the end they all traveled together through Guinea-Bissau to present the material there. The mobile cinema project ended in May 2015 in Berlin and became part of Filipa's documentary *Spell Reel*, which premiered at the Berlinale Forum in 2017.

- 40 Like *Kya hua is shahar ko?* before it, *Acto dos feitos da Guiné* was now also no longer just a film from the Arsenal Archive. Henceforth it existed in the presence of another archive in Guinea-Bissau. In an interview on *Spell Reel* Filipa later said “At some point I realised that cinema here was a channel to access a common past, not in the formatted sense of ‘opposite perspectives,’ but that actually cinema provides us with a common ground” (César and Younis 2017).

Transnational Narratives

Sana N'Hada and Flora Gomes were part of a group of young Guineans who had been sent to Cuba by Amílcar Cabral, the leader of the liberation movement in Guinea-Bissau, to study filmmaking at the ICAIC (Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos). Films connected to the ICAIC had turned up in the Arsenal Archive early on, including *Por primera vez* by Octavio Cortázar (1967), which won the Golden Dove Prize in Leipzig in 1968. It is a film about a mobile cinema that screens Chaplin's *Modern Times* as part of a literacy drive in a remote mountain village. Santiago Álvarez came to Berlin in 1965, after his agitprop film *Now!* had been shown in Leipzig. Legend has it that he took his own and four other Cuban short films out from under Rudi Dutschke's bed and gave them to the Arsenal. ICAIC also produced *De cierta manera* by Sara Gómez (1974), which was shown in the Forum in 1977. A German-subtitled 35mm print remained at the Arsenal. The first feature-length Cuban film by a woman director portrays life in a poor neighborhood in post-revolutionary Cuba. It remained her last film, since she died even before it was edited. There are various statements in the archives about who ultimately completed the film.

Then Let's Reconstruct the Archive Believed to Be Lost on the Basis of Oral History

In 2014 Didi Cheeka, filmmaker, writer, curator, and inventor of the character of the "Accidental Archivist," visited the former spaces of the Colonial Film Unit (later National Film Corporation/ NFC) in Lagos as a possible cinema space for the Lagos Film Society, which he had founded. While there he discovered old film rolls. Someone had told him about us, so he got in touch. On his next trip to Berlin he brought along two small film cans. We opened them together. What we founded there was something clumped up, hardly even recognizable as film. Assuming that the other reels were probably in this same state, he suggested we could reconstruct the entire archive on the basis of oral history. An archive beyond its status as object. We went to Lagos and examined the material with the portable equipment that had been built for Filipa's research in Guinea-Bissau. When the security staff at the NFC who was watching over our work saw that the material contained real images from Nigeria's history, they told us what they recognized there. They became archivists. We learned that a majority of the holdings had been brought to Jos in the northern part of the country a few years before. The NFC invited us to visit the National Film, Video, and Sound Archive there. It contains negatives and positives in significantly better condition. Among the film reels Didi discovered the title *Shaihu Umar* by Adamu Halili from 1976, which had been considered lost. At first without any reference material, but then finally on the basis of stories about the story that was supposed to be the basis for a film that everyone only knew from stories,³ the Arsenal decided to digitally restore it. More film reels were

3 The future Prime Minister of Nigeria, Tafawa Balewa, wrote the novel *Shaihu Umar* in 1955. It was used as school reading for many years. The fact that there had been a film version since 1976 was known, but the film was never available to be seen, it disappeared immediately after its first and only screening.

42 meant to be digitized on site, for which a scanner was installed in Jos. I traveled to Jos again with Vinzenz Hediger to take part in a conference on the topic of “cultural heritage.” An event with consequences: on October 23, 2019, the University of Jos and the Nigerian Film Institute (NFI) opened the first master’s program in film archiving and film culture in Africa with the support of the DAAD. From then on there has been a close partnership between those institutions, the Master’s program “Film Culture: Archiving, Programming, Presentation” at the Goethe University in Frankfurt, the NFC, the National Film, Video and Sound Archive in Jos, the Lagos Film Society, the Arsenal, and the DFF—Deutsches Filminstitut & Filmmuseum in Frankfurt. Alongside this the abandoned cinema of the former Colonial Film Unit has been renovated. *Shaihu Umar* had its Nigerian premiere there as part of the Decasia Film Festival, curated by Didi Cheeka, nearly 45 years after it was made.

Elective Affinities

Family Affairs is the title of a series of video conversations made by the writer and filmmaker Dorothee Wenner as part of the project Living Archive. She met with people who could tell about how individual films had found their way into the Arsenal Archive. *Family Affairs* is also the title of a film series and publication on Georgian cinema. Focusing on film countries is something temporary, it makes no claim to any attributions to the nation state, but shifts the focus to a place where something is in motion at a particular point in time or in a certain phase. Erika and Ulrich Gregor showed a continual interest in Georgian cinema, and the complex relationship between Georgian and Soviet cinema certainly contributed to this as well.

There’s a Strong Wind

Beihing de feng hen da / There’s a Strong Wind in Beijing is the title of the debut film by Ju Anqi, made in 1999, shortly before

the 50th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic. Equipped with a 16mm camera, he takes to the street, asking the inhabitants of Beijing about the wind conditions in the city. The 50-minute film shows everything that was filmed, leaving nothing out. For the screening as part of the 30th Forum in 2000 a 16mm print was smuggled out of the country in candy tins. This print was provided with German subtitles and can be found today in the collection at the Arsenal. Shortly thereafter the director gave another copy with English subtitles to the Arsenal for safekeeping. It became possible to give this print back to Ju Anqi in 2013, who by that time was living in the USA. *There's a Strong Wind* is also the title of an archival project that works with clips from the many films that found exile in the archive of the Arsenal as a safeguard from bans and censorship in many parts of the world.

Asynchron

In 1989, just a few months before the opening of the Berlin Wall, Erika and Ulrich Gregor were interviewed for a focus in the 19th Forum with documentary films on the crimes of the Nazi period. They spoke about the burden of proof, which by that time had become so overwhelming that no one could look away from it anymore. The process of the collective past had finally, albeit slowly and hesitantly, gone through certain necessary stages. At the time Ulrich Gregor emphasized that presenting these films was also based on a quite personal engagement, which stemmed from his own history, namely the decisive experience of the postwar period, which consisted in being confronted with the true degree of the crimes of the Nazi period. *Asynchron* was a restoration project and film program which took place in 2015 on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. The title was an expression of an ever-growing time gap. Digital restorations were intended to keep films alive, which, in view of the fact that there are fewer and fewer contemporary witnesses, increasingly have to take on the role of witness.

An Archive is Never Complete, nor Is a Restoration

Some of the prints that have stayed with us from the Forum are longer than the versions that were later released in cinemas and that have entered into film history. Does this make an archive more complete or less so? As part of the project Living Archive, the group Entuziazm⁴ attended to the, in their terms, non-film *Org* (1967–1978), by Fernando Birri. For many years it only turned up, if at all, in a 104-minute version. After a retrospective of his films at the Kino Arsenal in 1991 Birri left behind a print of the almost three-hour, excessive work in the archive, which served as the starting material for a digital restoration in 2017. Shortly thereafter a negative turned up at the Instituto Nacional de Cine y Artes Audiovisuales (INCAA).

In 2000 the Sudanese filmmaker, painter, and poet Hussein Shariffe (1934–2005) began working on his last film *Of Dust and Rubies*. Shariffe filmed at locations in Egypt, where he had lived in exile for 10 years due to his stance toward the Sudanese regime. His sudden death brought the film to an abrupt end. In 2018 a group of five people—including Shariffe’s daughter Eiman Hussein as well as the lead actor Tala Afifi—came together to discuss whether the work of this exceptional filmmaker could be digitized, restored, or even completed.⁵ This resulted in a lecture-performance as part of Forum Expanded, from which in turn emerged the film *Of Dust and Rubies, a Film on Suspension* (2020) by Tamer El Said.

- 4 The group ENTUZIAZM. Freunde der Vermittlung von Film und Text e.V. was founded in Berlin in 2007. It was dedicated to preserving and disseminating film educational text and film format from the past and present. The founding members included Michael Baute, Volker Pantenburg, Stefan Pethke, and Stefanie Schlüter.
- 5 The group was made up of Talal Afifi, Eiman Hussein, Haytham El-Wardany, Tamer El Said, and Stefanie Schulte Strathaus.

You Want to Be a Cinema? Then You Have to Build up an Archive

Even before the Egyptian revolution a group of young filmmakers in Cairo conceived a plan to open an independent cinema. The need for film education, exchange, and debate became all the more clear when a better future seemed to be looming on the horizon. In 2015 I traveled to Cairo for the opening, carrying two new 16mm prints in my luggage as a gift. Both films came from the group that Alf Bold had collected: *Sailboat* by Joyce Wieland (1967), which I remembered during a felucca trip on the Nile and which says in the title what can be seen in the image, and *(nostalgia)* by Hollis Frampton (1971), in which the spoken text describes images that can only be seen in the following shot, until they lie burning on a hot plate while the next image is already being described. Both experimental films were confiscated at the airport on my entry to Cairo.

One day the famous documentary filmmaker Atteyat Al Abnoudy stood at the door, offering her personal inheritance, consisting of her own films, which she had shot in Egypt in the 1970s and 80s, films that she had collected, and a paper archive, to the Cimatheque—Alternative Film Centre, which by then had opened. When Cimatheque co-founder Tamer El Said informed her that they were running a cinema and not an archive, she responded: “But you should be!” History has proven her right: Trust the Archive.

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Digital Scavengers and the Limits of the Archive: Excavating Lagos on the Internet

Vinzenz Hediger

"YouTube is not an archive," wrote Rick Prelinger three years into the portal's operation in 2009, because "preservation is neither its mission nor practice." But then, Prelinger wrote, we might as well concede that YouTube is an archive "in the public mind," and even "an ideal form of archive" (2009, 268). In 2002 Dominique Païni, the chief curator for film at the Centre Pompidou and former director of the Cinémathèque française, argued that the proper mode for exhibiting cinema was in a montage of clips, a vision inspired not least by Godard's "Histoire(s) du cinema," which discarded the cinephile concept of screening full films and complete bodies of works only (see Païni 2002). Problematizing what Prelinger called "the canonical mission of established moving image archives throughout the world" (2009, 268), YouTube went one step further and offered a democratized version of Païni's history of cinema written in clips: one in which the curatorial authority shifted from programmers to the audience, or from "attendance" to "performance" (see Casetti 2011), from merely going to the movies to creating your own programs (with more than a little help from the recommendation algorithm).

48 In addition to clips from fiction films, which Païni had in mind, YouTube features a wealth of historical footage from what Eric de Kuyper has described as the “vast domain of cinema as non-art,” in particular industrial, educational, and amateur films (de Kuyper 1994). But for much of this material YouTube is not so much an archive as it is a shop window that leads to other archives. Collected from flea markets or the dustbins of television stations and newsreel agencies, such clips are typically digital compressions of 16mm films,¹ some of them watermarked, which are uploaded by stock footage traders in the hopes of enticing documentary filmmakers or artists to license higher-resolution files for their projects.

These discarded materials could be described as scrap films, and the use of internet portals to extract value from them as digital scavenging. But precisely because YouTube is also an archive, we can envision a form of digital scavenging which, rather than making a buck off its past, treats scrap films as building blocks for cinema’s future.

But which future, and which cinema?

To explore the range of possible modes of digital scavenging I want to focus on a group of scrap films shot in Lagos, Nigeria, in the 60s and 70s. These are few and far between and, in that sense, statistically not significant. But they are analytically significant, for two related reasons. The scrap films were shot in a post-colonial city, which retained its colonial layout but was soon to evolve into one of the world’s most dynamic megacities and one which for some time now urbanists have looked to as a laboratory for the future (not necessarily good) of urbanity. Lagos is now, in fact, the most populous city in Africa with fifteen million inhabitants, projected to reach 24 million by 2030 (World Population Review 2023). Having been replaced as the capital of Nigeria by Abuja in 1991, Lagos is still the commercial and cultural

1 On film compression formats see Schneider 2020.

hub of the continent's most populous country. And despite the political ascendancy of Abuja, Lagos also continues to be the nerve center of the Nigerian oil industry. The scrap films thus connect digital scavenging to a broader regime of extracting value from remnants of the past, the modern fossil fuel economy. This regime is now coming to an end, as we can see, among other things, from Russia's imperialist war of aggression against Ukraine, which can be understood as the last gasp of a would-be empire built on the extraction of fossil fuels (see Etkind 2023). If cinema's mission is to witness history, as Godard claimed, then digital scavengers of the archival sort can view the scrap films as splinters of a future cinema that is a witness to, and perhaps even an actor in, the impending transformation of the modern economy of extraction.

Slumming it in the City of Extraction

The Nigerian oil industry was built up starting in the colonial period by European and American companies, most notably British Petroleum and Shell. Following a global trend Nigeria nationalized the oil industry in 1970 in the wake of the Biafra war, which had partially been triggered by a conflict over the taxation of oil revenues (Klieman 2012). Today the industry is dominated by a small set of joint ventures with corporations like BP, Shell, Chevron, Agip, Total, and Exxon-Mobile. Nigeria was the eleventh most important oil producer in 2022 and the largest in Africa. The oil industry accounts for 98 % of the country's exports and 14 % of Nigeria's domestic economy. The country's second most important exports, film and music, pale in comparison. Fossil fuels "possess the property of reinforcing structures of power," as Amitav Gosh writes, because they are mobile and can be used to maintain industrial production in resource-poor, high-population-density areas where cheap labor is abundant (2021, 101). In population-rich oil countries with relatively high population density like Nigeria, the extractive regime leaves local labor by the wayside. Like all oil industries the Nigerian industry is extremely

50 profitable for some players—most notably the government, for which it is the primary source of income—but creates jobs only for a few highly qualified technicians (Ross 2012). This is why the Niger delta, where the largest reserves can be found, remains one of the poorest regions of the country, even as it absorbs the brunt of the industry's pollution. Lagos and particularly Lagos Island on the other hand, the ocean-facing upscale parts of the city where the expatriate oil industry specialists would reside—and the British colonial elite before them (sometimes in the same houses)—is an enclave. It is life in this enclave that the scrap films document.

Some of the Lagos scrap films contain stock footage from news agencies, and some are newsreel segments and excerpts from documentaries, for instance about the highlife and Afrobeat music culture of the city (see Makinde 2019). The majority are amateur films, often shot from moving automobiles, and focus on the cityscape—buildings, infrastructure, market scenes, and people moving along the streets captured in passing. They resemble a popular genre of early cinema, the “phantom rides,” that is, short films shot with cameras attached to locomotives that show the view of the landscape from the front of a moving train (Blümlinger 2006). In most cases, the origin of the films remains unclear, but it is safe to assume that they were made by European and American oil industry engineers and executives (see Footageforpro.com 2019; Huntley Film Archives 2017a; 2017b; Kinolibrary 2014). Oil firms have a long history of producing industrial image and educational films on site dating back to the 1910s (see Dahlquist and Vonderau 2021). But amateur travelogues and home movies shot on Super 8 and 16mm by European and North American engineers working for resource industries in the postwar period are a genre unto themselves (Peretti forthcoming).² These engineers were sent out in large numbers across

2 Brian Jacobson is currently preparing a book on visual archives of extraction in colonial and post-colonial Algeria; Katharina Jost is working on a

the globe to work in oil fields, from Iran to Nigeria to Venezuela, at the onset of the “great acceleration.” This unprecedented phase of growth in everything after 1945, from population to consumption to energy use, is also referred to as the beginning of the “Anthropocene,” the first era in geological history in which human behavior is a decisive factor in shaping the environment.³ The oil engineers and executives who traveled the world to kick-start the great acceleration brought home films which memorialize their pastimes, living quarters, and work stations; the British Petroleum headquarters in Lagos are a recurrent motif in the Lagos scrap films.

The Lagos scrap films record a colonial city of extraction about to birth its successor, the sprawling megacity of the twenty-first century. At the turn of the millennium this megacity loomed large in the sociopolitical imagination of the west—or at least in the minds of some of those professionally engaged in taking the pulse of the present and imagining the future: urbanists, artists, philosophers, and curators among them. Rather than a monument of underdevelopment, Lagos was seen as a model of the future, available for inspection and analysis already now. Depending on the point of view, the prospect was exhilarating, if daunting, or chilling and bordering on the apocalyptic. At documenta 11 in 2002 curator Okwui Enwezor, who grew up in Anambra State in south-east Nigeria, dedicated one of the five platforms of the show, platform 4, “Under siege,” to the African cities, Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, and Lagos. A study conducted from 1997 onwards by Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas and a group of students from The Harvard Project on the City

dissertation on a family collection of amateur films shot in Venezuela as part of www.konfigurationen-des-films.de.

- 3 “The industrial revolution is sometimes proposed as the start date for the Anthropocene. The genocide of indigenous peoples in the Americas in the 16th century, which led to a reforestation and a cooling of the atmosphere in the 17th century, has more recently been suggested as the first recorded episode in which humans decisively shaped the environment” (Gosh cited in McNeill and Engelke 2016, 53).

52 was featured on the platform and became the most widely discussed take in the “exhilarating, if daunting” category. Koolhaas and his team diagnosed that Lagos consisted of quasi-organic forms of self-organization nested into the fragments of a partially abandoned modernist infrastructure. The “chilling, bordering on the apocalyptic” view was most prominently expressed by social historian Mike Davis in *Planet of Slums* from 2005. Davis scaled up his analysis of the politics of urban development of Los Angeles from his 1994 book *City of Quartz* to a global level and argued that megacities like Lagos and Karachi were essentially giant slums, harbingers of the future of urbanity under conditions of unfettered capitalism (see Davis 2005 and 2006). Complementing the messy optimism of Koolhaas and the Neo-Marxist pessimism of Davis, Canadian journalist Doug Saunders looked at the megacity from the perspective of urban migrants and their aspirations in his 2006 book *Arrival City*, with a focus on opportunity and particularly the difficult transition from informal modes of living in the city to legal residency and property ownership.

With a few exceptions, like Enwezor, most of these takes on the African megalopolis were formulated by northwestern European and North American authors, and they were primarily addressed to audiences in the Global North.⁴ The Global North’s concern over the megacity is an outgrowth of the “overpopulation” discourse, which started with the Club of Rome report on limits to growth from 1972, and it has echoes of the nineteenth-century literature on urban poverty and squalor, which paved the way for the modernist fervor for the spacious, sprawling garden city (see Jacobs 1961). Koolhaas, Davis, and Saunders all tried to assuage (or, in the case of Davis, further mobilize) the fears of their audience with solutions for the megacity problem: let chaos evolve into order, albeit with some new infrastructure to hasten the process (Koolhaas), fight capitalism (Davis), create

4 Ravi Sundaram’s *Pirate Modernities*, a landmark study of the transformation of the modernist urban space of Delhi from a media point of view, came out only at the end of the decade.

pathways for individual initiative so that chaos can become order (Saunders).⁵

The difference between Koolhaas and Saunders could be described as one between reckless (Koolhaas) and guarded (Saunders) optimism, but they are also separated by a difference in perspective and form. Koolhaas and his team traveled to Lagos at a time when western governments were issuing travel warnings for the city. "You needed to be a cowboy to go to Lagos," as architect Kunlé Adeyemi said, one of Koolhaas's interlocutors in the 1990s, invoking one of the iconic figures of settler colonialism,⁶ while Koolhaas speaks of himself as a traveler partially driven by a "narcissism of difficulty" (Michael 2016). In his lecture on the project at documenta, Koolhaas offered that he first traveled around Lagos by car and never stepped out of the vehicle. Famously, on his third trip Koolhaas obtained the "president's helicopter"⁷ to penetrate Lagos's "intense foreground" and get a better sense of its depth from above, even as he was putting even more of a safe distance between himself and the city's inhabitants (Koolhaas 2002). On the ground "the city had an aura of apocalyptic violence; entire sections of it seemed to be smoldering, as if it were one gigantic rubbish dump." Scavenging as an auto-poetic process is the primary mode of existence in and of the city. In this "gigantic rubbish dump" a "process of sorting, dismantling, reassembling, and potentially recycling" is going on, a "continuous effort to transform discarded garbage." But from

5 Koolhaas paired his Harvard students with students from Lagos who served as guides, but he was still accused of "slumming it" in Lagos like a Victorian in 19th century London by critics in the Global North. "Lagos shows how a city can recover from a deep, deep pit" (Michael 2016).

6 Albeit one that has its own history as role model for African urban masculinity, as witnessed in the "Cowboy" movement in Kinshasa in the 1960s (Gondola 2016).

7 We must assume that he is referring to Olusegun Obasanjo, a former military dictator who succeeded the rapacious tyrant Sanni Abacha and had engineered a transition to democracy once before, albeit without lasting success, in the early 1980s (see Siollun 2019).

54 the air, “the apparently burning garbage heap turned out to be, in fact, a village, an urban phenomenon with a highly organized community living on its crust” (Koolhaas 2002, 177). Throughout, Koolhaas views the city as an organism. No individual person makes an appearance until late. And when people do appear, it is a cataclysmic experience:

Flying over the city, Lagos reveals—at Oshodi Junction—the greatest density of both traffic and human beings ever known to man, literally unimaginable numbers of people. (Koolhaas 2002, 179)

Numbers played a critical role in the colonial imaginary. Numbers “provided a shared language for information transfer, disputation, and linguistic commensuration between center and periphery” and served the purpose of “*translating* the colonial experience into terms graspable in the metropolis,” to cite Arjun Appadurai (1996, 125–26). In the post-colonial megacity, “man,” the spectatorial subject of history, he who potentially knows everything that can be known, is overwhelmed by the unimaginable numbers of the people of the city. He has them in sight but cannot count them: the translation mechanism no longer works. Even as the “sovereign Humanitarian subject” (Himadeep Muppidi), here embodied by the Dutch urbanist hovering over the city in a helicopter, asserts itself, the colonial imaginary collapses, only to find a substitute in an experience of the ecological sublime, of the city a quasi-organic spectacle (Muppidi 2012, 124).

By contrast Saunders, a journalist by profession, conducted a series of on-the-ground case studies in Africa and Asia and chose a storytelling format to relay his view of urban migration and the megacity. He inverts, in other words, the foreground-background relation in the field of Koolhaas’s vision and substitutes a liberal humanism focused on individual agency and the enforcement of rights for the ecological laissez-faire liberalism of Koolhaas. Urban migration and urban growth are stories of arrivals and networks in the city and beyond, and the aspirations of urban

migrants can be harnessed for the greater good by a competent public administration and the management of citizenship and property titles.

It has been said that as “liberal humanism became the dominant logic of Western society, it became increasingly problematic,” leading to “elitist, colonialist and patriarchal ideologies” (Kellner and Lewis 2007, 406). Property titles, one of the instruments of opportunity in Saunders book, have been powerful instruments of colonial domination.⁸ In international relations, as the “War on Terror” has shown, the discourse of individual rights is suspended in episodes of the mass-destruction of non-white bodies (Muppidi 2012). The critique of the conceptual and epistemic frameworks of western modernity, of “secular universals,” along with the valorization of indigenous knowledge systems have been a central tenet of postcolonial theory (Muppidi 2012, 66). It would be a stretch to accuse Saunders of a neo-colonial attitude. But it could be argued that, even as he works—laudably, and quite effectively—to dissipate fears of migration in the Global North by assimilating migration into the legal and philosophical frameworks of liberal humanism, Saunders remains committed to a mindset of benevolent social engineering, a hallmark of the “sovereign Humanitarian subject.” At the same, Nigerian philosopher Olúfẹmi Táíwò has recently offered a critique of decolonial thought, arguing that a wholesale rejection of the legacy of the European Enlightenment and liberal democracy ultimately limits the space for African agency (Táíwò 2022). One of the key questions in this debate is whether the post-colonial condition will ever end, and what becomes of the remnants of colonial imaginary in the meantime. How do the scraps of the colonial imaginary shape the postcolonial condition, and can they become building blocks of a different imaginary, one that goes beyond not just laissez-faire ecologism and humanist liberalism,

8 Among many others see Kenyatta 1962 and Bourdieu 2010.

56 but post-colonialism as well? For all their insignificance, the Lagos scrap films may provide some answers.

Beyond the Aesthetics of Infrastructure as Superstructure

Writing in 2020 Okwui Enwezor argues that one of the lessons of post-coloniality is that “it exceeds the borders of the former colonized world to lay claim to the modernized metropolitan world of empire by making empire’s former ‘other’ visible and present at all times” through media and in everyday practice (Enwezor 2020). Of necessity, the Lagos scrap films partake in this post-colonial excess: circulated by the digital scavengers on YouTube and their websites, they are potentially visible at all times. But what do they show of the former empire and its ‘other’?

Cyprian Ekwensi’s novels from the 1950s and 1960s like *People of the City* (1954) and *Jagua Nana* (1961) provide a sense of Lagos in the late colonial and early post-colonial period. *Jagua Nana* tells the story of an ageing beauty and occasional consort from South East Nigeria and her lover, a young teacher who goes to study law in England. For them, Lagos is a space of aspiration, an arrival city in the sense of Saunders, but also a transitory space between the village and the colonial metropolis. An Italian crew tried to obtain permits to film *Jagua Nana* in the mid-1960s but was denied by Nigerian authorities, who did not wish to see their country represented in a film about a prostitute.⁹ In the Lagos scrap films, the stories and networks of Ekwensi’s Lagos also have no place, but for different reasons. In these films the streets are at best sparsely populated and far from crowded by unimaginable numbers of people. Only when markets come into view are the

9 For this information I thank Didi Cheeka, who at one point in the early 2000s negotiated for the film rights directly with the writer. Ekwensi died in 2007, aged 86.

viewers confronted with a higher density of bodies in movement. One of the Lagos scrap films contains this sequence: people walking on a sidewalk as traffic passes by, a shot of a woman on a sidewalk looking out on Lagos bay, followed by a shot of what we can assume to be the wife of the filmmaker in the car, back to a shot of a woman wearing a jug or package on her head on a modern concrete bridge.

In a recent essay Brian Larkin argues for attention to “the form of infrastructure,” that is, the aesthetic surfaces of infrastructure in which infrastructure and superstructure converge and in which the power dynamics of infrastructure play out as a matter of media aesthetics (Larkin 2018). Modernist infrastructure is for, and produces, modern citizen-subjects who are committed to progress and growth and work from an abstract conception of space as a place of economic opportunity. But in the colonial city, “infrastructure is superstructure,” as Frantz Fanon writes: not a neutral conduit, but built ideology, an exclusionary mechanism and a form of violence that enacts racial hierarchies by separating the parts of the city reserved for the colonizers from those of the colonized, which differ in layout, design, amenities, and living standards (see Fanon 1963).

The montage in the Lagos scrap film is enmeshed in modernist infrastructure, but it also reflects a continuing segmentation and separation of spaces and temporalities—inside, outside, moving around by car vs. walking or traveling by bus, modern transport vs. traditional modes of transport, for example, the woman carrying a jug on her head, those who are driving/looking, and those who are moving and being looked at. In his essay “How to Write about Africa,” a satirical inventory of western literary and visual clichés, Kenyan novelist Binyavanga Wainaina reminds us that “wide empty spaces and game are critical—Africa is the Land of Wide Empty Spaces” (2019). In the Lagos scrap films this pertains to urban spaces and urban infrastructure as well. “The postcolonial today is a world of proximity. It is a world of nearness, not elsewhere,” Enwezor famously wrote in the already

58 cited text. But in this montage the post-colonial urban space is still an elsewhere. It is a space not fully shared by those looking and those looked at. The woman carrying a jug on her head is a spectacle because she is both out of place and out of time, illustrating the “uneven time politics that underlie coming together” (Sharma 2014, 146). In her appearance, the abstract space of modern economic opportunity and the “Wide Empty Spaces” of Africa overlap, but do not converge. She is in the modern city, but she is not arriving.¹⁰

The Limits of the Archive

In the process of decolonization, the spaces of the colonizers were taken over by an elite segment of the colonized. But true decolonization, according to Fanon, would require that the colonial infrastructure be completely destroyed and eradicated from the territory. Similarly, Himadeep Muppidi argues, with an eye to the field of international relations, that “the world is more than the ‘minor-ity’ archives of Europe and the West,” more than even the most assertively universalist set of concepts can aspire to cover. The task is to “make these concepts travel beyond the European archive to spaces and worlds that are radically different, so different that the archival mode itself may be a border that needs to be crossed” (2012, 67).

The challenge for accidental archivists is to move beyond both the heritage-curatorial and the extractive mode of the archive to think about a new kind of cine-political imaginary. Digital platforms are one place to do so. They suspend, or rather disperse, the curatorial authority of archivists and can give space to a multitude of radically different stories. But then again, they are

10 Ousmane Sembène's *La noire de...* from 1966, dramatizes the violence inherent in this layout in the story of a housemaid from Dakar who follows a French couple to the Côte d'Azur and ends up committing suicide, which is replicated in the separation of her living quarters in the apartment of her French masters.

not. YouTube, whether in the archival mode, the shop window mode, or any other mode, is itself an infrastructure. It is designed to accommodate different usages, with the overarching goal of extracting value from and through moving images and sounds, whether indirectly, by using the old television business model to sell audiences to advertisers, or directly, as in the case of the commercial digital scavengers. It might be useful to think of YouTube and other seemingly open portals and platforms as an analogue of the post-colonial megacity, a sprawling space in which the future of cinema is happening already now, a space with innumerable inhabitants/films and an unending stream of new arrivals/uploads in which infrastructure is also superstructure (but one whose seemingly innumerable denizens are also carefully counted and accounted for, because collating metadata and counting interactions in terms of views and likes is the foundation of the platform's extractive business model). Digital scavenging is a practice nested into this infrastructure and determined by its affordances. But it can also be a practice that transcends these affordances. If film history can best be written in a montage of clips, then a different history of (and through) cinema can be built from cinematic scraps. And if the role of traditional film criticism is to judge the artistic value of a film, the role of the critical digital scavenger is to reassess and redefine the value of scrap films for a different notion and mission of cinema. With a view to a possible transformation of the extractive regime the challenge is to collapse, so to speak, the view from the helicopter into the quasi-organic process on the ground and to transform the smoldering gigantic rubbish dump into a productive critical practice.

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I NEVER WANTED TO BE AN ARCHIVIST:
ACCIDENTAL ARCHIVISM AND BIOGRAPHICAL
TURNING POINTS

Accidental Archivism: A Necessary Accident

Didi Cheeka

When it was announced that the library contained all books, the first reaction was unbounded joy. All men felt themselves the possessors of an intact and secret treasure. ... That unbridled hopefulness was succeeded, naturally enough, by a similarly disproportionate depression. The certainty that some bookshelf in some hexagon contained precious books, yet that those precious books were forever out of reach, was almost unbearable.
— Jorge Luis Borges (1999, 141)

Necessity, to paraphrase Hegel, expresses itself as accident. By this, I refer to the tendency of the accidental, as used in the title, to occur at precisely the moment it becomes necessary: the accidental (re)discovery of Nigeria's audiovisual archive was an accident that has enabled a necessary engagement with history. But this "unbounded joy" of being in possession "of an intact and secret treasure" quickly became its opposite as the archival materials, in their vinegar-decayed state, presented themselves as "forever out of reach." This too, is in correspondence with Hegel: the tendency of things to become their opposite. I

66 suppose, in foregrounding Hegel, my intention is to position accidental archivism as arising, necessarily, from the crisis, so to say, of conventional, or if you wish, institutional, archiving. We will deal with this further. But first, a thesis—by way of a background.

Background as Theses

To extend the notion of the accident to the personal—my point of entry into archival practice was purely accidental. It was the need to create an alternative cinema center dedicated to founding the first arthouse cinema in Nigeria—as opposed to the renewed growth of commercial cinema houses in cities across the country—that directed a small number of cineastes, critics, and curators to the building of the old Colonial [later Federal] Film Unit (CFU/FFU). In the abandoned rooms of this building, we stumbled upon hundreds of cans of decaying film materials in very bad condition, traces of a forgotten past, dating back to the colonial and immediate post-colonial period. In the 60s, following independence, Nigeria was a model on how to organize state archives, as the archival situation was quite good. The CFU, which was set up in 1939, represented “a significant state effort to use film and media to shape” (Rice 2019, 1) the colonial enterprise by speaking “directly to colonial audiences, producing and exhibiting films specifically for the colonies” until its demise in 1955. In its reincarnation as FFU, following independence, it diligently continued to document aspects of public and national life. Before us, in those dusty vinegar-scented backrooms, were memory’s ruins.

What is it about images from the past that exert such seductive pull? Perhaps it’s the siren call of memory, the need to know? In the eastern part of Nigeria there is a word that gained currency after the Biafran-Nigerian War (1967–70), *echezona*, which resonates with the English expression “never forget.” It positions remembering as a personal and collective duty. I was seduced by this ruin, this accidental memorial. From the outset, there were

doubts, questions: why was I doing this—why has it become an obsession; was my life as a filmmaker and critic over—overtaken by archival practice? This discovery triggered an international symposium on history, memory, and trauma to consider, not just the significance of these materials, but also how archives are kept in Nigeria. Ultimately, it led to an encounter with the archival engagement of Arsenal—Institute for Film and Video Art and, through this, Goethe University Frankfurt and DFF—Deutsches Filminstitut & Filmmuseum. Ultimately, these encounters culminated in the inauguration of a Film Culture and Archival Studies Master in Nigeria. But... how do you teach film culture and archival studies without access to your country's archive and film history?

It is, I think, correct to say that it was the rusted can of the forgotten movie by Adamu Halilu, pioneer director of the Nigerian Film Corporation, *Shehu Umar* (1976), accidentally yielded to us by the archive in our initial, tentative look-through, that offered access to Nigeria's national audiovisual archives. We made the decision, almost immediately, to have this film digitized and it had its world premiere at the Berlinale Forum (2018). Nigerian cinema had taken shape in the western and northern parts of the country—fueled by the oil boom of the 70s—removed from the eastern part (formerly known as Biafra) ravaged by war. However, ever since the emergence of Nigeria's commercial home video phenomenon and the subsequent UNESCO's Institute for Statistics in Canada's 2008 study on the state of global film industry showed that Nigeria's movie industry had overtaken, in output, the United States' and was second only to India's, the movie industry dubbed Nollywood had become the object of international study and academic discourse. What is never acknowledged is how it got here from there. The question is: what has happened to Nigeria's post-war (1967–70) cinema—what is the level of access to this pre-Nollywood cinema?

Antithesis: Archives as Prisons

As far as answers go, one is only able to reference an almost absence of access. The institutional diligence of painstakingly recording and archiving images as historical sources of knowledge has become—in the absence of diligence in preserving and making this knowledge accessible—its opposite. At its initial discovery, as we viewed the haphazard batch of rusted cans before us, what came to mind was a line from Alain Resnais and Chris Marker's *Statues Also Die*: "An object dies when the living glance trained upon it disappears." The archive seemed to come into focus: a place where films enter to disappear from living glance, to die and be forgotten. What institutional short-sightedness was responsible for this mass internment—or, perhaps to pose the question in a direct political manner: what political act of forgetting laid the foundation for this institutional neglect? To pose the question this way is to consider the possibility—or perhaps it's an admission—of Third Cinema archival practice a subversive act. In the sense that conventional archiving, with its formal structure, its connection to official funding and state apparatus, lack the political will to confront the challenges of contemporary practices of memory.

To pursue the idea of institutional archiving as deriving from the political act of forgetting. Citing the Nigerian experience. What you see is an institutional process in concentrated form: the accumulation of a significant number of audiovisual materials—dating back to colonial/post-colonial and post-war (1967–70) periods—and relative technical know-how on one hand, and, at the same time, absence of curatorial, artistic access to these materials on the other hand. I locate this process as a deliberate act of post-colonial military regimes that rose after the Biafra-Nigeria war (1967–70), to silence memories of atrocities committed before, during, and after. Given that history, as a stand-alone subject was recently banned from Nigerian classrooms, it means that the performative possibilities offered by non-traditional archivism

become the only way to grasp, to access an otherwise inaccessible history. In this lie the challenge and subversion of accidental archivism: how to tiptoe through institutional archives, one harboring forbidden materials as not to antagonize or frighten the authority to shut down or restrict access to this archive.

Perhaps I digress, but to quickly state this: I'm opposed to post-colonialism as a theory—it is not valid in the Nigerian experience of today (I tend to use the term post-war—in the sense that not only was the Biafran war the most traumatic event of our national life, it was the collective crime that birthed modern Nigeria and not colonialism). Since forbidden footage of the Biafran war exists within the archival holdings, how do we navigate the power structures that decide what archival materials should and should not be made accessible to the public? How would re-engagement with archival material related to the Biafra-Nigeria war affect continuing access to this archive, and how can artistic and curatorial practices overcome the potential obstacles of censorship and ease political unease? What I'm trying to do, using the chance discovery of hundreds of decaying cans of films in the abandoned rooms of Nigeria's Old Film Unit (dating back to the colonial/post-colonial and post-war periods), is treat history as trauma. What this means is that the new archivists who succumb to the seductive pull of images from the past are mostly artists, activists, filmmakers—to put it simply, accidental archivists.

Archivists of the Future

If access to the archives is to become the right of every citizen, then the State and institutional policies responsible for access to images from the past should actively “guarantee, without delay ... not only the formal right, but the technical conditions of access to this archive” (Derrida and Stiegler 2002, 35). This, however, does not seem possible without some parallel mode of archival practice—archival activism. Animating this activism involves conceiving “a different imaginary of the persona of the

70 archivist” (Azoulay)—a person who “brand[s]” archival materials and “put[s] them under chain and lock.” It is not possible to imagine the archive of tomorrow without first re-imagining the persona of the archivist. Archival activism has become necessary because the archival field has been radically transformed by the entry of accidental archivists. There is, for instance, Inadelso Cossa’s *A Memory in Three Acts*, which explores, through the story of survivors, the decade-long bloody struggle of Mozambique to free itself from Portuguese colonialism. I’m reminded also of the film *Independencia*, directed by Mario Bastos, which comes some forty years after Angola’s independence. Interweaving fragments of memory and archival material, *Independencia* presents a not so distant past to instigate dialogue and remembrance of things forgotten.

There is an ongoing memory boom in cinema as, utilizing the rich resource of history, filmmakers actively seek to engage with a violent past. It is possible that this seduction is informed by the fact that a new generation is only now awakening to its own history and the need to tap the memory of the last surviving witnesses to this history. This, of course, confront us with challenges: How do we engage with archives as a contemporary curatorial and artistic practice? How do we challenge and broaden the practice of working with institutional archives—especially regarding access? To go further on the curatorial and artistic necessity of accidental archivism—the idea is to treat this (re)discovered burial site as a site of trauma: the point of entry, then, is the question—how could a national archive of films contribute to the practice of memory and coming to terms with the past? Implicated in this question is the idea that history, especially in a country where it has been banished from classrooms as a stand-alone subject, could be reclaimed, not through purely academic discourse, but, rather, through archival practice as an act of public memorial, the mechanics of breaking personal and collective silence.

By this I mean that the act of dealing with an illegitimate past, so to speak, which is violently repudiated, demands more than a judicial, political process—reconciliation committees and constitutional proceedings are not enough, and have proved incapable, especially concerning inherited acts of hatred, anger in which the state is implicated. This method calls into being a new form of archival practice—turning to digitized archival materials. If it is true that the abandonment of Nigeria’s historical memory was rooted in the trauma of war, then rescuing the national audio-visual archives contains the possibility of a re-encounter with trauma, as well as an attempt to understand it. Archival practice thus becomes a witnessing, an excavation of memory, a shattering of silence. To conclude, then. My ongoing documentary project *From Post-colonial to Post-war: Cinema & Political Amnesia—The Forgotten History of Nigeria’s Post-war (1967–70) Cinema* is the inevitable, the necessary trajectory of my life as an accidental archivist.

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Accidental Encounters, Incidental Care, and Shared Archival Practices

Sonia Campanini

Accidental Encounters, Incidental Care

The expression accidental archivism sounded like a sort of oxymoron at first to my ears. The adjective *accidental* indicates something happening by chance, unintentionally or unexpectedly, whereas archiving is an act that is driven by a certain degree of intentionality, motivation, and commitment exercised by a person, group of people, or institution. We can even consider the archival act, intended as the transmission of knowledge and culture through documents to future generations, as the main feature that differentiates the human and the non-human conditions.

When is the human and conscious act of (film and audiovisual) archiving “accidental” then? The intuitive answer refers to accidental encounters with materials, documents, films that are found by case or chance. Film histories and film archival practices have been constantly rekindled by these occurrences, from the epical 1978 finding of 530 nitrate film reels buried under a hockey rink in the Canadian Dawson City—evoked in Bill Morrison’s

74 movie *Dawson City: Frozen Time* (2016)—to the providential retrieval of some degraded reels of the 1979 Nigerian film *Shehu Umar* (Adamu Halilu) by Didi Cheeka in Lagos in the buildings of the former Colonial Film Unit.

Such fortuitous discoveries are often followed by a moment when the accidental encounter unfolds in incidental care, a point in which a singular person, collective group, or institution decides to take in charge that object, to claim responsibility over that document, to deal with the memory inscribed in its material. The dictionary defines incidental as to something “that is connected, often by chance, to something more important” (Cambridge Dictionary). In accidental archival encounters this “something more important” is from my standpoint the moment in which somebody decides to take care of that object, to preserve and revive that particular film or video. Whether taken by private people, by institutional or independent organizations, this decision always implies a certain commitment in terms of time, energy, resources, and money.

In my view the wide scale of film archiving practices can be resumed in the following approaches: accidental, incidental, voluntary, activist, political, and institutional archivism. Following this thread and considering accidental and institutional archiving as the two ends of the spectrum, accidental archivism can be defined as what exceeds the power of the archives, what overcomes its “limits” (Mbembe 2002). How can accidental archiving become incidental, voluntary, activist, political, or even institutional then? Or conversely, how can institutional archivism become activist, voluntary, incidental, or even accidental? In what follows I focus on the role of education in this spectrum of archival practices in order to point out some issues at stake when thinking about accidental archivism and its tensions with institutional practice.

Weaving Transnational Networks for Film Archiving

Creating networks and contexts for shared works and collaborative actions among institutions and independent archivists/curators might be a first immediate answer to the previous questions. In the symposium *After the Archive*, held during the 2021 festival *Archival Assembly #1* in Berlin, archivists, curators, artists, scholars, and researchers discussed how film archives can act beyond their proper belongings, beyond the idea of collections as institutional property, beyond the regional or national borders in which they are inscribed. Roundtable conversations reflected on how institutions can work for a global audiovisual heritage intended as a transnational commons, how they can function as a “site for the negotiation of a transnational practice,” as suggested by Stefanie Schulte Strathaus in the festival’s program. Speakers presented projects and collaborations involving different cultural and educational institutions (archives, museums, universities, independent organizations) based in the Global South and in the Global North. Among these, the APEX Audiovisual Preservation Exchange project organized by New York University since 2008 offered an inspiring example for supporting long-term exchanges between students, teachers, archivists, scholars, and professionals from different geopolitical regions. The topics of activist and global film archiving has gained attention and resonance in recent years, as highlighted by the latest editions of the Eye International Conference organized annually by the Eye Filmmuseum and the University of Amsterdam.

Besides in film cultural institutions, transnational collaborations are being developed between universities that offer specialized masters programs in film archiving for training future generations of film/video/digital archivists. Global exchanges in the field of academic education are facilitated at present by the familiarity with online teaching and learning formats that were consolidated

76 during the COVID pandemic. I experienced such formats for international knowledge exchange organizing an online workshop in March 2022 on the preservation and digitization of video films. The workshop involved researchers and students from the film archiving master's programs at Goethe University Frankfurt, University of Udine (Italy), and University of Jos (Nigeria). A considerable part of audiovisual heritage in countries like Nigeria and Ghana is stored on video cassettes, a very fragile format especially if improperly stored in hot and humid conditions. On the other hand film archiving methodologies and practices, as theorized and practiced in institutions in the Global North, have been focused primarily on celluloid film, at least until recent times. Very little attention has been given to video film with a few exceptions, among which the University of Udine stands out with its decade-long specialization in the preservation and digitization of video art. The purpose of the workshop was to create a transnational network for exchanging knowledge, expertise, and best practices on video digitization by bringing together video archivists and researchers from the University of Udine with Nigerian students, who will likely have to deal with the remarkable video film heritage produced by the Nollywood film industry from the 1990s to the 2000s. In addition to cooperative learning formats such as online workshops, international exchanges between students and teachers can also foster both institutional and accidental archivism. As an example, three Nigerian exchange students coming for a visiting semester at Goethe University in Frankfurt got first hands-on experience on video preservation by digitizing part of a VHS collection coming from the Nigerian National Film and Video Censor Board during their internships at the film laboratory Omnimago in Ingelheim. On the basis of this exchange of knowledge, video preservation policies and practices will be implemented in Nigerian institutions in the near future.

If in recent years an academic and public debate is arising about the decolonization of archives and museums and the possible

restitution of film and audiovisual materials to former colonized countries (Sarr and Savoy 2019), less effort has so far gone into decolonizing universities as places of knowledge production and dissemination. Teaching materials, theoretical references, and case studies in film and media studies departments are still profoundly western-dominated, focusing on European or American film cultures. Besides that, university archives and collections are starting to be investigated with decolonial approaches with regard to their holdings. An example from the German context is the music archive AMA—Archiv für Musik Afrikas at the Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz, which was founded in 1991 and holds one of the largest collection of African music recordings outside Africa. In September 2022 researchers and archivists working at AMA organized a workshop inviting African scholars, lawyers, and professionals from the music industry to discuss how to make the AMA digitized collections available on a large scale, especially for African people, while at the same time respecting copyright laws and artists' interests. Weaving international networks for knowledge exchanges that involve a variety of actors from both the Global North and South seems a productive way to address the multifaceted issues concerning decolonization of archives and universities, digital restitution, and repatriation.

Towards Commons-Based Archiving and Shared Care

In my understanding, education on moving image archiving and curating, both formal and informal, is a crucial agent for triggering movements and oscillations between accidental and institutional archivism. Beyond dedicated master's programs, a basic knowledge of film archiving might enrich the general education of students in film and media studies as well as practice-oriented students in film schools, allowing them to gain a better understanding of film but also to question how they curate

78 and archive their own films and videos produced either professionally or privately. Topics concerning audiovisual archiving and curating could also be integrated in a simplified form in media education in primary and secondary schools, where such subjects exist, since youngsters are active agents in the production and dissemination of audiovisual material from an early age.

If we consider film and audiovisual heritage as commons (and there are many reasons for doing so), the forms of diffused archivism and curating can be defined as commons-based practices. A commons-based archival practice concerns the possibility of managing global audiovisual heritage beyond the state or market through the action of individuals and communities that self-govern this common resource through institutions, methodologies, and procedures they create independently, following often ethical principles such as fairness, openness, and sustainability. As utopian as it might seem from a practical point of view, especially if considered on a large scale, these incidental and activist commons-based archival practices accompanying the more institutional ones might be pivotal for dealing with the exponentially growing quantity of audiovisual materials produced in digital formats in the last twenty years, in order to save them from the fast oblivion of digital obsolescence or the indiscriminate data extractivism of media corporates and cloud services.

The discourse about future forms of film archiving also concerns the possible uses of algorithm-based and AI-based computational processes for digitization, preservation, and access purposes. The intersections between human and non-human/AI-based film archiving is a topic yet to be explored, which raises many ethical, institutional, and political questions. The possibility of storing enormous amounts of digital data, maybe entire film collections, in a few drops of DNA-molecules to be retrieved by AI machines is just one of the possible future outcomes to reckon with. Following the thread of my initial question, it might be interesting to investigate to what extent AI audiovisual archiving will function as an accidental, incidental, voluntary, activist, political, or

institutional form of archivism. Is AI-based film archiving going to be considered as a counterpart of commons-based film archiving, or are these two forms going to mix and support each other in the near future?

As a closing note in relation to human and AI-based archivism, I recall the words of head archivist and scholar Judith Opoku-Boateng, who in the frame of the already mentioned AMA workshop in Mainz pleaded for reconsidering the idea of “open access” of entire digital collections pursued by several western archives towards what she calls “responsible access,” a modus in which the archivist-curator maintains a central role in the mediation between audiovisual heritage and viewers. Responsible access from the side of institutions and shared care from the side of communities and activists are both valuable approaches for negotiating the tensions and challenges of present and future audiovisual archiving and curating.

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Situatedness: Accidental Archaeology of When and What

Ala Younis

How can we recognize an accidental archaeological latency in a film work? Let us consider this possibility in Mohamed Rachid Benhadj's 1980 film, *Rakem 49* (eng. *Number 49*). In the film, an Algerian family from the slums goes for a picnic in the wilderness, on a lot designated for their future home. The family arrives at the site after passing by Algiers's modern architectural monuments, elevating the family's expectations about their future housing. They arrive at a site marked by a sign that carries the information about the housing project. The text on the sign is flipped" (fig. 1). We cannot be sure if this is intentional or a mistake from the film's reel or negative. The flipped sign signals an upcoming tension. I pay attention.

During the picnic, future objects suddenly appear, the family is visualizing the promise of a good life offered by the national housing project. These objects are everyday items that do not normally appear in the barren wilderness. No architecture is seen in this lot, but a bathtub appears with the mother bathing with her five children inside it (fig. 2). Few seconds later, she sits in a hair dryer chair, referencing not only the community services she

82 expects in her neighborhood, but also the whimsical imagination of self-pampering possibilities she might enjoy (fig. 3). In another scene, her children sit on two rows of school desks, listening to a future teacher, referencing better education; and in another, they sit on a couch looking at a TV set on which a flower pot rests; the TV is only one more commodity in the house besides the knowledge, entertainment, and electrical services it signifies.

When the future neighbors arrive, they too start to imagine things, this time as if they were acting out scenes from fictional movies that might have aired on such TVs. For instance, the father and his son shoot at each other using loaves of bread as revolvers. When the son shoots the father, the latter acts as if he is collapsing to the ground before everybody giggles at the joyful cinematic re-enactments. The rattling irritates the first family. Each family can see and dislike the other's imagination of the use of this site. Soon, the two fathers break into a real fight. The first father turns his anger to the construction machines that are not working on his lot; he is frustrated and the machines are not bringing him closer to the promised future either.

Knowledge resides within these scenes, articulating a vision of the future, but further knowledge manifests in sensing the alienation produced from the families' imagination. Here, the competition between the two neighboring families, and the fight between the two fathers, forebode the violent war that would break out across Algeria a decade after the film's release. Something was brewing in the society, perhaps as the film was being made; we can see the differences in class, opinion, or imagination, at least. But my accidental arrival to the film gave me another reading of the emotions that surrounded its making.

The 60-minute color film was produced by Radiodiffusion Télévision Algérienne, which owns Télévision Algérienne, and the primary media organization in Algeria. The sovereignty over this establishment was regained after the end of French colonization on October 28, 1962, following Algeria's independence on July 5,



[Fig. 1] Mohamed Rachid Benhadj, *Rakem 49*, 1980, Algeria, 16mm film, 60 min. Film found in the archive of Arsenal—Institute for Film and Video Art, Berlin, in 2012. Film stills scanned by Marian Stefanowski / Arsenal.

1962. Up until 1994, Télévision Algérienne was the sole national television channel in Algeria. This public institution is responsible for communicating and disseminating information in accordance with a set of guidelines that stipulate that it must monitor the official activities of state institutions by reporting and broadcasting in the best interests of the country's citizens. To have a film that criticized the public housing shortage and futile promises of the state meant that the anger was too big to hold, perhaps.

Mohamed Rachid Benhaj has some critically acclaimed and committed works, but it is rare to find a text on *Rakem 49*. A copy appears to be in the archive of the British Film Institute, but Arsenal—Institute for Film and Video Art has a German-subtitled 16mm print, which survived in Arsenal's film archive in Berlin after a Forum screening in 1981. As I watched the film on a moviola editing table in Arsenal's archive, I was thinking of the how this film was commissioned as a critique of the government



[Fig. 2] Mohamed Rachid Benhadj, *Rakem 49*, 1980, Algeria, 16mm film, 60 min. Film found in the archive of Arsenal - Institute for Film and Video Art, Berlin, in 2012. Film stills scanned by Marian Stefanowski / Arsenal.

to be shown on its TV, but also of how the grains of the film eaten by the German subtitles were the reason that made this and other films in the Arsenal collection stay in Berlin after their screening. The film survived, and thus was made available, because it would not have traveled beyond the places that spoke its language or read its German subtitles. Similarly, I am in the archive appreciating while also aggravating these subtitles. For the same reasons of language, I ended up watching the Arabic films in the collection, which happened to be mostly from the Maghreb region; Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia.

In the collection there were a couple of Egyptian films but I did not attempt to watch them. When I asked the Arsenal founders about this focus on non-Egyptian cinema, they said they favored the films from Algeria for Forum because they were more avant-garde and not market driven. Egyptian cinema was either commercial or obsessed with Cannes. Arabic is spoken differently in that part of the Arab world, but my



[Fig. 3] Mohamed Rachid Benhadj, *Rakem 49*, 1980, Algeria, 16mm film, 60 min. Film found in the archive of Arsenal - Institute for Film and Video Art, Berlin, in 2012. Film stills scanned by Marian Stefanowski / Arsenal.

subconsciously-accumulated knowledge of Wild West movies, and spending hours waiting in the neighborhood beauty salon, my questions on my training in architecture, might have allowed me more entries into this film. I could connect to *Rakem 49* far beyond the Algerian context that made it, because its story related very much to similar films I grew up watching: films about the housing crisis in Egypt, the gradual fallout with the state figures, and miserable laymen scrutinizing a government's failed promises that deteriorated their lives. These observations were paired with reflections on the nations' self-image, futures that do not come, or come differently than imagined; the film could have been about any other place I knew or belonged to. But this was not enough to claim a link to *Rakem 49*. It was Algerian, and its surreal scenes in the wilderness made it stand out along with the flipped sign, challenging any simplified reading of the attempted historization or experimental documentary style the film utilized.

86 The film images or details were not accessible online at the time of viewing it, nor were the other Algerian and Moroccan films that I have watched on Arsenal's moviola. I, therefore, felt I had a responsibility towards the film and its possible future enthusiasts. I started looking for and translating the printed matter that was issued with the film as part of the Forum, and was hoping to make a publication on the whereabouts of these films in this archive. I could not go beyond a few chapters, because I was revisiting the intention of my publication. Was it an exploration of my diverted route in the archive, led by language? Was it a catch-up of an incomplete Arab film history that I found a way into? Many like me would like to know about these films, and so I singled out a minor element in each film to build a theory of investigation on it. The imagined props instead of architecture in *Rakem 49*, the synchronized body movement instead of migration in *Alyam Alyam* (1978, Morocco), the uninterrupted news reports on Lebanon's civil war in *The Barber of the Poor Quarter* (1982, Morocco), the educational posters in *Wechma* (1970, Morocco), the gas cylinders in *El-Faham* (1972, Algeria), and so on. I was making these minor appearances as accidental protagonists in the story that I am piecing across these film findings.

How special is my situated reading of the film, versus a general reading of the film? Was I too much affected by my own consumption of similar materials? Fredric Jameson argues that we will always be, even subconsciously, affected by the histories of the materials we consume, and thus "we are also generally inclined to think today that there is nothing in our possible representations which was not somehow already in our historical experience" (Jameson 2005, 170). This entanglement between what is being crafted and what is being aspired to is held captive to imagination. He writes: "The latter necessarily clothes all our imaginings, it furnishes the content for the expression and figuration of the most abstract thoughts, the most disembodied longings or premonitions" (ibid.).

My situatedness deduced knowledge from the threads of power relations between the political and the creative in these film productions. I chose to be represented by the minor and accidental, or by the prop that particularized the setting but did not change it, by the brewing feeling that produces a kinship between distant people or events. All coordinates, gestures, and movements describe an accidental arrival, an accidental archival arrival that might encapsulate an understanding of the present. They allow me to understand how things function, how states operate, how a ruling apparatus might self-corrupt, and how the unprepared plans of a future disruption might have been accidentally foretold in these very narrative fragments, documents, and statements.

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Seeing Again *Nuit et brouillard*—*Nacht und Nebel*—*Night and Fog*

Tobias Hering

*The following text was written as an introduction to the double screening of the French and German versions of Alain Resnais's 1956 film, *Nuit et Brouillard* (Night and Fog), at the 64th International Short Film Festival Oberhausen in 2018. The screening took place in the Gloria Theater of the Lichtburg Cinema in Oberhausen on May 4th, 2018, and was attended by approximately one hundred people. It was also the public inauguration of "re-selected," a research-based program series informed by the festival's archives. At the core of the re-selected project lies the idea that the history not only of each film but of each print is rhizomatically connected with and entangled in the histories of its time, and that tracing these ties will lead to revelations that also concern the present: the politics of memory, what we think we know, what we appreciate and safeguard, how we remember, how we forget, and how one imagines that which one hasn't witnessed.*

The film that we are going to watch has been watched thousands of times by millions of people. I assume that more than half of us in this room today have seen it before at some point, willingly or accidentally. In the discussion that we will be able to have

90 after the screening, it might be interesting to reflect on the expectations and memories with which you have come to see this film again, and what the re-encounter has meant to you.

I hope that I can start to explain a bit what this project, re-selected, is about by trying to answer a simple question: Why watch the film twice? We are going to watch Alain Resnais's *Nuit et brouillard*, first in the French original version with the text by Jean Cayrol spoken by Michel Bouquet, with English subtitles, and then in the German version with the translation by Paul Celan spoken by Kurt Glass. You will also notice that while in the original version of the film several sequences are in color, on the German 16mm print the film is entirely black-and-white.¹

Watching the same film twice—the fact of the “two versions” should already raise the question if it is actually the same film that we are going to watch twice. I do not want to be blunt by saying that the different languages make what we are going to see two entirely different films. However, with this film—like with many others—it is worth paying attention to how it has been translated into another language.² In this particular case of a film that traces and analyzes the mass extermination system implemented by Nazi Germany all over Europe, the German translation by Paul Celan inherited from Cayrol's original text the essential difficulty of having to break a silence. A silence that had been kept for reasons of shame, ignorance, or denial, but that also had to do with the fact that many of those who had witnessed

- 1 The French version screened was the digitally restored version, provided on DCP by Tamasa Distribution under license from Argos Films. The German version was a worn black-and-white 16mm print from the archive of the International Short Film Festival Oberhausen. A 35mm print of the French version is also kept at the festival archive, but has turned entirely red.
- 2 Primary sources for information on the production and reception history of the film are Sylvie Lindeperg's *Nuit et brouillard, Un film dans l'histoire*, published in French in 2007 and in a slightly extended German version in 2010, as well as Ewout van de Knaap's *Nacht und Nebel: Gedächtnis des Holocaust und internationale Wirkungsgeschichte* from 2008; see references at the end of the text.

and survived the horrors of the concentration camps had found themselves unable to speak about them. Both Cayrol and Celan had been affected by Nazi prosecution and deportation—Cayrol as a member of the French Résistance, Celan as a Jew. Cayrol and Celan were prolific poets of their time, and their texts are dense and complex literary works based on personal experiences. *Nuit et brouillard* was in fact the second text by Cayrol that Celan translated into German: in 1954, just prior to working on the film, he had already translated Cayrol's novel *L'espace d'une nuit*.³

For Celan, translating *Nuit et brouillard* into German not only meant negotiating his own experience of the Nazi terror with Cayrol's, but it also required him to translate the words of a resistance fighter into the language of the perpetrators. This aspect of the task loomed large for Celan and it must have made it a painful challenge for him. Accepting the task was consistent, however, with his resolution to continue writing in German even after the worst had happened; to bring about in his poetry a language that was marked and haunted by the atrocities it had witnessed and served, and to actually change the German language for good.

The very title of the film is a hint to the fact that translation is much more than a technical procedure, that every translation simultaneously uncovers and affects the body of a language. "Nuit et brouillard" is the literal translation for the common name of a decree enacted by Adolf Hitler in December 1941: the so-called *Nacht-und-Nebel-Erlass*, Night and Fog decree, provided the legal (if unlawful) base for the deportation of those who resisted German occupation in their countries of origin to be tried and sentenced by special courts on German or German-occupied territory. The decree explicitly aimed at making the victims disappear, if possible through a death penalty and its immediate execution, or through deportation without notification of relatives or legal institutions. Prisoners deported on the base of this decree were classified by the Nazi administration as NN,

3 Published in German as *Im Bereich einer Nacht*, in English as *All in a Night*.

92 *Nacht und Nebel*, and the two letters would eventually also be stitched on their clothes, as can be seen in the film. By the end of the war, about 7,000 people had been victimized under this category. The *Nacht-und-Nebel* decree was dealt with during the Nuremberg Trials in 1947 and it was rated a Crime against Humanity.

The French film historian Sylvie Lindeperg suggests that the Nazi bureaucracy borrowed the expression Night and Fog from Richard Wagner's *Rheingold* libretto in which "Nacht und Nebel" is a magic formula to make someone invisible. However, the expression had an idiomatic meaning in German before, signifying that something happens unnoticed or in secret, when nobody is watching or under poor conditions of visibility. While for Germans, then, "Nacht und Nebel" had a common meaning before it was adopted for a particular form of deportation, the expression "nuit et brouillard" was new to the French language and exclusively referred to the experience of those who were deported and categorized NN. The cynicism of a picturesque term like "night and fog" being used to describe an instrument of terror became part of the experience of the victims. Some of them would later refer to the word play in their writings, among them journalist Odette Améry in her memoirs of deportation to Ravensbrück and Mauthausen, and Jean Cayrol himself, whose first volume of poetry published after the war, in 1946, was titled *Poèmes de la nuit et du brouillard* (Poems from Night and Fog). It comprised poems he had written during his imprisonment in Gusen and Mauthausen. When in the summer of 1956, the expression "Nacht und Nebel" returned to the German language in Celan's translation of the film, its idiomatic function had forever changed, because it carried with it this history of violence and occupation. Those who didn't know, would now learn.

Nuit et brouillard was screened at the 3rd edition of the Westdeutsche Kulturfilmtage Oberhausen and it was among the

eight films that the jury honored as “particularly remarkable.”⁴ *Night and Fog* was screened once, on 24th October, and it was part of a compilation program of ten films beginning at 10:30 pm at the Apollo theater. *Night and Fog* was the last film in the program, preceded by a 20th Century Fox documentary titled *Volcanic Violence* (German: *Vulkanische Gewalten*). This means that *Night and Fog* probably did not start before 11:30 pm or even midnight, which makes me wonder how many people actually saw the film on that day here in Oberhausen.

As is well known, the film’s world premiere at the festival in Cannes, a few weeks earlier, had caused a scandal because the festival had buckled to an intervention by the German ambassador not to screen the film in competition, arguing that it did not “serve the understanding between nations” (“dass er nicht der Völkerverständigung diene”), which was a common lever to suppress a film for the uncomfortable facts it made public. One result of the affair was that the West German government, in order to make up for the embarrassment the scandal had caused, quickly decided to acquire the film for a wide non-commercial distribution in schools and public institutions. Thus, after being the first country to oppose *Nuit et brouillard*, West Germany became the first country in which it was widely seen. As early as December 1956, the West German language version was finished and the German Federal Press Office ordered 200 prints for its political education program. For budgetary reasons, these were 16mm black-and-white prints and it is a reprint of one of these which we are going to see in the second half of today’s program. At the very end the print contains a short trailer of the Federal Bureau for Political Education (Landeszentrale für politische Bildung) which we will get to see, if the projectionist lets us. In this form, *Night and Fog* became a common element in the curriculum of West German schools, on the program of film clubs

4 At the time, there were no competition programs in Oberhausen yet and no awards were given.

94 and the political education of labor unions, cultural associations, and churches.

I haven't yet been able to verify in which form the film was screened in Oberhausen in October 1956. This German version did not exist yet, but we can assume that a German translation of Jean Cayrol's text had been produced by the festival and that the German text was read over loudspeakers during the projection. In fact, when the film was screened again at this festival in 1966 in a retrospective curated by Enno Patalas, the catalog featured an excerpt from the German commentary. This excerpt is not identical with Celan's text and was probably quoted from the German dialogue list produced in 1956, which would still have existed in 1966 but appears to be lost now.

So why watch *Night and Fog* twice? Why watch it again in the first place? The idea first suggested itself by the fact that prints of these two versions exist in the archive of this festival. (They are of course not the only versions that exist of the film; there even exist two more German versions produced in East Germany in 1957, respectively in 1977, whose commentary differs distinctly from Celan's. These will probably become a topic of this project, too, at some point, as their genesis can serve as a prism through which to explore the different politics and aesthetics of remembrance in East and West Germany.)⁵ At the core of the re-selected

5 Since then, two comparative screenings of the East and West German versions of *Night and Fog* have taken place, one as part of the re-selected project in collaboration with Mareike Bernien and Nicole Wolf in May 2019 in the context of the first "The Whole Life" congress at the Lipsiusbau in Dresden; another in 2021, together with Jörg Frieß at the Documentary Film Festival in Leipzig within the retrospective, "Die Juden der Anderen" ("The Jews of the Others"), curated by Ralph Eue. A comparative screening of the French and the Dutch versions of the film took place at the Brussels Cinematek in January 2019 as a re-selected project presentation. These screenings were occasions to discuss how each version of the film had its distinct history of reception and to what extent the circumstances under which these different versions have been archived and are still accessible are also quite different. The discussion after the screening in Brussels

project lies the idea that revisiting films from the past can be a rewarding experience in the present. That the history not only of each film but of each print is rhizomatically connected with and entangled in the histories of its time, and that tracing these ties will in the end lead to revelations that also concern the present: the politics of memory, what we think we know, what we appreciate and safeguard, how we remember and how we forget, and how one imagines that which one hasn't witnessed—bearing in mind and holding dear an important idea of Walter Benjamin's, noted in "The Task of the Translator," that one can "speak of an unforgettable life or moment even if all men had forgotten it" (1996, 254).

concerned the fact that the two languages, French and Dutch, represent an ongoing dichotomy within Belgian society, the quite different ways in which the years under German occupation have been commemorated in these respective communities, and how questions of collaboration and complicity in the deportation system have been dealt with by post-war generations. Likewise, the comparative screenings of the two German versions provided grounds for a debate on the stark differences in East and West German "commemoration culture" (*Erinnerungskultur*) in relation to the Nazi period and the Shoah. They also made overtly visible how the wholesale delegitimizing of the GDR and its institutions after reunification has affected archival policies: while the West German version of *Night and Fog* with the translation by Paul Celan is readily available from various digital and analogue sources, the DEFA version of the film has only been preserved at the Federal Film Archive (Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv) as what is reported to be a "unique 35mm archive print." This print was not available for the screening in Dresden in 2019; the only form in which the archive would make this version of the film accessible to us was a digital file made from a time-coded VHS tape. The squalid impression thus brought to the screen could be seen as symptomatic for the devaluation of specifically East German perspectives on history and was commented as such during the discussion. Thanks to additional efforts by Ralph Eue, the Federal Archive made the 35mm print available for the screening in Leipzig in 2021. The screening experience was entirely different and in the ensuing discussion archival politics played a less important role than the differences in tone and vocabulary between the two versions and how they reflect the different "readings" of the fascist era in East and West Germany in the 1950s.

96 Why the same film twice? As an archive project, *re-selected* is also in favor of the *second look*, even a third look, of a practice of repetition, rewinding, watching again and again, in an attempt to understand better, to see more clearly. At its core, this project is about recognizing and appreciating differences, about befriending the idea that films lead a very heterogeneous existence that cannot easily be homogenized to the concept of a one and only original. How can we ignore the different ways in which a film has met its audiences over the years? How can what we say about a film in history be said independently from its unfathomable existence in the memory of those who saw it, especially if they saw it in different versions? How can we really expect to see the same film twice?

One of the many who were marked by watching *Nuit et Brouillard* in school was French film critic Serge Daney. In his famous essay, "The Tracking Shot in *Kapo*," he recalls how he was exposed to the film regularly when his literature teacher at the lycée Voltaire, Henri Agel, in order to spare himself and his students the burden of Latin lessons, turned the classroom into a cine-club:

Out of sadism and probably because he had the prints, Agel showed little films designed to seriously open the students' eyes: Franju's *Le sang des bêtes* and in particular Resnais' *Nuit et brouillard*. Through cinema I learned that the human condition and industrial butchery were not incompatible and that the worst had just happened. (Daney 2007, 19)

In what was to become his last text on cinema, a long conversation with his friend and colleague Serge Toubiana, which took place in February 1992 in a hotel in Aix-en-Provence and which was published under the title "Persévérance" in 1994, Daney calls *Nuit et brouillard* "the film that marked me" (2007, 90). At this point in their conversation the film prompts an interesting remark about cinema as such. Daney says,

cinema can only bring back what has already been seen before: well seen, poorly seen, unseen. Ten years later *Nuit et*

brouillard brings back what wasn't seen, bearing in mind that the images of the camps filmed by George Stevens, or those assembled by Hitchcock, have been stashed away by the Americans and the British. (2007, 90)

Here is an idea that I find very important for this project *re-selected*, the idea that even when we see something in a film for the first time, we know that it has been seen before, that it was visible, even if only for a few, even if it was hidden, and even if too many people have tried very hard not to see it. And this is true for the things that Daney saw for the first time when watching *Nuit et Brouillard*. He says: "Ten years later *Nuit et Brouillard* returns what wasn't seen," pointing out that the images that were shot during the liberation of the concentration camps by American and British camera men had quickly been locked away as an early concession to Cold War politics.

When Daney says that the *raison d'être* not only of this film, but of cinema as such was to bring back what had already been seen before, he seems to be referring to the archival function of cinema, to the fact that films, whether fictional or documentary, always create a record of their times, of something that existed and of the ways in which it existed. I think however, that this was not the primary intention of what he said. For Daney, *Nuit et Brouillard* was the revelation that cinema could only bring back what had been seen before—not only because it brought back images of what was already in the process of being forgotten, but also because the film helped him to understand the absence of his own father, whom he never knew, probably because he had been deported and murdered by the Germans before Daney was born. When seeing *Nuit et brouillard* for the first time, Daney did not expect to see his father in the images, but the film revealed to him the fact that someone had seen him, that what had happened to his father had been visible. For me, the essence of Daney's thought is that seeing something in the cinema brings us in touch with what is visible and through it with the possible gaze of others, with the fact that not only has what we see been seen

98 before, but also that we are usually not alone in seeing it again now. Watching a film, even if we watch it alone and in private, is always a shared experience, an experience that engages us with others who are often far away or not there anymore. And one of the questions re-selected can be understood to ask is, who they are.

Let me quote Serge Daney's thought once again: "[C]inema can only bring back what has already been seen before: *well seen, badly seen, unseen*" (italics added). The possibilities opened up by "*well seen, badly seen, unseen*" suggest that a certain repetition or revisiting, for example when watching a film again, is not merely a thing for cinema nerds and film researchers, but that when watching a film again we are doing something that touches the core of what cinema is: the possibility to see again what has been seen before, to reflect on its earlier audiences, and to experience the same thing differently; to realize that while we think we are watching the same film again, it is actually us who have changed. The context is different and the same film appears to us in a new light, a light that is filtered through layers of time that have settled on it (and on us) like sediment. In a short note on memory titled "Ausgraben und Erinnern" ("Excavation and Memory"), Walter Benjamin suggests that history is never written once and for all, and that in order to find something out about the past, one "must not be afraid to return again and again to the same matter" (1999, 400). I hope that this project, by recognizing that a film comes to an audience as a "copy," and that each screening of it engages us with a repetition of something that will however never be the same thing twice, will help to bring about a more nuanced understanding of the practice of cinema, and that it will also create fruitful, revealing, and engaging encounters with ourselves, with others, with films that—as Daney also says somewhere—are watching us every time we are watching them.

I thank the staff of this festival for making these screenings, this re-visiting possible.

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Against Forgetfulness, Against Monumentalization: Round and Around (2020)

Hieyoon Kim

In spring 2020, the South Korean artists Jang Minseung and Jung Jae Il embarked on a new audiovisual experiment project titled *Round and Around*. Commissioned by the Korean Film Archive, a government-funded film preservation center and cinematheque, the project was intended to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Gwangju Uprising. Also known as the “Gwangju Democratization Movement” or the “Gwangju massacre,” the civil resistance, which opposed the brutal military dictatorship and lasted from 18 to 27 May 1980, was pivotal in South Korea’s move towards democracy. For months, the two artists wove together a range of materials: dusty footage from state and public archives, fresh images of historic sites, and choral and ambient music.¹ At first glance, the result of their collaboration may appear to be just one of many historical documentaries that include archival evidence to augment an already established historical “truth” about the uprising. Yet a careful look directs us to its distinctive

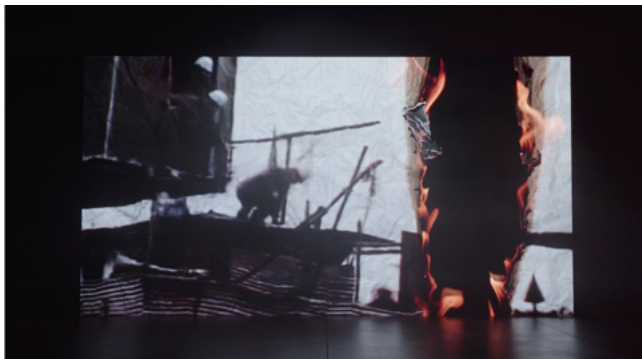
1 Composed by Jung, the lyrics of the choral music are chosen from the psalms of the Old Testament. The original soundtrack was globally released by Decca in 2022.

102 power that allows for affective encounters with history. It is from within this power that the film offers a generative site in which a new experience of pastness can emerge, an experience that helps us imagine an alternative history of 1980s South Korea in general, and Gwangju in particular.

One site of affective encounter arises when *Round and Around* invites us to evaluate, and potentially interrupt, the workings of the archives, particularly those of the state. Culled from these archives, newsreels and short films from the 1980s are quoted across the film as conduits to various historical events. It should be noted that these materials had been inaccessible until in the mid-2000s a liberal administration lowered the barrier to access the “official” archives: the National Archives of Korea, the Archive of KTV (formerly the National Film Production Center), and the Korean Film Archive. With this increased availability and transparency, this footage is now within reasonable reach of all who have an interest in historical topics. In a sense, *Round and Around* would not have been made if “archons”—of archives—kept any material trace of the past unreachable. The film, however, does not celebrate what might be seen as a triumph over archons. True, public access to state archives has been deemed a hallmark of “democratic” societies; now those in South Korea can indeed watch government-sponsored film footage on their preferred devices; every May, the mainstream media constantly disperse archival footage and photos of Gwangju through digital films and docuseries in the name of national commemoration. Amid this consumption of audiovisual footage as ubiquitous proof of the past, what captivates the artists is the systemic erasure of state violence across archives. Citizens of Gwangju, for instance, are not invisible in the state media, but their bodies and voices are overlaid with different stories and perspectives in the service of the powerful. Still, these materials, despite this manipulation, have been conserved and authorized as historical “records” in the official archives. What does democracy mean when these

archives hold little space for “the demos”—the people? Whose archives are these?

Round and Around confronts these questions while breaking open and reassembling archival footage to reveal what gets left out of the frame. This kind of appropriation of records resonates with what Jaimie Baron calls “embodied interruption,” an interruption that prompts other ways of looking (2021, 123). It bears significant political and ethical power precisely when these different modes of looking undermine hegemonic codes embedded in this footage that appear to be sensible and neutral. One of the earlier moments to evoke this power appears in the Olympic sequence in which the artists make the exclusionary nature of the state’s gaze visible. The sequence begins with a black-and-white image of the stadium in the present; the camera zooms in and out on various parts of the empty stadium in a way that magnifies its desert-like landscape. This image is soon juxtaposed with archival footage of the opening and closing ceremonies of the 1988 Seoul Olympics, filmed by the National Film Production Center, the government’s propaganda apparatus. A well-curated image of these ceremonies yields a particular view that the state attempted to promote to the rest of the world: South Korea, once a poor and war-torn country, has grown strong enough to host the world’s largest international sports festival. What breaks this curation is, first, the contours of the empty stadium in the present, and second, another piece of video footage of workers building tall apartments. This scene is dimly visible, perhaps because the original footage is in low resolution and projected onto a wrinkled canvas, which starts to burn (fig. 1). These buildings under construction were not built for those who previously lived there; thousands of Seoul residents were brutally evicted from their homes to make way for the government’s “urban renewal plans.” As part of the plans, the government evacuated the urban poor and cleaned Seoul up in preparation for hosting foreign guests at the 1988 Olympic games. Without giving a teleological explanation, the film reveals this contradiction. Beneath the surface of the Olympics,



[Fig. 1] *Round and Around* (Source: Courtesy of Jang Minseung and Jung Jae Il, 2020)

a gateway for the country to raise its global visibility, there was a violent demolition and uprooting of the people. What was shown to the world is disrupted and displaced by what wasn't (and shouldn't be) shown to the eyes of the powerful.

Round and Around enacts a more explicit interruption in its second half, which begins abruptly with archival footage of a 9-o'clock-news show that includes an official announcement of an "end" to the unrest in Gwangju. The voice of the powerful frames the citizens of Gwangju as "rebels" and "mobs" who threaten the community's well-being and safety. It boasts of the hardworking local police and the martial law security force who worked to "restore public order" and "protect residents." The authority's voice is overlaid on the image of the government's promotional newsreel, which showcases a concerted effort to rebuild the city in the aftermath of the "crisis." Here the state's gaze not only conceals the armed forces' excessive crackdown on the peaceful protesters but also criminalizes those who stood up to protect themselves and others against the randomly exercised violence. What disrupts this gaze and its power in the frame are the segments that follow: first, one in which verses from the Psalms appear in conjunction with a wave of wildflowers, and second, a set of negative photographs that unsettle the voice of the



[Fig. 2 and 3] *Round and Around* (Source: Courtesy of Jang Minseung and Jung Jae II, 2020)

powerful. Accompanied by a polyvocal sacred song, the sequence leads up to the unfiltered fragments of what happened during the filmed time of the newsreel: shoes left behind on the protest site, hands helping the wounded, the faces of those who lost their loved ones to police brutality, bodies rallying against the heavily armed forces, eyes glaring at the journalist's camera (fig. 2 and 3). Originally captured by a local photojournalist on site during the uprising, the strategic use of these images undermines the power of the original news footage that excludes any trace of violence. It works to dislocate the hegemonic voice and gaze embedded in

106 archival footage while reclaiming a space for those subjects and their gazes that were excluded from the frame.

With the film's critical take on archival footage as a container of the truth of an event, *Round and Around* encourages us to resist the urge to commemorate the past as it was, or more precisely, as it was recorded. Its reverse chronological organization of materials can be seen as an explicit rejection of the popular notion of history as a linear progression; by refusing to trace the established timeline of the pro-democratic movement or Gwangju, it certainly undermines the conventional historical narrative. Yet a more powerfully resistant ground emerges where images and sounds from heterogeneous times are juxtaposed so that viewers cannot comfortably dwell in a singular time. As analyzed earlier in the Olympic sequence, the film moves back and forth between clearly disparate times and spaces: the stadium in 2020 and in 1988, the apartment complex in 2020 and construction site in 1988, the muted sounds of the Olympic ceremony and construction noise. What pierces through this assemblage is a persistent concern about our relationship to the act of commemorating a past event. The film is, in the end, less about Gwangju or its origins than about a diagnosis of the current situation, that is, the commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the Gwangju Uprising and the 1980s as one of the most trying times in the country's modern history. How is it possible to memorialize what happened when the fragments of the past are still unfolding in front of us? When these fragments are brought to life, are we still able to position ourselves as mere consumers of the memorialized past?

Without forcing these questions onto us, *Round and Around* constantly brings multiple traces of the past to the center of the frame: the things, voices, and bodies that cannot be retrieved even now that Gwangju has been monumentalized as a social movement. And it invites us to respond to images in an intimate, embodied way, and thus facilitates the experience of other sensory impressions as well. What do these bodies in negative



[Fig. 4] *Round and Around* (Source: Courtesy of Jang Minseung and Jung Jae Il, 2020)

photos, abandoned historic sites, unspoken words in tunes, and even state records still hold for us? Negative photographs pull us into the site of oppression and resistance in the past. The wailing voice of the pansori singer pierces our bodies and adds palpable weight to a scene. The former prison and hospital take hold of our arms so that we cannot run away. These were places where thousands of citizens, detained and abused by the military corps, were forcefully brought. They became another interrogation site where the military force tortured the captives to get information about those “behind” the uprising and covered up many innocent deaths. Rather than explaining much about any implications these places might have today, the film nudges us to sense what still resides in these sites: aging pillars, dusty windows, rusted doors, ivy-covered walls, jungle-like gardens. These non-human objects gaze back at us as though they were living creatures that embody the wounds, tears, and blood of the people whose lives were shattered by state violence; the contact with these objects effects a transformation in us, as though we were touching the film with our eyes. In this sequence, some recently found footage of Gwangju during the uprising is briefly quoted, but not to narrate or reconstruct the past as it was. The faces of people, their moving bodies captured in the past, are mixed with the gaze

108 of non-human objects today. Here the gaps between the past and the present touch us, generating affect through the awareness of what cannot be retrieved (fig. 4).

Far from being driven simply by the insurgent impulse to deconstruct the historical narrative, the artists want to create a space that is charged with an unending tension around our efforts to commemorate the past. There is an unabashedly firm refusal not to resolve this tension by correcting and replacing old stories. To a certain extent, these replacements are vital given that the history of Gwangju has long been a contentious site for those who want to deny and even distort the established facts, for those who want to reveal the truth against the powerful, and for those who want to authorize the marginalized—women, the poor, the elderly, children—as active agents of the movement. But they are insufficient. It seems that some of these stories are ingrained deeply enough that their replacement might not challenge our fundamental self-conception and sense of history. It is this critique that leaves the film open-ended. The last contact that the film allows us to make with the past emerges from the fall of 1979. This time, the voice of Park Chung Hee, who ruled the country from 1961 to 1979, declares martial law in Busan, the country's second-largest metropolis, to shut down the anti-government rallies that have quickly spread across the region. The accompanying video footage shows student protesters with arms around each other's shoulders, making their way towards an unspecified destination. Because the film does not stack the deck in favor of a finite endpoint and decisive origin, by the time the film ends, we are left with more questions than answers. Why have these fragments been put together? What are they supposed to tell us? *Round and Around* stops there, with no satisfying exit to give us a sense of closure in history. Yet it is a tough reminder that, even after the film time ends, the remnants of the past are still there, calling us to respond to the affective experience they have generated in us. We have the choice to take

this reminder—to change our understanding of history and our experience of the world in ways that may transform us.

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NEW ARCHIVAL SPACES AND PLACES
OF CINEMA

Transnational Archival Practice as a Necessity in Cinema Practice: The Film Series *The Invitees* at Sinema Transtopia and the Rediscovery of *Kara Kafa*

Can Sungu

Munich Central Station. The train to Belgrade is leaving soon. Leaning out of the windows, the passengers wave at the camera. A farewell to Germany. Some are only temporarily ending their time working here, others forever (fig. 1). *Abschied* (eng. *Farewell*) is also the title of this film, whose last images faded into the credits. The Yugoslavian filmmaker Želimir Žilnik shot this 9-minute film in 1975 as one of eight films made during his stay in West Germany. Until only recently, however, even he didn't know anything about the fate of his film, which, to his knowledge, was considered lost.

We unexpectedly came across *Abschied* and *Unter Denkmalschutz* (*Under Heritage Protection*)—two short films shot by Želimir Žilnik in 1975 during his stay in Munich—in the archive of the Documentation Centre and Museum of Migration in Germany (DOMiD) while doing research for the film series *Die Eingeladenen* (*The Invitees*), initiated by Sinema Transtopia. Both films could be scanned and subtitled and finally shown with other films in this

114 eight-part program that ran between November 30, 2021, and October 8, 2021.¹

Before I go into the specifics of this film series, I would like to present Sinema Transtopia, the artistic direction of which I share with Malve Lippmann. Sinema Transtopia started in 2020 at the Haus der Statistik at Berlin Alexanderplatz as a transnational cinema experiment to forge a bridge between urban space and film as a cultural practice. After a temporary two-year use of this space in the midst of the pandemic, it found a more long-term home in its new location in Berlin-Wedding. Here Sinema Transtopia establishes itself as a transnational space for film culture, art, knowledge, and community, thus creating a place that takes urban and transnational living for granted, that creates access, stimulates discussion, educates, moves, provokes, and encourages. Sinema Transtopia thus stands for a cinema that sees itself as a social place simultaneously committed to local and international communities, one that regards film-historical work as the work of cultural remembrance and that is dedicated to a diversity of film culture and film art. "Transtopia" is a term used by migration researcher Erol Yıldız to describe spaces "where transnational ties and connections converge, are reinterpreted, and condense into everyday contexts." (2013, 9, translation from German) Following on from this we link geographies both near and far, taking into consideration their narratives, pasts, presents and futures. Cinema here becomes a meeting place where people come together not only to witness film, but to experience a space of lively discourse, of living, working and learning together. We are convinced that the narratives and memories of a transnational city must also be informed by "migrant knowledge" (Ayşe Güleç). Güleç indicates here a knowledge that has always already been there, but that has usually gone overlooked and unheard, and that contains a critical knowledge about social contexts

1 Further information on the program can be found at: <https://bi-bak.de/bi-bakino/die-eingeladenen>.



[Fig. 1] Still from *Abschied* (*Farewell*) by Želimir Žilnik (1975, ©Želimir Žilnik)

and connections marked by the experiences of marginalization. Archival practice is thus self-evident, even considered necessary in this cinema practice. Projects based on transitional archive research are therefore the focus of our programming. We see the cinema as a site where archives are activated, made accessible and visible.

The film series *The Invitees* was also such a film series at Sinema Transtopia, one focused on archival research. The series was initiated in cooperation with the non-profit organization DOMiD on the occasion of the 60 years since the recruitment agreement between Germany and Turkey, with an initial goal of newly viewing and contextualizing the film prints held at the DOMiD archive. With little known films from Germany, Turkey, and the former Yugoslavia, round table talks, and lectures, the series looked at the neglected histories of labor migration to Germany. It also analyzed stereotypical narratives and existing visual politics, encouraging new ways to view the history of migration while advocating for a transnational culture of remembrance. What this means here is a transnational remembering that does justice to

116 the significance of interwoven cultures of memory and can point out indentificatory references beyond the nation-state.

The project's starting point were archival holdings that had not yet been completely categorized and sorted. As a condition of this collaboration, a service was promised in return, namely, not only to view these holdings, but also to catalog them appropriately. There was therefore a strong wish for this collection to be not only the object of a one-off project, but also to be made accessible to other interested parties who wished to engage with these films in other contexts. For what seemed relevant to us was not only the question of what is or becomes part of an archive, but also of who gets access to these archives.

The central question of the film series was: How can we establish new approaches to working with archives and film heritage that would be independent of a definition of the "national film heritage" and that would not exclusively be based on the limited self-image of a nation-state? In order to find possible answers, we followed the traces of films that were made under the direction of non-German filmmakers or German filmmakers of color, that were shot with partly non-German teams in Germany and in non-German languages, but that explicitly dealt with life in this country. Due to the nation-state based definition of German film funding laws, these films had not been recognized as part of the so-called "German film canon" or were not considered part of "German film history." They therefore shared a sad fate, namely that they had either insufficient opportunities to be shown and seen in German cinemas or none at all, and ultimately to be preserved in German archives. These films had thus fallen victim to the nation-state definitions of possible film funding or of non-classification as German film heritage, although they were shot in Germany and told by people living in Germany.

These films take up the stories of migrants, pose questions about German society, were usually produced with limited means, and in some cases could not be publicly shown due to censorship in

their countries of production—and they also were not shown in German cinemas or in festivals due to lack of funds, networks, or other unfortunate circumstances. Neither in Germany nor in their original countries of production were they able to reach a wider audience; as cinematic outsiders they were often only accessible to diaspora or repatriate communities and special interests. Alongside the two films by Želimir Žilnik, already mentioned above, there was a program of short films from the former Yugoslavia including *Na Objedu* (eng. *At Lunch*) by Vefik Hadžismajlović (1972), *Halo München* by Krsto Papić (1967), and *Dernek* (eng. *Party*) by Zoran Tadić (1975)—all films that deal with the societal aspects of labor migration to Germany and that tell micro-stories of longing, separation, and return. Another film in the program was *Gastarbeiter* (eng. *Guest Worker*) by Bogdan Žižić (1977), which is constructed from illustrations by Dragutin Trumbetaš. Trumbetaš himself came to Frankfurt am Main as a so-called “guest worker” and worked there as a painter and graphic artist. As part of the film series *The Invitees* we, in cooperation with the film scholar Ömer Alkın, were also able to unearth the Turkish television series *Bağrıyanık Ömer ve Güzel Zeynep* (1978) by Yücel Çakmaklı from the Turkish state television archive (TRT), which was in part shot in Munich. Çakmaklı, whose films continued to be popular in Muslim cultural circles in Germany and are considered almost extended educational material, had dealt with questions of assimilation and migrant identity in this television film, just as he had previously in his feature films *Oğlum Osman* (eng. *My Son Osman*) (1973) and *Memleketim* (eng. *My Homeland*) (1974). Another discovery from the TRT archive, *Geyikler, Annem ve Almanya* (eng. *The Deer, My Mother, and Germany*) by Tuncer Baytok (1987) tells the painful story of a girl that has to prepare to say goodbye to her mother, who will soon go to Germany to be with the father. Both films, which come from the archives of the Turkish TRT, had their first public cinema screenings in this program.

“Toxic Films” in Political Educational Work and Dealing With Racist Narratives

As part of our research in the archive of our cooperation partner DOMiD, we also came across films that were commissioned by German cultural and educational institutions such as the Institut für Film und Bild in Wissenschaft und Unterricht (FWU), the Goethe-Institut, and the German Federal Agency for Civic Education, which distributed primarily by local state film distribution centers. For example, the lavishly produced language course *Guten Tag* by the Goethe-Institut was created in collaboration with radio and television broadcaster Bayerischer Rundfunk, and has the goal, in its 26 episodes, not only of teaching basic language skills, but also of familiarizing newly arrived young students with everyday life in West Germany. This incidentally includes conveying what the commissioning bodies define as “German culture.” Over the course of this series one can learn to correctly and clearly pronounce sentences like “I am a stranger here,” “I am a foreigner,” or “I don’t speak German,” which are then supposed to be used in ordinary everyday practice. The elaborate, artistic sets of the studio recordings sometimes have a surreal effect, the humorous staging intentionally trying to raise the fun factor of learning. On the other hand, the series *Viel Glück in Deutschland* (eng. *Good Luck in Germany*), commissioned by the Federal Ministry of Labor, prepared workers for everyday life on the job with vocabulary like “time card,” “personnel office,” and “The foreman is waiting.” In *Tipps für den Alltag* (eng. *Everyday Tips*) there is a comedic element to presenting what is characterized as “typically German” and what is conveyed as the standard to aim for. In the various language versions the “Gastarbeiter” protagonist here is called Ali or Yannis according to the version, and always plays the clueless, even hare-brained worker that still has a bit to learn in Germany. Similar patterns can be found in the educational film *Zu Gast in unserem Land* (eng. *A Guest in our Country*), produced

by the Federal Agency for Civic Education and broadcast by ZDF. Here the offspring of the majority society is prepared for the confrontation with the “guests.” The fictional action is commented on with graphic elements and interviews on the street, thus attempting to underscore the stories with facts and figures, but also with “the voice of the people.”

These film products influenced a certain media understanding of the migrant population in West Germany starting in the 1960s, generating an immense amount of stereotypes. These stereotypes and the images that go with them have formed a sediment in the consciousness of large swaths of the German majority society and form the starting point for an ordinary, everyday racism that remains largely uncritical to this day and that it projects on later generations with stories of immigration. The necessity of positioning ourselves against these recurring images and narratives obviously demands that we confront these “toxic films,” even if that can sometimes be unpleasant or even painful.

The team and the audience of *Sinema Transtopia* consists largely of people of color, who themselves have experiences of migration or who have a history of migration in the family. Confronting these images as part of the film series *The Invitees* therefore seemed immensely important to us, and we attempted, in discussions following the screenings, to shed light on these films by contextualizing them critically with the guests. We would like to do a thorough critical examination of these films in the future with the participation of the institutions responsible for them, the commissioning bodies of these productions, if they are prepared to confront their own institutional histories. For we believe that a self-critical reflection by German institutions, viewing these images and stories through an analysis critical of racism, could make a constructive contribution to more awareness when shaping the production of images today. Ultimately, a great deal has also been achieved in recent years as concerns non-discriminatory communication—thanks to the engaged work and demands of initiatives from civil society.

Kara Kafa: A Belated Rediscovery With a “Happy End”

I would like to end my essay with positive, hopeful thoughts, and so I mention a recently completed restoration project carried out by the Arsenal—Institute for Film and Video Art in cooperation with Sinema Transtopia. The reflections that deal with the central question of the film series *The Invitees*, namely how to establish new approaches to dealing with archives and film heritage that would exist independent of a definition of the “national film heritage” have developed in this project into a successful result. About ten years ago while reading a text, I ran across the title *Kara Kafa* (eng. *Black Head*), a film that was shot in 1979 by the Turkish filmmaker Korhan Yurtsever. I was able to get in contact with the filmmaker and to get a viewing copy. There was no acceptable screening print, since this was a film that had never be brought to premiere at all, and had been banned for 32 years. *Kara Kafa* was shot in 1979 with an exclusively Turkish team, mostly in in Duisburg, Cologne, and Berlin, and then finished in Turkey. Above all due to its leftist political viewpoint on migration the film stands out from the other examples of German-Turkish cinema, and deals primarily with questions of labor law, feminist perspectives, and racism in German society. After it was finished the censorship board in Turkey at the time banned the film. They claimed it wounded “the honor or our friend Germany, our fellow nation.” The filmmaker Yurtsever was indicted for the film, he fled to Berlin, where he lived in exile for years. Relatively quickly we decided to show the film in Germany to bring attention to this film, which until then had hardly been mentioned at all in German-Turkish film history. The lack of a screening print did not discourage us—after all the fact that there is only a poor digital copy already says a lot about this neglect. Through the support of our team we were able to make English subtitles for the film and in 2016 we showed *Kara Kafa* with the filmmaker present in our former project space, for the first time in Berlin. It was clear to

us, however, that the film could reach a wider audience by being restored, facilitating a new look at a largely hidden chapter of German history. We started looking for a better source material and in the end we were lucky. The original negative, which had not been confiscated by the Turkish authorities, surprisingly turned up last year, and served as the basis for the restoration initiated by the Arsenal—Institute for Film and Video Art in cooperation with Sinema Transtopia. In the restoration, which was completed in 2022, *Kara Kafa* finally received its belated German premiere as part of the 73rd Berlin International Film Festival (Berlinale), and then had its Turkish premiere at the 42nd Istanbul Film Festival. I view this restoration project as a successful example that can encourage a rethinking of the term “national film heritage.” It is hoped that this will facilitate further restorations of such transnational films, which stand for a new understanding of archival work beyond boundaries.

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“Can’t You See Them?—Film Them.”

Clarissa Thieme and Asja Makarević

Clarissa Thieme, filmmaker and artist, and Asja Makarević, film scholar, met to discuss Clarissa’s long-term artistic collaboration with the Library Hamdija Kreševljaković Video Arhiv Sarajevo, a collection of video testimonies recorded by the citizens of the besieged city of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, from 1992 to 1996. In response to the aggression, a group of friends around siblings Nihad and Sead Kreševljaković and Nedim Alikadić began to document their everyday lives. As they drew on their pre-existing video practice, they produced film essayistic commentaries and fictional miniatures that critically examined their situation. Subsequently, they created a video archive but also a space where they shared and discussed this material. The interview attempts to contextualize the emergence of this archive and answer several questions. Why is the Video Arhiv Sarajevo more than a mere collection of war footage, an “archival forum”? How can such a forum open itself up beyond its specific time and local context? What opportunities are there for artists, video and filmmakers like Clarissa Thieme, Nihad and Sead Kreševljaković and Nedim Alikadić, who, given the disruptive nature of the (post)war

124 condition, assume the role of accidental archivists? In which ways do their friendship and the ensuing artistic collaboration help them communicate through time, between the traumatic then and now, between the lived and mediated experience of war? Why does their archival practice appear more like communication via a time machine or a message in a bottle?

Asja Makarević: The Library Hamdija Kreševljaković Video Arhiv Sarajevo contains video testimonies by citizens of Sarajevo who recorded their daily life during the siege of Sarajevo (1992-1996). At the same time testimonies were made simultaneously by numerous citizens in Sarajevo due to the accessibility of video equipment at the time. Could you explain the overall context but also the specific situation that made the group of friends around the Video Arhiv Sarajevo archivists by necessity or accident?

Clarissa Thieme: The Video Arhiv Sarajevo is a collection of amateur videos shot by people around the siblings Nihad and Sead Kreševljaković and Nedim Alikadić in besieged Sarajevo during the Bosnian War. It was and still is located in a garden house, in the historical private library of Hamdija Kreševljaković, the first Bosnian historian and grandfather of the Kreševljaković siblings. Multilingual and internationally connected, he devoted his life to the historical study of Sarajevo under the alternating reigns of Austro-Hungarians and Ottomans and consistently pointed to the complex and rich culture of the region, which, out of an imperialist reflex, was and to this day is often dismissed as a periphery or no-man's land to the ruling political centers. So, there is this family archival tradition of the Kreševljakovićs' grandfather, on the one hand, and a growing group of people with their video equipment recording life under siege, making their own repository, on the other. At the beginning of the siege, there was a public call to the local population to document the attacks on Sarajevo. That surely influenced the Video Arhiv Sarajevo, whose members already had certain

cinematic skills, which took on a different dimension with the war. From the beginning on, it was not only about documenting and collecting but also about sharing the material, which included a variety of individual perspectives on the everyday life of war. I believe that the shared cinematic and archival practice helped restore their agency. The truncated perception of Sarajevo's inhabitants as victims was found not only in the aggression of the Serbian besiegers, but also in the logic of the international community's humanitarian intervention. Due to the overall depoliticization of the circumstances that led to the war, the victims of war were perceived much like the victims of a natural disaster. But in the context of the Video Arhiv Sarajevo, they are first and foremost filmmakers, documentarists, humorists, analysts, and cinematic poets. Making, collecting, viewing, and discussing images empowered them to speak about their situation. Here I talk about a practice of resistance that made them political actors and shapers of their future. Becoming a subject after being an object for different agents is also reflected in the active cultural scene in besieged Sarajevo.

AM: Can you tell us more about the genesis of the initiative *Između nas / Between Us*, which seems to be a starting point for your exploration of this particular archive? How does it relate to *Living Archive*, the project carried out by Arsenal—Institute for Film and Video Art, 2011-2013?

CT: When I first came to Sarajevo in 2004, I met Nihad Kreševljaković through acquaintances. He invited me to visit the Video Arhiv Sarajevo by saying, "if you are interested in a view of the siege of Sarajevo different to the one you already know, you are very welcome." A year later, Nihad showed me the material as we talked over coffee. Between my first visit and my first artistic collaboration with the Video Arhiv Sarajevo, more than ten years passed. At some point, we chose the term "archival forum" to describe the Video Arhiv Sarajevo, referring to the artistic archival practice,

the kind of exchange and resulting, constant editing and collaging. The idea of forum goes far beyond a collection. Its inherent qualities, the processual approach and openness for exchange, made us consider starting the project *Između nas / Between Us*. In terms of its material and genesis, Arsenal with its *Living Archive* project is, at first glance, fundamentally different from the Video Arhiv Sarajevo. But I saw a commonality in the history of the lived practice of both projects. Arsenal radically revitalized its archive as a living organism of interdisciplinary exchange, beginning in 2011. And Nihad announced towards the opening of the Video Arhiv Sarajevo at the end of 2012, during *Limited Space: Berlin / Sarajevo*.¹ Stefanie Schulte Strathaus moderated our main panel and asked about the potential of art and culture in the context of conflict, against the backdrop of the specific circumstances of Sarajevo and Berlin, while shedding light on the role of alternative archival practice.² *Do You Remember Sarajevo*,³ an archival film Nihad had made with his brother Sead and friend Nedim Alikadić, was shown the following day. Inspired by the Q&A and previous panel discussion, I finally asked Nihad if he would be willing to open up the Video Arhiv Sarajevo to others beyond the sworn founding group. The idea was to digitize the material, invite scholars, artists, and the public to work with it. Over the next few years, we felt

- 1 *Limited Space: Berlin / Sarajevo* was an exchange program, organized by Adla Isanović, Jasmina Gavrankapetanović, and Clarissa Thieme for the Sarajevo Art University (ALU) and the Berlin University of the Arts. It included seminars and workshops over two semesters, as well as the final series of events and an exhibition.
- 2 *The Limited Space: Berlin / Sarajevo* opening panel with Heinz Emigholz (filmmaker), Jasmina Gavrankapetanović (artist, scholar), Adla Isanović (artist, scholar), Angelika Levi (filmmaker, artist), Claus Löser (film critic, author), Clarissa Thieme (artist, filmmaker), and moderated by Stefanie Schulte Strathaus (film and video curator, co-director of Arsenal—Institute for Film and Video Art, founding director of Berlinale Forum Expanded).
- 3 *Do You Remember Sarajevo*. Dir. Sead Kreševljaković, Nihad Kreševljaković, Nedim Alikadić, Video Arhiv Sarajevo & deblokada, 2002.

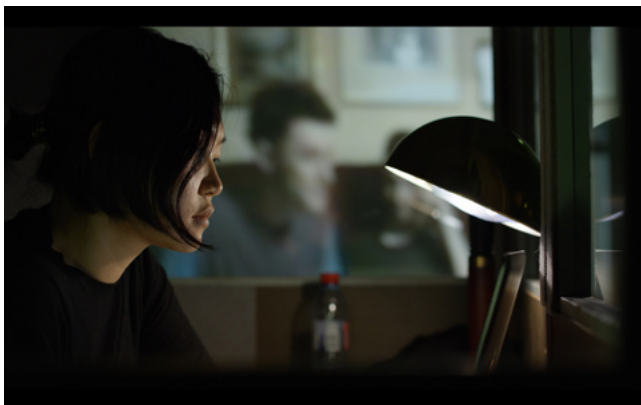
that the post-Yugoslav space did not appear on any agenda of European funding. At the end of 2015, we decided to launch the initiative without funding. We promised to include *Izmedju nas / Between Us* and the Video Arhiv Sarajevo into our artistic practice, whenever suitable.

- AM: The testimonies in the Video Arhiv Sarajevo come up repeatedly in your work. What insight does this kind of footage offer you, given your prior knowledge about the siege of Sarajevo, the Bosnian War, and the breakup of Yugoslavia? What are the aesthetic possibilities for further exploration?
- CT: When Yugoslavia broke apart in a succession of wars, I was a teenager in a northwest German province. The coverage of the wars was mostly one-sided, unanimous in the fact that Europe considered them inevitable and marginal. After the Cold War, huge parts of Eastern Europe including Germany underwent massive transformation processes and system upheavals, which were not received in such a detached way. I learned about the war in the former Yugoslavia through dramatically pointed TV images, in which a cruel force of nature seemingly met its victims. The style, which comes across as objective, depoliticized the situation and turned its actors into objects. There seemed to be something terrible happening in a very distant land. Fortunately, my family background enabled me to see things differently. My parents are workers, who were politicized on the left. My father's escape from Eastern Germany just before the Wall was built prevented them from having an overly romantic view of GDR socialism. Tito's non-aligned Yugoslavia seemed a desirable alternative. This political infatuation took me to the Adriatic Sea with them almost every summer. This connection was superficial, but in the 1990s, created a healthy resistance to German news images. When Nihad showed me footage from the Video Arhiv Sarajevo, a different, personal view of Sarajevo under siege emerged. In many videos, little

happens. The war was not an event, but a violently imposed, new destructive normal. By then, I sensed that there was a certain falsifying dramatic structure, the perspective of the West on which the stories about the war were built. The Video Arhiv Sarajevo made me see people, not victims. The radical subjectivity of the material turned things around for me. The friendship with Nihad and later with Nedim allowed me to relate. As long as our encounters are possible, I do not see an end to my exploration of the Video Arhiv, regardless of the aesthetic approach my work may have.

AM: How did your installation/performance piece *Vremeplov / Time Machine*—1993 / 2003 / 20XX / 2037 / 2320 / 2572 and your film *Today is 11th June 1993* from 2018 come to life? One format appears to inform the other. What did each, the installation and film, help you express?

CT: The performance *Vremeplov / Time Machine* and the resulting film *Today is 11th June 1993* were my first works with materials from the Video Arhiv Sarajevo. I found fragments of the sci-fi video shot in Sarajevo on June 11, 1993. A group of young people imagines themselves escaping the war with the help of a time machine. The video begins with “Today is June 11, 1993. The war has been going on for a very long time. I tried everything to get out, to save myself, but nothing worked. The only thing I have left is this videotape, which I’m going to give to my son, he’s going to give to his, and so on until the time machine is invented and someone who sees this comes and gets me out of here.” We hear this several times in different variations of the unedited recording. It is a game with time and different possibilities of reality. As I see it, no one came back from the future to save them. Instead, they dreamt themselves into the future. Here they are, 25 years later, permitting me to interact with the versions of themselves from 1993.



[Fig. 1]: Film still from *Today Is 11th June 1993* (Source: © Clarissa Thieme, archival video material courtesy of Library Hamdija Kreševljaković Video Arhiv Sarajevo)

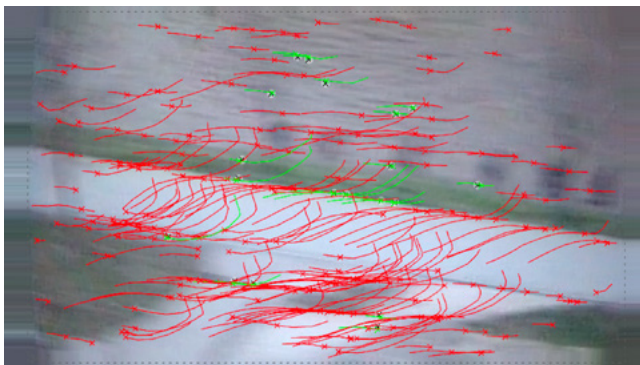
CT: It started with me wanting to reactivate the time machine but not knowing how. I knew I wanted to work with the process of translation and with a non-regional, female voice. The aspect of translation had to be perceptible. I found the perfect match in Grace Sungeun Kim, a South Korean video artist based in Berlin who lived in New York for a long time. Of course, this male group of sci-fi geeks needed a female voice to interpret them! With Grace, I worked out a monotone translation style, reminiscent of what they still do on TV in some countries: a (male) voice translating all the dialogue. Hilarious! As if Brecht snuck into television entertainment with the alienation effect. The translation booth was added last, and the synchronous translation became a sculptural object. There is an aspect of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia's (ICTY) iconography with the soundproof interpreting booth and simultaneous translation in its court rooms.

Before I did the film, I presented it as a performative interaction. I showed the video material, as it was shot in 1993, and translated the dialogue into the local language of the

exhibition site, delivered by a member of the local community. The performance has its own intensity: it is live and yet a historical document. With its different camera perspectives, the film works quite differently with time and space. It draws you in more quickly. Perhaps the most intimate view is that of the installation. One enters the translation booth, where the 1993 video is played with English voice-over and sits in the translator's chair looking at the transcript and its translation. On June 11, 2018, 25 years after the original video was shot, Nihad sat in the translator's booth and "translated" from Bosnian into Bosnian. That was absurd, but he transferred the experience of Sarajevo 1993 to 2018. In post-war Bosnia, many people struggle to translate their past into the present. Someone in the audience said it was like a message in a bottle coming back. In a broader sense, an archival practice functions similarly. You never know if someone will find the material, but there is a chance of dialogue through time, as with a time machine.

AM: Your short film and installation piece *Can't You See Them?—Repeat* (2019) draw on a testimony made by Nedim Alikadić. The video shows militia men nearby a river in a residential area, in relative proximity to his home. A lived-body experience of the direct witness of the unfolding siege of Sarajevo is caught by frantic camera movements. The movements are scrutinized by advanced digital image processing technology in your work. What drew you closer to the video and made you opt for this artistic strategy?

CT: Nedim recorded the Video 8 sequence in Grbavica on May 2, 1992. Shortly after, the Bosnian Serb troops occupied the district, expanding the siege around the city. It was one of the first videos I saw from the Video Arhiv Sarajevo and is part of the film *Do You Remember Sarajevo*. I still consider the off-screen cue: "Can't you see them?—Film them" a key moment to describe the impulse of documenting what cannot be documented. The video stayed with me all these years.



[Fig. 2 and 3]: Film stills from *Can't You See Them?—Repeat* (Source: © Clarissa Thieme, installation view, archival video material courtesy of Nedim Alikadić, Sarajevo, Grbavica, May 2, 1992)

One could argue that hardly anything happens and yet one senses the horror of a dam breaking. Nedim stands at the window of his apartment, and suddenly, thinks he might be shot. This is the beginning of war for him. The trembling and searching camera depicts the body of the bottomless fear.

I wanted people to encounter this trembling body. Nedim agreed I could work with his material.

I track the camera movement. The resulting metadata controls an automatic arm and ensures it moves a beam of light exactly as the hand moved the camera. I used the method of forensics that promised exactness and objective recording of this specific situation. The result was endless rows of numbers, which I sometimes juxtapose with the installation in the work *CYST #0* as a large-format print. The numbers express the absurdity of the forensic approach: everything is in there, and at the same time, you see and feel nothing. The clash is also in the motion control sculpture trembling and quivering from its movements, as a half-being, a man-machine. You can see the cables and the built-in technology, but the movement makes it "live." I find the switch in perception important because I am interested in making tangible what we lose when we focus on objectifying procedures, like forensic evidence and their implicit structural violence. Another aspect of the work is the loop, the "repeat." As I was preparing this work, I met Nedim several times and we talked about the video and the time of the siege from his point of view. During this time, I recorded him switching back as if he were there again. That was crucial because I could incorporate it next to the original video from 1992 and the technically generated embodiment (motion control sculpture) from 2019. It meandered seamlessly between the traumatic moment then and now in a never-ending loop.

AM: How would you relate your collaboration with the Video Arhiv Sarajevo and the initiative *Izmedju nas / Between Us* to the concept of "accidental archivism"?

CT: With regards to the Video Arhiv Sarajevo, both necessity and accidents come into play. The friends around the Video Arhiv Sarajevo found themselves entrapped in war. To call war an accident would be cynical and ignore the legal, political,

and moral responsibilities for the war crimes committed. Nevertheless, this group of friends, like many others, faced arbitrary life-threatening violence as a new normal. The Video Arhiv Sarajevo acted as a specific form of resistance to this unforeseen condition. The “archival forum” kept everyone involved sane, restored their agency, and confirmed artistic expression and culture as their fundamental human right. The initiative *Između nas / Between Us*, my artistic collaboration with Nihad Kreševljaković and Nedim Alikadić in particular, was enabled by the “archival forum.” It allowed their “message in a bottle” from Sarajevo under siege to be found in multiple ways. My artistic and political interest in archival practice is entangled with the idea of “archival forum” as commons. No one knows what will speak to someone else, but there is a chance of response and mutual responsibility through time. I am not sure whether I would call that accidental, but indeed, it cannot be mapped out precisely. It differs fundamentally from an understanding of a forum centered around forensic testimony and proof. The “archival forum” is a space of possible connections, not certainties. It calls for trust and openness to be touched, the willingness to fail, and still care about this shared space and dialogue.

Action-based Archivism: A Conversation with Mareike Bernien, Madhusree Dutta and Merle Kroeger

**Mareike Bernien, Madhusree Dutta, Merle Kroeger
and Alexandra Schneider**

Archives are ambiguous things. As Sylvie Lindeperg and Ania Szczepanska remind us, “from the first appearance of moving images ... cinematographic archives were envisaged as tools of knowledge and progress, and, at the same time, as instruments of control” (2021, 24). An audiovisual archive is both a promise and a predicament.

Documentary filmmaking is, among other things, an archival practice. Documentary filmmakers draw on archives, and they create archives in the course of their research and through their films. Mareike Bernien, Madhusree Dutta, and Merle Kroeger are three artists and documentary filmmakers who have collaborated in various constellations over the last two decades. Most recently, they have created works that can also be described as archives, more specifically as digital archives which, viewed individually and taken together, open up a virtual space between Germany and India, and raise important questions about the role of digital archives in shaping the possibilities of cinema.

136 The first of these projects is *The Fifth Wall* (*Die fünfte Wand*, 2021) by Merle Kröger and Mareike Bernien, a curated online repository that documents the work of journalist Navina Sundaram for German television. Navina Sundaram started working for German television in New Delhi in the early 1960s and came to Hamburg in 1964. For four decades she worked as reporter, presenter, filmmaker, and editor in Germany and abroad for North German Broadcasting (Norddeutscher Rundfunk/NDR), documenting current political events. In the 1990s she went back to Delhi as German TV's India bureau chief. Sundaram was a familiar face for German TV audiences, and precisely as such an agent of "subliminal enlightenment," as Sonia Hegasy (2023) put it. With a selection of her films from the NDR archives, photographs, letters, and other writings, *The Fifth Wall* puts Sundaram center stage as an author, journalist, and intellectual who situates and positions herself on key issues of decolonization, class, racism, and migration, with a view to both Indian and German politics. What stands out in Sundaram's work, as Ankan Kazi (2022) writes, "is its radical and subversive potential for re-thinking a media history of the globalizing world, as it tried to infuse the politics of the newly decolonizing world—from South Asia to South America—with the insular frames of German television."

In a similar vein Madhusree Dutta has recently co-curated two digital archives based on work that started within Majlis Culture Centre in Mumbai in 1990-2016. The first of these centers on the Majlis Culture Centre¹ and the second on the Project Cinema City². Those two digital archives are now placed into public domain, and they arrive at a crucial moment not just in India's political history. Together, they foreground the secular legacies of collective thinking and independent filmmaking beyond the customized and hegemonic media of India's current nationalist and populist politics.

1 See <https://www.majlisculture.in/>.

2 See <https://www.projectcinemacity.in/>.

Alexandra Schneider: As artists and documentary filmmakers, to what extent do you understand yourself also as archivists, and what is your take on the changing role of archives and archiving?

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Madhusree Dutta: Well, it's a very general thing: Has our sense of archiving or our purpose of archiving changed in recent times? What was the earlier concept? Was it preserving, like in the basement of a church or a synagogue, where everything was deposited? That was a kind of vault. A collection of materials, with no knowledge of the kind of reaction it would create, or no desire to know, or to decide. Maybe that has changed, because archiving today is more about the present, it is action based.

Now, here comes a question. When we work with collections now, are we trying to control them, then? Are we already trying to decide who will use them, and what kind of usage is allowed? I am being the devil's advocate. Somebody might criticize us and say, "Okay, you want like-minded people to visit your archive. You want to preconceive the way history is to be revisited." Obviously, we have an idea of what kind of revisitation we are hoping for. We do not want to decide what will be written, but orient what kind of things will be written or made out of it.

So first of all, a collection is made with an agenda. It's not open vault. It is an agenda. If we take *The Fifth Wall*: it is about Navina Sundaram, who in the 70s to 90s, in West Germany, was part of the public sphere of media. All these things are first given, and only then is the archive built. The archive is not built on TV, or on news, or even public media. It is about Navina Sundaram's particular position. Once that is decided the action is predicted too. In that sense, the future users are decided.

Merle Kröger: I do not see myself as an archivist, but I see myself as a documentarist, as you also do, Madhu. We always have

dealt with very delicate moments. I have become a documentarist because very early on I became interested in the complexity of a place or an event, and the multi-perspectivity of an event. I am always interested in really exploring it, in feeling it. It's not about simply showing an event.

I do not see myself as a detective, someone who tries to solve the riddle of hidden or forgotten stories. But as I was making documentaries, I realized that I always tried to bring up different versions of an event, or of a place, or even of a biography. I am more interested in the plurality of versions than of one story, which always suggests completeness, which I don't think exists. That's one thing.

I'm not a historian either, but the older I get, the more I feel that I am also becoming an archeologist of my own lifetime. While I'm alive, already history is being formed by others. So, I want to have a voice in this. I want to be one of many who can add to this building of history.

The Fifth Wall is a project like this. My generation grew up with only three television channels. And in my family, there was only one newspaper. There was a certain hierarchy of truth, which expanded as time went on. Now I suddenly find myself in the position that I might be able to add a voice to this construction of history. That's when I start archiving. But I would never say, I create an archive—a collection is probably indeed a better word.

Mareike Bernien: I would also not consider myself an archivist, but I work a lot with archival material in my films. I am an experimental and documentary filmmaker. Sometimes the archives are there at the beginning of a work as I use them for research purposes. Sometimes I also use archival footage to re-read images, and to re-read archives against their grain. Most recently, for example, I made a film on the Wismut Company (*Sun Under Ground*, together with Alex Gerbaulet, 2022), which was mining uranium in Saxony and Thuringia

during GDR times. We worked with the company's archive, but also against it.

I am coming more from a perspective that tries to deconstruct archives or intervene into archives. For me, the project of *The Fifth Wall* was something new because it was about building up a collection as a positive form, so to speak. It was not just about deconstructing history, but also about re-constructing history, and reconstructing history in a fragmented way through a specific gaze and situatedness that Navina is providing for us.

This brings me to the question of control, but also of the openness of an archive. For Merle and me, it was really important to contextualize the television works of Navina and not simply to put them online. We wanted to create a context and an attentiveness and thereby make them readable in a certain way. So we contextualized the work on the one hand through the material she was providing to us, as she was an archivist herself, archiving all the manuscripts, all the correspondences, letters she wrote to her parents. We created a structure in which the 66 films are at the center. And around these films, there are conversations, documents, interviews we conducted with Navina, and also commentaries by guests, who re-read these films in an actualized framework.

- AS: Mareike and Merle, in the context of the Grimme prize nomination, you wrote: "We see this project as a model of a future archival practice. Such practice understands the archive as a space that depicts (media) history not as a narrative of domination, but as a mesh of diverse—also contradictory—historical narratives that generate resonances in the respective present." Could you share some insights into the making of *The Fifth Wall*? Merle, how did you actually get to know Navina Sundaram?

140 MK: Actually, I got to know Navina Sundaram through Madhu. She wrote to me: "Do you know this woman who was so important in German TV, and she's an Indian?" Madhu triggered a memory, and the memory was a person of color, a presenter of the *Weltspiegel*, which is a television program of the ARD about things happening outside Europe. There was a real memory of having seen her on television, but that memory had already faded. Navina and me, we then collaborated for the first time in 2004. I always thought about how to depict her story and make it visible without turning it into a single story—I wanted to keep its multi-perspectivity. For a while I thought about making a documentary, but then Navina was very sick, and the possibilities of shooting were getting more limited. As I became a writer and had access to publishers, I also thought about writing a biography. I wanted to link her story to other stories, like the stories of two women who influenced her life very much: one is Amrita Sher-Gil, the Hungarian-Indian painter, and then Hedwig Dayal, a reform teacher, who migrated from Germany to India because she was persecuted by the Nazi government.

Through the fact that none of the publishers even knew the name Navina Sundaram, I became aware that her story had been completely silenced by the public television ARD in Germany, by media history, and also by migrant history, not least because she was not part of a community of migrants. She called herself a first-class migrant. Navina went directly into a center of power, which was the TV newsroom. She was actually a very lonely person in the places she occupied in her life and not part of a movement, as you could say.

I realized that we had to create a space for the complexity of her work and life in which she was not alone anymore, in which we connected her as Mareike just described it. This was why we decided on this special form in the end. I didn't want to show excerpts from her films, I wanted to show her complete films as a body of work, and I wanted to open the archive of

the NDR and get my foot in it, and then use my torch to put light on a shelf where nobody had ever looked before. But I had no idea how to do this. Mareike came at exactly the right moment and brought a lot of fresh discourse the project.

At one point we tried to create criteria for our selections. We always tried to avoid being anecdotal. Whatever was anecdotal, we tried to keep out because we always wanted to look beyond Navina as a person, as a very important person of course, but we wanted to keep the way free for her way of looking into the world, for the structurally interesting parts of the correspondence, for example, with the TV audience, not so much to tell anecdotes.

MB: For me it was important to set the films at the center, and let the films guide me and see if there were resonances to documents or correspondences. The selection process was also based on our subjective gaze; it was really exciting when Merle read me some letters and I was showing her manuscripts, or the lectures Navina had given. We did not know until then that she was also an excellent writer; from the '60s, '70s she had been writing articles for newspapers, or she gave lectures. These lectures give an insight on her own thoughts on feminism, development policies, and other topics. As Merle said, on the one hand we were somehow fumbling in the dark, but at the same time, we shared and exchanged. We were drowning in data. I always called it a big data project, which was way too much for two persons. But at the very end, just when some of the digital architecture of the website was available, we started to puzzle bits and pieces together and things started to make sense.

AS: Madhu, the two digital archive projects you recently have been involved in might help us to better understand that the audiovisual archive indeed is both a promise and a predicament. In the case of India, be it under colonial or BJP-governance, the idea of the state taking care of documents,

or archiving is nothing promising. There is no trust at all, to say the least, in state-funded archives. But then there is an urgent need to keep traces of what the BJP has destroyed and made invisible. Could you please say something about the challenges of your action-based digital archives?

MD: On www.majlisculture.in there is a page called Kashmir, but there is nothing on that page. We worked for ten years to develop an image archive on Kashmir. It's called "Public culture in 1990s in Kashmir." Kashmir, as you know, is very contested today. But earlier it was perceived as very picturesque, a more beautiful place than Switzerland. So, Kashmir was overrepresented, but always by others, even if the person behind the camera was a Kashmiri, the perception was always of the others—of the beautiful and the innocent. Which it is not, it has a very complicated political history, even before the 1990s—known as the period of insurgency. Kashmir is poor, and earlier nobody had access to analogous means to make images. So the images of Kashmir, in media and news, were always made by others. In the 1990s insurgency, the political movement for autonomy started. And at the same time, digital media came into the valley, and suddenly there was a mushrooming of video editing studios. I remember coming from Bombay, which is supposed to be the media capital, and yet I have never seen so many video consoles. So suddenly there was an eruption of images made by the local people. Nobody noticed it because there was such a strong political movement going on. But as accidental archivists, we were interested in that. We started collecting these images from video magazines, photo studios, media schools, etc. Yet we were also embarrassed to go to Kashmir and make any loud interventions because we did not want to do disaster tourism. So we were sort of tentative and our collection was not really very proactive. It is a long story, but I am just mentioning it here to understand the problem of fragile archives. But the

news spread that we were interested in images made by Kashmiris. So one day a man, a photographer with a daily newspaper in Srinagar, came with a huge sack, and said "Take it." I asked, "What is it?" And he said that these were photographs from the last ten years, which had appeared on the front page of the newspaper, taken by him. "But why are you giving us the hard copies? We'll digitize them," I said. He responded: "Take it because I am unable to keep it. Tomorrow, the state may come to my house and find these photos. They will not listen to me that this is my job. This may get me in trouble. But I don't want to destroy them. You take them."

So we took the resources out of the land. Will we be able to make it accessible to all people? Should we do that? Or should we be careful about who can see these photos? What does Commons mean in this case? Once we take the material away from its source will they be still available to people who really should own or access them? Should we credit the photographer as the author of these images? Or should we erase his name in order to protect him? Will that be right?

We still have not resolved it. 7,000 photos are still lying in a locker. They are not in the digital archive. That page has only lots of blacks and blanks to indicate the erased material or the material too risky to show. But think about it—the aforementioned images once were published in a daily newspaper. But 20 years later, you are hesitant to release them. This is self-censorship. The state may come on me, on him, in this political situation it seems like a high possibility. But actually, the state may not even come. But we are doing it ourselves. Is it responsibility? Is it being overly cautious? Self-censorship? I do not know.

So, we might say that the archive-action in this case is to highlight the absences. Highlight the gaps, highlight what is erased. And maybe we are also erasing it in some way or

other by insisting on highlighting the vacuum. Yet we are not a pocket-sized Wikipedia, the blanks are as important as the entries. And that is part of the curated archive-action, I would say.

MB: In our case, when we talk about gaps, we are not talking about *The Fifth Wall*, we talk about the gaps of the archives of public television in Germany, which are financed by tax money but are by no means public. So, the first big obstacle we were confronted with was the fact that the archives of German television are not accessible, unless you are a researcher, or you invest a lot of money for copying purposes. And then you also have to be lucky that the material you are looking for still exists because a lot got deleted. So to talk about gaps, we have to address the gaps, erasures, and inaccessibility of German television archives.

And this is also why we call our project a door opener: to actually open the archives of public television and extract a specific collection to highlight a view, which might otherwise disappear. In that sense, our archive or collection is actually an extraction of a much bigger and institutionalized archive. This is the first gap or the first lack we were confronted with. At the same time, you also find a lot of traces in our collection of things that are not there. For example, there's a letter where Navina talks about a film she did on Bertolt Brecht, but the film is not in the archive because it might have been deleted. So she actually produced a lot, lot more than what is represented in our collection. And there are little traces, glimpses of other work.

AS: In the context of *The Fifth Wall* you Mareike once coined the term "archival care practice" for your work—could you please elaborate a bit on this intriguing concept. How would you describe it, what is specific about this approach?

MB: For us, taking care is not just providing care for documents. Although there was a lot of invisible labor involved

while gathering the collection: digitization, clarification of rights, cutting out the paper documents in a very accurate manner because we also wanted to keep their materiality. Taking care, on the one hand, was about taking care of the documents: sorting and organizing content, but also caring about. We actually care about the history of Navina Sundaram and the place she took in German television as a very extraordinary figure. We wanted to highlight this position, which is shaped through a perspective of migration and through her gaze, re-read German television history.

Besides this, I was also wondering if one can consider the archive itself as a caretaker? As if the archive is involved in processes of reproductive labor by providing specific observations, views, and demands of the past and thereby enables us to set them in relation to the present. This might remind us to see things with more complexity, to see the supposedly known as something unknown and unfamiliar, and that many things from back then are still just as relevant today, such as structural racism in Germany. The archive thereby creates the basis for a critical work on history and the upcoming future as it allows us to research, to remember, to connect.

MK: Or just by being not invisible anymore. This is also an act of resistance, isn't it? You tried everything to make us silent, but here we are. And that's why it's so important. Stefanie Schulte Strathaus once said: films can be friends, but archives can also be friends.

MD: Merle, an idea, and only a novelist can handle that idea. It's not a documentary maker's idea, so it's up to you—say, a major collapse happens on the internet, and one page from one archive becomes the next page of some other archive in some other country and the third one from wherever. And so what happens to world history? It's a novel time.

146 MK: It's a nice scenario, and it's much more interesting than just that "we have to protect" our archives.

MD: It's like decolonial nation making. You make the nation, but at the same time you break it too.

The conversation took place online on August 11, 2022.

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Navigating/Activating: Working with Harun Farocki's Artistic Estate

Volker Pantenburg

What to Do?

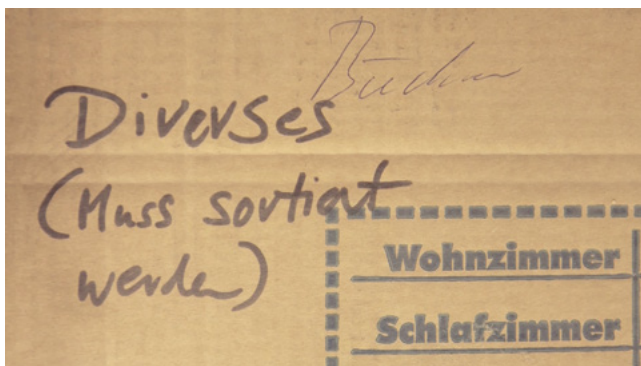
Following Harun Farocki's death in the summer of 2014 a group of colleagues and friends began to think about how to deal with the sudden loss. Along with Antje Ehmann and Farocki's daughters Anna and Lara we came upon the idea to establish a structure that on the one hand is certainly closely related to Farocki's work, and on the other encourages contemporary affiliations with that work. A chance finding, Farocki's short call to action *Was getan werden soll* (eng. *What Ought to Be Done*) from 1975 encouraged us to organize "a coalition of working people," as he wrote at the time, "not from an abstract understanding but from the contact points of their work." (Farocki 2017a, 5) Accompanied by a small A4 poster of the graffiti "ETWAS WIRD SICHTBAR,"¹ which the filmmaker had spray painted on a wall near the old Arsenal Cinema in Welscher Strasse, Farocki's call created the impetus for a series

1 Editors' note: the literal English translation is "something will become visible." "Etwas Wird Sichtbar" is also the German title of Farocki's film *Before Your Eyes Vietnam* (1982).

148 of by now fifteen booklets—fifteen attempts to move from or toward the archive, to activate it or to encircle it.

Accidental

The founding of silent green Kulturquartier and the move of the Arsenal archive to its premises was an unexpected stroke of luck for the emerging Harun Farocki Institut. The Arsenal—Institute for Film and Video Art has also proven to be our most important partner overall. Part of Farocki's artistic estate has been lying in one of their archive spaces since November 2015: some more than three hundred pieces of various media, above all 16mm and 35mm material, but also video cassettes in all conceivable formats, from U-matic to MiniDV, audio cassettes, and a couple of folders containing written documents. If this is an archive, then it is one of production and research, an "accidental archive," constituted by Farocki's decision to stash things away into a storage space in cartons, boxes, and plastic bags. These are working versions, raw material, leftovers, or material from the research on Farocki's films, some realized and others not, television broadcasts, and video installations, as well as para-materials on the numerous productions. "[M]aterial to investigate the present, the future past." (Farocki 2017a, 3)—Preserved by someone whose work navigates through archives in surprising ways and who was interested very early in the link between cybernetics and pedagogy. As Sven Spieker has written in a different context: "The authority of an archivist can be measured ... in part by his capacity for skillful navigation. Archivists are navigation specialists (cyberneticists), who also view the things stored in the archive in relation to the place where they are found" (2004, 9; translated from German). On one of the numerous moving boxes that landed in the HaFI archive we can read, in Farocki's handwriting, "Miscellaneous (Needs to be sorted)": archival work in a nutshell, including the option to reformulate or reject the imperative to "sort" (fig. 1).



[Fig. 1] Close-up of a moving box labeled “Diverses (Muss sortiert werden)” (eng. “Miscellaneous (Needs to be sorted)”) (Source: Harun Farocki Institut)

Remains

No one at the Harun Farocki Institut is a trained or professional archivist. Where expertise is lacking, but indispensable, we get support from the Arsenal, the German Cinematheque, or other partners. “Active relations” (2018, 3), as Jussi Parikka has called the relationship to the things left behind, the “remains,” characterize the archive in its innermost core, but they also point outwards from there. Farocki’s work consists of countless suggestions and indications about where further thinking, filming, or researching could go. When Peter Weiss would have turned 100 in 2016, we took the occasion to examine more closely the materials surrounding Farocki’s portrait of the writer and filmmaker (*Zur Ansicht: Peter Weiss*, 1979). This initiated the digitization of film material, provoked a look into the production files (published as HaFl 003),² and led to an inspection of a site in Wedding, one of the most important locations of Weiss’s *Aesthetics of Resistance*, in the immediate vicinity of silent green and the Harun Farocki Institut.

2 Editors’ note: published in English as *On Display: Peter Weiss, A Production Dossier* (2017b).

Poetic Force

Suely Rolnik suggests distinguishing the various politics of the archive (and their ethical approaches) “on the basis of the poetic force that an archiving device can transmit rather than on that of its technical or methodological choices” (Rolnik 2012, 4). What could this “force” be? Perhaps it is the energy with which bonds, connections, and alignments with the present can be generated from the latency of the materials found in this part of what Harun Farocki left behind. This energy can be called “poetic” because it tends to emerge more from changes, discoveries, and encounters than from systematic research. Along with the physical archive, which exists due to auspicious opportunities and strokes of luck, but also to the frustrations and interruptions of collecting, researching, writing, and filming, this means a theoretical understanding of the archive as a realm of possibilities and “metabolism” along with its “micropolitical potency” of refusing disciplinary constraints (Mende 2018). This metabolism of the archive also involves it growing: all Farocki’s friends, colleagues, and coworkers are invited to contribute to the archive; the “remains” from Farocki’s work are joined by the materials, which reflects the division of labor and collaborative character of the productions.

Highways and Byways

Navigating in the archive also means: recognizing, alongside the obvious routes, the side trails and secret paths. Obvious routes from recent years: a retrospective, as complete as possible, of Farocki’s films, TV programs, and installations in collaboration with the Arsenal and the Neuer Berliner Kunstverein (n.b.k.) in autumn 2017/2018, as well as publication of Farocki’s texts in so far six volumes (2017 to 2022); side trails that do not revolve around Farocki, but start from him or lead to him: the project on Skip Norman—like Farocki a student in the first year of the dffb (the German Film and Television Academy Berlin)—and

his work as filmmaker, cameraman, photographer, and visual anthropologist, which resulted in both an edition of the online journal *Rosa Mercedes* that fans out in various directions and in digitizations of his films; the interest for the cultural technology of “navigation,” or the retrospective of films by Ingemo Engström and Gerhard Theuring in June 2022. Little of this can be planned, there simply isn’t enough time or resources; we have to count on chance as our accomplice. One example: after a screening during the retrospective in autumn 2017 an interested spectator asked whether material still existed that Farocki had shot on the occasion of an early renovation of an old building in Spandau (it was her first large-scale project as an architect). In a film canister with the label “Haus” (eng. *house*) we found a film from 1982/83, practically in a finished cut, which observes and documents the careful renovation; an indication of the close connection, about which little has yet been examined, between Farocki and architecture. A second example: the tip to the broadcast (which ultimately did not occur) of the film *Hard Selling* in the final phase of GDR television in 1991 brings our attention to a carton with the label “Adidas.” Farocki accompanies a sports shoe salesman shortly after the fall of the Wall on his sales tour in the “new states.” Farocki: “I also don’t know the five new federal states and, if I want to film there, I have to have a leading figure. It is the profiteer, development aid worker and missionary all in one. He breaks into the accession area from the West in army strength” (2021, 3). Such findings can lead to larger projects or invitations (such as that to Elske Rosenfeld to work with the material from *Hard Selling*); booklets or digitizations; events in the cinema or in public space; residencies and encounters. The archive deals with the future as much as it does with the past and the present. Accidents will happen.

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Pirated *Lubunca* Films: Lambdaistanbul's Counter-archival Practices

Sema Çakmak

Watching queer films, for example about a love story, a real love story ... gave us the feeling that actually we are everywhere and there are so many stories ... we are not alone. — Okan, volunteer at Lambdaistanbul

Queer archives are one of the most precarious, especially in hostile environments. In this contribution I will try to speak about films as archive and to outline the shaping of the activist audiovisual archive of *Lambdaistanbul*, the first LGBTI+¹ rights organization in Turkey, founded in 1993, with special regard to its own film archive. With the help of interviews I conducted with two Lambdaistanbul members, I reflect theoretically on queer counter-archives and activist archiving practices at the margins of society and legality.

1 I am using LGBTI+ because in Turkey predominantly this version of the LGBTQI+ label is used. The letter Q does not exist in the Turkish alphabet and queer was turned into *kuir* taking on the Turkish pronunciation. I take this as an act of local “appropriation” of the “Western” terminologies.

154 In my interview with Lambdaistanbul volunteer Okan on October 28, 2021, he told me about the legend around the film *Gece, Melek ve Bizim Çocuklar/The Night, Melek and Our Gang* (1993) by the infamous Atif Yılmaz. Depicting the lives of a sex worker, her lover-pimp, and her flat mate, a young trans* woman and fellow sex worker, the film has one scene that shows a police raid in a bar. It is said that an actual raid happened during the shooting of the film. The director just continued the take and used the documentary footage afterwards for the fictional film. Thus, the film uses fictional and documentary footage and shows the dark alleys of Beyoğlu, Istanbul's central neighborhood for sex work and an emblematic living space for queer people until gentrification drove them out. Moreover, for the first time in Turkish cinema *Lubunca* expressions would appear on screen, the slang of queers in Turkey, that is, the *Lubunyas*.² So, even if the legend turns out to be untrue, the film is a testimony, an archive of the thriving queer subcultural scene and the sex work milieu of the '90s in this area. It embodies an accidental archive of police repression, homophobic, transphobic, and misogynistic violence, and the everlasting class issues in Turkish society paired with the double standards of patriarchy. Or to use Ann Cvetkovich's words, "film and video extend the material and conceptual reach of the traditional archive, collating and making accessible documents that might otherwise remain obscure ... [producing] the unusual emotional archive necessary to record the often traumatic history of gay and lesbian culture" (2008, 244). For subaltern groups like queer communities, films become means to counter their invisibilities and erasures by institutionalized central archives representing the powerful with their hegemonic and heteronormative narratives of history (Brunow 2015, 10). Now, if we follow Paula Amad's thinking, film functions here as

2 Lubunya is used like the term "queer" in Turkey and comprises all sexual orientations and gender identities that defy heteronormativity. *Lubunca* is a mix of linguistic expressions from different marginalized groups in Turkey like Roma, Greek, and so on.

a counter-archive: “Rather than emphasizing the deficiencies of the film-as-archive equation, I have thus chosen to explore the unique capacities—which I term counter-archival—of film’s relation to memory, the past, and history.” (2010, 22)

As a counter-archive of trauma, as queer audiovisual archives so often are, *Gece, Melek ve Bizim Çocuklar* represents, for *Lubunyas* and the LGBTI+ activism in Turkey, one of the first identity-affirming experiences through local film and thus occupies an important role in the collective memory of the movement. Lambdaistanbul grasped very early on the role that moving images could play for political activism, community-building, and activist archiving. My interviewee Okan³ participated in and co-organized several film screenings that took place regularly at Lambdaistanbul, including this film. He explains how valuable and important it was for the self-esteem of *Lubunyas* to see queer depictions in film at a time when they were simply non-existent, and to talk about them collectively:

Okan: It was very interesting for us to see Lubunya/queer representations in films. I mean, seeing that representation, regardless of what kind it was, made us go wild. And most of them were phobic that don’t mean anything to me today, like, garbage stuff. Still, it felt so good to see even those representations, just to *be* represented. (2021, translation by the author)

Cvetkovitch argues that stereotypes in films and videos of the “sad, lonely, or dead [lesbians] have become part of the archive of lesbian culture ... inventing an archival and documentary aesthetic that is more interested in preserving affect than in collecting positive images” (Cvetkovich 2008, 253). Okan’s remembering of the film screenings, even of the homophobic stereotypes, as a pleasing moment of identity-affirmation and

3 I use his first name since we got on a personal level very quickly with Okan. Moreover, in the Turkish language formal address also uses the first name, so this feels more natural.

156 community building makes them a part of the queer archive of *Lubunyas*, which is not only about positive images. Even problematic narratives and hostile depictions can evoke positive affects when the alternative is non-representation, social erasure, and isolation. As Rogerson argues with Heather Love, affects of abjection, violence, and exclusion, which represent basic experiences of the social damage of queer identities, are crucial when examining queer histories (2018, 85):

Queer archives provide sites of exile, refusal, and failure as well as persistence and survival. The significance of archival knowledge and queer history beyond the borders of the twentieth century exhume the unknowable into tangible evidence of difference, protest, conflict, and perseverance. (Rogerson 2018, 85)

In an activist context, however, archival practices might sound contradictory at first. Activist practices are embedded in the present and oriented towards changing the future. Thus, dealing with the past via activist archiving “may cause a tension, or ‘beautiful contradiction’” (Paalman, Fossati, and Masson 2021, 11), a tension for activism itself. However, like Rogerson here, queer temporalities and queer-activist counter-archival practices cannot be examined linearly. By embracing the traumatic past of abjection new futurities of solidarity and agency can be envisioned.

Thus, *Gece, Melek ve Bizim Çocuklar* depicts for the very first time in Turkish cinema the lives of trans* sex workers with all the violence they experience without being judgmental or moralistic, showing an audiovisual archive of *Lubunya* affects and spaces of Istanbul. Lambdaistanbul’s regular film screenings, bringing hundreds of queer films like this to its community, thus initiated the circulation and archiving of queer affects, shaped the LGBTI+ social movement in Turkey, and enabled identity-affirming experiences for Lubunyas on a political as well as personal level. Consequently, Lambdaistanbul’s film screenings and the subsequent

accidental film archive that grew out of them can be thought of as “socially motivated archival practices” (Paalman, Fossati, and Masson 2021, 11), serving not only for memory but for identity construction and political mobilization (Paalman, Fossati, and Masson 2021, 5). According to Niyaz, another Lambdaistanbul member whom I interviewed on 8 July 2021, Lambdaistanbul’s counter-archive is an assemblage of the personal collections of community members comprising diverse materials as well as approximately 150 films. The lack of professionalism, the arbitrariness of materials, and the mobility of the archive, as is often the case in precarious contexts like anti-hegemonic social movements, thus presents an excellent example of an accidental archive and classifies it, maybe obviously, as activist archival practice:

activist archiving describes the processes in which those who self-identify primarily as activists engage in archival activity, not as a supplement to their activism but as an integral part of their social movement activism. (Flinn and Alexander 2015, 331–32)

In the following I want to take a closer look at the activist archival practices of Lambdaistanbul, to examine how piracy became the only means for building its counter-archive within a restricted geography, thus creating an informal film culture that goes against hegemonic canon and taste.

Activist Archives, Piracy, and Care

When Okan first told me about Lambdaistanbul’s film archive, it was a happy proof of my hypothesis that films played a crucial role for community building and identity construction in the young LGBTI+ movement. In addition to the film screenings, which are ephemeral events, archiving them positions queer films as an important part of queer memory, affect, and history since putting something into an archive, deeming it worthy and necessary for preservation, accrues value on the specific objects. This also means that these films contributed to the

158 individual history of this organization, its community, and to the overall history of the LGBTI+ social movement in Turkey. Moreover, Lambdaistanbul's film archive had also a rental function. As another Lambdaistanbul member explained to Niyaz, they rented these films to community members and at some point also asked for a little fee that would go into the financing of the grassroots organization, which is until today funded solely by membership fees.

Like for many community-driven counter-archives, Lambdais-tanbul's "audiovisual collection [served] as community resource" (Paalman, Fossati, and Masson 2021, 10) to make queer films accessible to Lubunyas for the political and personal needs of representation. In this sense, these films and film screenings that were always complemented by extensive discussions were also used by Lambdaistanbul as pedagogical tools to learn more about queer existences, traumas, and activism around the globe. Lambdaistanbul is considered by many of its members as a "school" where closeted, isolated, and discriminated against Lubunyas could come into contact with each other for the first time and learn about the diversity of sexuality, queer politics, the mechanisms of power and oppression, and consequently overcome isolation and self-shame.⁴ By creating a safe space and providing a repository of otherwise inaccessible queer films, among other things, the "school of Lambdaistanbul" aimed at strengthening the self-confidence regarding the non-hetero-normative sexualities and gender identities of its members.

Nevertheless, showing queer films was a complicated matter in the '90s and beginning of '00s. Okan explains that access to queer films was extremely restricted. Turkish films depicting non-heteronormative identities like *Gece*, *Melek ve Bizim Çocuklar* or

4 *Lambda ile zaman tüneli/Time warp with Lambda* is a zoom recording of conversations of members published by Lambdaistanbul on YouTube and provides an oral history of the organization. Throughout, this analogy of Lambdaistanbul as a school is repeatedly highlighted. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LJc-JkwRSCM> (last accessed May 20, 2023).

shot by queer filmmakers were a rarity, and it was nearly impossible to find international films with Turkish subtitles, let alone global queer films being distributed in Turkish cinemas. Most of the films could only be made accessible via piracy. They had to be downloaded from the internet and be subtitled by Lambdaistanbul members themselves who spoke English well enough (films from non-English speaking countries were therefore impossible, according to Okan). On the other side, this enabled the organizers to use their own subcultural language *Lubunca*, a significant political identity marker of the LGBTI+ movement, for the translations⁵ of subtitles and film titles and thus appropriate these works for their own cause and community. So Lambdaistanbul's practices around films were not only curatorial organizations of screenings (members of the event-planning committee were free to decide which films they would like to show) but showed an active involvement in the shaping of a queer film subculture in the country.

Thinking with Abigail De Kosnik and her concept of "pirate-archivists," the pirated versions of films that would have been otherwise unavailable for the Lubunyas enabled not only the viewing of the films but an archival practice too. De Kosnik speculates that in a possible future "Collapse" of society and digital infrastructures pirate-archives could save media heritage because, most probably, the official archives would be destroyed. Although she speaks of digital archives connected to server issues this can be conceptually adapted to former versions of media piracy like the pirated DVDs and CDs in Lambdaistanbul's collection:

In the case of a pirate archive, which is not one site [like centralized official archives] but consists of many individual archives networked together, Collapse conditions may adversely affect thousands or millions of users' servers, but

5 For instance, *Stonewall* (1995) was translated into *Lubunca*.

some privately owned servers and drives will likely survive ... they will survive as cultural archives. (De Kosnik 2020, 66)

Consequently, only through piracy was Lambdaistanbul able to obtain these films to organize screenings and secure an archive of queer films for members to draw upon. Anti-hegemonic counter-archives require sometimes unorthodox methods, especially within marginalized and precarious communities that have no other opportunity to access these kinds of cultural resources. This seems to fit neatly into the following conceptualization of a counter-archive:

Counter-archives are 'an incomplete and unstable repository, an entity to be contested and expanded through clandestine acts, a space of impermanence and play,' ... Counter-archives can be political, ingenious, resistant, and community-based. They are embodied differently and have explicit intention to historicize differently, to disrupt conventional national narratives, and to write difference into public accounts. (Chew, Lord, and Marchessault 2018, 9)

In this context the "clandestine act" of piracy turns into an enabler of identity-affirmation that breaks with the invisibility or misrepresentation of the subaltern in official archives and can therefore be read as an act of care.

Using informal methods Lambdaistanbul offers us a counter-archive containing a counter-public film culture, and by extension, an alternative film distribution network of an activist community. In *Shadow Economies of Cinema*, Lobato argues that for a holistic view of global film circulation, informal systems, including pirate networks, must be thought of in conjunction with traditional industry networks. For him, official film production as well as distribution has long cooperated with and depended on these (black) markets in various ways. Of particular importance in the context of my research on the activist use of film and the potential of their archives to provoke social change is Lobato's

observation on how film circulation affects this potential for change in the first place:

to be of social consequence, a film must first reach an audience. In other words, it must be distributed. Distribution plays a crucial role in film culture—it determines what films we see, and when and how we see them; and it also determines what films we do not see. (Lobato 2012, 2)

Strictly speaking Lambdaistanbul's film practice cannot be considered a shadow economy, as there are no commercial purposes. However, the access to these films provided by the organization and its members, which was not available through legal channels at the time, and the autonomous translation and appropriation work, allows us to regard the organization as an "informal community distribution" or even an "informal counter-public distribution." In this context, these informal film practices of a community of care, the screening, archiving, and distribution of queer films, turns piracy and the resulting pirated film archive into activist counter-archival methods against state repression, which embodies "countercultural, political, and community-based archival practices" (Paalman, Fossati, and Masson 2021, 5).

Archival Crisis, Activist Chances

Today, however, gentrification as well as discriminatory landlords*lords have forced financially precarious Lambdaistanbul to change its location several times, which served not only as office space but also as event venue and storage room for the archive. Thus, when Lambdaistanbul lost its space in 2016 the archive needed to be relocated once again. After being stored for some time under poor conditions in the private homes of members it was given to *Kadın Eserleri Kütüphanesi/The Women's Library and Information Center (KEK)*. This was necessary to prevent the physical archive from further material damage until Lambdaistanbul could generate funds for a new venue as well as for the systematization and digitization of the archive to ensure

162 its future survival and accessibility (Uslu 2021, 327–330). This measure though, has made the archive inaccessible for now, and given the fact that not only the archive is at risk of obsolescence but the organization itself, the archive is not the top-priority for the time being. When survival is at stake, dealing with the past seems to become secondary. But as with Rogerson's inquiry above, queer pasts are necessary for the agency of today with horizons of queer futures in mind. If we think about archives as surviving in posterity, as "proof that a life truly existed, that something actually happened" (Mbembe 2002, 21), then having no archive or losing it becomes synonymous with death.

Lambdaistanbul must find ways to ensure the continuation of its counter-archive for its political struggle of legal protection and equal rights since queer archives have the potential to counter "systemic cisheteropatriarchal knowledge ... [and function as] a method of resistance to state narratives that limit queerness to criminality and coding" (Hosfeld 2018, 11–12). Both interviewed volunteers emphasized the importance of the preservation of and the accessibility to Lambdaistanbul's archive for LGBTI+ activism and Okan explained that the project of digitization is still very important even if they do not have the financial means yet. Digitization, as so often in debates about the longevity of archives, seems to hold the promise of long-term preservation and accessibility (Paalman, Fossati, Masson 2021, 2). De Kosnik, however, complicates this conception and does not consider official digitization of archives as a guarantee of preservation. In the case of Lambdaistanbul that is currently "homeless," it seems to be the only possibility for now.

So how can we think further about such a precarious archive that is inaccessible and under constant threat of obliteration due to hostile politics and socio-economic factors? What will become of the pirated and *Lubunca*-subtitled films that embody an accidental archive of the first encounters of *Lubunyas* with queer audiovisual representations and document the subcultural language of the local queer community?

In anticipation of the future access to its counter-archive, Lambdaistanbul's website, the Facebook page, and YouTube channel served me as a substitute digital archive for the time being and entry point to retrieve some information on the film screenings that were organized until COVID-19 hit. In addition, the website, which recently changed its interface, offers the oral history YouTube video mentioned above. Besides digitized archives, digital platforms also have the potential to function as archives, even if they are not originally intended to do so. Although the internet and social media are predominantly thought of within the framework of ephemerality, they can still be considered as accidental archives, as "proof of existence." YouTube, for instance, "enables a 'vernacular memory,' dissolving 'boundaries between material, official memory and the more ephemeral cultural expressions of memory'" (Paalman, Fossati, Masson 2021, 13). Lambdaistanbul's precarious material archive oriented me towards these alternatives, and finally, the indispensability of social media and internet usage for political activism today, makes this argument of "platforms-as-archive" and "platforms-as-memory" not too far-fetched. Notably in the function of queer archives to "reclaim their representations and narratives in public memory" (Hosfeld 2018, 9-12) the role of digital practices for the cultural memory of social movements should not be underestimated. To claim non-existence or death because of the lack of an "official" archive would disregard other forms of preservation like for instance oral history and digital traces. Damiens points out that archives of marginalized and/or activist groups can only convey a small part of their cultural history anyway (Damiens 2014, 44). The inaccessibility of Lambdaistanbul's archive is thus nonetheless not too great an obstacle in examining the organization.

Until now Lambdaistanbul's counter-archive, like most queer archives, which are collected and assembled by volunteers without professional archiving skills, or as my second informant Niyaz calls them, the "collecting activists" (Uslu 2021, 313,

164 translation by author), comprises something more like an accumulation of heterogeneous, unclassified, and subjective materials. Cvetkovich and others have argued that queer community archives follow a different logic than institutionalized state archives as being more concerned with the personal, individual, with affect and intimacy, where community members are more involved in archiving processes (Hosfeld 2018, 13; Uslu 2021, 4; Cvetkovich 2008, 243–44). Thus, “community-based archives oftentimes resist the urge to classify and order their collections, thereby not necessarily prioritizing already legitimated events” (Damiens 2014, 48). Moreover, Cvetkovich sees in community archives an emotional need for history that will not disappear even when archives become institutionalized, or state-archives start their own queer collections (Cvetkovich 2008, 251). Lambdaistanbul’s archive and the organization itself will survive not only because of its material and its future digitized archive but because of the place it holds in the collective memory of its queer community as a “school” and its role as initiator of the Turkish LGBTI+ movement of today. By providing an audiovisual repository for non-represented queer subjects Lambdaistanbul epitomizes a space for memory, care, and identity-affirmation. Those at “the margins of authoritative power are poised precariously between being written out of history or declared as criminals, mentally unfit or dangerous through state dominance” (Rogerson 2018, 83). The use of informal methods by its activist archivists, considered unethical in hegemonic society, as the only means of access, becomes necessary to fight discrimination and historical erasure, and enhance agency to break out from the hostile stereotypical narratives or erasures of official archives.

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Forgetting the Cinema of Transgression by Looking for Its Traces

Marie Sophie Beckmann

As I was scrolling through my Facebook feed in May 2018, I came across an intriguing offer: transgression for the price of \$20 USD plus postage. The seller was filmmaker Nick Zedd, who offered a “bare bones approach to guerrilla filmmaking” via his private Facebook account, “born on the streets of Manhattan’s Lower East Side.” The product—a package of films labeled “Cinema of Transgression”—could be paid via PayPal and would be shipped from Mexico City, as the location icon in the post indicates.

Nick Zedd was the self-proclaimed leader of a group of artists, performers, and filmmakers who collaboratively produced films in New York’s Downtown scenes of the 1980s, which Zedd eventually made known as the Cinema of Transgression and marketed as a new radical underground film movement. In 1985, he published “The Cinema of Transgression Manifesto,” in which he formulated the supposed movement’s aesthetically and formally transgressive program, and also determined its members.¹

1 Although Nick Zedd wrote and signed the manifesto alone, he aims to speak for other “Underground Invisibles” as well, namely Richard Kern,

168 He then compiled videotapes and organized screenings under the same banner. The publications and exhibitions that have emerged since then on the Cinema of Transgression are admittedly modest in number.² But through them, the narrative of a heroic, largely male-dominated film movement has been reproduced and consolidated, while the importance of the scene context and the variety of cross-disciplinary practices it produced have become obscured. This is thanks to what Patricia Mellencamp called the “catch-22 of the politics of US avant-garde (and perhaps of the counterculture),” (1990, 5) namely a “privileging of the personal” (xviii) despite an often-declared collective aspiration that “risked placing ‘meaning’ totally within the author” (Mellencamp 1990, 11). The actually resistant character of the films is thus paradoxically contained, which ultimately facilitates their incorporation into the value systems of the author and work-oriented art industries and institutions.

A reexamination of these films, as well as the practices that surround and frame them, requires both a reconsideration of the movement’s myth of origin and an exploration of their contexts of production, exhibition, distribution, and archiving. Zedd’s Facebook post is instructive in this regard. On the one hand, it confirms that the Cinema of Transgression is a label chosen by Nick Zedd for a (sellable) package of films whose appeal derives from the glorifying aura of a bygone era. On the other, the post’s informality, its social media-induced ephemerality, and its coincidental discovery also reveals the curious (digital) after-life of the Cinema of Transgression beyond (film) archives in the conventional sense of the word. Finally, it invites speculation:

Tommy Turner, Richard Klemann, Manuel DeLanda, *Erotic Psyche* (Bradley Eros & Aline Mare), and Direct Art Ltd (Zedd 2012, 17). In the later development of the Cinema of Transgression, however, the associated names diverge from this initial list, while Zedd continues to be considered its leading figure.

2 See, for instance, Sargeant 1995 and the group exhibition *You Killed Me First: The Cinema of Transgression* at KW Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin 2012.

Does Zedd, almost three decades after the invention of the concept, want to get rid of what's left of the Cinema of Transgression cheaply and quickly, even forget it? I would like to continue this speculation here for a moment. Because what would be at stake if the Cinema of Transgression were to be forgotten? And could it even be that the archive contains within itself a mode of forgetting that is essential for a future engagement with the Cinema of Transgression in particular, and perhaps with cinema in general?

Dispersion

When the films associated with the Cinema of Transgression were shot between the late 1970s and early 1990s as low or no-budget productions with a DIY aesthetic and a cast of amateur actors, they were initially shown at screenings and festivals in East Village nightclubs and off-cinemas or as part of performances and concerts. In addition, they circulated through reviews in underground zines or broadcasts on cable television, in artist-produced formats for Manhattan's public access stations. Some filmmakers transferred their Super 8 and 16mm films to videotape and distributed them through self-organized mail order or small, alternative distributors in the US and Europe. The latter not only led to the films entering the home video market for niche genres, but it also opened up the possibility of uncontrolled reproduction and circulation of these tapes.

Today, some can be viewed online as often unauthorized digital streams on platforms like UbuWeb, YouTube, or Vimeo, visibly bearing traces of an "aesthetics of access" (Hilderbrand 2009, 6) resulting from their duplication and multiple reformatting, or, transferred to VHS and DVD, as equally obsolete and obscure collector's items on sales portals such as eBay or amazon. Some original Super 8 prints have disappeared or were never reformatted for further circulation, while others are restored and collected by film archives and museums. Related output and

170 paratextual material, such as pamphlets, zines, VHS sleeves, or performance scripts, are shared on Social Media and in “rogue archives” (De Kosnik 2016) like fan-run online archives as well as collected by specialized libraries.

Given this continuous dispersion and the diversity of repositories that enter the picture, the Cinema of Transgression is not so much a self-contained historical phenomenon that aligns with a logic of initial rejection and retrospective recognition. Rather, both the concept and the films it seeks to contain continuously move around “promiscuously, across formats and display contexts,” (Balsom 2017, 102) experiencing multiple, often ambiguous framings as results of different “institutional cues” (Klinger 2006, 19). And it is precisely this situation that makes rethinking a challenge, but also a special incentive, even a matter of necessity.

Archival Skew

One of the first steps of this project was to go to where it happened and to see what has remained—and also where, in what form, and with what modes of access. When I traveled to New York City a few months after Nick Zedd published his Facebook sale post, I met with key figures of the 1980s Downtown art, film, music, and performance scene, and visited the very archive dedicated to documenting those scenes, namely the Downtown Collection at NYU’s Fales Library & Special Collections. Founded in 1994, it has grown to become the largest collection of materials related to the Downtown New York scene, including the personal papers of artists and writers as well as archives of art collectives and galleries, AIDS activism and theater groups, and night clubs from the 1970s to the early 1990s.

If you type “Cinema of Transgression” into the library’s search box, most results will lead to “The Nick Zedd Papers,” to folders or items such as “Cinema of Transgression International Press,” “Cinema of Transgression Event Flyers,” or even “Red T-Shirt with ‘Cinema of Transgression, Volume 1’ Patch.” This is because in

2011, when Nick Zedd left New York for Mexico City, he donated a large volume of materials to Fales, from personal family movies and professional correspondence to artwork, poetry, and film footage, to a corpus of materials detailing his efforts to make the Cinema of Transgression known.

Notably, most other filmmakers from the Cinema of Transgression's orbit are not represented in this institutional archive. Finding their stories and papers thus means finding them in person. When meeting Anthony Chase, Manuel DeLanda, Bradley Eros, Karen Finley, Tessa Hughes-Freeland, John Kelly, Richard Kern, JG Thirlwell, and Ela Troyano I was not only informed about activities, events, and works that are often overlooked precisely because they don't easily fit into the narrative of the Cinema of Transgression marketed by Nick Zedd. I was also allowed an unexpected glimpse of their private archives: "Here's something that might interest you." In no way processed for viewing by the public, these posters, flyers, newspaper clippings, photographs, zines, and films were kept because they are emotionally valuable, or because they will eventually acquire commercial value, being "worth what someone will pay for them," as Richard Kern said about his collection of zines,³ but not necessarily because an institution attaches historical relevance to it.

Forgetting

Against this background, Nick Zedd's donation to Fales initially seems like an attempt both to interweave his own life story even more strongly with the origin myth of the Cinema of Transgression and to inscribe both in the archival historiography of the Downtown scene. After all, it is the institutional archive that gives its documents and the person or groups they represent "a foundational status of existence" (Mbembe 2002, 20). However, another reading is also possible. For in the release and transfer

172 of his materials there is also a moment of surrender, or disposition, even loss. And this is not least because of the intimate relationship between archiving and forgetting. In this regard, let's consider Verne Harris's deconstructive reading of the link between archive and memory. Instead of assuming a linear development from memory to archive, the point here is rather a process of one folding into the other. Referencing Derrida, Harris writes that:

For deconstruction, ... memory and archives are best understood as genres of the trace, subject to what Derrida calls 'the law of the law of genre,' namely, 'a principle of contamination, a law of impurity, a parasitical economy.' ... The boundary between memory and archives should be seen as a process and, more specifically, as a process of invagination. (2012, 151–52)

What follows from this is also a complication of the opposition of memory and forgetting: "The logic of the trace is an enabling to forget. Every movement to record memory, to keep it safe, is a movement to forget, whether it is the movement ... from consciousness to unconsciousness, from memory to archives" (Harris 2012, 152).

Considering this complication of the archive, memory, and forgetting, the proposal to forget the Cinema of Transgression by looking for its traces takes on another layer of meaning. Between letting it sink into oblivion and rehashing consolidated stories, another path opens: one in which archives are not only used in their function as repositories, but are examined in their modes of operation, politics, and voids. In this way, attention can be drawn to that which resists containment by a consolidated historical account and can be found beyond (or in between) the framework and logic of established practices of archiving and exhibition: contradictory memories, fluid practices, unruly objects, cross-disciplinary constellations, ephemeral aesthetics, and the impossibility of reconstruction. In other words, one could discover

not only what remains, but also what moves on—implicitly, incidentally, and accidentally—and invites us to follow its trail.

I thank those who generously shared their memories and time with me, your anecdotes and insights proved incredibly valuable. To the kind and helpful staff at the Fales Library & Special Collections at New York University, I thank you for your patient assistance in navigating the archive.

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On Transnationality and Archive Practice: A Chronicle of the Rafla Collection

Tamer El Said

In December 2018, Stefanie Schulte Strathaus put me in contact with Ihab Rafla, who was in touch with the Arsenal—Institute for Film and Video Art seeking shelter for his father’s film collection, which was stored in their family apartment in Cairo’s neighborhood, Heliopolis.

The father, Magdy Rafla, was a jeweler who had a jewelry shop located in downtown Cairo during the second half of the twentieth century. Magdy was also a passionate cinephile who had spent his life amassing an extensive collection of films, a true testament to his love for this art form. Spanning the early 1900s to the 1980s, his collection encompassed a mesmerizing array of cinematic treasures from all corners of the world. However, after Magdy’s passing in 2017 at the age of 87, his vast collection was left lonely inside his empty apartment.

In the first week of January 2019, I visited the Rafla apartment, unsure of what I would encounter. The sight that unfolded before my eyes left me fascinated—a sight that can only be described as a cinephile’s paradise. Each room within the expansive flat

176 was overflowing with films and film-related materials, immersing the space in an aura of cinematic history. It was a testament to Magdy's unwavering dedication and an insatiable curiosity for the silver screen.

Ihab, Magdy's son, suggested moving the collection to Germany, but it was clear to the Arsenal and us that it had to stay in Egypt. From this moment on, we started a new journey of collaboration with the Arsenal to work on this collection, following a 9-year history of collaboration on many other joint projects.

In March 2019, we relocated the Rafla collection to Cimatheque.¹ A few weeks later, we organized a workshop with the Arsenal to work on the collection at its new shelter. Guided by the expertise of our esteemed archivist, Yasmin Desouki, and the invaluable insights of Lisabona Rahman, a film preservation and restoration specialist from the Arsenal, a dedicated group of 10 passionate volunteers joined forces to embark on the meticulous inspection and assessment of the collection's content and physical condition.

The Rafla collection is a remarkable ensemble, encompassing a diverse range of cinematic items that offer a profound glimpse into the material culture surrounding cinema-going and film collecting during the second half of the previous century. It includes approximately 1000 9.5mm Pathe Baby films, around 1,200 16mm and 35mm prints, hundreds of amateur films and home movies in various formats such as 8mm, Super8, and 16mm, orphan films, newsreels, as well as rare magazines and books that provide a wealth of historical and contextual knowledge, in addition to many invaluable cinematic apparatuses, including rewinders, projectors, splicers, and viewers. Rafla's comprehensive collection of equipment not only offers insight into the inspection and maintenance of film reels but also comprises an array of projectors of different gauges—both locally

1 Cimatheque—Alternative Film Centre: <https://www.cimatheque.org/>.

produced in Egypt and internationally acquired. Furthermore, the collection showcases an intriguing assortment of world films thoughtfully translated into Arabic, providing a captivating window into the history of subtitling and inter-titling practices in Egypt.

Following extensive research and working hard on alternative methods to build a climate-controlled room, we were able to equip, seal, and outfit a room inside Cimatheque to host the analog collection in the best possible conditions within our limited resources.

In July 2021, we launched a call for volunteers program. The response was overwhelming, with over 220 applications pouring in within a week. Inspired by this growing interest, we initiated a regular volunteer program, which proved to be a transformative experience, not only for the volunteers but also for our team and the collection itself.

As the program unfolded, we had the privilege of providing basic training to 80 young practitioners specializing in Library Sciences, equipping them with the essential knowledge and skills required for effective archival practices. Additionally, 10 individuals received specialized training in film preservation techniques, further bolstering our capabilities in safeguarding these cinematic treasures.

The involvement of these dedicated volunteers has been instrumental in our ongoing efforts at Cimatheque. They have become an integral part of the day-to-day operations, actively contributing their expertise and enthusiasm to various tasks such as indexing, cataloging, and digitizing the collection. Their commitment and passion have been truly inspiring. They represented a new generation of archive practitioners who have emerged as a driving force within the growing archive community in Egypt.

178 The extensive work on the Rafla collection resulted in findings that surprised everyone. The collection includes incredibly diverse material, but the true treasures are amateur footage of Egypt shot primarily during the 1920s and 1930s. It captured local provinces, bustling Cairene streets, and governorates such as Port Said and Alexandria, shot by Egyptians and also by German, Greek, British, and Italian ex-pats who lived in the country. The footage provides an unforgettable and rarely-seen view of Egypt at a critical point in its history. It offers a unique window into Egyptian life under the British protectorate, revealing a layer of the colonial history in the Arab region. It also contains footage shot in different European cities by Egyptians during the 1950s and 1960s. Many of these images do not exist elsewhere, and these are the sole prints available, making the collection the most precious one we know about in Egypt, let alone in the MENA region. Amazingly, it still remains in its country of origin, which is a rare feat.

In February 2022, the Arsenal and Cimatheque organized a cutting-edge workshop led by Lisabona Rahman on “Advanced Techniques and Challenges in Film Archiving and Preservation.” Following the workshop, we are currently collaborating with Arsenal on developing a trilingual toolkit that will offer a comprehensive resource covering various aspects such as inspecting, logging, film repair, splicing, digitization, and cold storage techniques.

Our collaboration with the Arsenal offered Cimatheque an incredible opportunity to learn and grow. To us, transnationality is not about bringing people from different nationalities together. It’s not about acquiring or showing material from different parts of the world. Transnationality is a daily practice, vision, and mindset that are based on a set of values and principles.

Openness, mutuality, transparency, eye-to-eye level, exchange positions, maintaining cultural differences as a source to enrich the process rather than a way to demonstrate hierarchy, and

challenging the power dynamics that are imposed by the funding structures and geopolitics are key elements to be considered in every step and every decision we make in our collaborations. **179**

This is what we need today more than ever, and we owe it to ourselves before anyone else.

This text benefited from reports on the Rafla Collection by different team members of Cimatheque, including Yasmin Desouki and Hana Al Bayaty.

NEW CINEPHILIAS: BEYOND THE
MANSREADING MACHINE

Afterword, Three Years Later: For a New Cinephilia

Girish Shambu

Nearly a decade ago I wrote a book called *The New Cinephilia* (Shambu 2014). In the early 2000s, I had been part of the first wave of film blogging, and the book grew out of my experiences in that community. *The New Cinephilia* attempted to reflect theoretically upon the internet-induced paradigm shift that had reconfigured the forms and nature of film discourse among cinephiles. However, in the months and years after the book's release, as I cast a backward glance, it hit me with acute embarrassment that the book contained a glaring blind spot. It did not acknowledge or analyze the fact that the landscape of film culture is and always has been grossly uneven.

For over a hundred years since the birth of the cinematic medium, both the making of films and the writing about them has been dominated, globally, by men. In Euro-western culture these men have been overwhelmingly white and heterosexual. The resulting marginalization of women, LGBTQ people, and Black, Indigenous and other people of color is a problem that was mostly ignored by the traditional "old cinephilia." But especially in the last decade, a rising chorus of cinephile voices, on social

184 media and beyond, have been publicly and pervasively calling out this marginalization. The #MeToo movement, which was founded by activist Tarana Burke in 2006 and exploded in 2017, raised these voices to unprecedented levels of urgency. It was a spirit of solidarity with these demands that drove the manifesto “For a New Cinephilia” (Shambu 2019).

A confession: I half expected that the manifesto would be received as just another rant—during a social media age in which the genre finds daily and ubiquitous expression—and thus, dismissed without a thought. And so, it was a surprise to discover that it found some resonance in film and cinephile culture globally. It was discussed and argued over in classrooms in the USA, Europe, and Brazil; provided the focus for round-table discussions at film festivals; and seeded debate on social media and film websites. An anecdotal observation: over the last three years, as I have tracked the patterns in its reception, I have noticed, time and again, that the vast majority of those who have had the most emotionally charged responses to the manifesto have been (it must be said) ... male.

If auteurism and its individualist focus are key to the old cinephilia, some of the most incisive, rewarding, and inspiring texts I have encountered in film culture in recent years have been communally focused—and have been written by women and gender-nonconforming people. The old cinephilia is centripetal. It all too often drives discourse toward a center that is occupied by the auteur. In a contrasting and centrifugal spirit, I want to gather here ten texts that (for me) resonate powerfully with the new cinephilia and gesture toward its rich and fertile future. Because nearly all of them are available in open-access form online, they constitute a scattered, accidental archive that has provided a basis for exciting and productive engagement in online cinephilia communities in recent years:

Erika Balsom and Hila Peleg’s essay on the monumental retrospective they co-curated, “Feminist Worldmaking and the Moving

Image" (Balsom and Peleg 2022); Lawrence Carter-Long's manifesto on disability and film (Carter-Long 2019); Jemma Desai's book-length paper, "This Work Isn't for Us," an analysis of how UK arts policy has systemically marginalized people of color (Desai 2020); Racquel Gates and Michael B. Gillespie's manifesto "Reclaiming Black Film and Media Studies" and its exhortation to go beyond superficial understandings of the representation of Blackness (Gates and Gillespie 2019); Elena Gorfinkel's manifesto "Against Lists," which went viral on social media and launched a flood of conversations on list-making in cinephile culture (Gorfinkel 2019); Cáel Keegan on a new, "use-based" conception of a queer canon (Romano 2022); So Mayer's "speculative cinephilic" list of the ten greatest films of all time (Mayer 2022); Geneviève Sellier's classic, iconoclastic and ever-fresh 2008 text on the male-dominated French New Wave and its disturbing ambivalence about women, *Masculine Singular* (Sellier 2008); Abby Sun's systemic analysis of film festivals and their labor practices (Sun 2021); Kristen Warner's invaluable theorization of diversity reduced to its simplest and crudest forms, "plastic representation" (Warner 2019).

Five decades ago, Adrienne Rich urged feminists to reject traditional histories authored by and descended from patriarchal traditions (Rich 1972). She proposed, instead, the practice of "re-vision": "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction." If the "old text" could be, for us, the entire history of cinema, the above writings model re-visionary practices that show us pathways and possibilities to step into. The work of the new cinephilia awaits: there are films to re-view, histories to re-write, a whole world to re-make.

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Kinothek Asta Nielsen: Fugitive Archives

**Gaby Babić, Karola Gramann,
and Heide Schlüpmann**

*...to reintegrate the imaginary in the reality
of man. — Edgar Morin, The Cinema, or the
Imaginary Man*

Long before the Kinothek Asta Nielsen was finally founded in December 1999, Karola Gramann and others were discussing the need for a feminist film archive. Already by the end of the 1980s films by directors from the context of feminist, independent film work were no longer readily available—for example the early films of Elfi Mikesch. But there was obviously no public interest in such a facility. Around this time (1990s) this was also not a focus of any of the existing archives. This has clearly changed since then, as women have been able to exert more influence at the appropriate places in these archives. The archive and the policies of the Arsenal (now Arsenal—Institute for Film and Video Art) were an exception to this.

The Kinothek Asta Nielsen was founded in a culturally and politically favorable situation in Frankfurt am Main by a group of engaged protagonists from the film and cinema scene. The

188 archive resulted from this. Conceived as a living archive, the Kinothek took on the task of retrieving the often neglected works of women from the archives, putting them in the cinema next to contemporary films, and thus creating a new audience for them. In the end the audience is the “archive,” by rescuing the films from petrifying in the discarded past and keeping them alive. We are working on this archive and are motivated to do so not least by a change that has been driven by the FIAF archives since the 1990s.

It is well known that the big film archives changed over the course of the 1990s. As a rule they still have a cinema. The interest in bringing film together with an audience, however, is now met by the trend toward “access,” that is, toward facilitating access to the holdings through databases and digitization. But this “access,” which has been developing since the 1990s, has meant the gradual disappearance of the opportunity to lend film prints for exhibition. On the contrary, the prints are becoming archival assets, which are preserved, but which are increasingly rarely let out of the storage rooms to head to the screen.

Up until the 90s archives were somewhat hesitant to open up to researchers. Working with the often heavy reels of film and loading them onto the viewing table was a job that demanded care and attention. This respect for the materials is no longer conveyed to today’s access users. This is a loss that also affects the joy of discovery that resurged, especially in the 1980s, when the films from an entire epoch, that of cinema’s early years, were gradually brought out of the catacombs. Holdings that had largely not been recorded, nor identified. At the time it was not only films that were being discovered, but also a cinema, which had equally fallen into oblivion: a different kind of cinema could be seen in the films.

This other cinema became the object of historical research. Outside of scholarship, however, this can potentially be recognized in every screening of early films. The experience of Early Cinema made it emphatically clear that there was more than just the one

cinema, but many different ones over the decades. These have been preserved in the films. It is not only a matter of showing films, but also of allowing the cinema in them to become visible, open to our experience. When Hollywood films from the 1930s to 1950s began to be screened in independent movie theaters during the 70s, they were recognized as a “male cinema” and became the object of feminist criticism. This not only concerned the films, but also the shaping of mass cinema, which confronted the women in the audience with their absence in society, despite their seemingly growing participation there. At this time, this vision provoked an avant-garde to pull out of the cinema in protest and to set out into their political or academic spaces of filmmaking. Today the opposite is political: it is a matter of abiding with and in the cinema, a place that provides space for the perceptions and imaginations of both the films and the audience, thereby also bringing history into the present, as well as creating moments of commonality. Without such a present of history shared with others, the future, the direction of progress, remains empty.

Once again on the subject of the editors: We might say that in this sense of maintaining cinema, the cinemas in their diversity (and this concerns more than just history), we have become archivists. The circumstances of the disappearance of cinema—in its multiplicity and variety—from the cinema have made us so. Alongside the “movie theaters” there is now a variety of media in which films can be seen. But there is yet another horizon, which is not publically present. The cinemas of the present are related to the forms in which they existed in history. Opening our eyes in this direction is a task that falls to the cinemas. At the same time they provide an opportunity for those who make films today and in the future to understand the cinema anew as a site of their audience, to develop new forms to oppose the dematerialization of their perception, the loss of reality and dream.

As a rule the institutional archives are following the trend of isolating history from the present and separating it from everyday

190 life. With the “culture of remembrance” (“Erinnerungskultur”) society is provisionally positioned in its depraved state. This shortcoming, however, obviously provokes a counter-movement of amateur archivists to oppose the emptying out of the present and to add back the history that has been removed.

From Singular to Plural

Erika Balsom

The archive, the archive, the archive. Which archive? Sometimes it can feel as if the concept has been stripped of all specificity, mutating into an ideality from which all the material constraints that bear down on institutions of film culture have been magicked away. While specialist debates on audiovisual archiving have long moved past such an abstract idea of “the archive,” evocations of this notion markedly persist in the broader field of film and media studies. What do we lose when we refer to “the archive” in this way—in the singular and with a definite article, as more or less synonymous with the entirety of extant film production?

It is tempting to trace the prevalence of this usage to the influence of Michel Foucault, but if this is indeed the case it is founded on a misreading. Although he refers to “the archive” in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault is emphatically clear on the point: “By this term I do not mean the sum of all the texts that a culture has kept upon its person as documents attesting to its own past, or as evidence of a continuing identity” (Foucault 1972, 128–29). And yet this is one notable way in which the term is often used today. An historical project might be framed as “returning

192 to the archive"; one might speak of "exploring the archive of anti-colonial films," for instance.

Talk of "the archive" in one sense names something real: a changed relationship to the films of the past. It evokes a dematerialized plenitude and mass accessibility, brought into being by the digitization of photochemical artefacts and their subsequent circulation online, whether sanctioned or not. Facilitated by the internet, this new availability feeds back into scholarship and theatrical exhibition. How many excellent repertory series of recent years would never have taken place were it not for encounters that first occurred online? It is hard now to imagine that renowned works of film history should be especially difficult to see. Things have changed. With the flood of files, a changed notion of "the archive" comes into being—a *cinéma imaginaire*, to revise André Malraux's formulation.

The benefits of this situation are well established. So why quibble with the idea of the archive, singular definitive? For a start: because this *cinéma imaginaire* is indeed imaginary. Nestled within it is an implication that all of film history now stretches out before us as a flattened virtuality. Images cascade, all seemingly equally available to the curious gaze, all at the click of a mouse (provided, that is, one knows where to look). Present here is a dangerous element of fantasy, a fundamental misrecognition of the actual state of affairs. It suggests an abundance without gaps, unaffected by the ravages of time or the policies of rights holders, unmarked by hierarchies and exclusions that doggedly persist. "The archive" is an overwhelming presence; it has no beginning and no end, no relation to authority. When in fact, archives—tied as they are to commencement and commandment through the root *arkhē*—are the domain of absence as much as presence, places of purported origins, policed boundaries, and finite resources. With their claim on posterity, they are something other than collections, lists, repositories; something other than the experience—at once true and false, alluring and overwhelming—of digital abundance.

The abstraction at play in the notion of “the archive” risks eliding the complexities of real archives. To speak in the plural is to acknowledge the immense variations that exist across institutions and the very different lives lived by moving image artefacts in and outside them. These heterogeneities became forcefully apparent to me during the work that led to the project “No Master Territories: Feminist Worldmaking and the Moving Image,” an exhibition and film program of some one hundred works by more than eighty filmmakers and collectives that I co-curated with Hila Peleg for the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin in summer 2022. In researching nonfiction films and videos by women, primarily from the 1970s to 1990s and made all over the world, we engaged with national archives on six continents, private institutional archives, filmmakers’ personal archives, and collections of bootlegs. Most works we aspired to see were not available online, even on specialist private torrent sites. We encountered films easily available in wonderful copies, newly restored, and films that did not exist in any publicly exhibitable format, digital or photochemical. There were lost films, damaged films. There were films that had sat on shelves for decades, undigitized. There was a film we were denied permission to exhibit by the rights holder, a national television archive, because a man appearing within it had contacted them to assert his “right to be forgotten.” There were preview copies we received in hours; there were films we waited years to see; there were films we never managed to lay eyes on, even with the substantial resources, name recognition, and generous lead times of a well-funded German institution. We heard from archivists who had long wanted to restore particular works in their collections but who could not move forward until significant curatorial interest could be ascertained. In short, to comprehend the material conditions of archives is to understand something about the vast differences between them, as well as something about the diverse lives of these films, many of which have been underappreciated and underseen. Some of these works have been looked after very well due to the tireless and ongoing efforts of individuals

194 and organizations, but others have heartbreakingly not received the care they deserve. When we speak of “the archive,” these specificities fade from view. As an academic who had scarcely engaged in these kinds of negotiations prior to undertaking this project, I found the process at once illuminating, dispiriting, and inspiring.

The archive, the archive, the archive. There is no archive; there are only archives and collections and lists and repositories. Policing terminology can be pedantic and boring. Yet at the same time, the words we use matter, for they shape how we comprehend the accumulated artefacts that comprise film heritage. How might scholarship be transformed through a better acquaintance with the functioning of archives in the plural? Too often these are separate worlds. Today, not despite but because of the digital plenitude of “the archive,” it feels urgent to fortify the existing points of contact between archivists and scholars, and to create new ones. Through building these alliances, another passage from singular to plural can be helped along its way: the urgent movement from a limited canon of “masterworks” to a more expansive and inclusive conceptualization of the many histories of cinema.

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[Fig. 1] Flyer for "Rising Stars, Falling Stars" at Arsenal—Institute for Film and Video Art, Berlin, May 24, 2008 (Source: Vaginal Davis Collection, Marc Siegel, Berlin)

My Little Lady Digs: Vaginal Davis on “Rising Stars, Falling Stars”

Marc Siegel and Vaginal Davis

Shortly after moving to Berlin from Hollywood in 2006, Vaginal Davis started sniffing through the vaults of the Arsenal—Institute for Film and Video Art. She sensed that the Berlin archive was a good place to start looking for early feminist and queer traces. The result was Rising Stars, Falling Stars—a monthly series of experimental rarities, long-forgotten commercial films, and even familiar classics of early cinema, viewed from her tilted perspective. Each screening was accompanied by live musicians and introduced by Ms. Davis. (Davis 2012)

On Sunday November 13, 2022, Marc Siegel sat down with artist Vaginal Davis to discuss “Rising Stars, Falling Stars,” the legendary film series she curated for the Arsenal—Institute for Film and Video Art in Berlin (fig. 1–4). The discussion of Ms. Davis’s curatorial practice necessarily digresses into a consideration of the biographical factors that shaped the accidental development of her archival strategies.

198 Marc Siegel: You started “Rising Stars, Falling Stars” at the Arsenal in 2007. Over the next decade or so, it went through a number of different stages, each time with a new focus.

Vaginal Davis: The concentration when it started was for the most part only silent films from the archive and within that highlighting and spotlighting the sort of queer and feminist tissue elements to early cinema.

MS: That lasted from 2007 to 2012, right?

VD: Yes, yes. In 2012 during “Camp/Anti-Camp: A Queer Guide to Everyday Life” we did a shift to “Rising Stars, Falling Stars: We Must Have Music!”¹ And that was from 2012 to 2015, I think. Then we did another shift to focus on architecture, costume, and make-up, “*Briefe aus der Garderobe*.” I think we did that for several months and then we did another shift, and that was “Rising Stars, Falling Stars: Sweet 16 mm, Never Been Kissed.”

MS: And after that came the series “Contemporary Vinegar Syndrome,” right?

VD: Yes, we did a complete breakdown and dropped the title. Stefanie [Schulte Strathaus] suggested that we just stop using “Rising Stars, Falling Stars.” At that point we had been doing it for almost a decade, or over a decade. Even though I loved the title, which is based on a book about silent movies, I thought it was a really good idea to just completely have a whole new point of view altogether. That’s where “Contemporary Vinegar Syndrome” came in, which we kind of saw as bringing this new adage of, you know, Andy Warhol: “Anyone can be famous for 15 minutes”—but taking that one step further and creating a new movement, a movement du jour, every 15 minutes. This is part of the movement du jour:

1 “Camp/Anti-Camp: A Queer Guide to Everyday Life” was a festival curated by Susanne Sachsse and Marc Siegel that took place at HAU and Arsenal in Berlin in April 2012.



[Fig. 2] Recto side of flyer for the screening series, "Rising Stars, Falling Stars: Briefe aus der Garderobe," at Arsenal—Institute for Film and Video Art, Berlin (Source: Vaginal Davis Collection, Marc Siegel, Berlin)

“Contemporary Vinegar Syndrome,” where we’re focusing on the decrepit patina, cinema as decrepit patina. Starting with the degradation of the film, when it starts to get infected with vinegar syndrome and creating this new movement. From pretending and putting it out there, it sort of manifests itself. You imagine it and then it becomes it.

MS: You were imagining a political movement around the decrepit patina of archive films?

VD: Exactly.

MS: Thinking of new political–

VD: And social, artistic, and cultural ways where this can be expanded. It can be observed. It can be theorized. It can be completely inculcated into a sort of way of living. It’s kind of a lofty goal in itself. But it’s also done with humor. Just being playful and whimsical. It’s whimsy. It’s bringing all those things into play.

MS: Vinegar syndrome is of course a real archival problem that affects cellulose acetate film. Did this issue determine your selection of films? Was there a shift in your curatorial process from the various manifestations of “Rising Stars, Falling Stars” to “Contemporary Vinegar Syndrome”?

VD: Oh yeah, because when we went in to look at the archive, we went into it with a more... Because you know, Daniel [Hendrickson], the Muslim, and I were working together on it, and you know how critical she is. [laughs] Of course the archive was moved from Arsenal on Potsdamer Platz to silent green in Wedding, so you couldn’t escape this feeling of deterioration, being in a former crematorium. You know, silent green, soylent green. All that affected our way of looking into the archive. I think we would sift through a lot more films. Because before, I would always have a certain one already in my head.

MS: How did you choose the films?

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VD: Well, before Daniel became more involved, I was spending a lot of time just going through the database in the Arsenal offices on Potsdamer Platz. A lot of the movies I was already familiar with. The staff there was just really, really helpful with bringing things to me and they would set up—because I'm so technically not able to... When Daniel became more involved, he would actually put the things on the... what's that machine called?

MS: A flatbed, a Steenbeck.

VD: Steenbeck. Yeah, he was good at that, doing the technical stuff. 'Cause you know, I was really horrible about that stuff. "*Tunte und Technik*." I think that with "Rising Stars" I already had an idea of what I wanted to show. But then with "Contemporary Vinegar Syndrome" it was delving even more into things and finding them. 'Cause, you know, Muslim has very esoteric tastes. When we were in silent green, we watched a lot more. It's also because it's further away from us. Just going to Potsdamer Platz was relatively easy 'cause it's just three subway stops away or a short bike ride. But going all the way to silent green was more of an adventure. Working with the crew there—Juan [González] and Marcus [Ruff]—they were really great. I think that we relied on their suggestions for things too. You know, they're experts in their own right.

MS: It's important to be open to what archivists recommend.

VD: Exactly. Because they're working in the archive on a daily basis.

MS: When viewing for the series, would you watch the entire film?

VD: Oh yeah, pretty much so.

MS: Did you ever screen something that you didn't watch beforehand?



[Fig. 3] Recto side of flyer for screening of *Neurasia* (Werner Schroeter, 1968) as part of “Contemporary Vinegar Syndrome” on August 23, 2020 at HKW—Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin (Source: Vaginal Davis Collection, Marc Siegel, Berlin)

VD: No, no. I don’t think I did. I think that probably goes back to the days when I used to screen films for Shari [Frilot] for the New Frontiers section of Sundance film festival. I guess this is my naiveté—I didn’t know that most people who were looking at the films for the film festivals didn’t watch the entire film. They just watch a little bit and then go on to another one. But I think I was the only one that watched all the short films and all the feature films from beginning to end. I was the only one. [laughs] Which shows you the naiveté that I had.

MS: Let’s talk about the origins of “Rising Stars,” how you came to curate this series at the Arsenal in the first place. You started in 2007 when Stefanie asked you—

VD: ...to come up with a concept. Actually, it was at your and Susi’s [Susanne Sachsse’s] dinner party. I think the Empress, Stefanie, was somewhat aware of what I had done with Sundance.

MS: Did you have archival experience, any history of curating and programming films or doing archival research before “Rising Stars”?

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VD: Well, at UCLA at the Melnitz, I spent so much time there.

MS: The UCLA Film and Television Archive screenings?

VD: They used to have every—was it every Saturday or was it once a month? I can’t remember, it was so long ago. But at the Melnitz, it would be on Saturday from 12 noon to 12 midnight, showing films from the archive. That was incredible. And I was quite young, ‘cause it was during the Upward Bound program. I think I was in 5th grade. And this was like an offshoot of the MGM program, the Mentally Gifted Minors program, where I was taking actual coursework at both USC and UCLA.²

MS: Incredible. Upward Bound for smart public school students—

VD: Well, I don’t know about smart. It was just a special program through the Los Angeles Unified School District, that was a sort of tie-in-program, I think, to the MGM program. Part of Upward Bound was spending a lot of time at libraries and archives. I went to a high school near the old Mary Pickford estate that’s in Fremont Place, which was a gated community in a section of Hancock Park between Olympic and Wilshire. Mary Pickford and her mother lived there, I think, in the teens. I have a history with this actual house, because in the ‘70s Muhammad Ali lived there.

MS: Mary Pickford and then Muhammad Ali—wow!

VD: Yes. And he invited all the top graduates of my high school to a big reception at that house.

2 The MGM program, which began under this name in 1961, was specific to California schools, whereas Upward Bound was a federal program designed to support students from low-income families or those whose families didn’t have a college-going tradition.

204 MS: So you were at a reception with Muhammad Ali!

VD: He had like a chamber ensemble play for the reception and this wonderful food spread. The house is gorgeous, gorgeous. I think he was the first Black person to live in Fremont Place, because Fremont Place is southward from Hancock Park. What's his name—uh—Nat King Cole was the first Black to get into Hancock Park, and they gave them hell trying to move there, Nat King Cole and his family. But I think Mohammad Ali was the only one—because Fremont Place is a gated, private street. You can't imagine what a thrill it was to be able to see this house and go into Fremont Place, which I could never just walk into. To go to this reception for the top graduates of my high school. And you know, my high school, Los Angeles High School, also had a working relationship with 20th Century Fox. Because 20th Century Fox filmed *Room 222*—remember *Room 222*?

MS: The TV show?

VD: It started in 1969. It was quite ahead of its time, along with Diahann Carroll's sitcom *Julia* where she's not playing a maid. She's a nurse. This show was set in a contemporary urban high school. The opening credits were filmed in the gorgeous old Los Angeles High School building that got destroyed in '71 with the earthquake. I was in high school from '76 until '79. But because of this relationship between Los Angeles High School and 20th Century Fox and because I was the editor of my school newspaper, I was able to go to the screenings of films on the Fox lot and also eat at the commissaries. The thrill of that, of being able to go and—I didn't have a car or anything—and getting off the bus, walking through the gates of 20th Century Fox to get to the screening room: that was a thrill for me! And being able to go to these screenings like a film reviewer of, like, the LA Times or any other mainstream magazine. You know what a big deal that is? I got to see the screening of *Alien* when it came out; with Sigourney Weaver

and Veronica Cartwright—I love Veronica Cartwright! She is so good. But all these things are kind of interconnected—in terms of archives.

MS: Clearly, your early exposure to libraries, archives, film screenings, Hollywood stars, and celebrities shaped your future archival practice. What I always loved about attending “Rising Stars, Falling Stars” was that it was more than just going to see a film from the Arsenal archive that was selected by Vaginal Davis. There was always an element of excitement and sexy uncertainty in the air, not really about the screening of a little-known film, but about how Miss Davis would articulate its relevance to her and us. There was music playing in the cinema as we entered. Stefanie would introduce you and then you made your grand entrance, singing, often from the back of the cinema. You would then proceed to the “reading of the text,” your brilliant and unexpected film introduction—

VD: I tried to present the films in different ways.

MS: And there was always the legendary “kissen, trinken und sexen und flirten” in the red Foyer afterwards.

VD: [laughs] Because there’s not a lot of flirting in Berlin and I wanted to bring that kind of party hostess thing. One thing I’m known for is bringing people and different kinds of groups together.

MS: In your introductions, you often hilariously and absurdly riff on the radical possibilities of reflecting on specific Hollywood stars from queer, feminist and/or Black perspectives. Just to pick one example, here’s an excerpt from your introduction to *Die freudlose Gasse* (The Joyless Street, G.W. Pabst, 1925), which you screened on March 16, 2008:

The first film I ever saw with the great Asta was G.W. Pabst’s *The Joyless Street* (*Die freudlose Gasse*, 1925) in Los Angeles at the UCLA Film Archive. From that moment on i became

an ardent Asta submissive and vassal to her almighty will and power. I'm not in fact I no longer want to be Vaginal Davis, continental film hostessa, but I want to transform myself into the faithful Josephine, the famed confidante, personal assistant, faithful servant and valiant protector of *Die Asta* at the old Nero Film Studios. Yes, this is a performative evening, so let's stretch into the Anarchy of the Imagination, and create a lesbian separatist/feminist utopia of genius feminine psychology. That is how I like to see the important oeuvre of *Die Asta* in all its hallowed glory. Just think about the possibilities. (Davis 2012)

- VD: Well, that's stretching the imagination, talking about her maid Josephine who's also the maid to Louise Brooks when she was filming *Pandora's Box*. It's just taking something that someone may neglect—like who would write about someone's maid—stretching that out and making that more the centerpiece than even the star; this interconnection between the star and her maid and how her maid was really transformative in her career, as a confidante, as someone that she ran things by. That screening was presented during a month of Asta Nielsen screenings organized by Karola Gramann and Heide Schlüpmann of the Kinotek Asta Nielsen.
- MS: It's so great how much Karola and Heide, these two experts on Asta Nielsen, value your whimsical approach to opening up new ways of articulating the relevance of Asta Nielsen.
- VD: Well, that's what I hope. I don't know if with every presentation things always work; but that's the goal that you're working towards. There is a method behind it all. [laughs] It may not always seem apparent. This is like the story of my life, where people always later, in hindsight, realize, "Oh, she wasn't just a high holy developmentally disabled temple concubine. There was actually a method to her insane madness."

For the very last time!

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[Fig. 4] Verso side of flyer for "Rising Stars, Falling Stars—Sweet 16mm: Never Been Kissed," on January 12, 2018, at silent green, Berlin (Source: Vaginal Davis Collection, Marc Siegel, Berlin)

I get that so much. Because it's so easy to just dismiss a person like me, you know, it's very, very easy.

MS: It seems that part of your archival or curatorial strategy is to turn those figures that interest you—no matter how well or little known they may be to the rest of us—into significant reference points for queer, feminist, and Black culture today. In an introduction to an evening focusing on the silent film comedienne Mabel Normand, for instance, you emphasize her love of “the charms of *Schwartze* (Black men).”

VD: Yeah, if you can call it a strategy. I don't think I was that determinant. I think it was just organic to the way I view and see things. Well, I try to bring in miscegenation to show that there was always racial mixing. It's been pushed aside. With Hollywood stars or people who come from wealth and privilege, there's always been slumming, going to Harlem, going to buffet flats. Because let's face it, the white culture was so boring and they wanted to do something that was more exciting. Where do you go that's more exciting? You go uptown, to Harlem, where Black culture, music, arts, and sexual things are happening—where the excitement is, where the fun is. Yeah, it's scandalous, you know. But people who are somewhat decadent, as Hollywood types are, they want to be part of where the action is. I like to put that into the mix too. Of course, I do it in a sort of humorous way. But I like to bring it out because it's always been there. It's always been there. That also goes back to my mixed-race background, with my family being Creole from Louisiana. So yeah, I throw in these things that people with *bildungsbürgerliche* background and class sensibilities would probably never give credo to within a film context, a film archival context—let alone mention it.

MS: So you show films from the archive that are significant because they allow you to thematize social or political issues that you want to deal with today or that you want people to

be thinking about. You may not have thought of this as an archival praxis. But it seems to me that your work has always been about turning to archives of Black, feminist, queer, and film culture for what they can offer you for reinventing yourself and the world around you. You thereby make clear what's relevant or can be relevant about that stuff for many of us today.

VD: Exactly. And that has always ignited my *tuches*. These concerns didn't begin with this series. I've worked in this way since I was in Junior High School. I've always looked at things in this bratty critical sort of way. Some teachers loved it. Some saw it as an assault, as in "What does this uppity Negro child think she is? She's just an uppity Negress. Who does she think she is?" This is something I've gotten all my life. Of course, there's this anger that flows through me. But I've channeled this anger into my little lady digs. And I think that's been my survival mechanism. I actually never thought I would get lauded for it. That's the thing. If you don't die, if you manage to hang on, people start to recognize you. Basically, I've been doing the same things since I was a child—ad nauseam actually. I mean, I haven't recreated the wheel. I didn't think of it as an art praxis.

Many thanks to Jakob Villhauer for assisting with the transcription of the interview.

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We Have Always Been Fabulous: *Fragments of an Unfinished Manifesto*

Mohammad Shawky Hassan

"Because we can't know in advance, but only retrospectively if even then, what is queer and what is not, we gather and combine eclectically, dragging a bunch of cultural debris around us and stacking it in idiosyncratic piles." — Elizabeth Freeman

#1. A Queer Document is a Palimpsest in the Making

To embark on an Egyptian queer archival project could be a dangerous undertaking. It is not only so because the notion of "queerness" is constantly evolving, expanding, and rejecting a definitive strictly delineated identity, but also because any attempt to trace the cultural and historical contours of "Egyptian-ness" could easily fall into traps of reduction, exclusion, or purism. How can we then create archives that could potentially carry both labels without essentializing either of the two identities? How could such archives encourage multiplicity, reject coherence, and embrace archival methods where the terms

212 themselves are constantly questioned, including the notion of the archive itself?

The possibility of a queer archive, whether in Egypt or elsewhere, is further complicated by the systematic erasure of traces of queer existences, not only by authorities and self-appointed guardians of morality (المواطنین الشرفاء), but also by queer subjects themselves, since material evidence of queerness has historically been used to “penalize and discipline queer desires, connections, and acts” (Muñoz 2009, 65). Therefore, any queer archival attempt that relies exclusively on physical traces or evidentiary regimes would be ignoring by default the vast spectrum of clandestine encounters, ephemeral traces, undocumented emotions, fleeting gestures, and coded languages that characterize queer existences and that a truly queer document needs to reflect.

With that being said, and if we submit to the assumption that the trace is the “final epistemological presupposition” (Ricoeur 1988, 116) of any archive, it is hard to imagine that such a literal, narrow understanding of the trace as the physical evidence of queer existence would make a document inevitably queer. Instead, it is the affective invisible traces retrospectively imprinted on a document by the queer subject that make it truly a queer intricately crafted imaginary palimpsest, which includes—in addition to the original document—the emotions it evoked, the associations it elicited, the various readings it enabled and the connections it made possible with other documents that could then, with or without prior agreement, come together to generate a truly queer archive.

#2. It Is Time for the Queer Archive to Come Out of the Celluloid Closet¹

Given the constraints of tracing the complexities of queer lives within the parameters of the “physical trace,” many Egyptian queer archival attempts, whether or not they have been labeled as such, resorted to mapping representations of homosexuality and/or transgender identities in mainstream cultural productions as accounts of a queer existence that has been historically contested and often denied. Many of these studies and curated film programs focus particularly on queer representations in Egyptian cinema, given the elevated position it continues to occupy within the fabric of the allegedly collective memory of the nation.

Among the images that immediately come to mind and that have been perpetually cited by scholars of LGBTQI+ representation in Egyptian cinema are Ismail Yassin’s or Abdel Moneim Ibrahim’s crossdressing scenes in *Al Anesa Hanafi* (1954) or *Sukkar Hanem* (1960) respectively, or scenes that include gay or transgender characters or allude to homosexual desires in films such as *Hammam El Malatily* (1973), *The Yacoubian Building* (2006), or more recently *Family Secrets* (2014).

The inclusion of queer characters in many of these films, with a few exceptions most notably in the films of Yousry Nasrallah, is usually complimented with a comic twist, a moral judgement, a dramatic ending, or at the very best a call for compassion with the queer character, whose circumstances have led them to this inevitably miserable fate: a position that comforts the homophobic spectator and that makes these—and only these—representations palatable for the heteronormative target audience. Why then keep reproducing the same studies about the

1 In reference to Vito Russo’s *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* (1981).

214 same films over and over, granting these representations a power they do not deserve?

To be perfectly clear, I do not wish to belittle the value of representation in informing attitudes towards queerness, or to play down the ways it shapes not just how others see us but also how we see ourselves as queer subjects. But to grant these problematic film representations the status of “queer documents” or to dignify them with further studies is to simply remain content with the mere acknowledgment of our existence, regardless of how disturbing this acknowledgment might be, and to give up our agency as a community to speak for ourselves or represent our own history and presence.

#3. Queer Documents Have Always Been There, We Just Didn't Know They Were Queer

Despite the abundance of the aforementioned representation studies, there remains little investigation of forms, aesthetics, and languages that have gradually come to acquire a unique value among queer counterpublics,² not because of how they represent a queer identity as such, but rather because of the complex ways these counterpublics have come to identify with them, regardless of whether or not they were originally intended for a queer audience, or had anything to do with queer representation in the first place.

Rather than focusing on how—or if at all—we have been represented, why not shift the attention to a prospective canon of images, sounds, and texts that have shaped common frameworks of memory, as well as linguistic, aesthetic, and performative registers for Egyptian queer communities? Why not revisit snippets of pop culture products that have accidentally created an eclectic idiosyncratic archive-in-the-making of costumes we

2 I first encountered the term “counterpublics” in Warner (2002).

adored, gestures we imitated, songs we learned by heart, dance numbers we memorized, divas we identified with, jokes and phrases we appropriated and integrated into daily conversations, drag performances, and eventually social media memes?³

I am talking here about cinema, television, and music productions that have eventually acquired their queer status not because they were inherently queer per se, but rather because of how they have been received and reterritorialized (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 320) over the years by queer Arab consumers, imprinted on their memories and embodied in their movements (see Taylor 2003). This shifts the focus of the archival project from the products themselves to the spectators and listeners, who found “something” queer in these images and sounds, passionately recycled them and wove the seemingly disconnected pieces to construct their own vocabularies, narratives, performative acts, and queer worlds out of them.

The proposed archive, therefore, is not about the images or the sounds themselves, but rather about the fabulous unorthodox afterlives we, as queer Egyptian consumers, carved for them, and would accordingly acquire its “Egyptian” status not out of a nationalist impulse, but rather based on what has been made available to an Egyptian queer pop culture consumer at different points in time regardless of the origin of the product, singer, or actor.

Think of Sabah’s dresses we were fascinated by, Sherihan’s Fawazeer choreographies we repeatedly performed alone in our rooms, Soheir EL Bably’s jokes in Rayya we Skeena we recited in our conversations, Nabila Ebaid’s comebacks from *Al Raqesa Wal Seyasy* we shamelessly reenacted and Samira Said’s songs we imagined singing to our own lovers: images and sounds that we might not have known at the time how or why they were queer,

3 For meme examples, see the Instagram account: Takweer تكوير / Exploring queer narratives in Arab history and popular culture @takweer_.



[Fig. 1] Donia Massoud playing the role of Shahrazad in Mohammad Shawky Hassan's *Bashtalak Sa'at* (2022), © Aflam Wardeshan/Amerikafilm.

but whose circulation among queer counterpublics—with a queer reading as the cherry on top—gave them a prolonged afterlife (see Siegel 2017).

#4. A Queer Archive Knows How to Disidentify

But how can one think through tropes within cultural production that retain a significant value to queer counterpublics when they in themselves continuously reinforce heteronormative, and in some cases even homophobic, worldviews? How could we identify with Nabila Ebaid's character in *Al Raqesa Wal Seyasy* despite the film's problematic depiction of homosexuals? How could we allow ourselves to breathe afterlives into music performed by singers we knew were homophobic, or films that we, like Vito Russo, "knew better than anybody how badly [they] treated queers, but still loved them"?

To acknowledge these pop culture products as raw material for a queer archive despite all of this is definitely not a call to uncritically ignore their problematic aspects, or to "willfully evacuate [their] politically dubious and shameful components," but

rather to learn to disidentify with them as José Esteban Muñoz proposes:

Disidentification is meant to be descriptive of the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship. (Muñoz 1999, 4)

In our case, the queer spectator/listener resists unproductive “good dog/bad dog criticism” (Muñoz 1999, 9) impulses and cleverly recycles these works, reinventing them from a queer positionality to carve out a world that might have been composed out of selected images, sounds, and words, and yet does not fully resemble any of the works they originally belonged to. Just like the original manuscript of a palimpsest is scraped or washed off—albeit not completely effaced—to allow for the writing of new texts on top, the queer document is here created by dismantling, piecing together, and writing over that which already exists.

#5. Straight Tools Will Never Build a Queer Archive

Perhaps if we embrace these works that continue to inform, rather than represent, our culturally specific queer identities, and allow ourselves to own what is rightfully ours, we could be getting closer to the conception of a truly queer—as opposed to an LGBT—archive, one that does not seek to define a sexual identity, but rather unsettle it, one that—much like a queer identity—is constantly evolving, whose limitations are unclear and whose possibilities are endless.

The proposed archive would, therefore, be built upon the “remains, the things that are left, hanging in the air like a rumor” (Muñoz 2009, 62). It would be an embodied archive of “gestures, movement, emotions, talk, and repertoires that reconfigure the what and the where of the archive” (Morris and Rawson 2013, 78),

218 one that employs forms and techniques that have been left out of archival practices, much like queerness has been historically left out of sexual categories.

To think that such an archive could simply be conceived through normative archival structures, processes, and methodologies of collection and categorization would defeat the entire purpose of the project, since there is nothing about any of these pop culture products that is de facto queer per se. Perhaps if we manage to fully project our queer selves onto the documents as well as the archival process itself, we could be on the verge of a fabulous, palimpsestic, constantly evolving archive that connects the lives of thousands of queers who might never have met before, but who remain till this day connected through invisible networks of common references, shared emotions, and silent gasps.

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On Decay: Reflections on Working with Neglected Films

**Lisabona Rahman and
Julita Pratiwi (Kelas Liarsip)**

We are Kelas Liarsip, a virtual study group founded in 2021 by six women and non-binary individuals engaging with moving image heritage and tracing women's work in the Indonesian Nusantara archipelago. We are citizens of the world who inherited decayed films due to neglect because of political conflict or lack of political will. We live in a period of post-military regime, where the space for freedom of expression and for uncovering history is always precarious.

For us, the rare occasion of watching old Indonesian films not only consists of touching moments and magical energy but is also often painful. The old films that we can watch are mostly incomplete due to missing frames and sound; full of scratches, mold, or bacterial infections. Our knowledge of the past is mediated by decay and loss, exhibited by film artifacts that we still can find. Our knowledge is also shaped by an awareness that a big part of our film history artifacts are absent.

We came to engage with archiving not because being an archivist was a dream for us. Quite the contrary, the archivist is a position

222 that is highly controlled by the state, one that has been ruled by the military for 32 years and still suffers from its consequences. It's hardly what one would call a cool career. The state limits memorializing practices, investing resources only to maintain the versions from its own institutions, and neglecting or sometimes persecuting citizens who initiate alternative processes. Only state archives have regular funds and can regularly do training to care for obsolete materials, making the knowledge of archiving very exclusive. Kelas Liarsip consists of Lisabona Rahman and Siti Anisah, who began engaging with the archives as film programmers, Imelda Mandala as queer festival organizer, Efi Sri Handayani and Julita Pratiwi as film school graduates. We were brought together by burning questions: who were the women working in film before us and where are their works?

In late 2020, when film historian Umi Lestari tried to watch a film reel from *Dr. Samsi* (1952) by pioneering female director Ratna Asmara (1913–1968) at the private film archive Sinematek Indonesia in Jakarta, she encountered a dead end. The reel was in an advanced stage of decay. The viewing table was not working properly and gave out the smell of burning. She stopped the viewing halfway into the first reel out of fear of damaging the film (Lestari 2022).

Decay on film reels or dysfunctional playback devices are signs of the malfunctioning management of Sinematek Indonesia, but the problem is more systematic and widespread. Umi's experience is normally to be expected when working with archival film materials in Indonesia, as neglect happens either on purpose (in form of censorship or selective memorialization), or not on purpose (in form of ignorance). Both will end up with the same outcome: erosion of memory.

No one of us had heard about Ratna Asmara as a director, some knew her for her acting. We came to realize that the historiography of films from our region is predominantly male-centered, militaristic, commercial, nationalistic, or colonialist.

That is why Ratna Asmara could never have been part of our local film canon. This will challenge our efforts to interrogate and unpack existing historiography by means of interdisciplinary knowledge in film studies, history, film preservation, feminism, and queer theories. It is also possible that some of her films haven't survived. In the case of absence of films or other historical evidence, we were encouraged by "imaginative speculation" as practiced by feminist film historians such as Neepa Majumdar and Eliza Anna Delveroudi, presented in *Doing Women's Film History*, as a way to transcend limited available archival materials (Majumdar 2015; Delveroudi 2015).

Umi's experience was a very concrete challenge for us. If nobody was able to access Ratna's films, her works would continue to decay until nothing would be left to be read. Ratna was being erased from history.

We decided together to start a political resistance to this ongoing neglect and marginalization by means of caring for Ratna's films. We chose to pool our knowledge on historical research, film analysis, and preservation techniques in order to inspect and digitize *Dr. Samsi*. We believe that an integration between professional archivists, historians, and film scholars should be the very basis of this group. We have members who are trained in film handling technique, and others as film historians. We feel that this combination is enriching for our working group as each member complements the other's perspective.

We have organized regular study sessions since March 2021 through virtual classrooms. Lisabona, who took up a master's degree in film preservation and presentation, put together learning materials about professional archive practices, especially informed by experiences of archives working in situations with minimum resources and political support such as Ray Edmondson's text on archives outside of the Europe and the North American region, as well as experiences shared by curator Didi Cheeka and filmmaker Tamer El-Said, who have been working

224 in challenging political contexts in Nigeria and Egypt. For us in Kelas Liarsip, learning about professional practices was not a way to advance our career or move up the social ladder, but it is a way to resist state censorship.

The second phase of work consists of preparing film materials for digitization, which started from February 2022 in Jakarta. The digitization process was done with a minimum budget, without digital cleaning, and it was completed in April 2022. We were finally able to watch Ratna Asmara's *Dr. Samsi* seventy years after its making, as an HD digital file, in a classroom of a cinematographers' association in the southern suburb of Jakarta.

The condition of old films from Indonesia is generally bad, but films made by women, non-military, migrants, or leftist artists as well as non-commercial films are even more neglected and unknown. Jakarta, the city where we work, hosts a lot of old film materials. It's a hot and humid place located close to the equator. Our biggest challenge is to deal with film reels infected with vinegar syndrome under the condition of non-existing resources (tools, knowledge, money) or what scholar Janet Ceja Alcalá (2013) calls "orphans of infrastructure" in her article about struggling archives in Latin America. The reels we inspect are often deformed because of shrinkage and the emulsion part is suffering from years of deterioration. In functioning film archives, decay due to vinegar syndrome would be the absolute exception, like an accident, but in Jakarta it is—alas—the norm.

There are only two accessible film scanners located in the city and only one of them works in sprocketless mode. Around four studios offer CGI services for commercial film production, including digital image and sound cleaning. To start a film restoration project in Jakarta means a considerable mobilization of political, financial, and technical resources. Neglected non-canonical films are neither privileged enough to attract the attention of public funding institutions, nor to earn a shift in the already overworked studios.

Therefore, at Kelas Liarsip we try to develop methods and networks to allow us to digitize decayed reels with available resources and learn to analyze and present decayed films. We retain signs of decay because the resources we need to erase the traces of decay are simply too immense and impossible to afford. This is not a position of resignation or exploitation of poverty or poor resources, but an invitation to explore possibilities of work and reading. Based on our experience the decay inside of the film couldn't be seen as a natural cause of decomposition. It is more than that. We see decay as a way for film reels to speak up or expose their condition.

Film reels are not just a passive object for us, but rather subjects that declare a status coming from interaction with humans and their institutions. Kelas Liarsip is still at the beginning of exploring a series of questions regarding the position of subjectivity or the agency of decayed films, especially when we talk about accidental archivism. Can we eventually consider "accidental archivist" as more than the role performed by humans in archiving practices, but also performed by the medium or materials such as celluloid film, which is a chemical synthesis? This question needs further elaboration, which is beyond the scope of this article.

We choose to work with 'decay' as the starting keyword because it is an acknowledgement of the process and result of destruction by natural causes and neglect. We refrain from using the words 'damage' and 'deterioration' as the terms seem more general, and they do not specifically refer to the act of neglect. We see the crystal-like acid dust, scratches, the losses of image and sound as ways to present the neglect, and we find it urgent to convey these facts to our contemporary public, as well as to emerging generations. We are aware of the potentials of using digital cleaning as a way to speculate about the films' better life or alternative reality, but we choose not to prioritize investing our time on this and instead on drawing attention to the scars of decay as a state that is a reality for films that are abandoned by the society that once produced them but no longer wishes to

226 acknowledge nor care for them. We want to present and read the films as they are, with minimum digital cleaning and intervention on image and sound, to declare their decayed presence to our sense of sight and hearing.

Our research journey keeps us questioning the condition and dominant practice of film archiving and research in our region. For instance, the precarious condition of film vaults, the restoration practice that relies on total digital cleaning and film analysis that eliminates the reading of decay on film reels. Although there is an option to eliminate the decay during the reading process, we felt there is something odd and unethical about it. The code of decay is a term that could be used to map its character in relation to the film material. This code could be used as a consideration during the process of analysis. Film texts under the deterioration material would open a different interpretation and present a different challenge due to its reduced condition.

The research, which preserves the knowledge about decay, is the way to care, to identify, to remember—and to resist marginalization in our historiography. We decided to use this as our embarking point to make changes, being aware of the fact that this is only the start of a very long journey.

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INTERLUDE

The Arsenal in Berlin*

Ulrich Gregor

At the beginning of January in 1970 the Friends of the German Cinematheque (*Freunde der Deutschen Kinemathek*) opened up the Arsenal Cinema in Welser Strasse in West Berlin—in place of the Bayreuther Lichtspiele, which had specialized in Adele Sandrock films but that was now in dire straits. The Friends of the German Cinematheque, founded in 1963 as a supplement to the German Cinematheque, had two main motivations to establish their own cinema: the increasing frequency of their events, and on the other hand the increasing difficulties in continuing this work where it had so far taken place—in the studio at the Academy of the Arts (*Akademie der Künste*) and at the Bellevue cinema. While the Studio of the Academy of the Arts in particular did provide near ideal conditions, the rent was too high, and often enough the studio was not available when filmmakers traveling through town suddenly appeared with film rolls under their arms or when screenings were tied to a specific date. So already in 1969 it seemed auspicious (and, with regard to the film holdings available

* The original German version first appeared as "Das Berliner Arsenal" in *Theorie des Kinos*, edited by Karsten Witte and published by Suhrkamp in 1972.

232 at the various Berlin archives, possible) to open a continuously running cinema under the direction of the Friends of the German Cinematheque. "Arsenal" was chosen due to the variety of possible interpretations of the name, but not least in reference to the Soviet silent film by the same name directed by Alexander Dovzhenko, which the Arsenal screened at its opening and has regularly repeated at the beginning of January).

The founding of the Arsenal initially entailed significant difficulties, because a subsidy from the Berlin Class Lottery (*Berliner Klassenlotterie*) to purchase the cinema, which had practically already been confirmed, was denied at the last moment. So the necessary amount had to be procured by our own efforts and sometimes in imaginative ways. But we managed, and we also managed to keep the Arsenal financially above water and to protect it from the collapse that some were already suspecting. The fact is that this was possible is mainly due to two circumstances: first, the many years of work by the Friends of the German Cinematheque had already cultivated an audience that now provided a core audience for the new cinema; and second, practically all the staff at the Arsenal went without a salary. Only in this way was it possible to get a cinema—with a demanding and unique programming structure that was devised as an alternative to what was already on offer by the commercial movie theaters—over the critical period of the first year (Kersten 1971).

From the beginning the program at the Arsenal was conceived as a program of great breadth and variety. Each day the Arsenal screened and screens at least three different films (on weekends it comes to five, including a screening for children and a late-night screening at half past midnight). This conception of the program resulted from the goal set by the Friends of the German Cinematheque at its beginning. They were concerned with achieving a specific kind of educational and informational work, by presenting films not as isolated objects, but as part of a context that went well beyond the individual film—whether in connection with a retrospective, a thematically based program,

a national cross-section program, or a seminar. According to this conception, films should not be presented as singular “artworks,” but as products of a medium that can be explained through certain factors—through social, political, economic factors, through factors within the artistic tradition or in rejection of artistic tradition. The Arsenal therefore always attempted to place a film in relation to at least one other film or a whole group of films. The ideal case was to develop larger retrospectives and program blocks, such as recently the retrospectives of documentary films and Soviet silent films; such as the program of Cuban and Latin American films, Polish, Soviet, Hungarian, English, Italian, Algerian, and new German films that could be seen in recent months; such as the grouping of films aimed at a political demographic or those under the title *Der phantastische Film* (eng. *The fantastic Film*) and *Innenwelt als Außenwelt* (eng. *Inner World as Outer World*). The latter was devoted to certain aspects of experimental film. Films in the programming conception of the Arsenal were thus always supposed to be introduced “purposefully,” and this principle is in no way restricted to the political and demographically oriented films.

Another principle of the Arsenal is to confront the old with the new. When the Friends of the German Cinematheque was founded in 1963, they assumed their primary duty to be in relation to film history, although they never saw this duty in a one-sided museum-like sense. Rather, they were much more interested in forging new paths in film history from today’s perspective, in breathing fresh life into the classics of film (as well as forgotten or underestimated works from the past) by interrogating them from today’s point of view or today’s aesthetic sensibilities. This can occur by selecting classic films according to certain angles, but also by systematically contrasting old and new films. This is why the Arsenal always tries to organize the programming in several parallel series, alongside a historical retrospective: for instance, to show a modern program that is chosen according to its own criteria, but that in the ideal case

234 also has some relation to the historical program. This allows for constant interconnections; spectators can make discoveries for themselves. Film history can be received and evaluated according to modern criteria, films of the present can be measured according to the thematic and formal developments that had already been reached by the medium of film in the past. The Friends of the German Cinematheque understand film history as a continuum that reaches into the present. But even the engagement with modern film, with film as a medium of social communication, must be brought into relation (if it is not to deteriorate into blind empiricism) with the awareness of the historical development of the medium of film.

This concept is oriented to that of the best foreign cinematheque-cinemas (Cinémathèque Française in Paris, Cinémathèque Belge in Brussels, National Film Theatre in London), but it attempts to go beyond these models since the Arsenal sees itself as equally committed to contemporary film as to historical.

Through its work the Arsenal seeks to contribute to the dissemination of a new understanding of film whose main traits have already been formulated, but also to the formation of a new audience that no longer views film as a consumer product to fill their leisure time, as a means of aesthetic beautification, distraction, or obfuscation, as a vehicle for "entertainment," but as a medium of enlightenment, of critique, and of reflection, or of personal expression, of experiment, and of imagination. A program that starts from such an understanding of film in no way needs to be dry or boring, it can be presented as original, varied, pleasurable, and surprising.

To the extent that it has attempted to develop such a program, the Arsenal has understood itself from the very beginning as a deliberate alternative to the existing system of commercial cinemas (including the arthouse cinemas). These cinemas are namely not in any position to truly accommodate the new understanding of film and the new wishes of the audience because

they are ultimately obliged to view film primarily as a commodity, because they are fundamentally subject to compulsory amortization of the capital invested in films, building, and equipment.

Generally films are only shown once or twice at the Arsenal. In rare cases, however, films are also given more screenings (at most up to seven in a month when it's a matter of "establishing" a certain film or filmmaker who otherwise has no chance). For experience has taught us that individual films have to be introduced over and over at intervals to get a certain reputation with the audience (already in 1970 and 1971 the Arsenal repeatedly showed some Stroheim films and Alexander Medvedkin's classic *Happiness*, during which we noticed a tendency toward growing audience numbers—as was the case with the English experimental film *Mare's Tail*, which no one wanted to hear anything about at first, while now it has "found" its audience.) It has, however, also been one of the Arsenal's principles to show a film, even with repeat screenings, only once a day, and to hold to the rule of three different films each day.

The work of the Arsenal also seeks to contribute to closer communication between the members and the spectators as well as between filmmakers and spectators, so that the cinema becomes a meeting point and a discussion center. (This is the aim, for instance, of the idea of the "open house," an evening where anyone can bring and screen his films, or an attempt planned for the future to screen films or film clips "by request" on certain evenings). There are unfortunately some inhospitable structural factors at the Arsenal that get in the way of developing communication. The foyer is too small, other rooms need to be found, which at the moment are not available.

The Arsenal (much like the National Film Theatre in London) is a cinema club that is open to members and their guests. The membership is necessary because it forms the conditions for the official status of *Gemeinnützigkeit* (comparable to non-profit status) and because many films can only be obtained for a

236 members' group. Membership at the Arsenal (membership is obtained from the Friends of the German Cinematheque) cost 10.80 DM for a half year, and 5 DM for students and interns. Movie tickets for members cost 2.50 DM per screening, 3.50 for guests. In addition there are day passes and passes for individual series, which offer further discounts.

The members (currently there is a fixed base of around 3,500) receive the Arsenal's monthly program by post, which contains the program details as well as details on the individual films and programs on the back side. This monthly program is printed in a run of 25,000 on average and placed or hung in many locations throughout the city. The information on the programs is supplemented by sporadically appearing program booklets (series "Kinemathek") and by mimeographed sheets on individual events. Overall the information on the events can still not yet be considered sufficient. But there is no quick fix for this situation; for in order to produce sufficient information on each individual program a highly qualified person would have to be hired full time exclusively to this end. Aside from the difficulty of finding such a person, the funds for this are currently not available. Nonetheless the information on the films has recently improved. The most important publication to mention here is *Das Kino als Ideologiefabrik* (eng. *The Cinema as an Ideology Factory*) by Klaus Kreimeier—texts and images from a television series that was produced for the WDR.

In 1971 more than 80,000 visitors came to the Arsenal (and that with only a ten-month season due to construction—that amounts to an increase of 30% over the previous year).

The Arsenal audience can generally be characterized as a young audience with a preponderance of university students. But there are also many interns and school-age students among them as well. Depending on the nature of the program, there are sometimes quite different groups of visitors coming to the Arsenal, for instance for older or foreign films.

National groups (Italians, Spaniards) come to the Arsenal to see films in their native languages. At this point it can be added that foreign films as a rule are only screened in their original versions at the Arsenal, and when there are no subtitles they are translated into German using a microphone and loudspeaker. Due to a principled aversion to dubbing, which destroys one entire dimension of the film (namely the original soundtrack), German-dubbed versions are only shown in exceptional cases, and only when this is unavoidable.

Advertisement for the Arsenal is currently limited to sending and distributing the monthly program. Occasionally press screenings will be held for new films; the reviews have always had a positive effect on audience numbers. In general the press is happy to support the work of the Arsenal. In addition, however, one of our goals is for the daily program of the Arsenal to appear in the advertising section of the newspaper, which is currently not happening due to the unfulfillable financial demands of the newspapers (by contrast it has long been common practice in Paris that all newspapers publish the daily program of the Cinémathèque Française without charge).

In terms of technology, the Arsenal is equipped for screenings of 35mm, 16mm, and 8mm films. Thanks to a grant from the state of Berlin and the Kuratorium Junger Deutscher Film it was possible to purchase a 16mm projector and to carry out a general modernization of the technical equipment, especially also the sound equipment. At the moment we are still undergoing difficulties screening 35mm silent films at the correct speed (16 or 18 frames per second) and with the correct aspect ratio as well as screening films with a separate soundtrack. The Arsenal has acquired a mobile 35mm projector from the early days of cinema with adjustable speed. Unfortunately the image it produces is too dark. We are pursuing the option of slowing down the speed of the of the 35mm projector when screening silent films by installing an electronic frequency transformer (a new invention that has recently come on the market and replaces the expensive

238 Rotosyn system). In addition we need to acquire a stationary dubber for all existing formats of Perfo-Sound (so that not only 16mm, but also 35mm can be screened with separate sound).

The Arsenal gets the films for its program from archives, television stations, producers, filmmakers, distribution companies, and cooperatives, with only a very small portion coming from commercial film distribution. These prints usually have to be tracked down with great effort; it is equally difficult—and costly—to obtain screening rights. It is obvious that putting together such a structured program entails much higher organizational expenditures than for a commercial movie theater, which only needs to get the films from distributors. Especially because we are in Berlin, many prints have to be brought in by air. For this reason public funding for the Arsenal is an existential question in the long term. (The legitimacy of support for non-commercial film work by public funds need not be explained any further here). Initially there were great difficulties with the Berlin Senate Office. The grant for the “Arsenal” in the first year was minimal. By now, however, (in part inspired by the founding of the Arsenal) other venues and municipal cinemas with a similar orientation have developed in other parts of West Germany, and have received public recognition and, in some cases, generous support from the municipalities. The situation of the Friends of the German Cinematheque has also improved in this way. For the year 1971 there was a support package of just under DM 30,000. This is still much less than what the work needs (and less than what other municipal cinemas in West Germany have received), but a certain perspective of positive development can be recognized nonetheless.

One of the most important factors supporting the new cinema work is now the International Forum of New Cinema (*Internationales Forum des Jungen Films*) which was initiated in 1971 in a bid to rescue the Berlin Film Festival. A significant part of the films in the Forum could also be made available afterwards to other venues in West Germany by the Friends of the German

Cinematheque, which has also provided new impulses to the work of these institutions.

The future of the Arsenal, like that of other non-commercial "venues" in West Germany, will be reliant on close cooperation with one another. It is absolutely necessary to inform one another about programs and plans (which in part is already happening), but also to become active in procuring prints and screening rights, since prints and rights can usually be obtained more easily with a larger number of interested parties than when only a single, isolated interest appears. There is also no point in waiting until a central German film archive makes enough funding available to prepare distribution prints of all the important film classics (although this would be a goal worth striving for); rather the venues and cinemas of the new type must make efforts, within the range of their possibilities, to create prints of the films necessary for their work and to finance them jointly. The first steps in this direction have already been taken.

1972

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CINÉKINSHIPS: CREATING NEW NETWORKS
OF FILM CULTURE

The Eloquence of Odradek: Hussein Shariffe's Exilic Film Objects

Erica Carter

This essay's tale of accidental archivism has points of origin across northeast Africa and the European continent. We start with one proximate to this current volume. At the Berlin Film Festival 2019, the Arsenal—Institute for Film and Video Art, Berlin, began a collaborative initiative to retrieve and recirculate the films of exile Sudanese artist-filmmaker, poet, and public intellectual Hussein Shariffe. Shariffe had first emerged as a fine artist during Sudan's early decolonization years; he studied painting at London's Slade School of Fine Art; shuttled back and forth until the late 1980s between London and Khartoum; moved in Sudan in circles close to government, including as head of the Department of State Cinema in the early 1970s; and worked during that period on his first documentary, *The Throwing of Fire* (1973). In 1989, a military coup ushered in a thirty-year dictatorship under Omar al-Bashir. A prominent critic of the new regime, Shariffe fled into exile in Cairo, eventually beginning work there on his last, unfinished film, *Of Dust and Rubies: Letters from Abroad* (ODAR: 2005).



[Fig. 1] *Of Dust and Rubies: Letters from Abroad*. Production still (Source: Claude Stemmelin, n.d.).

ODAR subsists today only as a collection of silent rushes: cinematic refigurings of rhythms, images, and tropes from poems by exiled compatriots of Shariffe including Abdel Rahim Abu Zikra (“Departure in the Night”), Mahjoub Sharif (“The Traveler”), and Ali Adbel Ghayoum (“Whirlpools of the 20th Century”). Despite traumatic beginnings, this fragmentary film object contained the seeds of archival futures. In 2019, prompted by an approach from curator Heba Farid, Arsenal artistic director Stefanie Schulte Strathaus began a new collaboration with partners including Sudan Film Factory director Talal Afifi; Cimathèque Cairo co-founder and filmmaker Tamer el Said; and friends and family, including writer-translator Haytham el-Wardany and Shariffe’s daughter Eiman Hussein. A two-day workshop and public panel focused on ODAR at this early moment in the project. The participants presented first thoughts on the film’s traces of exilic pasts and unrealized futures at the Berlinale. The panel featured in an essay film by Tamer el-Said, *Of Dust and Rubies: A Film on Suspension* (2019); and in December 2020, the project went

peripatetic, following Shariffe's own transnational journeys, with a screening and discussion mini-series in London, and subsequently, an essay film presentation by student researchers Deem bin Jumayd, Niya Namfua, and Mai Nguyen first at the Arsenal's September 2021 archive festival, *Archival Assembly #1*, later at the Eye Museum Amsterdam (May 2022) and the British Film Institute, London (January 2023).

The title of Bin Jumayd et al.'s essay—"Towards a Cinema of the Incomplete" (2021)—highlights a signal aspect of this project of traveling archival retrieval. The film scholar Janet Harbord sees in unfinished films a resistance to the totalizations of a fully achieved narrative or perfectly confectioned aesthetic form (Harbord 2016). Our work with *Of Dust and Rubies* adds an archival facet to Harbord's account. Two years of screenings and discussion events on and around ODAR brought contributions to our expanding digital file store: an orderly/disorderly configuration of objects and images that amplified ODAR's stories, building constellated perspectives on the experiences of migration, remigration, and exile that the film presents. Relocating Shariffe's film to London in our 2020 mini-series brought contributions from the Slade archives, with gallery programs and early artworks revealing ODAR's indebtedness both to his painting and to two visionary experimental features *Tigers are Better Looking* (1975)—Shariffe's graduation film from the UK National Film and Television School; and *The Dislocation of Amber* (1975), a film whose blend of elements from western modernism with Arabic and African arts recalls Shariffe's experimental practice at the 1960s Slade and London's Gallery One. Researching these and other titles involved in turn reviewing materials from the family archive, as well as chance deposits by collaborators on the Arsenal project: photographs, scripts, poems, scholarly articles, scrapbooks, student records, assembling themselves like iron filings around the film-as-magnet, and loudly demanding, it seemed, inclusion in our conversations on Shariffe.

246 This, then, is our project's accidental archive: a dust trail of ephemera growing in volume and density as we pursue our curatorial meanderings around Shariffe's stations of exile and transient belonging. Calls for inclusion from such fugitive objects pose knotty challenges for archive work. What strategies allow us to hold and care for gifts accrued on our curatorial journeys? Our impulse is to document, and thus to name, order, and classify: here is a photograph, this is its object, its authorial origin, its place and time. But we risk here immobilizing in reified taxonomies objects born in the circulatory flows of migration, exile, archival retrieval, and transnational remediation in festivals and other public fora. How then to retain these objects' vitality: their capacity to move both in the sense of spatial transit around migratory circuits, and affectively, working their magic on audiences transported by intertexts that multiply his film works' affective charge?

Writings by scholars of the archive and cultural memory suggest a response. Beatrice von Bismarck advocates a post-humanist embrace of non-human subjects (not just Shariffe's films, then, but photos, scrapbooks, post-it-notes, letters, bills of lading, audio cassettes, and the rest) as co-creators in the archive of knowledge, memory, and affect (von Bismarck 2022, 16). Ann Rigney recalls this volume's title when she dubs such objects an "'accidental archive' comprising 'yet-unarticulated traces' of 'potential ... meaning'" (Rigney 2015, 14). Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer echo Rigney's suggestion of an "articulation" by non-human speaking voices when they write of "testimonial objects" whose mute yet somehow audible stories bear their own "stamp of individuality, of voice, tone and modulation" (Hirsch and Spitzer 2006, 369) (fig. 2). Eiman Hussein and Haytham el-Wardany write similarly of conversations in Hussein Shariffe's archive across and between archival fragments. For Hussein, ODAR's unfinished script "resonates" with the film images it was destined to accompany. A poetic duologue subsists, then, between text and image, despite the absence of the voiceover



[Fig. 2] Testimonial objects: On the set of *The Dislocation of Amber* (Source: Mohamed Bushara, Sondra Hale, n.d.).

envisaged for the film's final cut. For el-Wardany too, those same images—shot in, but making strange the landscapes of his Egyptian homeland—express an exilic camera's "solidarity with other forms of life and other places" (Afifi et al. 2022, 12–13).

These comments point to elective affinities across and between archival fragments and their surrounding worlds. These metaphorical, visual, rhythmic, tonal, chromatic, poetic resonances disrupt archival epistemologies, questioning the status of unedited footage, shot lists, scribbled notes, and memos as inert empirical material functioning only to ratify historical narratives of filmmaking lives. Our project is allied instead to living archive projects where exhibition or live performance activate live connectivities between historical artefacts and present worlds (Arsenal 2014). The Berlinale 2019 panel on ODAR paved the way. While Hussein and el-Wardany excavated from the raw footage traces of an exile gaze transmuting national landscapes into territories of "unhoused" migrant belonging, Stefanie Schulte Strathaus linked the film's mythic protagonists—mermaids and mermen, one played by a younger Talal Afifi—to

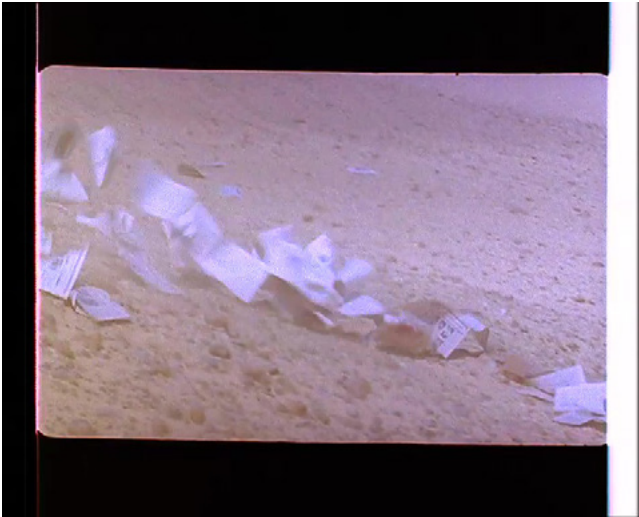
248 Shariffe's own image of the sea as an "organized intelligence network," whose underground messages spread through the "glittering vaults ... of many Atlantis" (Afifi et al. 2022, 12–14; Shariffe n.d.b).

The 2019 panel ended with a reading of Franz Kafka's short story, "The Silence of the Sirens." Kafka's repurposing of Homer's *Odyssey* had suggested for Schulte Strathaus the longevity of migrant stories as sites of production for mobile forms of archival knowledge. Our own quest for an approach to the migrating archive steals similarly from Kafka, this time however from a different story that melds its inferences of transit to questions of memory, language, and loss. In 1919, Kafka published *Die Sorge des Hausvaters* [The Cares of a Family Man]. The protagonist is Odradek, a creature that appears and disappears in a tenement staircase: an object with a life (it moves, it speaks), but that is also inanimate, "a flat, star-shaped spool for thread," with a "crossbar" and a "rod," wooden or metallic elements that lend to Odradek an interim existence between states of life and non-life (Kafka 1971, 469). Odradek's origins are obscure: its name may be Germanic or Slavonic, but is perhaps neither; it comes and goes, occupying spaces of transit—the garret, the stairway, the entrance hall; it disappears repeatedly, before resurfacing, and posing to the family man the same enigmas: what is this object, what is its provenance, how does it combine such formal perfection with a lack of intelligible shape and certain origin?

Kafka's creaturely experiments were surely palpable reference points for a film artist whose writing on his own techniques of constructivist film collage ranged effortlessly from notes on western modernism—Rhys, Yeats, De Chirico—to Sudanese literature and myth (Shariffe n.d.a). Kafka has been illuminating in our project as a speculative interlocutor most particularly in discussions of voice and archival address. Our efforts to retrieve, conserve, and restore artefacts from Shariffe's film and document archive are entwined with a curatorial and publishing program traversing global destinations including London,

Amsterdam, Berlin, and Khartoum. We have attempted in this context an archive practice that ranges across digital platforms, institutional sites, media forms, communities, and audiences. Shaping that practice is a poetics of the archive that considers films and other objects as speaking subjects with their own agency in conversations we attempt across spaces, times, collectivities, and forms. In other writing, we have drawn on film scholars including Francesco Casetti and Nanna Verhoeff to write in a more theoretical vein of Shariffe's archive films as deictic ensembles whose position "here" in the archive is oriented towards as yet indeterminate positions beside or beyond themselves in space in time (Carter and Kent 2022; Casetti 1998; Verhoeff 2012). Kafka's "The Cares of a Family Man" suggests a more poetic approach to deixis—the linguistic function that establishes the relational positionality of the enunciating subject—as a structuring force in archive practice. In the story, Kafka's narrator attempts a dialogue with Odradek: "And where do you live?" he asks: 'No fixed abode,' he says and laughs; but it is only the kind of laughter that has no lungs behind it. It sounds rather like the rustling of fallen leaves. And that is usually the end of the conversation" (Kafka 1971, 470).

A passage in the ODAR rushes speaks with special eloquence in Odradek's language of fallen leaves. A book lands on a rocky desert hillside. The wind—a ubiquitous presence in this film—blows the book open, the camera panning slowly across rocky ground that catches the pages, if only momentarily, as they rise unsteadily into haphazard flight (fig. 3). The absent sound invites us, like Kafka's family man (and in the spirit of photography critic Tina Campt), to "listen" to these images, revisiting Shariffe's archive for clues to the experiences they narrate of exile and diaspora (Campt 2017). Scanning Shariffe's films and writings, we find the same desert wind: in *The Dislocation of Amber*, for instance, where the wind is an audible voice narrating histories of violence; in Shariffe's poem *Sandstorm*, the wind here a metaphor for a despot's cruelties that "bleed the blackness into ash"; or



[Fig. 3] *Of Dust and Rubies: Letters from Abroad* (Source: Claude Stemmelin, n.d.).

scenes from ODAR where the wind has a softer presence, nudging folds of sand into mellow patterns, and recalling the strange comforts of solitude in desert landscapes.

The associative chain invoked by ODAR's images of book, leaves and wind suggests an archive and historiographical practice that eschews epistemological hierarchies positioning ODAR, say, as "artist film," "experimental cinema," "haptic cinema," and so on (though it is also all of these). Shariffe's films call alongside this for a poetry of the archive that works associatively and intuitively across archival objects and their human interlocutors, fashioning what Shariffe himself might have called a constellation of "construction symbols"—a composite visual language, and local-global stories of Sudanese cosmopolitan modernism and decolonial film heritage (Shariffe n.d.a).

In 2022, we began work on an open access digital document and audiovisual archive designed to bring Shariffe's films into

conversation with extraordinary artefacts —photographs, scrapbooks, poems, critical writings—from his own transmedia practice. In transnational curatorial collaborations, we have continued to present our project as a resource for public conversations on exilic pasts and Sudanese futures. A last word on Odradek highlights that task's necessity. In 1934, Walter Benjamin wrote of Odradek as "the form which things assume in oblivion" (Benjamin 1999 [1934], 811). Hito Steyerl follows Benjamin in identifying such "modest and even abject objects" as memory vaults "in whose dark prism social relations [lie] congealed and in fragments." Listening to Odradek involves a work of translation that Steyerl calls "political" in its capacity to mobilize congealed form, and reorganize relations across human and object worlds. Potentially created in this process are "global public spheres whose participants are linked ... by mutual excitement and anxiety" (Steyerl 2006). At the time of writing, anxiety prevails. Since 15 April 2023, war has raged again across Sudan. If Steyerl's shared futurity (her "mutual excitement") is to subsist, then our own translational work on Shariffe's films becomes yet more urgent. As we share in public fora Shariffe's filmed stories of futures past, we hope to release what Eiman Hussein calls her father's films' "unhoused energies," mobilizing resistance to military violence by revivifying the voice of an artist-filmmaker speaking in the quiet but infinitely eloquent language of Odradek's falling leaves.

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Cinema-ye Azad: The Lost History of the Iranian Independent Cinema Collective

Hadi Alipanah

In the 60s in Iran short films were mainly produced as commissioned works. Historical events and industrial developments were captured on film to glorify state achievements. Independent productions were rare since the necessary equipment for 16mm and 35mm film was only available to governmental institutions and film studios.

Professional equipment was not easily accessible to independent filmmakers. For the few self-produced films that were made under adverse conditions, there were hardly any distribution possibilities.

Against this background, on 3 October 1969 in the courtyard of a kindergarten in the center of Tehran a meeting took place. There, organized by young, open-minded cultural enthusiasts and filmmakers, some independently produced 16mm films and one 8mm film were shown on a makeshift screen.



[Fig. 1] Screening of Collection of Cinema-ye Azad short films, Shiraz Art Fest 1975 or 1976 (Source: Hadi Alipanah, date unknown).

After the screening, former journalist Basir Nasibi gave a speech—he himself showed two of his own unfinished 16mm film works that evening.

Unfortunately, this speech was not recorded; the memories of those present are partly summarized in the book *Ten Years of Cinema-ye Azad*.

During my research in recent years, I interviewed some of the participants. Through my questions, long-forgotten memories came back to light. Basir Nasibi, for example, founder and leader of the Cinema-ye Azad movement, remembers well what was manifested that evening. Mainly, the engaged group declared its dissociation and dislike for the Iranian commercial cinema of those days. The call in the Tehran backyard was for them to become independent of the state power that wanted to control the content and approach of filmmakers, and to devote themselves to self-determined narratives and creative content. There was a call for experimentation and to overthrow state dogmas with film works.

The handy 8mm film cameras spread rapidly at the end of the 60s. Among professional filmmakers, however, the format was frowned upon as amateur film material.

But because of the greater and easier accessibility to cameras and material, and for lack of alternatives, Nasibi advocated that 8mm film could be used just as much as a serious, artistic means of expression. For it is not the camera that makes the film, it is not the size of the frame that matters, but the creativity and the motive of the filmmaker. The new movement was founded. A few days after this event, the film director Fereydoun Rahnema suggested that Basir Nasibi call the collective of the young creatives Cinema-ye Azad (*Cinema-ye Azad* literally means "Free Cinema," referring to independent filmmaking).

In the beginning, the group mainly organized film screenings at universities. To get into the exchange, interested people had to attend the collective's screenings, to which Basir Nasibi was usually present, or the followers had to write letters. Cinema-ye Azad did not have an office. There was only a mailbox at the Tehran post office with their name. It was important for the group to answer the requests and suggestions of the supporters that were reaching the collective from all over Iran. Nasibi devoted hours every day to answering the letters. Through newspaper articles and advertisements in film magazines, the Cinema-ye Azad movement drew attention to itself. The number of letters increased with each passing month. Meanwhile, the group produced many films, mainly short films, and submitted them to film festivals.

Cinema-ye Azad started to receive a lot of attention and recognition. Recognized filmmakers were now aware of their work and attended the film evenings. And more and more enthusiastic supporters wanted to pick up a camera themselves. Studying film in Iran was not easy at that time, it was only offered as a minor with limited access at Tehran University. There was no curriculum. Outside the capital, opportunities to study film as an

256 art form was even more limited. In other regions of Iran, not possible at all. Here, only enthusiasm and autodidactic knowledge counted, which was gained by sharing experiences at common film evenings and reading film magazines. Motivated young artists who wanted to make a film themselves worked according to the trial-and-error principle. As soon as someone mastered the camera, he passed on his knowledge to others.

As Cinema-ye Azad became more and more professional, the group made a decisive contribution to cultural policy in the film sector. Their work was not limited to the production and screening of short films, but also to the development of Provincial offices throughout Iran. Publications and the first film magazine on short films, independently organized film festivals that formed regionally, and even a television program dedicated to short films were part of their achievements. The scale of Cinema-ye Azad's activities were such that in 1974 the collective managed to gain the financial and general support of Iranian National Television while maintaining their independence. Some cultural and governmental organizations tried to imitate the concept of Cinema-ye Azad even back then.

Through the work of the collective, showing cinematography on 8mm became common in universities, cinemas, and festivals. A few commercial film studios tried to sign the talented filmmakers of the Cinema-ye Azad movement as directors for feature films. During their 10 years of activity, the group had more than 300 members, produced about 1,000 short films and 5 full-length films for television. They maintained 20 active offices in several Iranian cities and organized 9 festivals, 3 of which were international; more than 30 regional short film festivals were also regularly organized as part of the Cinema-ye Azad movement (fig. 1-3).

In 1979, a few months after the Islamic Revolution, Nasibi had already left Iran, when the remaining members of the collective were invited to a meeting on Iranian state television. After



[Fig. 2, left] Poster, Cinema-ye Azad Film Week, 1975 (Source: Hadi Alipanah 1975).



[Fig. 3, right] Poster, Cinema-ye Azad, 9. Festival, 1977 (Source: Hadi Alipanah 1977).

attending this meeting, they realized that the new regime would no longer allow them to operate freely. Therefore, they all decided together to stop the movement. The new leaders in the country tried to continue the activities, with new members and name change from Cinema-ye Azad to Islamic Amateur Film-making Center. However, they failed to imitate the pulse of the movement.

When I started researching the history of Cinema-ye Azad, apart from the book *Ten years of Cinema-ye Azad* by Basir Nasibi, which was published outside Iran and is very hard to get, there were no reliable and accurate documents of the movement's activities, nor were the films available. In the preface to his book Nasibi describes that his memory has shortcomings, but he did not want to be deprived of the attempt to reinterpret the memory. The

258 biographies and works of most of the filmmakers have not been archived.

Despite my efforts, I did not manage to get support from state or private institutions to carry out this research. Many documents from the central and provincial offices of Cinema-ye Azad have been lost. Part of my work is researching the films and documents and preserving and archiving the pieces I have found. To date, I have been able to recover about 300 films made during the active period of Cinema-ye Azad. Contacting and talking to the filmmakers of the movement helps me to compile additional material on the films. Many of the filmmakers now have transnational biographies, and studying their fates gives me a deeper insight into Iran's film history. My search goes on and on, the curiosity about each lost film and their makers is a journey in itself. I keep asking myself, how could such a significant film movement be forgotten?

Translated from Farsi by Afsun Moshiry

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Collaborative Dialogues and Calcutta's Super 8 Film Movement

Amrita Biswas

My research interest in Calcutta's Super 8 film movement was triggered by a blog that had been published on the webpage of Activist Canvas.¹ Wanting to know more about it, I scheduled field trips to the West Bengal Film Centre (Kolkata) as well as to the National Film Archive of India (Pune) in 2016. However, both the archival institutions failed to offer any print material related to the movement. Being anchored into research networks in Kolkata enabled me to navigate through such archival absences.²

- 1 Activist Canvas's web blog traces the history of the Super 8 film movement both in and beyond Calcutta. It studies how groups and collectives had been formed (such as WOLF and PIX) to not only systematically learn about the techniques of making a film on Super 8 but also to make films on the format. The blog offers insight into the various practices that had developed around the format (such as organizing film festivals and establishing contacts with institutions working on Super 8) and argues that Super 8 contributed to the culture of independent filmmaking.
- 2 I use both Calcutta and Kolkata throughout the paper. Since the city was officially renamed to 'Kolkata' from 'Calcutta' in 2001, I use 'Calcutta' to refer to the decade of the 1980s and 'Kolkata' to refer to the contemporary.

260 Acquiring contact details of a personal collector from one of my peers, I found a willing collaborator to my research in Amit Bandyopadhyay. He offered me access to all the materials that he had collected at his residence in Kolkata. Bandyopadhyay had been a film society activist (affiliated with the North Calcutta Film Society) and had actively engaged with the Super 8 movement during the 1980s. He had preserved all the booklets, news publications, pamphlets, and magazines that were related to the movement, out of his sheer interest. His personal collection thus enabled me to circumvent the institutional silence on the film movement. To aid me in my research, he laboriously went through the bulk of documents at his residence, sorting out what, he deemed, would be relevant for me. The materials within his collection were replete with notes that he had scribbled on the documents. Bandyopadhyay discussed how Super 8 had seemed to be a harbinger of novel cinematic possibilities during the 1980s. The movement witnessed an active investment into popularizing the format as an alternative media that was cheaper to procure, in comparison with 35mm. The primary motive for mobilizing the format was to document news that the mainstream media did not cover. However, filmmakers soon began to experiment with the format in the realm of “narrative as well as aesthetic strategies,” as articulated by Saumen Guha. Guha was the pioneer of the movement who introduced the format to interested students in Calcutta by conducting workshops (WOLF or Workshop on Little Filmmaking) to train them. Besides WOLF, organizations such as People’s Film Workshop (PFW), Chitra Chetana, and Jadavpur University Film Society (JUFS) also engaged with the format. Further, JUFS and Chitra Chetana jointly organized the first national Super 8 film festival on the premises of Jadavpur University, Calcutta, from 17th to 21st December, 1983.

My conversations with Bandyopadhyay grew organically over time, spilling over into lengthy discussions surrounding the movement. The discussions have been pivotal to my research, where I have traced the genealogy of contemporary independent

film practices in Kolkata to the Super 8 movement (Biswas 2019). During our meetings, I informed him about the dismissive attitude from a Kolkata-based librarian who opined that Super 8 was just a “toy for the elites” and therefore unworthy of academic research (conversation with the author, 2016). The specific class constituency who could afford to purchase, and thereby use the equipment cannot be ignored. However, it is also pertinent that the Super 8 movement incorporated workshops and training sessions (WOLF) where interested candidates could collectively use equipment to make films. Besides, there were also facilities in Calcutta which provided Super 8 equipment on a hire basis.

Bandyopadhyay corroborated that the Kolkata-based librarian echoed the dominant perspective, shared by filmmakers who were once associated with the movement, that considered the movement as a failure as it produced films of less technical “quality” than what had been aspired to (interview with the author, February 2022). In another publication, I address this discourse of failure that congealed around the media format and analyze the motivations and aspirations that had fostered the movement’s development in Calcutta (Biswas 2022).³ With film festivals, scheduled lectures, and screenings, Calcutta witnessed a spurt of enthusiasm around the format.

The process of my research on Super 8 renders explicit the dialogic encounters between the personal collector and myself. Furthermore, Bandyopadhyay read my research papers and offered his critical input where he deemed it necessary. Scholars have theorized the diverse ways in which the format had been used as well as the multiple contexts of the exhibition of films

3 In this paper, I focus on the transnational collaborations that the movement witnessed, aside from the horizon of possibilities that the format had ushered in, with regard to film production and circulation. I thereby shift the emphasis from the notion of “failure” discursively associated with the movement to underscore the aspiration towards a participatory practice of alternative filmmaking that the movement had engendered through film-making workshops.

262 made on small-gauge formats (Szczelkun 2000; Shand 2008; Zimmermann 2008; Mukherjee 2019). There has also been critical work on how private collections can serve as productive repositories for historiography (Schneider 2007). In a similar vein, Bandyopadhyay's personal collection and his anecdotes about the movement have been crucial to my historical analysis, where I have underscored the cinephilic and activist impulses of the film movement by studying its manifestos. Besides, the personal correspondence with Bandyopadhyay enabled me to contextualize the movement's specificity within Calcutta's film culture.⁴

It is significant to mention here that I had also contacted other personal collectors to access documents pertaining to my research. Some of them were skeptical of collaborating with me. They were apprehensive that the academic researcher might be a "parasite," merely acquiring materials from collectors who had invested their time, energy, and labor into collecting them. They shared their previous experiences where researchers never collaborated with them during the process of writing their papers or after their articles had been published (conversation with the author, April 2021). Bandyopadhyay, too, had been cognizant of the hierarchy between the researcher and the collector. However, he was keen to collaborate with me as he considered it to be a potential avenue for activating a dialogic space where we could collectively deliberate upon the challenges inherent in preserving materials on Super 8. We also discussed the problems of undertaking a historiographical project that has to navigate through a paucity of archival materials. Bandyopadhyay was concerned that his collections should be available to other interested researchers as well. To address the precarity of the few surviving materials on Super 8 at his disposal, Bandyopadhyay suggested that I capture images of all the documents and convert them into PDFs.

4 Both Bandyopadhyay and Guha opined that the movement should be understood relationally, in alignment with the film society movement as well as the practices of publishing wall, table, or little magazines that took place in Calcutta.

He construed that the creation of a digital copy could serve as a back-up in the case of contingencies.

Bandyopadhyay's anxieties about the "long-term and efficient" preservation of the materials resonated with Saumen Guha (interview with the author, February 2023). During the lengthy in-person interviews with Guha, he showed me his personal collections on Super 8, comprising mostly of festival booklets and questionnaires that he had printed for his workshop lectures on Super 8 during the 1980s. He allowed me to capture images of the festival bulletins and the books that he had written on the format. He also asked me to string all the images into a single PDF file so that the print materials had a digital copy. Guha was also confident that there were Super 8 films within his collection at his residence. However, it seemed a gigantic task to him to sort the films out from the bulk of materials that he had collected over time. Through a series of meetings, Guha described in detail the moments in his personal life that influenced him to engage with the format. He also spoke about the political and creative experiments that the movement had aspired to usher in, within the cinematic ecology of the city. The nascent curiosity surrounding the format had also motivated him to deliver lectures in other areas within West Bengal as well as in other states of India. Seeking to participate in the exchange of information on Super 8, Guha was joined by fellow enthusiasts to publish bulletins that focused on worldwide film festivals on the format. Describing Super 8 as the format that facilitated people to "tell their stories through their own voice," Guha regretted that the advent of VHS eventually limited the film movement's potential (interview with the author, February 2023).

During the interviews, Guha and I discussed the strategies that we can adopt to preserve the documents as well as the few Super 8 films that accidentally survived within his huge personal collection. He also informed me that a researcher is trying to procure a converter to digitize the few Super 8 films that he has been able to scout. Further, Guha has established

264 communication with filmmakers to know if the state government will be interested in the process of institutional preservation. It will also be a productive step forward if we can acquire materials from other collectors and pool the dispersed resources together. This, however, is still a challenging work-in-progress, continually building upon our discussions on Super 8.

At this specific point in time, it is therefore difficult to predict where these conversations are headed. What is significant, however, are the dialogues that have been forged through my interaction with Guha and Bandyopadhyay. I already have indicated how the discussions have been pivotal to my research, where I have juxtaposed archival materials with anecdotal evidences to write a history of the movement. Additionally, the personal correspondences with Guha and Bandyopadhyay have definitely carved out a collaborative space to collectively think about the networks that we can forge and the different strategies that we can adopt for preservation. I read such dialogic encounters as necessary efforts geared towards determining the efficient preservation of the film and paper traces of Calcutta's Super 8 movement that have accidentally survived through personal collections.

I thank Dwaipayan Bandyopadhyay and Dr. Parichay Patra for providing me the contact details of Amit Bandyopadhyay and Saumen Guha. I am grateful to Bandyopadhyay and Guha for helping me with their personal collections and for being patient with time-intensive interviews.

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The Pyramid Used to Be a Mountain

Almudena Escobar López

How to find yourself in the history written by others? How to trace what is known to have existed but is not documented? And perhaps most importantly, how to imagine a future that comes from the past and makes possible alternative models of socialization and territoriality? Colonialism is a deep wound still in the process of development that affects those who suffer the consequences of its perverse mercantile adventure every day in their flesh. It is not enough to ask for forgiveness, or to recognize civil rights, the process needs to be profound and most importantly real. A paradigm shift is needed to allow for the coexistence of different ways of understanding *el territorio* beyond private property, and to contemplate the State beyond an institutional and sovereign political organization.

Opening the vaults of the archive offers a point of entry to the ongoing experience of colonialism, revealing the voids and silences hidden underneath their carefully crafted network of decontextualized documents. But only regression and recombination are not enough; the archive as an institution also needs to be questioned as does any mechanism of control and power.

268 As Ariella Aïsha Azoulay points out in her book *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (2019), archival technologies are not neutral tools, they are the theoretical basis of the State that legitimizes official history by isolating the present from the past, history, and politics. In order to act, it is necessary to reconfigure and sharpen the spatial and material sensitivity to glimpse the residual violence and let ancestry emerge. The objects from another time contain the epistemologies to which they belong; landscapes are silent witnesses to the crimes of the past, and the body bears the horrors of another time.

Colectivo los Ingrávidos is an audiovisual collective from Tehuacán founded in 2012 during an intense moment of protests in opposition to the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) candidate Enrique Peña Nieto. They started directly reporting during the mass demonstrations against the Mexican government through an anonymous YouTube channel. Working collaboratively was a necessity—Mexico together with Haiti are the deadliest countries in the world for journalists according to Reporters Without Borders—but also a political decision aligned with the collective authorship as viewed by the Third Cinema movement in Latin America. From the beginning Colectivo los Ingrávidos has always been concerned with how history is written and how images and sounds are used to serve the logic of the government. To confront the use of cinema by the state as a technology of ideology and control, the collective's members have often found themselves filming during protests or reactivating archival materials in their work. Their cinema delves into the technologies of history and representation with particular attention to the continuity of colonial extraction processes, including museums, television, and archives. But most importantly they have developed an understanding of cinema as a ritual process that links the ancestral with the material. Their living cinematographic practice, nurtured by the collective spirit of the American avant-garde, is a form of aesthetic resistance that captures the emergency, spontaneity, and energy of direct



[Fig. 1] Still from *Transmisión/Archivo de Indias*, HD video shot on 16mm with color and sound. Photo courtesy of the artist (Source: Colectivo los Ingrávidos 2014).

political action as spaces that are both lived and conceptual. They combine the militant spirit of third cinema with structuralist experimental film practices and their own ancestral epistemology. The result is a radical filmmaking invested in the cinematic apparatus and its possibilities within their own cultural context. They deal directly with the institution of the archive and by doing so they also offer their own alternative understanding of what an archive can be.

In their film *Transmisión/Archivo de Indias* (2014) they include images of the Sevillian archive that protects the documents, maps, and objects from the time of the Spanish invasion, as well as portraits of the conquerors, without recording anything about the cultural, demographic, and natural devastation that resulted. The film speaks directly of the environmental terror of the archive. Instead of focusing on the documents, the camera observes the space through fisheye lenses, creating a claustrophobic sense of anxiety (fig. 1). The soundtrack is an increasingly accelerated breathing that feels asphyxiated by the horror of the packaging and the consequences of the barbarity of the conquest. The space of the archive is itself the source of a kind of



[Fig. 2] Still from *Pirámide erosionada*, HD video shot on 16mm with color and sound. Photo courtesy of the artist (Source: Colectivo los Ingrávidos 2019).

terror, the spatial anguish of what colonial extraction implies: an archive of barbarism.

Pirámide erosionada (2019) is a radically different way of thinking about archives and documents if we compare it with the Sevillian archive of the conquest. The film documents a Mesoamerican settlement in the region of La Cañada, a pyramid. The camera rapidly navigates the landscape capturing glimpses of its different textures. It maneuvers through the grass, looks at the corn plants from below, and places itself at ground level to see up close the rocks, the sand, and the soil (fig. 2). These images flicker nervously on the screen at the rhythm of a drum jazz improvisational soundtrack by percussionist Gustavo Nandayapa. Instead of focusing on the archeological and the forensic aspects of the ruin, the camera develops an animistic relationship with the environment, capturing the emotional powers that are still present in the site. The film in itself is a ritual that induces a filmic trance through a landscape that exists in a space between two worlds: “a hypnotic landscape that it is also a gaze or point of view of the stones, the minerals, the moss, the water, the river ..., erasing and dissolving [the pyramid’s] defined forms and giving it another kind of life, another psychic rhythm, thus producing

a horizontalization of the pyramid, allowing us to perceive how [it] used to be a mountain" (Escobar López and Colectivo los Ingrávidos, 2020). The powerful music and the treatment of the images as a political force with multiple layers makes it impossible to see *Pirámide erosionada* as a documentary about the Mesoamerican ruins in La Cañada. Instead, this film needs to be understood as a ritual that takes a leap at the moment of the semiotic collision of the so-called "conquest," counteracting the violence of that moment with the recovery of ancestral practices through cinema. The film proposes a double-cinematic and colonial-ritualistic trance that deals with 500 years of irreconcilable excess. I argue that the film experience of the ruin proposed by Ingrávidos "accidentally" becomes a living archive that provides space for the ancestral. By connecting the forensic and the empirical with the spiritual, the shamanic, and the poetic the collective propose a new concept of archive outside western epistemology.

The Los Ingrávidos trilogy made in 2017 that speaks about gendered violence against women in Mexico also becomes a living archive that connects the current Mexican femicides to larger cultural formations. Each film is told from a different perspective: *¿Has Visto?* from the point of view of the mothers, *Sangre Seca* from the daughters, and *Coyolxauhqui* from the disappeared victims. While *Coyolxauhqui* uses landscape and objects, the other two films use footage from protests in a public space. *¿Has Visto?* shows the Mexican Mothers March that takes place annually on May 10th to protest the disappearances of civilians, and *Sangre Seca* the protests from International Women's Day on March 8th, 2017. All three are filmed with expired film stock, which produces the washed-out colors in *¿Has Visto?* and *Coyolxauhqui* and the characteristic pinkish tone of color fading, combined with a degraded flaky surface of the 1959 Kodachrome used for *Sangre Seca*. Working with obsolete stock at a practical level speaks directly to the scarce access to film stock in Mexico while also allowing them to play with the question of



[Fig. 3] Still from *Sangre Seca*, HD video shot on 16mm with color and sound. Photo courtesy of the artist (Source: Colectivo los Ingrávidos 2017).

the indexicality of the photographed image. By registering the protests on film, Ingrávidos transforms them into something tangible, empirical, which could be considered part of an official archive. Colectivo los Ingrávidos is also invested in using the capacity of the film to determine the experience of the image as an entity in itself, performed in the audience's space. Flares, fade-outs at the beginning and the end of the reels, grain, and other qualities become intrinsic parts and evidence of the film as object. The surface of the screen and the materiality of film are as important as the images and the sound. The apparatus becomes a central element that works in relation to the image instead of being a simple carrier of images. Los Ingrávidos are invested in making the viewer aware of the medium, proposing a radical empiricism in which perception and knowledge are not necessarily the same thing. Form is content and content is form. The films of this trilogy are more than a straight documentation of the protests or the space where the murders take place. The femicides are not a question of particular moments, what is at stake is the intervals between moments in time, which connect all the actions as part of larger cultural formations.

In *Sangre Seca*, three different temporalities collapse: the eroded celluloid is the present tense of the audience; the images are from the March 8th protests from 2017 (fig. 3); and in the soundtrack, the poem *Oscuro*, written and read in 2012 by María Rivera, documents the violent repression of female protestors carried out by the police in San Salvador Atenco (2006). Rivera's "poesía documental" records experiential accounts of personal history. Her poetry is not an aestheticized use of language, rather a direct and sincere intervention that proposes a living archive that registers concrete situations, like the attacks in Atenco, which are denied by the government or purposefully obscured or erased. Rivera's poetry describes the reality of what happened while simultaneously denouncing the official discourse. "Poesía documental" provides an alternative form of archiving closer to Cvetkovich's (2003) "archive of feelings,"¹ because it is both personal and public. Documentary poems intertwine primary sources with poetry writing, in an attempt to incorporate stories that the mass media tend to ignore. Mark Nowak (2010) describes documentary poetry as "not so much a movement as a modality within poetry whose [origins are] along a continuum from the first person auto-ethnographic mode of inscription to a more objective third person documentarian tendency." Mexican *poesía documental* is a form of political resistance because it constitutes an archive of erased accounts of social violence.²

Coyolxauhqui recasts the dismemberment of the Aztec moon goddess Coyolxauhqui by her brother Huitzilopochtli, sun, human sacrifice, and war god. A visual poem about the cyclical nature

- 1 For Cvetkovich archival materials contain "repositories of feelings and emotions, which are encoded not only in the content of the texts themselves but in the practices that surround their production and reception" (Cvetkovich 2003, 7).
- 2 Writers including María Rivera, Javier Sicilia, and Cristina Rivera Garza investigate and document homicidal acts of violence ignored by the Mexican government, such as the femicides from Ciudad Juárez that took place between 2009 and 2010. There is a poetry that allows for public mourning and pain over spectacles of horror.



[Fig. 4] Stills from *Coyolxauhqui*, HD video shot on 16mm with color and sound. Photo courtesy of the Artist (Colectivo los Ingrávidos 2017).

of traditional myths and rituals, the film begins with colorful cactuses; the animistic camera meanders to the hectic rhythm of an improvised percussion ensemble, capturing blurred snapshots, images of fruits, and vast landscapes (fig. 4). Halfway through the film, a zoom of the rising moon with a soundtrack of ghostly female voices alludes to the violent murder of the Aztec moon goddess, Coyolxauhqui, by her own brother, Huitzilopochtli. The final minutes of the film refer directly to contemporary Mexican femicides—gender-based murders of women—by showing images of sandals scattered around the ground, a pad over a patch of dry branches, underpants creased between stones, and bras hanging from the dry branches of a bush. The film takes place in the deserted area of La Mixteca, where there are numerous textile *maquilas*—manufacturing assembly plants of duty-free components for exportation. Here, the original femicide of *Coyolxauhqui* connects with the horrific wave of femicides that began in Ciudad Juárez among young women employed by the *maquilas*. Each piece of clothing on screen is a sensitive record of the physical presence of what happened in La Cañada. In this way the film becomes a collective

archive that combines the empirical—the clothes—with the ancestral—the myth of Coyolxauhqui—and the poetic.

Ingrávidos' work is a system of afterlives and reincarnations that suggests a broader discourse, one that surpasses the limitations of spatiotemporal coordinates, creating relational images. What happens in Juárez is connected to what happens in Mixteca—and what happened to Coyolxauhqui—because they all take place within patriarchal neoliberal capitalism. Ingrávidos' expanded understanding of history proposes a cinema without limitations that demolishes its current architecture. A cinema that looks back at the viewers and involves them in a transcendental political visual experience that bridges the ongoing trauma of colonialism. In this way, their cinema establishes the conditions of an anti-colonial archival practice where forensics are not at the center but rather an additional element that needs to be reexamined and juxtaposed with other forms of knowledge.

Thank you to Davani for her friendship and her trust.

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Destabilizing the Official Film Archive from Within: S.N.S. Sastry's *And I Make Short Films*

Ritika Kaushik

"India's story is there on film," said James Beveridge (Mohan 1969, 6), referring to the vast collection of Films Division of India (FD), comprised of more than 8000 films on art and culture, development and planning, citizenship and reform, children's films, defense films, and experimental films, animations, and news-reels.¹ India's primary state institution of documentary and short film since independence, FD was imagined as a national audio-visual record of India's story in all its colorful renditions—an all-knowing, positivist archive. On its twentieth anniversary, FD commissioned an experimental film on its history, *And I Make Short Films*, made by S.N.S. Sastry.² The late 1960s saw a period of experimentation at FD under the supervision of Jehangir Bhowmgar, when dissonant practices emerged and figures like Sastry, Pramod Pati, and S. Sukhdev came to the fore. *And I Make Short Films* self-reflexively places film experimentation within the context of national debates about the role of documentary

- 1 James Beveridge, a Canadian filmmaker, exerted immense influence on the Indian documentary movement as he was closely associated with FD.
- 2 Sastry worked for FD from the 1950s till his death in 1978.

278 film in a developing nation. As Sastry remixes and reappropriates footage from a variety of sources with techniques like contrapuntal audio-visual montage, the film presents a figurative history of the growing postcolonial nation. Through a focus on *And I Make Short Films* (1968), this chapter shows how Sastry's film destabilizes the official archive of state sponsored films from within. In the process, the official film archive transforms into a dynamic entity that is open to foraging and activating histories that challenge a monolithic vision of the Indian nation.

Style, Insider's Perspective, and Archival Appropriation

Documentary films in India were screened compulsorily before the feature films in theaters across the country, amidst the rising cigarette smoke of impatient audiences and the din of snack vendors. In response to such inattention, Sastry began to use what was called a "flashy and nervous" (Pendharkar 1978, 78) style, leavening serious topics with humor, self-reflexivity, and irony. He achieved many of these effects by remixing preexisting footage with other media like photographs, newspapers, and popular songs—an economical way for a filmmaker with unrestricted access to FD's whole archive. In fact, in one of his only surviving pieces of writing, Sastry proposed recycling footage through a creative use of sound as a way to save precious raw stock, which filmmakers were always hard pressed to get (Sastry 1968, 9). But, apart from practical considerations, Sastry's penchant for archival appropriation also derived from his deep knowledge about FD's holdings, having previously worked as a newsreel cameraperson for FD before becoming a director. Along with the rising impetus towards experimentation during the late 1960s, Sastry's unrestrained access to footage from FD's films, his insider's perspective of working within a state institution, as well as his familiarity with FD's archive, all provided the perfect storm

of incidental and intentional circumstances ripe for the practices of reuse and reappropriation that flourished in many of his films.

This is not to say that Sastry's work is entirely singular, as various international found footage filmmakers have worked from within or with institutional archives, while trying to rewrite histories through reuse of newsreels, photographs, and posters and by reworking the archive's own materials. There exist contemporary parallels with Sastry's practice in the varied works of Arthur Lipsett at the National Film Board of Canada and Santiago Alvarez at the Cuban government's Cuban Film Institute, to name a few who also made films during the 1960s and 1970s. While Sastry's reuse and reappropriation at FD runs parallel to this international history of found footage filmmaking and reflects the influence of global developments in political and experimental cinema, his practice is steeped in specific local contexts like compulsory exhibition and constraints of institutional filmmaking at FD.

The Archive as a Promiscuous Site

Consider how an elusive sequence in *And I Make Short Films* intermixes a scene from a benchmark of Indian art cinema with piercing public images of a Prime Minister's funeral. We see the young protagonist from *Aparajito* (1956), the second film in Satyajit Ray's renowned Apu trilogy, look on as Sarbajaya (his mother) offers water to Harihar (his father) on his deathbed. A cut takes us to the inconsolable face of Hari Krishna Shastri in 1966, at the funeral of his father, the Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri (who succeeded Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in 1964). A loud bang follows, and we see a close up of Harihar rising up to the water but falling back on the bed. A cutaway shot of pigeons flying away from a rooftop signals his death. Sarbajaya's scream and a shrill flute from *Aparajito* continue over a series of sudden cathartic cuts as we see Nehru's face carrying a distraught look, almost as if reacting to the news of the death from the previous scene, a tear drop falling from the eyes of a deer from one of the

280 earliest major Indian animated films, *The Banyan Deer* (1957), and a shot of the burning pyre at Shastri's funeral. As Harihar's reel-life death and the grief of Sarbajaya and Apu runs parallel to the real-life grief of Shastri's family, the above sequence collapses the differences between the fictional world of Apu and the domain of the Indian nation state facing the deaths of its Prime Ministers within its fateful two decades.

The scene transitions to a lot of people crying and then cuts to the shadow of a galloping horse, and we see Nehru riding it. A cleverly edited found-footage montage makes it appear that a crowd of people are looking at him in abject melancholy. An eyeline match fakes a quick exchange of nods between him and the recently elected Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Finally, we see Nehru batting in the cricket field; he hits a ball and as it goes in the air a solemn music rises. The umpire indicates that the player is out. The innings of the famed first Prime Minister of India are over, the film seems to tell us. The melancholy abruptly turns into a warning, as loud gunfire overwhelms and rages over the music and we see a shot of Nehru's dead body covered with garlands. Gun sounds continue as we see still photographs featured in quick succession of three world leaders who were assassinated: Mahatma Gandhi, John F. Kennedy, and Martin Luther King.

This sequence exposes the paternalistic dimension of the Indian state and its leaders like Nehru and Gandhi. At the same time, it reveals the international dimension of the nation's postcolonial history from the time of its independence, as it moves from personal tragedy in fiction, to the national tragedy of deaths of two Prime Ministers, and finally invokes figures of world leaders whose deaths left indelible impacts on the political landscape of the world. However, more than a simple evocation of contemporary political or cultural events, the sequence puts on display the permeable boundaries between the domains of art and public life, inscribed by social and cultural memory activated through recognizable ephemera.

This last dimension is further strengthened as Sastry uses several scenes from the popular Hindi film *Jis Des Mein Ganga Behti Hai* (1960), the most enigmatic being a gloriously lustrous Kammo, played by Padmini, swimming sensuously in a pond. Sastry intercuts shots of Padmini swimming with the movement of an underwater turtle. Next, we see Padmini emerge breathless from the water in a celebratory declaration of love, singing “Ho Maine Pyaar Kiya (I have fallen in love!).” As the playback singer’s breathy heaving continues, Sastry cuts to footage of a competitive female swimmer catching her breath. This popular film’s excerpts would be unmistakably recognizable by the movie-going audiences even as they become ambiguously transformed through this intercutting and activate familiarity as well as alienation with them. While operating through formal and affective logics, the above cuts suture three different somatic dimensions—the sensuality of desire from a popular Hindi film song, the lithe aquatic rhythms of the turtle, and the matter-of-fact journalistic image of a young woman swimmer triumphantly catching her breath.

In both the above examples, the film makes formal connections between images and sounds from different media topographies to perform a historical function. By remediating film ephemera, it turns the archive into a promiscuous site, one where the banality of everyday life shares latent affinities with the vernacular idioms and somatic energies of popular films and art cinemas.

It must be emphasized that such use of preexisting footage, while present in Indian parallel cinema, was never commonplace in FD’s films. Indeed, the film offers a jarring contrast to other FD productions that deal with its own history, such as *Through a Lens Starkly* (Kuldeep Sinha, 1992). A somber and monumental film, *Through a Lens Starkly* presents FD’s history with interviews while using preexisting footage denotatively to illustrate what is being said. The only exception is the film’s ending sequence, which suddenly evokes an expressive tone through an eclectic mix of rapidly cut visuals and sounds, exploding with

282 multi-valent connotations. This ending sequence, it turns out, is made up of excerpts from *And I Make Short Films*, including the above-described scene of Nehru on a horse, albeit with minor modifications. This brief part of *And I Make Short Films*'s most evocative montage sequences turns *Through a Lens Starkly*'s sombre and monumental take on FD's history into an expressive document where meanings are not easily attributable to images.

Curation, Archiving, and Found Footage Filmmaking

Giovanna Fossati has argued that “found footage filmmaking, in its practice of selecting and presenting films made by other filmmakers and changing their ‘meaning by placing [them] in a new context,’ shares an inherent aspect of the practice of film archiving.” (Fossati 2012, 3) I contend that Sastry's work begins to resemble that of an archivist as well as a curator, making FD's archive a dynamic entity where film meanings and the categories that govern them are in constant flux. Sastry's work as a filmmaker shares deep synergy with contemporary curators and archivists who carefully analyze, organize, and make records accessible to the public. For example, his work can thus be seen as akin to archives like Arsenal—Institute for Film and Video Art in Berlin, as its Indian cinema collection contains a range of experimental, art films, and both independent and state sponsored documentaries, even as the access to prints to many of which remains quite uncertain or impossible in India.³ Arsenal's collection includes films like Ray's *Aparajito*, Jehangir Bhowmgar's *Radha and Krishna* (1957), or Guru Dutt's *Pyaasa* (1957) whose footage features in some form in *And I Make Short Films* (and many more in Sastry's *Flash Back* (1974)). This correspondence between selections of films is reflective of the

3 Case in point was the experimental film *Badnam Basti* (1971), which was considered lost until 2019, when it was found accidentally in Arsenal's archive.

shared synergy of an accidental archivism that pervades both Arsenal's and Sastry's work. Just as archives write history by selecting which films to preserve, found footage filmmakers similarly "rewrite film history" by using the films from within the institution (Fossati 2012, 4).

It is also significant here that only in the last two decades have films like *And I Make Short Films* taken a prominent place in experimental film history in India, owing to sustained curatorial efforts, like Shai Heredia's *Experimenta*, which in 2004 re-introduced FD films from 1965–75 into discourses around experimental cinema. This has been followed by Amrit Gangar's *Cinema of Prayoga* (2006), Heredia and Nicole Wolf's co-curation "Experimentations from India" for Berlinale's Forum Expanded in 2008, the weekly film club "FD Zone" (which programmed films from its own archive with contemporary documentaries), and other efforts of individual curators like Avijit Mukul Kishore.

Just as such curators have shown how Sastry's films offer alternative entry points into experimental film histories of India, we may also see in them insight into alternative histories of the Indian nation. *And I Make Short Films* unsettles the Indian nation's official historical trajectories as imagined through film, by selectively juxtaposing the heterogenous audio-visual ephemera surrounding events that define India's postcolonial moment (such as Nehru's death) with the dynamic promiscuity of popular visual culture and art. Given his intentional interventions and insider's perspective, Sastry shakes the positivist logics of the archive from within, mobilizing the possibilities of access offered by the archive's own creation. At the same time, through formal interventions that activate multiple valences of social and cultural memory from seemingly banal bits and pieces of history, his films make way for unexpected and uncontrolled meanings. Sastry's recycling of preexisting footage moves away from a representative logic to one of historiographic method, where the past is not something being re-presented, but is something to be recalled, remembered, reused, and re-made in the present.

284 It is this logic that in turn destabilizes the archive as a static repository of the past and transforms it into a promiscuous site through new uses and relations between sounds and images. As contemporary archivists and curators compel us to look back at complete films and their connections to larger film histories, it is also pertinent that we take seriously this ephemeral and sensuous archive created intentionally through films like *And I Make Short Films*.

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A Festival Under Fire

Shai Heredia

The new cinephilia radiates outward, powered by a spirit of inquiry and a will to social and planetary change. It is no coincidence that so many filmmakers valued by the new cinephilia—women, queer, indigenous, people of color—have an interest in activism, and view cinema itself as part of a larger cultural-activist project. — Girish Shambu (2020)

At the Berlinale in 2020 I was on a panel entitled “At the End of the Red Carpet—Festivals under fire, festivals as sites of criticality.” The panel was essentially a reflection on the role of the film festival in the current global landscape. My view at the time was rather cynical, and came from a place of deep sadness about the political situation in India and across the world. Responding to the title of the panel I said that maybe it was time to burn all film festivals to the ground and to start afresh, because if this is the world that we have participated in constructing then we need to stop, re-evaluate, and work towards re-ordering things.

286 Ironically, at that same edition of the Berlinale in 2020, I found myself doing a deep dive into political films from across the world through the incredibly curated programs of films in the Forum 50 Anniversary program. I was profoundly impacted by this immersive experience. As histories of political and cultural movements came alive on screen through a diversity of stories of activism and resistance, many peoples' struggles that have shaped our times across continents were re-presented in all their cinematic glory. These films generated fresh questions and offered new answers. It became evident to me that in the current moment of historical amnesia in India, accessible film archives and distribution networks for archival films can play an important role in shaping our society.

What can the contemporary learn from the archive? How does political cinema survive, grow and express solidarity in the face of oppression? These were some of the questions that arose through my experience with archival cinema at the Berlinale in 2020. And in the subsequent years of the pandemic, as global inequalities and injustices intensified and became more visible, it was these questions that continued to echo through my mind. While vaccine inequity placed a clear value on whose lives matter, between the 'rich' and 'poor' countries, India struggled through the dark days of COVID with a fascist leader at the helm.

In March 2020, the Indian government called an immediate lockdown, giving citizens 4 hours to pack up their lives and find their way home. As people began to scramble for food, shelter, medicines, and money, millions of migrant workers lost their jobs overnight and began their long journeys back home. With no interstate transport available, women and men, boys and girls, the young and old, walked miles and miles across the country, over days and weeks to reach their homes. They carried backpacks, babies, children, and even each other. They lined the highways across the length and breadth of this country. While on their journey they were criminalized as spreaders of the virus and subjected to violence and humiliation. Many fell sick and

some sadly died. Amidst this, the ongoing anti CAA/NRC protest movement¹ led by women and students that had gained significant momentum across the country was forced to shut down. The vibrant protest site of Shaheen Bagh in the capital city of Delhi was evacuated, leaving little to no trace of the radical people, voices, and spirited energy that filled the area. Meanwhile, the Indian government congratulated itself on its response to the pandemic, turned a blind eye to the suffering of millions of migrant workers, and rushed to push through a bill in parliament that disempowered farmers, sacrificing them to private industry. This kicked off one of the biggest farmers' protests the country has ever seen. These were just some of the images and stories that characterized the early COVID years in India (see Abi-Habib and Yasir 2020).

It was during this complex and difficult period that I realized it was imperative to revive Experimenta (www.experimenta.in), the biennial film festival that I founded in 2003 and that had had its 10th edition in 2017. We needed to commune and to heal. The political and cultural need of the hour was for us to devise a new language and create versatile forms of resistance before it became too late. And so, after a 5-year hiatus, Experimenta was poised to return, albeit in a new avatar. Moving away from the conventional festival format, the plan was to curate a program of political cinema that challenged the state and reflected upon the current era of uncertainty in India. But how was this going to be possible in a country where any critique of the government gets journalists, activists, and artists thrown into jail, where films are randomly banned and censored, where mainstream media is controlled, and where all cultural expression in opposition to right-wing ideology is termed 'anti-national'? The answer lay in my experience with the archival films in the Forum 50 program.

1 These protests occurred after the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) was enacted by the Government of India, which was essentially designed to profile minority communities, especially Muslims, and question their citizenship, ultimately towards building a Hindu India.

288 The strategy for Experimenta 2023 was to construct a subversive curatorial framework by excavating the history of political cinema and digging deep into the archives. The program was designed to draw parallels between the current political landscape of India and peoples' struggles from other cultural contexts. How relevant is the history of global social movements today? How does cinema as an art form persist across time to offer critical representations of the aspirations, mistakes, and contradictions of nation states? These were the questions that framed the program. Respondents from across India, including artists, filmmakers, writers, activists, journalists, and scholars were invited to contextualize these historical films and connect them to the situation that we were facing on the ground today. The realities of conflicts made visible through revolutionary cinema, seemingly only relevant elsewhere and belonging to a different time, worked as activators to create a discursive environment. And so, for five days with a packed hall at the Goethe-Institut in Bangalore, Experimenta became an inclusive and safe platform for many voices of dissent.

As an aside, I would like to point out that to protect the respondents from being identified by the dark side, we chose to credit them only in the acknowledgements of the festival brochure and not under the program that they were discussing. We were advised that if anything became controversial, the brochure would operate as physical proof against these particular individuals. Sometimes, paranoia is not a bad thing.

Experimenta 2023 opened with *Rule by Consent* (1967) by Vijay B. Chandra and Pramod Pati, a propagandist film produced by the Films Division of India that celebrated the Indian democratic system and the fourth general elections of India. The irony of watching this utopian vision of a secular, socialist newly independent India on screen while considering where history has led us today was an extremely complex and emotional experience for many of us in the audience. This film led us into examining issues of migration, labor, oppression, censorship, and

colonialism through Ibrahim Shaddad's *Camel* (1981) and *Hunting Party* (1964), Chris Marker's *On vous parle de Paris: Maspero, les mots ont un sens* (1970), and Med Hondo's *Mes Voisins* (1971). With Howard Alk's *The Murder of Fred Hampton* (1971) and Yolande du Luart's *Angela—Portrait of a Revolutionary* (1971), we addressed the Black American struggle against racism and inequitable capitalist power structures in 1960s and 70s America. Today, these films serve as relevant documents of how state-sanctioned violence is used against minorities, activists, and intellectuals. We reaffirmed the power of community organization and resistance movements through the feminist protest films of the Yugantar Collective *Molkarin* (1985) and *Sudesh* (1983) alongside *Phelandaba (End of the Dialogue)* (1970) by members of the Pan Africanist Congress, a clandestinely shot first-ever film on the horrors of Apartheid in South Africa. As we immersed ourselves into these worlds, we were able to discuss issues of caste, campus politics, student activism, police brutality, the tragedy of the state of Kashmir, incarceration of activists and journalists, and political assassinations that are an everyday occurrence in today's India.

Experimenta 2023 was a festival of protest. A protest generated through shared history, cultural memory and social consciousness as embodied in cinema. As a community in solidarity, we immersed ourselves in art as resistance and considered new strategies for subverting and challenging power structures. Through political cinema from the archives we were able to embrace social movements, celebrate the power of collectives, and reflect upon the myriad forms of protest that cinema inspires. The future of our societies is rooted in mapping a continuum with political activism of the past. And the future of the film archive is embedded in how we practice our politics as artists and curators today.

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THE VAST DOMAIN OF UNSEEN FILMS:
MAPPING THE CINEMA WE NEVER KNEW

An Archive of the Future, An Archive for the Past

Constanze Ruhm

Who is not aware of the past lives in the present by continually repressing the past. For the true past appears in the present from time to time; it is—as is the present—inexhaustible. — Carla Lonzi

An archive of film reels from a time long before the invention of cinema and of an unknown format was recently discovered by an Italian feminist researcher who wishes to remain anonymous. This archive was hidden in a wooden box and buried under clutter in the basement of a former women's prison from the 17th century, which today is an important location of Italian feminist history—the *Casa internazionale delle donne* in Rome. In addition, shards of what seemed like a broken mirror were discovered inside the box. Upon closer examination, it appeared that this mirror's single fragments were of an ambiguous nature: unexpectedly, they would darken and then suddenly come alive, vaguely looking like liquid crystal screens. Sometimes, they would flash for a few seconds, displaying some visual noise to then fade again and return to their opaque, mute mirroring surface.

296 The moving image sequences discovered on the reels (that also contain unintelligible sound) show groups of women of different ages in a large overgrown garden who are engaged in various activities, sometimes difficult to discern; their style and clothes clearly link them to France of the seventeenth century, their identities are currently investigated. The women are involved in conversations and discussions, they read and take walks, at times they talk directly to the camera, and sometimes it seems that they rehearse scenes, as if it was a theatrical performance and the garden their stage and rehearsal space.

The material is often obscure, blurry, and shattered but sometimes renders intensely colorful visual impressions—stunning images that, despite being heavily affected by the long time they have been hidden underground, display a strange, compelling, and touching beauty. The sequences were printed on an unknown material which at the moment is still being forensically analyzed—a material that is soft and translucent, sensitive to light but surprisingly to touch as well, as if it were alive, almost skin-like but not skin... a material that had managed to contain these images over three hundred years, as an investigation into its date of origin has yielded.

So far, not much is known about the author of these recordings, but there are some hints that point to a young Italian actress from the seventeenth century named Armanda, originating from Palermo in Sicily, who had moved to Paris to work with Molière and then, for unknown reasons, had ended up as prisoner in the very prison in Rome that centuries later would become the Casa internazionale delle donne, where she would finally leave her treasure.

How this young woman came into possession of a camera and that recording material at a time where such technologies did not yet exist, and how she would have learned to use it and, as well, maintain the equipment charged without electricity is a miracle,

a riddle that perhaps will never be properly solved unless one believes in time travel.

At this point and as a consequence of this marvelous discovery, and despite there still being more questions than answers, some histories will most certainly have to be rewritten.









[Fig. 1-8] Installation A SHARD IS A FRAGMENT OF A LIFE (Source: Constanze Ruhm 2023). Fig. 5: Laetizia Santillan; Fig. 7: Gemma Vannuzzi.



[Fig. 1] Delhi Durbar 1903 by James Kerr (Source: Hamzic 2014, 193)

The Non-Human Archive

Veena Hariharan

Remarking on a photographic record of a 1903 Delhi Durbar procession by James Kerr, Vanja Hamzić notes how it has been “photobombed” by a “lone canine pariah” (2014, 193) (fig. 1). He writes, “... early photographs of Indian pariah dogs are notoriously rare. Unlike tigers, elephants, monkeys, snakes and other animals typically associated with India, pariah dogs are captured by the colonial-time photographer’s camera almost exclusively by chance” (ibid.). Such non-human traces can be said to constitute an *accidental archive*. Defined variously as “unintended,” “unruly,” “ephemeral,” “anarchival,” the accidental archive is stumbled upon by happenstance and serendipity in unlikely places, and contrasted to ideologically inflected institutional archives, carefully contained, even if contaminated by delirium and dust.

Curatorial logics of archives often work as filters that simultaneously enable and hinder access to the accidental ephemera that is present in all archives. Following José Esteban Muñoz’s (1996) famous emphasis on ephemera’s “anti-evidence” and “anti-rigor” in “queer acts” of reading, Alanna Thain (2017) gestures toward the anarchy inherent in the archive that queer

304 or feminist readings can unravel not so much in terms of what is missing in the cache but what we failed to read previously because of dominant structures of thought. In the manner of subaltern historians who read colonial texts such as police records and legal documents against the grain of empire to reveal agential native subjects, anarchival reading can be subversive acts of resistance.

Can we extend such a reading to the non-human subject? In her deconstructivist reading of the colonial archive, postcolonial feminist Gayatri Spivak (2016) explains that “traces” in French, contains the word “spoor”—the tracks of wild animal dung, often used to hunt them down.¹ Like trackers, who pursue wild animals from traces as diverse as pugmarks, butterflies, to yes often spoor, can we follow the scent of the non-human animal in the archive? The thing about animals, especially strays, is that they often wander into the pro-filmic by accident and end up being part of the film or image. How to read this accidental archive of animals? One way is to literally change the filters on existing archives—what if we now look in the archives not for memories, star bodies, and locations but for non-human animals?

Animal vestiges in the archive are essentially human records of their presence in objects, diaries, notes, ephemera, paintings, photographs, and films and are as such entangled with human histories of representation, exploitation, labor, or domestication. Thus, animal traces may be found in taxidermic hunting trophies, expensive ivory and fur, bones in objects of everyday use, in the racing track as speculative bids, as hybrid therianthropoc figures in gargoyles, as representations in Indian temple art, or in family albums as companion species.

1 In fact, the connection is even more visible in the German language, where *Spur* is the word for trace, including that of animals, just like in the Dutch word *spoor*. The etymological origin of these Germanic words is literally ‘footprint,’ related to e.g. Sanskrit *sphurati* (eng. *he kicks, dances*).

Then, quite literally, non-humans can be agential archival agents too. The shift toward recovering the “anarchival materiality” (Smith and Hennessey 2020) of film archives, for example—magenta film stock, mold and decay that accrue to celluloid—are recent turns in archival reading practices. Films like *Lyrical Nitrate* (Peter Delpout, 1991) and *Decasia* (Bill Morrison, 2002) draw attention to this by celebrating decay and making the combustible nitrate film stock itself the subject and material of the films. Juan Rodríguez calls for a “mycological study” of the bio-deteriorated image in the decomposing Havana film archive in terms of the unintended effects of non-human micro-organisms—effects such as chromatic flares, which artist Alexandra Navratil in her work on the presence of non-human actants in the archive, refers to as the “metabolism of images.”

Following Mahesh Rangarajan’s (2014) caveat against reading animal evidence directly or uncritically off oral and visual texts, we can read archives more as process than evidence, in order to see how real-world conditions, policies, and cultural attitudes to non-human life congeal as texts. In the example that I began with, the stray dog constitutes an accidental element in the frame—ignored amidst the hustle and bustle of the city’s elaborate arrangements for the coronation ceremony, overshadowed by caparisoned elephants and a sea of bystanders waiting for the durbar procession to pass. Such a rare sighting of the image of a pariah dog in the archive can enlighten us about, among other things, the largely benign human attitudes toward the stray dog in colonial India. Paired with other such archival images, and juxtaposed with legal, urban, and municipal colonial archives as well as the embarrassing riches of the extensively documented ornamental durbars, we may attempt to reconstruct a history of animals (in this case the pariah dog), animal-human entanglements, and animal protection laws in historically feral cities. Such “zoomorphic” (Pick 2011) readings, which emphasize the non-human in the animal-human dyad, will help us to write

306 new histories where non-humans are the event rather than the accident of the human archive.

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Found or Lost? Turkey's Vulnerable Film and Video Heritage

Özge Çelikaslan

Archives cope with many challenges. Tangible archival material is threatened by vandalism due to social conflicts, economic shortfalls, theft, neglect and obsolescence of materials, and environmental factors. All archives, including well-organized and financially sustained institutional archives as well as those of the communities of dissent have to cope with these challenges and risks. They also have to deal with their archives' ephemerality, impermanence, and evanescence due to a lack of sustainability plans and financial problems, together with the threat of political oppression, censorship, and confiscation. Archives that document human rights violations in conflict countries or territories like Turkey are especially under constant threat. There are many cases of confiscated archival documents, film and video material, computers, and hard drives; confinement; and the shutting down of organizations and their projects. This paper looks at the discussion on the vulnerable conditions of film and video archives of activism and dissent communities and several practices in Turkey. The discussion here focuses on the temporality of the archives in the context of time and ephemerality. I examine the temporal

Temporality of Activist Archives

In theory, the archive is thought of in terms of consistency, maintenance, and transmission, but in practice, archives are vulnerable, contingent, and obsolete—and activist film and video archives are the most vulnerable. Alycia Sellie et al. (2015, 462) briefly address the temporal particularities of these archives, arguing that the shifting temporalities of activist spaces and various operational challenges, especially financial costs, permanently raise significant questions. Many archives are only able to accommodate short-term projects under these conditions (ibid.), a temporal characteristic that results in a loss of trust and solidarity among members. Archival records and outcomes, knowledge, and experiences easily vanish due to the ephemerality of the material, resources, and non-eligible, discontinuous organizational and environmental conditions.

Many collections of activist film and video archives are temporary, just like the collectives they belong to and the movements they document. This is another difference between traditional archiving as a practice of the everlasting and non-traditional archival practices as always temporary. The traditional archive institutionalizes the past, hence tending to fossilize it, whereas the activist archive is continuously being made, hence inevitably endangered. Essentially, activist film and video archives must cope with the difficulties of preserving low-budget and unstable material and formats. Thus, according to Alycia Sellie et al. (2015, 10), both the collections themselves and the movements they represent are associated with impermanence. The culture of social movements is often created in formats that are already difficult to preserve because the records are created using mass production and inexpensive analog or digital materials that are unstable (ibid.).

Paalman, Fossati, and Masson (2021, 8) highlight this topic in their introduction to a special issue on activating the archive of *The Moving Image* journal, asserting that “collecting such material for activist purposes often results in unstable archives” and claiming that most recent studies on the relationship between activism and social media focus on “access and re-use.” The archive is thus understood as a collection that serves the “present” rather than the past (as a record-keeping system) or the future (as a system for long-term preservation) (Paalman, Fossati, and Masson 2021, 13). The instability of activist archival practices does not stem from a prioritization of access and re-use but from a variety of other reasons, such as lack of resources, political oppression, and a lack of knowledge and experience.

In fact, many factors combine to result in the instability of activist archives. Collection, acquisition, and selection require a lengthy time period, while sensitive and endangered political material is usually scattered to safeguard it from prosecution or simply because of disorganization. Considering the difficulties of archiving LGBTQI moving image archives, in 2007, Lynne Kirste (2007, 134) noted that the archival material “being ‘everywhere’ created both opportunities and challenges for preservation and access.” Since then, over the last 15 years, LGBTQI communities have made massive progress in assembling archival materials. However, many amateur and independent film and video productions of queer communities are still stored in unsuitable environments rather than in archives. Kirste (2007, 134) explains this as due to the limited distribution opportunities of amateur and independent productions and stresses the archives’ vulnerability, asserting that as long as their elements remain in filmmakers’ closets and basements, they will eventually deteriorate, suffer damage, or be discarded or lost. At this stage, in fact, only the filmmakers have access to the materials. Thus, Kirste stresses the importance of archival outreach in order to make the images viewable now as well as in the future.

310 The risk of losing historical film material of LGBTQI communities that Kirste addresses applies to many vulnerable communities. According to Kirste, avoiding the loss and deterioration, sustaining accessibility, and creating appropriate conditions for the preservation of moving image materials require “sufficient staff, climate-controlled storage, specialized equipment, expertise in film and tape handling and care, knowledge, and appreciation of moving image history and LGBT culture”—as well as money (Kirste 2007, 134). Scarce labor and financial resources are widespread problems for maintaining the archives. Housing and storage expenses are too high for many unfunded communities to cover. As Cifor (2017, 51) remarks, community archives, including LGBTQI archives, have often been and continue to be located in private homes because of systematic barriers, financial incapacities, and issues around reliability.

Regarding financial challenges, the costs of digitizing printed and analog audiovisual materials tend to be unaffordable for small, already alternative communities. Angela Aguayo (2020, 82–88) draws attention to the vulnerable preservation conditions of participatory community media in the United States. Many of the works from the 1960s and 70s are lost or disintegrating in the archive since they have been “disregarded as nonessential works of history” and thus reckoned as insufficiently important to be preserved. As Aguayo notes, in the last 50 years, microbudget community films followed the technological development from 16mm to half-inch Portapak to videocassette, from cable-access television shows to satellite transmission, and most recently to digital video, mobile phones, online networks, and drone photography (*ibid.*). Aguayo claims that recording and broadcast formats progress, but the ability to preserve participatory community media recedes. The recordings are continuously lost on deteriorating film and disintegrating tape and left to age in storage closets or nearly vanish on hard drives (*ibid.*). Indeed, the preservation problems are not limited to analog material. Digital material, also, is not stable. The high general expectations of the

preservation capacities of digital formats are also over optimistic. 311
In fact, digital(ized) materials are not a hundred percent stable
and durable.

Jerome McDonough and Mona Jimenez (2007, 168) wrote that analog tapes require periodic reformatting, but the signal inevitably degrades during the transfer; thus, while “initial reformatting from analog to digital is certainly costly, future reformatting, properly executed, may prove less costly (as it is more amenable to automation) than continuing a tape-to-tape process.” Digital formats enable long-term preservation facilities with different budget options. This technology, however, has vulnerabilities concerning the uncertainty of maintenance due to limited resources, capacity problems concerning labor, space, and money, and (further, ongoing) technical developments. Digital preservation is not a sustainable solution, and the digitization of archival material does not guarantee an infinite lifetime. Many incidents have ended in the loss of archives, even in the largest institutions, let alone in the under-resourced, alternative world of the activist organizations.

The commonality of maintenance problems and the main reasons for the instability of activist archival material have attracted the attention of researchers and practitioners. Although not specifically focusing on the weaknesses of certain practices, this framework will help to present the general situation of archiving the moving image and the vulnerabilities of activist archival practices, including the ones in Turkey. As I have become an accidental archivist over the last ten years, I got involved in several archival endeavors in Turkey and took the initiative together to make their film and video collections accessible. These collections include militant film heritage of the 1960s and the 70s, found footage collections, analog and digital video collections of activists that I shortly review below.

Militant Film Heritage in Turkey

The militant cinema movement in Turkey brought film cameras to the streets at the end of the 1960s. Members of the Young Cinema Movement (Genç Sinema Harketi), which broke off from Turkish Cinémathèque (Sinematek), produced the first examples of the militant cinema movement in Istanbul (Kara 2013). Enis Rıza, one of the group members, describes it as a civic and collective movement whose members also traveled to different towns and cities, recording what they observed, making short films, and distributing them.

Despite all the challenges and difficulties, they recorded rallies, workers' marches, strikes, boycotts, occupations, and NGO activities, as well as street theater performances, and making documentaries until their office in Istanbul was shut down following the military coup on March 12, 1971, when some of their films were confiscated and many members were either arrested or fled abroad. According to Şirin Erensoy (2019, 53), one of the young filmmakers smuggled some of the films abroad and was later murdered. The rest of the collective did not know of the whereabouts of the smuggled films. On February 25, 1978, the Young Cinema Movement was finally closed down, and the films were handed over to the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions (Türkiye Devrimci İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu, DİSK) (Kara 2013).

Films salvaged from confiscation are still in storage and have yet to come to light. A film collector and media artist, Ege Berensel (personal communication 2019), discovered a pile of militant films made before the 1980s by several groups of filmmakers, such as Real Cinema (Gerçek Sinema). Several film collectives had gathered at political parties, such as the Turkey Labor Party (Türkiye İşçi Partisi) and Turkey Communist Party (Türkiye Komünist Partisi), and syndicates, such as the filmmakers' and miners' syndicates (Sine-Sen, Yeraltı Maden-İş), along with several university socialist groups and film clubs. Many films and street tapes

from this period assumed to be 'lost' had either been seized by the military commissions or smuggled abroad. Berensel found others in flea markets, secondhand bazaars, and the depots of collectors, unions/syndicates, and private collections.

Berensel started to collect 8mm films in the beginning of the 2000s. He first found an 8mm film collection of the Marxist-Leninist political movement "Devrimci Yol" (Revolutionary Path, Dev-Yol) in a storehouse. He cleaned up the films and made a telecine transfer with his own means and found an 8-hour footage of a well-known rally of miners "Yeni Çelttek" and May 1st demonstrations, including the protests of Dev-Yol fugitives (Berensel 2016, 116). Over the years, Berensel became acquainted with the junk shops, flea markets, and warehouses in Turkey, where he discovered a pile of film collections considered "lost" and developed his restoration skills to rescue them. He says:

I have acquired all kinds of devices in order to digitize images, and to telecine films and restore them. I have pursued 8mm films sold by PTT (Postal Service of Turkey), exceeding 30 years old, as they could not be delivered to their addresses. A film related to the post-12th of September (military coup) period was one that appeared among the films stored by the PTT, as they could not be delivered to the address after having been shipped abroad for developing; the footage was shot from a curtain pitch on the top of a wall in Kabataş. (Berensel 2016, 116)

Although Berensel approaches private archives, personal collections, and family storages for his devotion to bringing the lost film heritage out, he still believes that the films that witnessed political movements specifically before the 1980s still remain hidden somewhere.

Many missing videotapes have also been brought to light by archival initiatives in the last few years. Several groups and individuals recorded political events and protests during the 1990s, such as human rights abuses, civil disobedience practices,

314 precedent trials, fact-finding missions, press conferences, and interviews with lawyers, human rights advocates, and state officials. For example, artist and activist Şanar Yurdatapan collected such recordings related to human rights and freedom of expression. An archival initiative has been taking care of Yurdatapan's collections from TV stations, local agencies, and human rights organizations. There are over one hundred video files consisting of approximately two hours of footage and more than a thousand video entries, some of which last two minutes and others up to fifty minutes. There are about 250 hours of video footage covering the years 1993-2006.

This collection specifically shows that the visual memory of the 1990s is shaped by the discovery of various mass graves, bones, and bodies in excavations in waste dumps and informal graveyards and associated trials and forensic reports. However, most of the files, forensic reports, shreds of evidence, and audiovisual recordings from those years were destroyed or remain undiscovered, and the remains are left to decay in storage or are waiting for expiration on hard drives. Doğan and Bayram (2020, 214), who have analyzed Yurdatapan's collection, including the recordings of the court testimonies of victims of state violence who survived, note that most of the tapes were neither digitized nor preserved in appropriate conditions, so the short lifespan of VHS and other videotapes means that they remain undiscovered records.

I Want My Archive Back!

Independent, non-institutional archiving practice has been both informally and officially regarded as a criminal act in many conflict countries, including Turkey. Having a complex relationship with archiving, some governments forbid and ban any non-sanctioned archival attempts. For instance, state-led discrimination and oppression in countries like Turkey that have a history of military coups/regimes target dissident communities

and have aimed to annihilate the political memory of leftist, autonomous, and liberation movements, often enough with considerable success. The present governmental regime in Turkey can easily classify any activist archiving initiative as an illegal activity.

An example that illustrates the archival fear in Turkey that pervades in the chilling air of state oppression is the confiscation of the archive of video activist and documentary filmmaker Oktay İnce in 2019. Police seized İnce's digital archival material, which spans more than twenty years of work containing the recordings of human rights activism in Turkey (Bishara 2019). İnce's case symbolizes and reveals the history of systematic confiscation and annihilation of radical and pro-democracy archives and film materials constituting the memory of media collectives, syndicates, journalists, artists, and filmmakers in Turkey since the beginning of the 1960s.

Following the confiscation of the archival material, İnce started a series of protests and called out: "I want my archive back!" Thereby *the archive* has been brought in the country's political agenda as a cause of dissidence and a field of struggle and right (Doğan and Bayram 2020). This particular case and many others reveal the fact that it is void of a support and preservation mechanism for people's *right to the archive* and their claim for safekeeping the common documents of history enables its violation. İnce continued to protest the confiscation by Turkish authorities within and outside the system of strict pyramidal control of state security agencies, juridical structures, and information organizations until he received his hard drives back at the end of 2021.

While his digital archival material consists of more up-to-date political events, the videotape collection that was disregarded during the raid extends to the end of the 1990s and the 2000s. Shortly after the raid, İnce and I transported his videotape collection to two institutions in Europe for restoration,

316 preservation, and digitization. The collections consisting more than a thousand videotapes in different formats are comprised of all of İnce's output in the last 20 years: footage of the LGBTQI struggle in Turkey, Kurdish displacement and the consequences of war in western Turkey, antimilitarist movement, Gezi resistance, movements of workers' unions, syndicates, human rights organizations, and the radical left in Turkey. İnce also documented the hunger strikes of prisoners against isolation policies and F-type prisons at the end of the 1990s and during the mass layoffs in 2015-16.

Protecting the archival material from possible violation and destruction refers to the right to recordkeeping. As well as making visible the violation of rights and social struggles, these records ensure the formation of a basis for public debate. As Doğan and Bayram (2020, 214) argue, the visual records in the human rights archives contribute to creating public spaces beyond the juridical space, including not only those of academic institutions and human rights initiatives but also wider arts and cultural spaces. The emergence of accountability and the potential of judicial remedy depends on human agency and the publicity that comes together around these records. In the case of the non-existence of this kind of publicity and the continuation of unjust conditions, these records preserve and bring their tacit potential to the future. Thus, such archives are powerful mobilizers of knowledge and memory, which can create global accountability with an encompassing force not only for the past but for the present and future.

Conclusion

As asserted by Paalman, Fossati, and Masson "all kinds of films get neglected or endangered, but activist media especially run the risk of being lost," the reason being that "they have usually been released outside of mainstream distribution channels and often under political threat" (2021, 11). Accordingly, activists

in Turkey have often not been able to provide the necessary conditions to preserve their audiovisual records. Their images have been criminalized, destroyed, stolen—or just lost, literally. Remains are decaying in darkroom corners and expiring on old tapes and drives. As outlined in this paper, the difficult conditions experienced put archives and their actors in a fragile, weak, and vulnerable position prone to damage, disappearance, and loss and urgently impelling the identification and seeking of coping mechanisms. They have to tackle these challenges in their small, restricted environments, and strive to find forms of continuity and dissemination in the context of instability, precariousness, and discontinuity of specific agents. Yet, maintaining these practices would include nourishing relations within and outside the archives, attending to the archival material, and building connections among the archival initiatives and other agents.

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Pleasure in/of the Archive: Porn Workshops at the Schwules Museum

Nils Meyn

Despite being one of the most common and mobile of audio-visual formats in the history of the moving image, hardcore pornography receives very little attention from archival institutions. It is everywhere, but we often hear nothing about it. It does find its way into archives, when it is confiscated, when on the contrary it is interpreted as an artwork, or simply because it would be a shame to throw it away. But in the end it is hard to shake off the subliminal cultural agreement that porn films are “smutty little movies” (Alilunas 2016) that threaten the respectability and legitimacy of institutions and that might destabilize the status of cinema as one of the most important art forms of our time. It therefore often remains unclear what exactly exists in which archives. The afterlife of hardcore porn in the archive rarely goes beyond purely storing them, and its history seems fragile and inconsistent. So how, despite these circumstances, can we value porn? How can we deal with smut, archivally and curatorially? These are questions that have only recently

320 been garnering notice in discussions about film archiving.¹ The Schwules Museum in Berlin has also begun to pose these questions more intensively with regard to its own collection of porn films. In cooperation with the Pornfilmfestival Berlin the museum regularly hosts archive workshops, to which I have contributed both in their conception and their direction.² In these workshops the museum invites porn filmmakers, sex workers, artists, and porn fans into its archive. They explore the museum's extensive collection of gay and queer porn films, view films, and discuss the possibilities and marvels of a porn archive. Together they explore the often still undetermined place that desire, intimacy, kink, and excess have, both in the cinema as well as in the archive. This seamlessly leads to a reflection on the contours of a queer archival practice with film.

Living Porn Archive

The basic goal of the workshops is to create a space that, beyond cataloguing and storing porn films at the Schwules Museum, opens up a productive exchange about the explicit contents. It is meant to make the porn films more accessible, after all, they have been neglected for a long time in the museum's collection work. Around two thirds of the porn collection, encompassing roughly 4,000 objects, remain unexplored (unlike the non-pornographic film holdings, approximately the same amount, which are for the most part catalogued by now). This work on the porn collection falls to volunteers and interns, which is typical in

- 1 Within film studies and with a focus on gay pornography in the archive, we can single out examples like Zsombor Bobák (2017) as well as my writing on the video cassette pornography in the collection at the Schwules Museum (Meyn 2021).
- 2 I have been facilitating the Porn Film Archive Workshops since 2021 along with the filmmaker and curator Simon Schultz, the media researcher and archive director of the Schwules Museum Peter Rehberg, and the historian and board member of the museum Ben Miller. Some of the workshops take place as part of the official supporting program for the Pornfilmfestival Berlin.

the museum in general for the work of processing the holdings. Their capacities, however, are often too limited to get such a copious collection completely under control. At least temporarily, the archival workshops are meant to counteract the precarity of queer collection work. In their efforts to open up a collection for a group of interested parties and to favor interactive use over pure storage, the workshops ultimately pursue the idea of a Living Archive. Conceived and mobilized by the Arsenal—Institute for Film and Video Art especially for film collections (see Schulte Strathaus 2013), the Living Archive unfolds, however, quite differently in the workshops. It consists first and foremost of involving queer communities and their intercommunication on the affective experience of pornography. In this sense, it ties in the character of the queer archive as influentially described by Ann Cvetkovich, as an “archive of feelings” (Cvetkovich 2003). This seeks to provide a space for a collective and egalitarian approach to queer memory that is as emotional as it is intellectual. This is why the personal interests of the participants are of particular consequence in the workshops; they are not required to prove any official position or professional standing. They are free to express their wishes, preferences, and fetishes so that the facilitators can find appropriate material, which sometimes produces wonderful coincidences and surprises. Through the alliance with the Pornfilmfestival Berlin, an important venue and community space for the sex-positive, post-pornographic scene in Berlin, not only have many porn fans been made aware of the workshops, but also persons who are professionally involved in the industry have registered. And their interest is not waning; the workshops are completely booked each time. More than a few participants decide, after the workshop, to support the collection work of the museum on a volunteer basis—a useful effect for the archive. One participant is now curating the film series *ForteForte* at the Club Culture Houze, a sex club in Berlin-Kreuzberg. Once a month the audience sits there on leather mats among cages, slings, and bondage chairs and watches queer-feminist porn films, partly from the collection at the Schwules

322 Museum, on a small screen. Perhaps this is one way to realize the Living Porn Archive. The boundaries between the cinema as a static mode of film screening and the promiscuous cosmos of cruising and BDSM cultures seems to get blurred, as it has long been the cultural practice in porn cinemas and queer sex clubs. But only at the sex parties, which take place later in the day at the Club Culture Houze, does it in fact come to intimate bodily contact. This way of curating porn film screenings, less sexually than intellectually charged, which also characterizes the Porn-filmfestival Berlin (Bobák 2017, 52), initially seems to contradict the stimulating nature of porn. It achieves, however, according to Bobák, something remarkable: “a reinstatement of the sexual into public domains” (2017, 44). Such events suspend the dominant division of private and public, which traditionally relegates the presumably “obscene” cultures of pornography into the private sphere of the home or the back room of a video store. They release cultural norms from their rigidity and thus have immense political significance.

The Manual Histories of Smut

Considering the porn collection at the Schwules Museum it makes sense to see sexual media practices included in the porn archive’s inventory. Since the museum has not had an acquisitions budget since its founding in 1985, and because the preservation of ordinary life is one of the cornerstones of its mission, it takes donations of all kinds from individuals who, for instance, have given the museum their private home video and porn collections. This is why the film collection today predominately consists of amateur formats such as VHS, Super 8, and DVD. It is mainly made up of commercial versions as well as private dubs and reduction prints. The porn films in particular reveal traces of a media practice. Privately collected porn films often come with hand-written sticky notes and cassette labels on which collectors indexed the contents of each copy or documented their personal modes of use. Such an “erotic index of desire” (Strub 2015, 126)

reveals private collections themselves to be an archive, which can tell a story, albeit an intransparent one, of pleasure and desire. “What gets collected here is also collecting itself,” is how Peter Rehberg (2022, 47), the museum’s archive director, puts it. In the workshops this aspect becomes part of the viewing process, for example when a group views a VHS mix tape and attempts to use the attached handwritten indexes to discover a logic behind the mode of compiling the copied sequences and clips. In addition, the object registration form, which the workshop participants are given and that puts them in the role of archivists, contains an open field in which they can enter the labelings. It often seems difficult, however, to break the materials down into discrete facts to fill in the form, “because sex and feelings are too personal or ephemeral to leave records” (Cvetkovich 2003, 181). For instance, we can only speculate as to exactly what a collector wanted to register with the tally sheets for each of his porn films. In addition, much of the basic data, such as the film’s exact year of production or, in the case of many pirate copies, the original film title, cannot be easily determined. This “trace historiography” (Alilunas 2016, 30) required by the porn archive makes clear how fragile and vulnerable this history of pornography is. This becomes tangible, not least technologically, in expectation of media formats going obsolete. The Schwules Museum has within its resources consumer video recorders and Super 8 film viewers, which can also be used by the workshop participants. For many of them, this is their first practical experience with analog film technology. Manually turning the crank on the Super 8 viewer evokes feelings of media nostalgia, which obviously remain in many of the participant’s memories. Ultimately, they get a glimpse of how porn films were watched in the past and what kind of seductive role was played in that process by the media format. Or also how “media breakdown” (Gotkin 2017, 40) defines video pornography to this day, namely when video recorders and cassettes turn out to be defective just before or during the workshop, no longer able to produce any (satisfactory) image.

Queering—Perverting the Archive

"It enables intimacy to enter the archive, and it is valuable for that reason alone," writes Tim Dean (2014, 9), lauding the place of pornography in the archive. The workshops seem to confirm this, for if there is anything we can all agree on in the closing discussions, it is the capacity for the workshops to create a space in which taboo topics can be spoken of openly and without shame—just as is also accomplished at the Pornfilmfestival Berlin (Bobák 2017, 48). Watching porn films together and discussing their imaginative power and historicity is a pleasure that is all too rare. Archival work is also community work, as the workshops signal. Intimacies in this context are not simply to be understood as bodily, but above all play out affectively between archive users and between collectors and object. But is there also space for genuine sexual arousal? As we found out in the discussions, the setting of the workshop and of archival work leads us to adopt the cerebral attitude that is expected of archivists. But the practice of collecting need not occur entirely without pleasure. In cataloguing porn films, the archive staff at the Schwules Museum have recourse to a keyword catalog conceived for porn. This favors a colloquial vocabulary over a "respectable" sexological one, and takes account of the diversity of sexual practices and fetishes. Making this diversity accessible is one of the great promises of the porn archive. Of course, against the backdrop of the specific genesis and history of the Schwules Museum, the porn collection cannot fulfill all promises.³ The discussions make transparent: a queer ethics is needed for the archive. But alongside feminist and trans porn films that defy gender norms, and transgressive BDSM porn films, doesn't this ethics also include

3 The Schwules Museum has transformed from an exclusively gay cultural space into an inclusively queer one, and this includes its collection and exhibition policies. The majority of the museum's (porn) collection thus still refers to gay, white cis men. By contrast, the perspectives of BIPOC, lesbians, trans and inter persons are underrepresented, although they are being gradually strengthened.

preserving and exploring the unethical, problematic, or boring pornographies? As the participants have aptly remarked, there are two different perspectives from which we can approach pornography: on the one hand as an artwork, on the other as a field of resonances for practices and feelings that give it meaning. The porn collection at the Schwules Museum brings these two perspectives to the fore. It shows that gay and queer everyday cultures are impossible to imagine without porn. It is necessary to archive porn in its forms as art and also as smut, taking account of how it is passionately appropriated in everyday life and how it reverberates there. For film archival practice, whether porn or not, this means that film culture worth preserving is not only to be found in the public sphere, but also plays out in the intimacy and private sphere of the home. Queering the film archive therefore also means taking account of often common or covert places and contexts, in which the marginalized and the perverse have used film to imagine a better and more pleasurable life. If we think of the archive as a utopia, it is a place of liberated bodies and beautiful consensus free of hierarchy, where the canon gives way to a plurality of voices and a space for resistance opens up.

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Cross-Fading Archives, Resurfacing Infrastructures: The Cinema Historian as Accidental Archivist and Activist

Simone Venturini

Introduction

A recent Italian research project—“MMC49’76: Modes, Memories and Cultures of Film Production in Italy” (1949–1976)¹—allo- cated its whole first phase to taking a census of, collecting, and organizing archival sources (Comand and Venturini 2021a). Looking back at this first research stage, the aim of this article is to reflect on the relationships between historical archival incidents or “accidents,” research infrastructures, and the role of the different archival, scientific, and corporate communities at stake.

Among the primary sources investigated, three archival records (fonds) in particular stimulated our academic work and placed the scholars involved in an unexpected activist framework: the Italian

1 See <https://cineproduzione.uniud.it>. This article stems from the collective work of the universities of Udine, IULM Milano, Parma, and Roma 3 research team and in particular the project PI Mariapia Comand, with whom its contents were conceived, discussed, and shared.

328 film production archival series (1949–1994) housed at the Central State Archive (Archivio Centrale dello Stato, ACS); the Italian Film and Audiovisual Industry Association (Associazione Nazionale Industrie Cinematografiche Audiovisive Digitali, ANICA) historical archive; and the online Italian Cinema (Archivio del cinema italiano) database, first put together at ANICA in 1987.

Over time, these collections have become cross-fading archives: documents and data in transition, fading because they are not catalogued (the ministerial fonds); they have been moved and taken apart (the corporate archive); or they now have different or limited ends to their original purpose (the database).

These turning points could be defined as archival “accidents,” which the research group dealt with by seeking to distinguish between what can be grasped on a surface level and what goes deeper down, in other words the “archival grain” (Stoler 2009). They are the upshot of circumstances or unexpected complications resulting from epistemic, socio-economic, industrial, and technological transformations and therefore pragmatic decisions: to separate Italian and co-produced films in the day-to-day management of ministerial files, thus creating a second marginalized and for a long time invisible series at the ACS; to safeguard a corporate archive that may have been at risk of disappearing by moving it to another location; to reset the primary function of a database from historic and scholarly ends to economic and accounting purposes.

Traditional archives such as those discussed in this essay (a state archive, a corporate archive, a pioneering database) would not seem to call for critical or activist frameworks, or radical rethinkings of canonical archival forms. And yet, we immediately thought of these archives as “communal resources” requiring the engagement of several stakeholders (Paalman, Fossati, and Masson 2021). Therefore, our solution was to come up with a stewardship responding to a range of needs rather than the requirements of single projects or scholars. It was an approach

based on concrete archival cross-connections and the role of communities in reactivating the archives (historians, archivists, industry professionals, state officials, data managers, and visual designers).

The research group therefore found itself working together in a communal space in the role of activists and accidental archivists shaping the future of historical research and the collective imagery and storytelling of some of Italy's most important twentieth-century industrial heritage. In particular, the team realized that these archives were not necessarily a static system of knowledge from the past. Instead, it framed them as a relational, multilayered network of documents and data, discourses and practices that came right up to the present day and could be reactivated thanks to the participation of all the communities involved. Rethinking these archives and illuminating their hidden potential as to their public and communal role made the research a means and a social responsibility and not an end. As a result, the stakeholders and research team took a cooperative and inter-institutional approach based on the development of cataloguing and research infrastructures, in view of creating a connection between the fonds—and a shared knowledge network.

Following on from these premises, I will describe how we approached these fonds, mixing cinema history, accidental archivism, and new ways of thinking to reshape the future of historical research through its infrastructures.

Accidental Archivism I: The Rediscovered Italian Co-Productions

The Central State Archive (ACS) in Rome houses the papers that film producers had to send to the Directorate General for Cinema (Direzione Generale Cinema, DGC) so they could label their film as Italian and obtain the permit for public projection, processes that

330 had to be followed to claim Italian nationality, facilitations, and therefore public funding.

In particular, a “Co” archival series—conserved at length but formerly inaccessible—was discovered² alongside the well-known “Cf” fonds, covering 1949-1994 and the subject of research for at least twenty years.³ The “Co” “parallel” archival series contained international co-produced films and was generated on the occasion of the approval of the 1965 film law: “it was their large number, in Italian cinema’s most intense period of internationalization, that made the Directorate General change their practices and separate them” (Di Chiara 2021, 36).

Here we became accidental archivists, working side by side with the ACS archivists. Together we decided to sample the files from the fonds and put together a new cataloguing model to trace and make a detailed snapshot of Italian cinema at the height of its internationalization. We queried and identified many specific historical aspects of the sources and documents and highlighted sensitive micro and macro-historical and quantitative analysis data. Metadata from more than 1,800 files were put into a new digital catalogue, enabling specific searches and at the same time encouraging quantitative questions to be asked about production companies, costs, and funding, as well as the European countries and third parties involved. Italian cinema could now be read from a new distant and transnational slant.

The research group cooperated and invested economic and scholarly resources to create an innovative database that would include the other abovementioned ACS archival series from the period 1949 to 1994 and become an entry portal for future research projects and initiatives. In addition, it would become one of the cross-connected archives forming a web atlas based

2 Thanks to Ph. D. Mirco Modolo, the head archivist at the ACS cinema fonds.

3 See, among others, the seminal research on the Cf fonds by Farassino (1988) and Venturini (2002).

on storytelling and data visualization.⁴ In such a way, researchers acted as activists enabling what was still hidden to emerge and what was accidental to become infrastructural.⁵

Accidental Archivism II: The ANICA Historical Archive and the Lead-Up to a New Brighton for Italian Production Studies

ANICA was founded in 1944. After the war, it gained a central role in the Italian and international production system and cultural scene. The association's historical archive is therefore a source of extraordinary importance for Italian film industry studies. Its history is marked by "accidents," and in particular, between the late 1990s and the early 2000s, by a reckless safeguarding initiative involving ministerial, industrial, and private institutions. It is an all-Italian story that would be worth telling.

In short, the archive needed to fade out awhile so that its enormous potential for production studies could be grasped (Brunetta 1994; Comand and Venturini 2021b). At the start of the 2000s, "when the archive was at a low ebb, no one had any idea or desire to deal with the overproduction and unsuitable spaces were filled with documents made illegible and irretrievable owing to their very number" (Saggiaro 2015, 3). Thus the central core of the ANICA historical archive moved from the historical center of the Italian filmmaking industry (Rome) and its natural location (the ANICA headquarters in Rome) to the hills of Basilicata and more precisely to a warehouse at the newly established Cineteca Lucana film library in Oppido Lucano. The move was clearly

4 See www.mmc4976atlante.it.

5 Here the reference is to infrastructural studies but also to the fact that secondary, marginal, and accidental elements can become the engines of the research itself, as framed by the by now inextricable relationship between archival and digital infrastructures and historical and humanistic research, which are linked to and influence each other in many ways.

332 driven by a fear for the archive's disappearance, but the reasons for this move to an institution still in the setting-up phase and fundamentally lacking any archival competences are still not fully explicable. Nevertheless, neither this incredible archival accident nor the tricky conditions have managed to prevent several researchers and scholars, including our research team, from dipping into the fonds housed in Oppido in recent years. The reports of those who had the chance to view the material on site, in this extraordinary, hard-to-reach place owing to the uncertain infrastructure and organization, paint a picture of historians-cum-adventurers, explorers and archaeologists, and ultimately, accidental archivists.

Only more recently has there been a change of perspective, forged in part by the MMC49-'76 project, fostering the protection of the documentary heritage over individual research needs. The research group decided to go back upstream and seek out ANICA as its interlocutor. A healthy partnership blossomed, which soon led not only to the reordering of the internal fonds but also the discovery of sources and documents still present in Rome and, as we will see, the scientific "reactivation" of the ANICA Italian cinema database.

The 2020–21 reordering and cataloguing activities gave a more precise picture and measure of an archive that is actually the sum of several different archives. These activities uncovered a treasure trove of essential research documents which, thanks to new access regulations, could be consulted in a transparent and safe way. Hence, the current database reveals the ANICA archives' sensational potential for the historiography of Italian film production modes and cultures, while also underlining the basic need for archives, industry, and academia to work together in their shared mission to protect the heritage and to produce and exchange knowledge.

Accidental Archivism III: The ANICA Italian Cinema Database and the Archaeology of Italian Digital Film Studies

The ANICA Italian cinema database⁶ is one of the most reliable and widely used filmography sources in Italy. What is less well known is that the archive came about as a “research project” funded by the Ministry for Tourism and Spectacle and the Presidency of the Council of Ministers. It was devised in 1987 by film historian Aldo Bernardini who until the early 2000s coordinated an interdisciplinary workgroup at ANICA that set up the valuable database whose “goal is to collect all the information on Italian films in a single archive ... designed and set out to meet a whole series of research needs and to make selective searches of the input data” (Bernardini 1995, I-II).

The initiative can be seen as the upshot of New Film History, the rediscovery of Italian silent cinema and the consequent need to build a filmography infrastructure to reach out to film archives, scholars, and universities as well as ANICA itself, which had published Italian-made films every year since the 1950s. As the project drew to an end, the database became a central tool for the redistribution to producers of the monies recorded by the Italian copyright collecting agency (SIAE) for “private copying” of motion pictures.

The “reactivation” of the Italian cinema’s historical scientific database should not be seen as a one-off, standalone project on new (Italian) cinema history but as part of a wider rethinking of (digital) research infrastructures (Noordegraaf, Lotze, and Boter 2018). In recent years, Italian film scholars and historians have started to take a closer and more conscious look at the sense, potentials, and practices of the digital humanities, beyond their merely “tactical” function (Kirschenbaum 2012, 415–28).

6 See www.archiviodelcinemaitaliano.it.

334 As such, Bernardini, already a pioneer of new historiography, can now be framed as an innovator and precursor in the field of digital film studies (Grant 2012; Burghardt et al. 2020) as applied to Italian film history: “I try to best use IT resources to make and take the new conception of filmography work to its extreme consequences ... IT greatly benefits filmography thanks to the possibility that it offers to store, order and compare large quantities of data” (Bernardini 2001, 258).

The current online version of that IT archive, set out following the methodological criteria adopted by its deviser to achieve his ambitious goals (Bernardini 1995, I-XXXIII; Bernardini 2001, 258–61), is just one part of a vaster set of sub-archives, fields, and relations. Therefore, we wanted to reactivate a somehow silent research infrastructure and draw out its worth through specific queries and visualizations and analyzing otherwise lost data. The first quantitative and historical-analytical questions about aspects such as below-the-line production roles and figures, transnational filming locations, and technical industries are still being investigated, and are coming up with some very interesting results for the field of production studies. By reloading the hidden archive, we have partially fulfilled what has always been the goal at the heart of the project, that is, to one day expand the data system created by the encounter between filmography and IT to make it a “global archive” of Italian film history (Bernardini 2001, 260–61).

Conclusions

Ultimately, the accidental archivism triggered by the archival accidents in the three case studies and the role of accidental archivist assumed by scholars has had several positive effects on research. First of all, they have made it clear to the academic community how and how far research infrastructures can mold and fashion the research itself in terms of an epistemic ally and heuristic vehicle and not an ancillary tool. Second, they have

caused historians to adopt a stance in the public interest, pushing them to act for the preservation and long-term sustainability of the heritage and the knowledge produced. Third, the renewed attention towards these archival fonds has not only aided their protection and accessibility, cross-connections, and new ways of engagement, but it has also enabled film production cultures, modes, and memories that had been pushed to one side, hidden, unresearched, to re-emerge and be shared.

In conclusion, through these archival accidents, the fonds were activated in different ways: in the first case, communities and stakeholders benefitted from the cataloguing, quantitative data analysis, and sharing through digital humanities tools and environments of the newly rediscovered archival series; in the second case, heritage of fundamental importance for Italian production studies was ordered, safeguarded, and put back together, paving the way to new paths of research and storytelling on the film industry, which forms an important part of the so-called Made in Italy label; lastly, in the third case, a pioneering database, a digital infrastructure of the historiography of Italian cinema whose roots go back to the 1980s, was reframed and brought back to its initial scholarly aims, mainly through queries and visualizing the archived data, highlighting the need for a mature field of digital film studies in the Italian context.

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[Fig. 1] Still frame from 35mm film reel of outtakes filmed by Stevan Labudović, showing the arrival of "The Galeb," the ship of Yugoslav President Tito in Ghana, in February 1961 (Source: Non-Aligned Newsreels x Filmske Novosti)

Flotsam and Jetsam

Mila Turajlić

*History disintegrates into images, not into stories.
—Walter Benjamin*

Most countries' maritime laws distinguish between "flotsam" and "jetsam" as different types of marine debris. Flotsam is defined as anything that is unintentionally left behind after a shipwreck that floats to the surface after a ship sinks. Jetsam describes debris that was deliberately thrown overboard by a crew of a ship in distress—either to lighten the cargo load or as some other reaction to a problem the vessel has encountered—which is discovered floating in the water or washed ashore. The distinction is important, as it establishes the presence of intent to remove material from the ship. Flotsam may be claimed by the original owner, whereas jetsam may be claimed as property by whoever discovers it.

"Filmske Novosti," the official newsreel agency of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, was the only film studio in the country directly answerable to the federal government. Mandated to document the political, social, economic, and

340 cultural life of the country, they fulfilled this mission from their creation as a section of the partisan units during the Second World War. While television supplanted their prominence and reach from the 1970s, their work effectively ended only in the 1980s, with the twin collapse of socialism and the disintegration of the country. When I arrived to start research on my first film there, in 2005, they was a *savezna javna ustanova*—federal public institution—though we were no longer a federation. As such there was nobody—no body—who could officially appoint a new director to the institution, meaning there was no one who could authorize me access or the right to use the archive. By the following year, Serbia had adopted a new constitution, Filmske Novosti had become a republic cultural institution, and my work was underway. For the next five years, as I dug underground searching for archives to tell a history of how Yugoslavia had been narrated politically via cinema,¹ forces were at work on the surface dismantling, discarding, and removing the traces of Yugoslavia from the landscape of our public memory. Institutions were privatized, archives were emptied, streets and schools bearing the names of partisan heroes renamed, public holidays changed, statues removed.

How do you face the archive of a history that has disintegrated? In a situation where, as Lawrence Ferlinghetti writes: “The North Pole is not where it used to be.” What to make of this archive, which was at once an officially sanctioned chronicle and an agent in the creation of the social imaginary of Yugoslavia, that had now lost its political compass? What is the expectation an ideologically abandoned archive places on those of us who arrive seeking to reactivate it? How to go about imagining this practice? How to recount that search for the right critical approach, the correct emotional distance required in performing it? And how to work with the possibility of what is there?

1 *Cinema Komunisto*, 2010, 100 minutes, directed by Mila Turajlić, produced by Dribbling Pictures.

In his study on *Memory, History and Forgetting* Paul Ricœur describes the condition such as the one in which I encountered the archive:

A document in an archive ... has no designated addressee, unlike oral testimony addressed to a specific interlocutor. What is more, the document sleeping in the archives is not just silent, it is an orphan. The testimonies it contains are detached from the authors who “gave birth” to them. (2004, 169)

The mute and orphaned condition became the conundrum I spent the next decade of my practice trying to untangle. Having completed my first film in 2010, by 2015 I was back in the archive. What brought me there was an encounter with one of the “authors who birthed it”—in fact, the last remaining cameraman of Filmske Novosti, Stevan Labudović. Over the next three years, until his death, we would work together on addressing the orphaned and mute condition of the images he had fathered. Stevan’s career and perspective on the images was shaped by the privileged position he had ascended to at the tender age of 27, in being selected in 1954 to be part of a two-man crew to film a series of voyages by ship undertaken by Tito at the height of the Cold War. Over the next decade, the presidential ship “The Galeb” (eng. *seagull*) would become the symbol of Yugoslav diplomacy as Tito left Europe to travel to 18 countries in Asia and Africa, all of which, with one exception, had just emerged from colonialism (fig. 1). These glimpses into newly-created countries, where Tito was often the first foreign head of state to visit post-independence, are complex vessels, ciphers of political (self-) representation, national imaginaries, and performative diplomacy. They were recorded without sound.

The materials Stevan filmed became the basis of what could be called ‘the non-aligned collection’ of the Yugoslav newsreels. Starting in 1959 the collection would expand to include materials filmed by Labudović during a clandestine mission he was sent on

342 by President Tito, to create a documentary film on the Algerian war, which the Algerian Liberation Movement (FLN) could use in its diplomatic and media efforts to win international public support in their struggle for independence from French colonialism. Sent to Algeria to create a militant image in an act of solidarity, he would end up becoming an important chronicler of the war. By the time Algeria won its independence, Labudović had, by the estimates of the Algerian Liberation Army (ALN), filmed a total of 83km of 35mm film, the reels still preserved in the vault of Filmske Novosti in Belgrade. Of particular importance was the fact that I had the chance to work with his outtakes, the unused and unseen images he had filmed, which helped me measure the disparity between his perspective and the political mechanisms of selection and editing that governed the newsreels. What complicated the process was that Stevan had authored the images, but not the words to narrate them. Someone else would make them speak in the voiceovers of the newsreels released at the time. Working through the paper documentation stored away in the offices at Filmske Novosti, and having been granted access to the Diplomatic Archives of the former Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the outline of a structure began to emerge, a state-run strategy of harnessing cinema to Yugoslavia's non-aligned agenda. A cinematic image that would not merely document the birth of the Third World project, but would be employed to create its image and make its voice heard in on the world stage. The missing sound then, was not only a physical absence, but a metaphorical one.

As we worked through the reels stacked in Filmske Novosti, of which many were labeled, but most were not catalogued or indexed, through the random gestures of opening cans and the serendipity of identifying frames, a fragmentary picture began to emerge from this debris floating around us. Stevan's presence at my side, and his personal documentation including his diaries, provided the images with a subjective gaze and political intention. His filmmaking was informed by the experience of

making propaganda as a member of the photographic units of the Yugoslav partisans during World War Two. In conversation with his images in a cinema, at a flatbed editing table, in front of a laptop, we constructed a ‘behind the scenes’ voiceover revealing the process of their filming.²

And yet, the fragmentary nature of this archive was frustratingly incomplete. A rarely-mentioned third category of marine debris is “derelict”—the term for goods or wreckage that lie at the bottom of the sea. Joining this material that hadn’t resurfaced, through displacement and decay, were memories that had also been submerged for decades. Faced with the gaps and silences of the archive, the gesture I found myself performing as a response was to solicit the missing voices in an attempt to weave an oral history around the images. Following Stevan’s death, and feeling the incompleteness of a singular perspective, I began seeking out and recording those involved in the story who were still alive. Seeking to activate the archival materials I would show them in individual or group settings, creating public and private space for them to be experienced. This work took me across the former Yugoslavia to encounter sailors who had been on the *Galeb* with Tito during the Voyages of Peace, diplomats who had formulated Yugoslavia’s non-alignment policy, and Algerian combatants in whose units Stevan had filmed.

The response to Ferlinghetti’s entreaty to “bring together again the telling of a tale and the living voice” became, over the past three years, a creative, performative, and participatory

2 A diptych of two feature-length documentary films would come out of this collaboration, entitled *Non-Aligned & Ciné-Guerrillas: Scenes from the Labudović Reels*. *Non-Aligned* (2022, 100 minutes) revisits the birth of the Non-Aligned Movement as captured through Stevan’s camera and perspective during Tito’s voyages on “The *Galeb*” and the materials filmed during the first Non-Aligned Summit in Belgrade in 1961. *Ciné-Guerrillas* (2022, 94 minutes) explores Stevan’s Algerian footage, by looking at how the militant image played a role carrier of the diplomatic struggle for Algerian independence.

344 process. In each setting, from Algiers, to Accra, to Belgrade, a silent screening of the recovered archival footage becomes an invitation for those gathered to interpret and claim it, by overlaying in their own voice personal memories, interpretations, and imaginaries, generating a counter-memory. This in turn has led me to create a still ongoing practice-oriented research project we have named “Non-Aligned Newsreels,” which records the construction of a new living archive. In face of the Serbian government’s continued dismissal and discarding of Yugoslavia’s political and cultural heritage, this ‘jetsam’ can be re-appropriated by those of us who salvage it, reactivate it by creating new artefacts, and see in it a poetic capacity to help imagine new forms of collective resistance—“the last lighthouse in rising seas.”

My deepest thank you to Stevan Labudović for the cinematic adventure we traveled together, to Vladimir Tomčić and Jovana Kesić for opening the vaults of Filmske Novosti, and to Mme Zehira Yahi for opening the doors of Algeria to me.

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LOST PLATFORMS: ACCIDENTAL ARCHIVISM
AND THE OVERPROMISE OF TECHNOLOGY

Film Heritage at the Curb

Philipp Dominik Keidl

What kinds of fan-related objects do archives collect, and how do these film and star-related commodities qualify as heritage? These two questions were at the center of the seminar “Film and Material Culture,” which I taught in the PhD program “Configurations of Film” at Goethe University in spring 2022. With the program’s doctoral students, I visited three collections on film and fan-related objects, including collectible albums, comic books, scrapbooks, promotional materials, and merchandise. At first glance, the collections told a story that begins with the passion and work of amateur collectors and ends with the official appraisal and acquisition by established heritage institutions. In some cases, we learned, fan collectors had carefully prepared, on their own initiative, the transition of their private collections to public archives. In other cases, heirs had reached out to curators and offered them complete collections or single objects that had either been known to be valued by the deceased person or had been found in basements and attics when their home was emptied. In both instances, fan collectors and the public showed an evident awareness of the value of film-related materials as

348 well as the work official institutions perform in preserving and exhibiting them.

Yet, what struck me most were not the examples of successful transitions from private collection to public archives. An anecdote shared with me by a curator from the Deutsches Filminstitut & Filmmuseum (hereafter DFF) led my interest in another direction. Several years ago, a person contacted this curator to ask if the DFF would be interested in their recently deceased partner's collection of merchandise, tie-ins, promotional materials, and other film and star-related ephemera. After an initial inspection, the curator agreed to pick up part of the collection. However, due to a scheduling conflict, the appointment had to be postponed. But as it turned out, rescheduling was not an option for the bereaved spouse, who packed the items into boxes and placed them on the curb for passersby or garbage services. Apparently, the collection triggered unwelcome memories of their partner, and dealing with their grief in this moment of distress was prioritized over organizing the collection's transition into an archive; thus, the collection never ended up on the DFF's shelves. This anecdote relativized stories of successful transitions from private collections into official archives. It is a reminder that film-related material culture is lost daily, without even documentation of discarded collections, fans' curatorial practices and principles of appraisal, or the rationales of potential donors.

Scholarship on the intersection of fandom and material culture has demonstrated the importance of collecting as part of the building of fan identity (Geraghty 2014; Jenkins 2020). In many instances, fan collectors also share knowledge about their collections in their own exhibitions or media productions (Keidl and Waysdorf 2022). And in some cases, fans collaborate with official heritage institutions on temporary or permanent exhibition projects (Hoebink, Reijnders, and Waysdorf 2014). Throughout such collaborations, official heritage institutions assess the value that a collection has for their archives and its potential users. At the end of this archival appraisal, the

specificity of a particular past (the meanings and values given to a collection by the fan collector) is superseded by a more generic sense of the past (the history of film and film fandom). Consequently, the material traces of a fan collection may survive, but the personal memories and the expert knowledge of the fan are habitually lost. The anecdote about the discarded collection, however, presents a different mode of assessment. Here, a fan does not take the initiative to organize the divestment of their collection. Rather, the burden falls to individuals who become custodians of a fan collection by chance and without previous interest or involvement in the fandom.

For these “accidental fan archivists,” the personal relationship to the deceased influences how they handle the inherited collection more than any consideration of the contexts and subtexts of fandom and film heritage. Material culture is entwined with their experience of loss, and they often divest of the objects so that a “deceased individual may be gradually reduced to the evocation of one or two key objects [which may lead] to the simplification of their memorialization” (Miller and Parrott 2009, 506). But whereas archival acquisition and personal divestment share the tendency to transform the specific into the generic, the former usually results in the expansion of a collection while the latter commonly leads to the reduction of previously owned possessions. This connection between death, memory, and material culture affords insights into the spouse’s motivation to contact but not wait for the DFF. Fandom might have been an important identity marker for the departed spouse, yet it did not define the relationship between the spouses. Other mementoes representing friendship, romance, parenthood, occupation, and other forms of leisure were perhaps better suited to remember the deceased. Accordingly, the widowed spouse was aware that the fan’s collection of merchandise could be of interest to the DFF, but was not very motivated to preserve it.

I tell this anecdote not to point fingers at those who must make decisions of what to keep and what to give away in moments of

350 immense distress. Yet it is hard to imagine that the prominent estates of Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Maximilian Schell, Volker Schlöndorff, or Curd Jürgens (all housed at the DFF) would have been disposed of so easily and without any outcry. Their destruction would be declared an irreparable loss for film history. What qualifies the one example as a tragedy and the other as an unfortunate series of events is not the quality of stories one could tell about advertising and merchandising articles. In recent years, research on material culture has provided profound insights into the production, promotion, exhibition, crossmedial and transmedial expansion, reception, and preservation of film and cinema culture (Affuso and Scott 2023; Askari 2022; Hastie 2007; Santo 2015; Trope 2011). Rather, it is the quantity of these objects encountered in everyday life that gives a false idea of permanence. The “rhetoric of the original” (Hediger 2005) is an important cornerstone in the conception of film heritage, putting emphasis on fragile and “auratic” things like celluloid or original production materials such as costumes, concept arts, and props. In turn, discussions on products such as merchandise are habitually defined by a “rhetoric of the generic, mass-produced, cheap and disposable,” as these things fall into the category of what Wendy A. Woloson calls “crap”: objects that are “paradoxical, contradictory, insincere, unnecessary, and fundamentally false” (2020, 8). Indeed, the ubiquity of “stuff” like merchandise puts it in danger of “fading from view, and becoming naturalized, taken for granted” (Miller 2010, 105). It is because of this perception of merchandise as marginal yet ever-present that fan collections—or collections of “thrown aways not thrown away” (Desjardins 2006, 40)—are in danger of being eventually thrown away for good.

Ideas like “crap” and “heritage,” however, are culturally, socially, and politically determined and relative categories. As such, an anecdote about one discarded fan collection should not be understood as a call for the comprehensive transformation of crap into heritage. The main concern is how such constructs determine what can be studied and known about the history of

fandom and film's material culture. According to Caetlin Benson-Allott, "conditions of availability and unavailability structure scholars', critics', and fans' relation to film history" (2021, 77). While she focuses on the loss of films because of industrial logics and the deterioration of prints and videos, her argument could also be extended to the availability and unavailability of those objects that usually form the foundation of fan collections: merchandise, promotional materials, and other ephemera. Hence, while film scholars increasingly call on their peers to look "behind," "past," or "around" the screen (Benson-Allott 2021; Geraghty 2014; Gray 2010; Rehak 2014), the material culture that exists outside the screen and that structures how fans as well as general audiences think about film is discarded and lost daily.

Of course, archives can tell many successful stories about acquiring objects from collectors or their heirs. Still, this is not reason enough to be satisfied with what can already be found in film archives, as one can only engage with those objects that have been preserved and those collectors who have shared their stories. What remains unknown are the stories we do not have the chance to hear. The anecdote of the discarded collection is a reminder of those stories we cannot tell because they found their premature conclusion at a curb—not because the objects are crap, but because there is the assumption that somehow, somewhere, someone else will preserve this stuff.

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Unexpected, Contingent, Accidental: Cinema in the Contemporary Digital Archive

Ravi S. Vasudevan

In counterpoint to the idea of accidental archivism, this essay considers the idea of a contingent archive. Archival accidents, for example the unexpected appearance of a media object opening up novel archival directions, may be based on a certain latency of a field yet to be properly articulated as a field of memory, history and knowledge. I pay special attention to the field of video as critical to an expanded archive of cinema, and how it comes to be constituted to create this infrastructural possibility, especially from the late 1980s in India.

There is an element of curiosity, and a desire for surprise, a pleasure in not knowing what we are likely to see when we trawl the Internet. Focusing on cinema in India, this paper takes the surfacing of the cinema in digital formats as a register of the unexpected, the contingent and the accidental. As I will argue, the contingent is distinctive, for what it draws attention to is not the play of pure chance; it is an engagement with the fact that the how and when of the emergence of archival objects depends on other things, actions and events. Films that were considered lost turn up on YouTube; sounds and images of lost cinematic objects

354 may arrive in bits and pieces, as video and audio files, as memes, analog transferred into the digital, uploaded by the commitment and obsession of lovers of film, but also more casually. Provenance is not always clear, and cinephiles and lovers of film music offer proofs and weigh in with opinions to identify a film clip or a musical rendition. Elements of the official film and media archives, some of which are notoriously impossible to access, may also come to light; other parts, accessible but dormant, unused, may also yield the unexpected.

A couple of years ago, there suddenly surfaced on the 'net a series of photographs, probably dating to about 1951, just after India's independence from British colonial rule. The photographs circulated widely, on a number of sites, and attracted attention for their apparently salacious content. The photographs featured A.R. Kardar, a long-standing and respected film producer and director, with a career traversing the Calcutta, Bombay and Lahore production centers of the subcontinental film industry, dating back to the silent era. The photographs show Kardar and an associate receiving two girls who then disrobe, and finally strip to their underclothes. Kardar is shown at various distances from the girls—in one image, very close, when he touches one of the girls; he and his associate scrutinize them with great care and apparent discernment. Kardar also stands at a distance, apparently in order to view the gait of the auditioning girls as they walk. The camera for the shot is placed at an angle, and is well posed to capture the relationship between the evaluative eye of the producer and the unselfconscious, even matter of fact way the girls present themselves and perform for the producer and, of course, for the camera. However, there must have been clear instructions by camera man James Burke, then head of *Life* magazine's New Delhi bureau, that his subjects should forget the camera, and not look at it or the person using it. Apart from one tell-tale look of this sort, from Kardar's associate, there is no breaching of this instruction. And yet the camera must have exercised a significant presence, assuming an ideal angle, and

determining the angle and line of the girls' walk (Sarkar 2023; Let's Talk About Bollywood 2013). It appears Burke was successful in entering the intimate interior worlds of Bombay cinema in those years, for we also have, along with the Kardar photographs, ones capturing the Hindi film actors Madhubala and Begum Para (Bollywoodirect n.d.; Famous Personalities 2014; Old Indian Photos 2014).

While the photographs in Kardar's offices are completely unexpected, those of the women actors are not; and yet here, too, we may note a risqué quality to the pictures. Begum Para lies on the ground, striking a sultry pose and exposing her décolletage to the camera. In several shots, Madhubala's sari *pallu* (border) falls off her shoulders, exposing her blouse. It is the studio "audition," however, which is startling, and implies a singular and secretive public for its perusal; for while we may assume that the phenomenon of women presenting their bodies to the producer was not untypical, as in the nature of a public secret, to photograph the event was untypical, its singularity highlighted by the fact that the capture was done by a foreign cameraman. Moreover, the photograph was never published in the world of illustrated print. Finally, when it was published, it was done so well after Burke's death and anonymously, at least until we get further information about who uploaded it.¹

The same goes for the appearance of films considered lost, or about which there was little or no awareness. Consider the history of information film genres. In the South Asian context, presently we have some newsreel, some topicals, perhaps one industrial or process film, promotional films, and very little in the way of advertising film.² A particular frustration arises from the

1 The research of Sabeena Gadihoke (2022) has established that Burke's photographs came to be uploaded through an agreement between Time-Life and Google in 2008. However, the way different sets of images came to circulate and be discussed is not always clear.

2 The field considerably expands if we consider colonial amateur films and home movies, something I have addressed separately (Vasudevan 2012).

356 fact that more might be available in deposits such as the British Film Institute, but access policies are restrictive. In one instance, I was the recipient of an informal sharing arrangement that gave me *Tins for India* (1941) by the iconic director, Bimal Roy, and made in the well-known Bengali studio, New Theatres. I proceeded to share the video more widely. There was nothing accidental about the film's emergence, but it might appear accidental because it came online without any formal or official edict. It was contingent on a collegial sharing of resources. The official release came later, when the film appeared as part of a package released online by the BFI to commemorate 70 years of Indian independence. The BFI also holds a rare Dunlop ad film, *Dream House*, made in 1954, featuring leading film actors Ashok Kumar and Meena Kumari and directed by an iconic short filmmaker, Hari Sadan Dasgupta. Unexpectedly, it is now widely and easily available on YouTube, shared by one "Shams" in 2018. The existence of these films in various foreign deposits points to the existence of an audiovisual archive that dates to colonial times, but is not available to the very people whose lives and histories constitute its main content. Here, I share the evolving agenda that has emerged to assert rights to the image, and to make such film material available to scholars, practitioners, and a wider post-colonial public (Hediger, Campanini, and Cheeka 2021).

Formally speaking, these media materials, from Burke's photographs, an as yet solitary industrial process film, a rare advertising movie, are digital deposits facilitated by the participatory architecture of Web 2.0. And, in the very process of the deposit, moving from photochemical index to digital information, they signify earlier times and present time. Quite separate from the advent of the digital, even the official archive can have the aspect of being recent and, indeed, contingent. Taking circulation and exhibition as key to the film archive, with the understanding that each cinematic performance is subject to possible mutability (Hoek 2010), my research identified railways as important not only to film delivery but also to film production, circulation, and

exhibition in the 1920s and 1930s. Sarai researcher Satakshi Sinha started trawling the National (paper) Archives for further information and came across a very informative memorandum from the publicity officer of the Great Indian Peninsular Railways, AE Tylden Pattinson, dating to 1927. An instruction was scrawled on the cover of this governmental file, "Destroy by 1940." As Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (2018) has noted about the colonial origins of India's National Archives, a key component of the initiative was firstly to destroy files considered insignificant or redundant, a paring down and streamlining of holdings, rather than holding onto everything. The government archive had this original administrative design, to function as a memory that served government institutional economies and needs and ensured against unwieldy demands on space and storage. The continued existence of the memo on railways and cinema, marked for destruction, comes across as entirely fortuitous.

There is another informal domain to be explored. A number of entertainment films previously considered "lost" have surfaced on YouTube, some of which have been quite revelatory, leading to a rewriting of film chronologies. This too is a contingent, rather than accidental archive, and relates to the video as key "carrier" of feature film content. Tamil film scholar Stephen Hughes (2013) noted a few years ago that the celluloid holdings of the National Film Archives of India of Tamil cinema in the so-called studio period of the 1930s and 1940s were hugely outflanked by commercial video availability of feature films. And it is indeed in video history that we can look for the substance of a contingent film archive. Reflecting on my own development as a film historian, one shared by others of my generation, VHS was a key resource from the late 1980s. After sitting at the Steenbeck at the National Film Archives in Pune during the day, I would set off to explore video markets to get a hold of movies in the evening. Around the same time, in the United Kingdom, doing research for a dissertation on Indian popular cinema, I found myself keeping careful track of two sources. The first were the various video

358 rental units, often doubling as sweet shops, in North and South East London. Video versions had to be scanned carefully for deletions, as it was assumed customers were primarily attracted by song and dance sequences. Personal VHS libraries of this sort helped one go repeatedly over the film with an intricacy that Steenbeck viewing did not allow for—and the films circulating in the video market were not always available as celluloid. The second option was recording from TV, with Channel 4's Cinema of Three Continents programming, and Nasreen Munni Kabir's initiatives to promote Indian cinema, getting me excellent copies of canonical films such as *Awara* (Raj Kapoor, 1951), not to mention song sequences assembled by Kabir along with interviews of composers, lyricists and others to document Hindi/Urdu cinema in *Movie Mahal* (1986–1988). By this time, companies such as Shemaroo, which originated as a book circulating library in 1962, started buying up video rights to motion pictures and setting up video rental outlets. By the mid-1990s satellite television and the development of 24-hour channels had companies getting rights in order to fill viewing time. All sorts of movies quite remote from the canonical oeuvre, including horror movies, started populating television in the early hours of the morning. Fresh from my off-air recording practice in the UK, I managed a bit of the same by using timer-recording, and despite the vagaries of electricity and cable connections.

It was in one such foray that I recorded *Amar Rahe Yeh Pyar/ May This Love Be Eternal* (Prabhu Dayal, 1961), a film about the Partition of India seen through the experience of a woman who loses her husband and child as the subcontinent careens into the horrendous blood-letting between communities. In Sarai, our media research program, the VHS was copied in the early 2000s, though I do not believe it was digitized. Nevertheless, it was available for a growing scholarship on the cultural history of the Partition. When film scholar Bhaskar Sarkar (2009) assembled material for his book *Mourning the Nation: Indian Cinema in the Wake of Partition*, this was one of several films he could not find

in the National Film Archives' celluloid holdings. This VHS copy was an artefact of the video transformation, which involved the commercial mining of cinema for mass distribution through television and video cassette players, and now through online portals and YouTube. As Ramon Lobato (2012) points out, video constituted a shadow economy of the cinema, a distribution network which took it into a myriad viewing contexts beyond the cinema theater. I would add that not only did it reconstitute the market for feature film content, it provided the wherewithal for the expanded archive of cinema that we know today. A low-resolution video of *Amar Rahe Pyaar* now features on YouTube, along with another film Sarkar could not find in the celluloid archive, *Apna Desh/One's Own Country* (V. Shantaram, 1949). And there are many, many more such instances of lost celluloid materializing as easily accessible online video. It was an infrastructure brought into being by commercial drives and televisual programming, and drawn on by cinephiles to develop the personal collections that constitute the loosely configured online digital deposits of cinema today.

Let me return to the government archive as a site of contingency. Despite bureaucratic constraints, the official archive was a contested site in which individuals and groups who compose it play a game of peek-a-boo, watching for a viable moment to facilitate a public life to the archive. There were music lovers lurking in the thickets of the state. The archive of state broadcaster All India Radio, notoriously difficult to access, nevertheless started emerging online, as individual employees set up websites and Facebook pages to make past music programs available. In all of this, we get a sense of how the digital contemporary features a particular constellation of historical time, capturing a diverse and dispersed range of material, some of it emerging from the disaggregation of the nation-state. A state which commanded, controlled, and planned now appears somewhat differently, as decomposed into a complex matrix of motivations, impulses and artefacts that find hospitality in the digital present.

360 From an archival point of view, it is the work of the collector outside the state who has been key to our ability to map an intricate archive of the cinema. The government radio employee sharing governmental recordings with a community of like-minded film and music lovers is part of a burgeoning group of amateur archivists and collectors. As Ravikant argues, the collector here is a complex media entity, collating film in video formats, film music in gramophone and audio cassettes, visual and print material in posters, cassette and gramophone record covers, publicity leaflets, film magazines and song booklets, even source novels where relevant. In turn, these communities of enthusiasm and sharing adapt to the new possibilities of moving material online, circulating it, and developing techniques to search the data they have assembled. The film historian is a relatively modest and minor entity in this bigger tribe.

This essay draws extensively on conversations I have had with Ravikant, the leading media historian who is developing a major archive of cinema, radio and print at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi.

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Don Quixote in the Archive: Or, Making Sense of Film Heritage in the Age of Overabundance

Francesco Pitassio

*Without cinema, without the close-up, would
Kracauer have been able to speak of microhistory?
Carlo Ginzburg*

Being Don Quixote

Surfing YouTube a user might come across totally unexpected rediscoveries,¹ which, as a post on Facebook recently announced, resurface after having been believed lost for decades, as is the case of late Weimar film *Gilgi. Eine von uns* (Johannes Meyer, 1932), starring Brigitte Helm.² Or, conversely, the internet flaneur could stumble on dubious versions of major historical works, such as the posthumous and highly controversial *Don Quixote* (Orson Welles, unfinished), which producer Patxy Irigoyen and director Jesús Franco released in 1992 (Kiwata 1992; Rosenbaum 2007).

- 1 A discussion of YouTube as an archive is to be found in the section “Storage” of Snickars and Vonderau 2009.
- 2 The film is to be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gztLDJ7lrbl> (accessed January 14, 2023).

364 Beyond the controversies of the posthumous reconstruction, which interpolated the documentary Welles directed for the Italian TV *Nella terra di Don Chisciotte* (1964) with footage he shot from 1955 onwards for the feature film he never concluded, the version uploaded by Irigoyen/Franco is even more objectionable, as the English dubbing is not lip-synchronized and the information the caption conveys is ambiguous, as regards the origin of the edited materials and who is responsible for them.³

Rediscoveries and defacements live side by side in the expanded mediasphere produced by the concurrent digital rollout (Fossati 2018) and the explosion of dynamic web. Whereas digitization and dynamic web offer unprecedented opportunities for attracting attention on cultural heritage, engaging audiences, and reaching out to visitors/viewers who could not, otherwise, benefit from it (Economou 2016), their pitfalls are no less relevant (Combi 2016). It obviously exceeds the limits of this contribution and even more my individual ones to pinpoint and discuss all the risks. I would, however, like to briefly linger on what, in my view, is one of the most urgent ones for the same notion of heritage overall: the loss of historical sense and related thinking. In a groundbreaking work, American historian Roy Rosenzweig (2011) indicated two concomitant jeopardies for history in the digital age, that is, the fragility of material sources and the overabundance of the digital ones. In fact, film heritage suffers from the decay of analog formats and, possibly, even more so for native digital; and as much as from the multiplication of digital versions, whose reliability is often questionable. As recently path-breaking reflection has highlighted, if in the early 2000s Rick Prelinger called upon abundance, today this latter “is increasingly considered a problem, which has led to calls for the development of novel strategies for retrieval and curation. But as the range of curation and presentation practices expands, questions are also

3 This version is to be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-zRZaalXvhk> (accessed January 14, 2023).

being asked about the choices they involve” (Paalman, Fossati, and Masson 2021, 3). I would like to address three challenges for the film heritage archives and an opportunity, in the Scylla and Charybdis of vulnerability and plentifulness of our age. The challenges resemble the one Don Quixote takes, when charging against the windmills. But had he not been represented as such, world literature (and Orson Welles) would barely be able to remember the character...

The Film Found in La Mancha

Notoriously, Miguel de Cervantes opens his novel with a metafictional preface, where he avows that the real author of the story is an Arab historian, writing in aljamiado, Cide Hamete Benengeli, whose manuscript Cervantes retrieved. However, the physical manuscript is neither incorporated into the novel, nor shown. In fact, it doesn't exist. So what happens if the materiality of film vanishes, while the impression of total availability of digital versions triumphs? How much can we credit an ever-present digital artifact, while the access to its material source is limited or impossible? Film heritage archival institutions come into play as validation organs, through three subsequent actions.

Firstly, the “authentication” process determines whether the artifact is what it declares and/or appears to be, by surveying its internal and external evidence (Reitz 2017). Whereas the “digital enhancements of heritage materials can make them more convenient to use ... they also pose challenges to maintaining the document/object’s authenticity in its traditional meaning” (Manžuch 2017, 9). Analog film heritage requires authentication referring both to completeness and materiality, in terms of the qualities of the image as implied in one format (Canosa 2001; Farinelli and Pozzi 2004). Since “certain digital restoration operations ... intervene on the form as well as the material of the analogue image” and risk erasing its historical dimension (Saba

366 2022, 177), accounting for all the interventions provides users with authentication.

Furthermore, exposing users to the materiality of sources, which archives hold and preserve, enhances the historicity of the heritage and attracts attention to the paramount function archives play in transmitting memory across generations (Lameris 2005; Flückiger 2012; Flückiger and Lameris 2019). Restorations exhibiting not solely the final outcome, but the materiality of different sources and their migration from different copies and formats into a final film, documenting the philological interventions, as is the case with the recent work on the non-fiction film *La battaglia dall'Astico al Piave* (1918) (Bellotti and Venturini 2022), channel the chances of archivism into a historical narrative. Getting to know material sources is an accident archives, artists, and audiences need to keep a sense of history.

Aldonza or Dulcinea?

Don Quixote, in his attempt at reviving chivalry, designates a peasant celebrated for her skills in salting pork, Aldonza Lorenzo, as his lady love and renames her Dulcinea del Toboso. Therefore, in the name of inherited (although obsolete) cultural values, real persons and practices are deleted and replaced by other ones.

The digitization of film heritage can maintain the canon of national film history/ies, which shaped the work of moving image archives in their early days. Or it can engage viewers and scholars in reading the past and its repositories according to new or never asked questions. In fact, the emergence of “community archives” (Manžuch 2017) and associated issues, together with classification and access policies favoring the engagement of communities in surveying, enhancing, and circulating this heritage (Brunow 2017) is an opportunity hitting two birds with a stone. On the one hand, individual communities can create or support archives, or these latter match their needs for materials; on the other hand, communities can shed light on an array of neglected heritage (useful

films, small gauge films, amateur films), which demand a whole different set of tools and questions for the media historian, thus expanding the scope of historical reflection and the functions archives perform (Frick 2009). These are the cases of initiatives such as *Cinematic Bologna*, which the association Home Movies organized in the Italian city to give back, through a diffused exhibition within the urban area, the amateur film heritage which citizens donated (Home Movies n.d.).

As an Epitaph...

At the end of Don Quixote, Cide Hamete Benengeli writes an epitaph: "For me alone Don Quixote was born, and I for him. He knew how to act and I how to write." In fact, archives, no matter how accidental or crazy, like the self-deluded Cervantes character, need somebody writing history. For the interest in film heritage and archives, whether these be institutional or less so, is generated when audiences are aware of the existence and function of film heritage and its archives and are therefore willing to economically support them (Lawton, Fujiwara, and Hotopp 2022). Media historians hold here a paramount function in two possible ways to accidental and professional archivists. By intermingling media literacy and public history within digital environments, they provide audiences with a framework for discovering and engaging with film heritage, making sense of a shared past and prompting historical thinking (Seixas 2013; Thorp and Persson 2020), and understanding how film heritage is experienced across times. Such endeavors have a twofold function. They offer viewers the opportunity to accidentally collate materials within a guided pathway, that is, to create their own associations within a designed environment, mitigating the randomness of the association and validating the collated sources; and they train their interest for the past, both cinematic and factual. On the other hand, scholars can operate as both counterparts of prospective archivists, driving their attention to film heritage repositories and negotiating with such institutions

368 access policies and educational initiatives, as is the case for a digital toolkit generated as part and parcel of a wider research project named *Victor-E: Visual Culture of Trauma, Obliteration, and Reconstruction in Post-WW2 Europe*, now embedded in the portal *Historiana* (<https://historiana.eu/partners/victor-e-project>). In fact, whereas many institutions significantly increased modes of access and film and media literacy endeavors, there is still much work to be done in close cooperation, as recent surveys indicate (Fontaine and Simone 2017). It might be a good way to make the most of the energies and drives of accidental archivism, while not getting lost in the sense of history in La Mancha...

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BABYLON'13—As It Is

Ivanna Khitsinska

Editors' note: *Ukraine became an independent country through a democratic vote in 1991. Ukraine remained a democracy because, as historian Serhii Plokyh writes, regionalism, rooted in political and cultural differences, made parliamentary democracy the system best suited to govern the country. Ukrainians successfully defended democracy twice against would-be autocrats in the Orange Revolution of 2004 and the Revolution of Dignity in 2013–14. Substantiating Tocqueville's observation that the essence of democracy is tax authority at the community level, democracy in Ukraine became irreversibly entrenched through decentralization after 2014, which devolved key fiscal responsibilities to communities and led to a marked improvement of public services and infrastructure. Ukraine's resilience in the face of Russian aggression is that of self-government in a fight against autocracy, of a robust civil society fending off an attempt at neo-imperialist subjugation. Babylon'13 is the cinema of that civil society: a democratic movement of filmmakers who have been documenting the fight for democracy since 2013, and in films which focus on ordinary citizens and their actions rather than on heroic leadership figures. In the process, they have*

372 *compiled a growing archive of short films, a cinematic resource for self-governance, which exemplifies the political affordances of digital platforms and image and sound technologies, which can also be described as an accidental archive whose structure and composition reflects Ukraine's democracy: self-governed, decentralized, open, and accessible. The following text is a presentation by the collective's coordinator Ivanna Khitsinska.*

Babylon'13 is a kino, a cinematic chronicle of civil society, telling the stories of the people and events of the past nine years that have fundamentally transformed the Ukrainian nation.

Aware of the power of cinematographic arts and guided by civic and patriotic sensibilities, Ukrainian filmmakers founded the Babylon'13 kino-ruk (cinematic movement) immediately after the bloody dispersal of the Kyiv students' demonstration in support of Ukraine's European choice at the end of November 2013. Over the next nine years the movement came to harness the creative powers of hundreds of filmmakers from all professions from all over the country.

In this time, Babylon'13 participants have created hundreds of short films that were made available to viewers around the world through the Internet. Thousands of hours of videos documenting people and events, first during the revolution, and then during the war, were made and provided to other filmmakers, television channels, and independent productions. Babylon'13 films on YouTube have garnered millions of views, and the collective's web audience, numbering in the tens of thousands of subscribers, spans the globe. News networks like CNN, Al Jazeera, ITN, etc., have shown Babylon'13 films, and Babylon'13 collaborated with the 1+1 television channel in Ukraine to produce and broadcast the TV and web series *Zyma shcho nas zminylo* (eng. *The Winter That Changed Us*, 2014).¹

1 See the opening episode at <https://youtu.be/8Lo7GkYY2wo>.

During the Revolution of Dignity the Babylonian cameramen often risked their lives and incurred injuries, including from stun grenades, rubber bullets, and shrapnel.

When Russia annexed Crimea in response to the Revolution of Dignity, two Babylon'13 cameramen, Yaroslav Pilunsky and Yuri Gruzinov, were kidnapped on the peninsula. Threatening him with his pistol, Pilunsky's kidnapper yelled at him: "Do you know that your camera is stronger than army weapons?!"

Following that, the Babylonians edited a film by the same name—"Stronger Than Weapons"—a full-length documentary that takes us back to the Ukrainian revolutionary winter of 2013–2014 and which was released in theaters in November 2014.² It returns to the events that changed our lives forever, and most importantly, to the people, thanks to whose sacrifice and dedication a new Ukraine is emerging in fire and hope. The film is based on materials shot by the Babylon'13 creative association, the Maidan's cinematographic hundred, during the revolution and the Ukrainian-Russian war. This is a heart-warming story...

Since 2014 the cine-Babylonians have held thousands of screenings, attended festivals around the world, and won awards for their cinematographic and civic achievements, including the 44th Kyiv International Film Festival "Molodist" Prize for Babylon'13's contribution "to the development of Ukrainian cinematography."

Over time, the creators have crystallized an understanding of what they are doing. This is not television aesthetics, this is not an elementary recording of a news event, but an attempt to make sense of events through cinematic means—to convey the very spirit of the protest, to record the images of resistance and, perhaps above all, their human dimension, which is exactly what documentary cinema should strive for. In the end, an important

2 See the trailer at <https://youtu.be/TNr1obXtX4M>.

374 moment happened for Ukrainian cinema—it found contact with a thirsty audience, which had not happened for decades.

Since December 2013, screenwriter and director Volodymyr Tykhi has been the head of Babylon'13 as a creative producer. Right from the beginning, more than 50 people took part in the project, creatively and organizationally, driven primarily by their enthusiasm: directors, producers, cameramen, and audio and video editors. Most of those who have joined and support Babylon'13 were in their twenties, a few were still students. They included screenwriter Valeriy Puzik, screenwriter-directors Yulia Hontaruk, Yulia Shashkova, Maria Ponomaryova, Dmytro Sukholytkyy-Sobchuk, Ivan Sautkin, Kristian Zheregi, Roman Lyubyy, Kostyantyn Klyatskin, Denis Vorontsov, and Dmytro Starodumov; cameramen Yuri Gruzinov, Yuri Dunai, Slava Pilunsky, Ihor Ivanko, Andriy Kotliar, Ivan Bannikov, Serhiy Stetsenko, Andriy Lyseckyy, Volodymyr Usik, Dmytro Rybakov, composers Mykyta Moyseyev and Anton Baibakov, audio directors Andriy Rohachov, Maria Nesterenko, Andriy Nidzelesky, editor directors Serhiy Klepach, Ivan Bannikov, Pavlo Lypa, Maksym Vasyanovych, producers Marko Suprun, Oleksandr Bratyshchenko, Hanna Kapustina, Ivanna Khitsinska...

During the three hottest months of the revolutionary events of 2013–2014 and until today, the Babylonians have recorded and are recording the evolution of civil protest in Kyiv and beyond, working to comprehend the Ukrainian people in their war against the Russian invader in the dramatic space where, right beside the Joy of Life Death tragically breathes.

Thus, the work created by the participants of Babylon'13 is a recording and film interpretation of the popular uprising and the Revolution of Dignity, it is an analysis of the insidious annexation of Crimea and the lands of the Luhansk and Donetsk regions, as well as the beginnings and dramatic progress of the Russian-Ukrainian war from 2014 to 2022, but it is also an exposure of the corruption that has permeated society, it is a mockery of common

vices. And the genres of Babylon'13 film work are as diverse as the community of filmmakers themselves, ranging from dramas and lyrical dramas to portraits, tragicomedy, tragedy, and satire.

The National Union of Cinematographers of Ukraine provided the premises for the work of Babylon'13 during the most troubling times of the Maidan—the Small Hall of the House of Cinema. Later, space was rented from various Kyiv organizations that supported civic activism.

Cinematography is the most technologically advanced modern artform, and the Babylonians have faced important organizational challenges. These were overcome in a spirit of solidarity. We shared our personal equipment with friends in the filmmaking community. Ihor Savychenko, who was just starting out as a producer, also provided help, and we received further assistance from the “Izolyatsiya” (eng. *isolation*) Cultural Initiative Platform of Donetsk.

The projects are primarily self-financed, sometimes aided by voluntary donations. Tens of thousands of hryvnia were raised through the “Spilnokosht” crowdfunding platform. Babylon'13 also enjoyed the tacit financial support of Rinat Akhmetov, the wealthiest Ukrainian, and support from fellow cinematographers, including sound editor Artem Mostovoy, film critic Serhiy Trymbach, and director and producer Dmytro Tomashpolsky.

From the beginning of the civil protest the Babylonians filmed Ukrainian reality and showed what is happening here and now through the prism of a cinematic understanding of society. They recorded the formation of a political nation, the birth of a civil society that answers the call to the life of the polity on a daily basis. In Babylon'13, filmmakers were united by the belief that people's perception of the reality that surrounds them and the state of social affairs can be changed through documentary cinema. And, striving to change the world around them, they

376 changed themselves, feeling and understanding the community's need for truth.³

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3 Further information on Babylon'13 can be found at <https://babylon13.org.ua> and <https://www.youtube.com/@babylon13ua>.

TRAJECTORIES OF RESTITUTION



[Fig.1] Still from *sease the light* (Source: Alkebu Film Productions 2020)

Ejo Lobi: Reimagining a Future Past

Petna Ndaliko Katondolo

My grandmother used to tell me to observe the moon.

You see, my grandma would say, she is the same moon and we know how she will look in the coming days, but that is not all there is to her.

I would ask if the moon sees us every time we come to greet her. My grandma would say yes and even teach me how to spot a smile when the moon smiled back at us.

I would ask if the moon is not tired of going through the same routine again and again.

Grandma would say that each appearance of the moon is a new adventure for her—that she always looks forward to discovering the new things that have happened, the new innovations she influenced, and new friends she would meet. So it was not a routine, but a journey.

Then Grandma would look at me and tell me: you see, she has been watching you growing since you were a newborn and every time you come to greet her, she enjoys seeing how tall you are

382 getting. How you are making impressive moves while dancing in the circle at the harvest celebrations. This she does for all beings—new rivers that are appearing, eagles' new nests and traces flying in the air, volcanoes rumbling before they spit fire, mountains growing, and trees touching the sky, fire, water, air, stones... Can you imagine how knowledgeable and wise she is?

Grandma was planting a seed in a very well-chosen young brain. She was offering a special cosmological literacy, not only passing knowledge through her voice but also imprinting that knowledge in my body and my bones through the cycles of rituals the moon offers. Here, the notion of reciprocity and interdependence with all living beings is crucial. When preservation or archiving is disconnected from living beings, it gives space for abuse without measuring the consequence. Hence the need for considering multiple ways of archiving: verbal archives, body archives, proverb archives, musics... These give space for fertile sources of imagination and ecological balance.

To achieve this, one needs patience, needs to relearn how to live in the natural world, and needs to slow down and be part of the process. This is one of the first spiritual exercises I learned from grandmother: to do things slowly. Being present with everything you do, doing things deeply. By accomplishing them, one accomplishes oneself elementarily.

What if this question of slowness could allow us to envisage time, and embody a feeling of time, as abundant, whole, and integrated within us in relation to the living biosphere of which we are an integral part? What are the qualities that would differentiate such an experience from our contemporary daily life in which we have the relentless impression of time running out? Most of us live in cultures that have lost the embodied sense of time-abundance. We experience time as a fast train hurling along its linear tracks towards a troubled and uncertain future. By slowing down, we gain the opportunity to shift our sense of time from something that moves forward to something that moves downward into

deeper layers of being. How might this also shift how we imagine time in relationship to generations yet to come, to have a long view that enables us to open more fertile ground for a wider diversity of possible futures rather than the present one-track ecological future of doom and disaster?

To be able to live according to these principles one has to understand how the future of the past is linked to the past of the future. A need to connect ourselves with the whole of living and have layers of our being in the world that articulate life in us and the different dimensions of our identity.

So what do we remember? What do we want re-membered in order to re-imagine?

My grandmother's story, or storytelling as an arc and act/process of archiving, has some key elements to consider. The rhythm articulates a different temporality—a notion of time articulated not for excessive exploitation but for interdependence. Here is the starting point for imagining any living space decentered from human singularity to plural recognition of multiple living beings' points of view. Symbolism, the choice of metaphors, connects the *lina* to the *lita* concept (the visible and invisible, or the root and the plant), the old to the new and newness to the old. My Grandmother's decision to imprint the moon ritual in me as the living archive is the same process by which a family name in Nande culture connects the ancestral wisdom that makes one an ancestor.

Knowledge for re-membering heals. The knowledge held in stories and proverbs is like medicinal plants: the more you know, the less chance you have of poisoning yourself.

The proverb narrative structure is simple and insightful, aural traditional sayings that express a pearl of perceived wisdom based on common sense or experience. They invite a reflection through metaphors that facilitate social cohesion through non-violent communication. The mastering of proverbs provides an

384 important social barometer in many indigenous cultures, where the orientation of youth to adulthood is measured through the capacity for understanding and mastering proverbs.

Approaching cinema with a proverbial narrative structure means that rather than a single perspective or three act structure, the story unfolds as a series of puzzles that invite nuanced and personal reflection on histories and ideas that may or may not be familiar. It's a change of perspective and a fundamental change of scales, of value.

Ejo-Lobi: how to open the link to reconnect time.

In the Kinyarwanda, Lingala, and Ewe languages, both “yesterday” and “tomorrow” have the same word. As a map of culture, language can help us remember lost social practices and orient us to creating new ones. Rearticulating knowledge like this can provide us with tools to avoid the doom promised to us in future ecological disasters.

Ejo-Lobi is a concept to reimagine a future from different notions of temporalities and to enact human stories that will make sense for the living. We did not climb on the shoulders of our elders to look at their toes, as the proverb goes. The fertile imagination archived in me by grandmother is indeed the soil from which I grow and act (interact).

The world is made of stories and humans enact the stories they believe. — Alkebulan Proverb

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An Accidental Virtual Archive of Colonialism

Grazia Ingravalle

This short essay is a first-person account of an *accidental* and rare archival find, surrounded by evidentiary paucity and lack of interpretative coordinates. It sparked several collaborations and a journey—a virtual one by necessity, due to travel restrictions during the pandemic—from the physical archive to what, in the following pages, I define as an *accidental* virtual archive of colonialism.

The Society of American Archivists (SAA) lists twelve different definitions of the overlapping terms *archives* (pl. n.) and *archive* (sing. n.), emphasizing the systematic and continuing character of record keeping. Definitions of the archive as “the official repository of a nation, state, territory, or institution’s records of continuing value” implicitly assume the self-enclosed nature of the entity originating the archive(s) (SAA’s Dictionary of Archives Terminology). Against this normative framework, the term archive—and archivism by extension—appears at odds next to the qualifier *accidental*. Yet, by introducing connotations of irregularity, incident, contingency, and chance, the term *accidental archive* foregrounds situations in which upheavals, loss

386 of sovereignty, (cultural) genocide, displacement, and diasporic migration have complicated the work of record preservation and interpretation. While limited space here does not allow for an exhaustive account, in what follows I shed light on the revisionist historiographic potential of investigating *accidental archives*.

During a 2019 research trip to the National Film Archive—Audiovisual Institute (FilMOTEKA Narodowa—Instytut Audiowizualny, FINA) in Warsaw, I *accidentally* stumbled on a 1933 silent film about Polish settlements in the Brazilian state of Paraná. *Polish Settlements in Brazilian Wilderness (Osadnictwo polskie w puszczech Brazylii)* opens with a drawn map of South America and four animated arrows crossing the South Atlantic Ocean from right to left, reaching the Brazilian states of Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina, Paraná, and Espírito Santo. Was this a travel film about a geographical expedition in the “Brazilian wilderness,” I wondered, or a chronicle of Polish migration to South America, or, yet differently, a film recording a largely unknown chapter in colonial history?

As the map fades, a tilt shot moves from the highest foliage of a giant tree vertiginously down to the base of its broad trunk. Then, specular images of farmers axing and sawing the huge tree alternate, flipping 180 degrees around their vertical axis in a frenetic rhythmic montage that culminates with the tree’s capitulation (fig. 1). More depictions of deforestation, shrub mowing, forest fires, and araucaria trees follow. Next, a wooden crucifix appears amidst the trees, and three minutes into the film, the first title card announces, “New life has been created on the jungle cemeteries felled by the axe of the Polish settlers.”¹

As this title card suggests, during its brief independence, lasting only from 1919 to 1939, Poland bought into Europe’s colonial dream, attempting to establish and consolidate its presence on the African continent and South America (Puchalski 2017; Balogun

1 Translation of title cards courtesy of FINA.



[Fig. 1] *Polish Settlements in Brazilian Wilderness*. Courtesy of FINA.

2018; Ureña Valerio 2019). Evidence of Poland's short-lived colonial ambitions during the interwar period, this footage baffled me as nothing short of a historical and "political anachronism" (Hunczak 1967, 648). Two major historical events had until then guided my reading of Poland's interwar cinema. The first was the 1919 Treaty of Versailles, which reinstated Poland on the map of Europe after over 120 years of partition and colonial rule by the Habsburg Empire, the Kingdom of Prussia, and czarist Russia. The second was the Nazi invasion just twenty years later—which led to the extermination of what at the time was the largest Jewish community in Europe, the annihilation of the Polish resistance, and the systematic destruction of Poland's cultural heritage—inaugurating a long period of foreign rule lasting until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 (Lewak, Lipska, and Sokol 1962).

Demarcated by such tragic circumstances, my reading had *accidentally* replicated the dominant historical narrative of a "national martyrology," proceeding "from battlefield to

388 battlefield, from oppression to oppression, from massacre to massacre, with Poland standing as an inevitable collective victim” (Porter-Szücs 2014, 4). Before chancing upon this film, like many, I had been unaware of the existence of any Polish settlement overseas nor of the Second Republic’s colonial agenda. These archival images revealed what anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler calls a “minor history” (Stoler 2009, 7). They exposed not just my ignorance, but foundational negligence of histories relegated to the periphery of major historical events revolving around west-centered epistemologies.

Polish Settlements in Brazilian Wilderness is an orphan film. Close to nothing is known about the circumstances and people involved in its making, the locales in which it was screened, or its audience and reception. Until recently, the film had been misidentified and circulated under a wrong title in some of FINA’s internal records. Of the three films about Brazil known to have been produced in Poland between 1930 and 1939, it was the only one to have survived (Hendrykowska 2014, 222).² By cross-referencing press accounts, yearly statistical data, and the film print’s length (230 meters), archivist Grzegorz Rogowski established that the film in question was the 1933 *Polish Settlement in Brazilian Wilderness* (2020, personal communication). As Michał Pienkowski explained to me, the film’s negative, which combined both silent and sound film stock (academy format), confirmed its reidentification, placing it in the early years of the transition to sound (2020, personal communication).

Evidentiary scarcity is a condition unfortunately common to many Polish films and production records dating to the period before WWII, the majority of which were destroyed during the war, particularly in the 1944 Warsaw uprising (Haltof 2002, ix). In the absence of primary sources, I wondered what the historical value of *Polish Settlements in Brazilian Wilderness* was as a film

2 The other two titles are *Paraná’s Pioneers* (*Pionierzy Parańscy*, 1935) and *Young Brazilian Polish Community* (*Młoda Polonia Brazylijska*, 1935).

orphaned of not just authorship but archival context too. Which historical events did it *accidentally* testify to? In 1930s Poland, cinema did not function as a staple within a consolidated colonial state apparatus, the feeble existence of which the Nazis wiped out at the end of the decade along with its propaganda and archives (Grzechnik 2019). Surrounded by absences and gaps in documentation, investigating this colonial record forced me to interrogate the epistemological weight of archival evidence.

In *Reconfiguring the Archive*, Patricia Hayes, Jeremy Silvester, and Wolfram Hartmann criticize theorizations of the archive that, in their view, assume the paradigm of the sovereign European nation-state. They examine a collection of thousands of colonial photographs in the National Archives of Namibia, ranging from postcards to family albums, which document the country's history as it shifted from British to German and then South African rule. These photographs' contorted, informal, and undocumented routes into the archive resulted in the destruction of information regarding these pictures' provenance. What happens, Hayes, Silvester, and Hartmann ask, when an archive "has not been organised on longstanding bureaucratic principles ... but has been assembled unevenly, haphazardly, anonymously?" (Hayes, Silvester, and Hartmann 2002, 115). What happens, we may add, when a whole archive is *accidental* as a result of various processes of colonization? To counter such an archival vacuum, since 1997, *The Namibian Weekender* has published these pictures, asking readers to identify the subjects captured. Doubly or trebly removed from their original context, reproduced, and recaptioned, these colonial archival photographs have since become, in the authors' words, "cross-cultural spaces," open to different identification communities and academic audiences who bring different reference systems in their reading (Hayes, Silvester, and Hartmann 2002, 111 and 113).

Similarly, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Michel Foucault advances an image of the archive as a distributed, cross-disciplinary "system of references." As he argues, a book and, by

390 extension, a film text and visual record are “caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network” (Foucault 2002, 25–26). According to Foucault, throughout history, texts and records have become intelligible within a broadly conceived archive he identifies as a “system of statements” (2002, 120 and 145). In his words, such a system comprises

Relations between statements (even if the author is unaware of them; even if the statements do not have the same author; even if the authors were unaware of each other’s existence); relations between groups of statements thus established (even if these groups do not concern the same, or even adjacent, fields; even if they do not possess the same formal level ...); relations between statements and groups of statements and events of a quite different kind (technical, economic, social, political). (Foucault 2002, 32)

In the absence of empirical archival evidence, I placed *Polish Settlements in Brazilian Wilderness* within a similarly conceived reticular, distributed archive, mobilizing different fields of discourse, branches of knowledge, and cultural and media repositories.

Thanks to a virtual network of film historians, archivists, curators, translators, and filmmakers that generously shared their knowledge and work with me, I began reimagining the archival *accident* within a dispersed system of references, situating *Polish Settlements in Brazilian Wilderness* within multiple spheres of signification beyond the evidentiary archive. I cross-referenced several digitized records and texts, including 1930s issues of Poland’s colonial propaganda journal *Sea (Morze)* and Polish film theorist Karol Irzykowski’s 1924 book *The Tenth Muse (Dziesiąta muza)*, now in the public domain. In this way, I started deciphering the film’s avant-gardist aestheticization of agricultural labor and visual tropes such as the settler’s house and the Sower monument in Paraná’s capital Curitiba.

In 2020, my colleagues at FINA and I presented our research around *Polish Settlements in Brazilian Wilderness* at the online edition of the Orphan Film Symposium. From Vimeo, where the conference organizers initially uploaded the film and the video recording of our presentation, the film *accidentally* began circulating on several Facebook pages, including one called Curitiba in the Past (*Antigamente em Curitiba*). Dozens of descendants of the Polish diaspora in Brazil watched the clip in awe, celebrating it as a unique record of the Polish-Brazilian community in Paraná. Appropriated by new communities of identification, *Polish Settlements in Brazilian Wilderness* entered a wider, informal, culturally hybrid audiovisual archive that stretched from Poland to Brazil. As filmmakers, enthusiasts, and scholars kept discussing the film clip on Twitter, YouTube, and via email, other titles related to the Polish Brazilian diaspora began populating this *accidental* archival network, including Hermes Gonçalves's 1953 documentary *Costumes and Traditions of Poles in Paraná (Usos e Costumes dos Poloneses de Paraná)* and Sylvio Back's 1982 *Life and Blood of a Polak (Vida e Sangue de Polaco)*. *Polish Settlements in Brazilian Wilderness's* virtual circulation unearthed stories that were now about Poland as much as about European immigration to Brazil, the latter's policy of whitening (*branqueamento*), its environmental impact, and the subjugation of indigenous tribes (Ureña Valerio 2019).

As an archival *accident*, testimony of Polish migration to Brazil, unfulfilled colonial fantasies, and Polish-Brazilian histories, *Polish Settlements in Brazilian Wilderness* forced the boundaries of the physical archive, demanding revisionist readings. With its layered historicity, it tested the binarism of much postcolonial discourse, leading me to radically interrogate rigid oppositions such as white colonizer/non-white colonized and first-world metropole/third-world periphery, as well as the mutual exclusivity of the positions of victim and perpetrator (see Rothberg, 2019). As an epistemically dense visual record of colonial experiences, *Polish Settlements in Brazilian Wilderness* pushed me to situate it within

392 an archive of colonialism that is at the same time virtual, dispersed, participatory, interdisciplinary, culturally hybrid, and *accidental*.

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African Film Heritage: The Case for Restitution

Nikolaus Perneckzy

African calls for the restitution of moving images predate the historical debates at the center of Bénédicte Savoy's important recent study, *Africa's Struggle for Its Art* (2022). Already in 1958, the Benin-born filmmaker and later historian of African cinema Paulin Soumanou Vieyra demanded the return of moving images pertaining to African cultures—one among the many unmet demands of the struggle for independence that have only gained in urgency since. In this short intervention, I will offer a brief consideration of what restitution might mean in relation to the moving image in general and African film heritage in particular. On the most general level, it is a real question of whether the concept of restitution, which has been elaborated primarily in relation to land, irreproducible artifacts, and human remains, is pertinent to the medium of film, a technical object with its own, medium-specific operations and affordances, including the fact that it can be reproduced in both analog and digital formats. To reframe restitution through the medium of film will therefore necessitate a rethinking of that paradigm.

396 Another likely objection to my yoking of restitution to the moving image is historical in kind and concerns the specificity of African film heritage. There are good reasons to question whether the displacement of African films meaningfully compares to the systematic extraction of African bodies and artifacts and their subsequent accumulation in Western museums and ethnological collections. The violence that transported African films into Western archives, certainly if we are talking about works made after independence, generally differs from that upon which claims for restitution are usually based. A majority of films—prints and files—have ended up there “legally”: by force of co-production contracts, the push and pull of technical and economic dependency, and the dull compulsion of global market forces skewed against African filmmakers—all contributing factors to what we might call the “forcible internationalism” of African cinema or its “extraversion,” which obtain across the entire syntagm of the moving image from film production, distribution, and consumption all the way into the archive. However, as critical provenance research has shown time and again, the mere fact that an object was acquired legally does not preclude the presence of coercion and subterfuge; the best-known documentation of the extralegal and unethical activities that often accompanied formally legal transactions is Michel Leiris’s *L’Afrique fânotome* (1934). If Leiris’s testimony concerns the acquisition of statues and other artifacts, audio-visual archives, too, may at times conduct themselves in this way and even feel warranted in their actions by virtue of some abstract preservationist ideal. But the larger and more difficult challenge is this: in order to contest the sequestration of African films in Western archives, we have to address the contractual terms and economic relationships that underpin the unequal distribution of this heritage and the uneven development of archival capacity more broadly. Indeed, we would have to expand the remit of restitution to include artifacts displaced by forms of slow and structuralized violence, and find a persuasive language to describe this (ongoing) process.

If we extend the discussion to Africa's colonial and ethnographic film heritage, which was produced within a generalized context of injustice (*Unrechtskontext*), the shape of the question shifts yet again. The conditions under which these images were originally acquired, the institutional circuits on which they were displayed, and the locations where they were finally stored, make them more immediately comparable to other kinds of looted artifacts. Ciraj Rassool (2022), writing against a tendency to treat looted artifacts and human remains as separate entities, insists on their shared provenance and archival contiguity—the fact that they were collected and displayed *together*. This argument also extends to moving and still images. More fundamentally, one could argue, with Ariella Azoulay (2019), that the taking of photographic images under colonial rule or from an ethnographic point of view itself constitutes an act of capture and of separation, in a clear analogy to the extractive process by which other objects were taken. Azoulay, it should be noted, is critical of the restitution paradigm in its current configuration precisely because it does not sufficiently attend to this original violence of objectification and separation, which rent whole life-worlds apart and turned them into partial objects for Western consumption. “Giving back,” Azoulay warns, does not do enough to address the enduring damages wrought by these dispossessions.

Although there has been much talk of treating colonial cinema as a “shared” or “borrowed” heritage (e.g., Benali 2001), not everyone would agree it ought to be recuperated as part of Africa's film heritage. Students in a class I taught in Berlin were deeply troubled by the multiple registers of violence encoded in the colonial film archive, with some arguing that these images should not be shown at all. African archivists, for their part, have raised concerns about what they see as the archival overrepresentation of the colonial period. Both are valid and necessary queries, which I cannot address here in full. As a shorthand response, I again refer to Ariella Azoulay, who speaks of the “colonial photographic wealth” (2019, 282) accumulated in Western archives, meaning

398 that these are historical documents of great, including monetary, value. Our best guides to the question of recuperation, in any case, remain those African and diasporic filmmakers who have made it their task to reclaim the colonial archive as matter and as memory. In reading this archive with and against the grain (Stoler 2009), filmmakers such as Costa Diagne, Suliman Elnour, Ahmed Bouanani, Assia Djebar, Jean-Marie Têno, or Onyeka Igwe have elaborated subversive, reparative, and abolitionist approaches to Africa's colonial and ethnographic film heritage, while struggling to gain access and afford prohibitive licensing fees—an enduring struggle that has only intensified since the 1980s, when audiovisual archives, facing widespread neoliberal austerity, scrambled to monetize their holdings.

But why opt for the *return* of African film heritage held in Western archives, you may ask, when the most practical, inexpensive, and lasting solution would clearly be the provision of digital access? I do not mean to dismiss the importance of digitization and the expanded range of possibilities it affords. Digitization creates new digital objects and images with new affordances for circulation and participation, which can be useful in managing and, yes, “sharing” collections, including those of colonial and ethnographic provenance. But there are good reasons to be wary of digital panaceas. Digital access generates just as many problems as it does solutions. In addition to all the familiar quandaries—from the non-trivial costs of digital archival infrastructure to digital obsolescence and on to the global digital divide—there are a number of issues specific to the digitization of shared or otherwise displaced heritage, which have been much debated in recent years (e.g., Agostinho 2019; Odumusu 2020).

It has been questioned whether openness and accessibility are self-evident and universally desirable goods. What about culturally sensitive images, for instance, those that depict secret and sacred objects or rituals reserved for initiates? What about images that harm and dehumanize? Who gets a say over how such images shall be used? What about the right to reuse them?

Digitization projects, moreover, run the risk of reproducing the categories and nomenclatures embedded in archival metadata and in the film material itself. Automated, algorithmic forms of ordering and accessing images entail a further extraction of data at an unprecedented scale of information, which may not be appropriate for handling images of people pictured without their consent or with little control over the terms of the encounter. Digital databases privilege modularity over context; even where they are geared to user-participation, they enable certain kinds of archival knowledge while foreclosing other forms of knowing the archive. The provision of access alone, then, is not enough; we must address forms of epistemic violence encoded in the interfaces, classifications, and technical operations that mediate archival images, and rethink the ways images are labeled, datafied, stored, and transmitted.

But the most basic issue is this: when audiovisual archives in the Global North mandate “access” to what is sometimes euphemistically called “shared” film heritage, it is often they who set the terms of accessibility, whatever they may be. *They* determine how far access should extend, how this heritage can be exploited (or not); they assess collections, decide what will be digitized to what standard and how it will be datafied, all the while precluding alternative conceptions of what it might mean to share this archival responsibility and authority. Have access, but on our terms.

As the experience of African filmmakers working in this presumed digital utopia shows, the promise of easy access frequently hides the persistence of unequal property relations. There are, of course, legal hurdles to challenging the ownership of shared heritage. In the realm of the image, copyright reigns supreme. This legal framework yokes image property to a narrow understanding of authorship, which does not recognize filmed subjects as co-creators of the image. Such hurdles, I would argue, need to be tackled pragmatically, on their own terms, but with a view to abolishing those same terms, which are cultural and economic

400 as much as they are juridical. In order to question the ownership of shared film heritage, we need to undo the naturalizations of intellectual property law with its bias against other forms of possession or attribution. This, too, must be part of the project of moving image restitution.

Recent years have seen a proliferation of transnational partnerships in the field of audio-visual archiving, often on a North-South axis, with the aim of salvaging, restoring, and preserving important works of African cinema (Sanogo 2018). But while these are urgent and necessary tasks, the current framework for archival partnerships and exchanges under the banner of “international co-operation” frequently ignores and sometimes entrenches colonial legacies of uneven development and unequal exchange (Sanogo 2022). Whether we talk about the “shared” film heritage of colonial or ethnographic provenance, or the dispersed and often precarious film heritage of many postcolonial cinemas, the truth is that world film heritage is everywhere *unevenly* shared. If moving image restitution is to be more than a symbolic act it must go beyond the repatriation of individual films, towards a broader transformation of caring relations in audio-visual archiving globally.

Such a holistic understanding, which takes restitution to entail both a new “ethical relation” (Sarr and Savoy 2018) and forms of material reparation, is precisely what Paulin Soumanou Vieyra articulated in 1958, at the dawn of decolonization (Pernecky 2022, 384). Vieyra’s call has been restated many times since, prominently by Seipati Bulane-Hopa at the 2011 FIAF Congress in Pretoria. But not only has this been a real and enduring demand for a long time, moving image restitution already is a reality. There are numerous precedents for restitutive practice within and outside of established archival institutions, from which we can learn, and which we must amplify and generalize. For critical and imaginative resources, we may turn to the history of international solidarity in audio-visual archiving, especially in the socialist and nonaligned worlds, which contains numerous, if

informal, instances of “really existing” moving image restitution (e.g., Aventurin and Morin 2021; Metschl 2016). Also of interest here are the policies and practices developed by archivists working with indigenous communities in settler-colonial societies such as Australia, ranging from community consultations regarding the handling and storage of culturally sensitive images, to the implementation of indigenous knowledge labels in databases and interfaces and the joint elaboration of collections management and digitization protocols that would respect the integrity of photographic portrayals that are deemed con-substantial—that is, of *one* substance—with the ancestors depicted therein, and on to digital repatriations or “returns to country” (James 2020). These institutional efforts at reform and redress, moreover, have been critically accompanied by a host of film scholars and anthropologists highlighting fault lines, tensions, and contradictions within (e.g., Barwick et al. 2020). Finally, we may turn to the growing number of archives and archival projects—accidental and otherwise—in the Global North that are engaged in a fundamental rethinking of archival responsibilities and protocols of care (e.g., Fossati 2021; Haeckel 2021; Carter and Kent 2022). Together, they point beyond the paradigm of “shared” heritage to the horizon of a global cinematic commons.

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Accessing the Nigerian Film Archive: Tensions and Questions

Añulika Agina and Didi Cheeka

Introduction

At the opening keynote of the 27th Visible Evidence conference in December 2021 convened by Vinzenz Hediger and comprised of Hyginus Ekwuazi, Didi Cheeka, Filipa César, Stefanie Schulte Strathaus, Ellen Harrington, and myself, I presented a critical reflection on the urgent need to access documentary films in Nigerian archives. The thrust of the reflection was to call for co-ownership of such archives rather than restoring, digitally preserving, and repatriating audiovisual materials from Europe to their countries of origin and leaving them entirely in the “hands” of Nigerian (or other African) governments. That approach made access difficult if not impossible. My position was based on two recent experiences (described below) with the National Film, Video and Sound Archive (NFVSA) in Jos, Nigeria, and the British Pathé. I encountered difficulties with the first while the second was a smoother process. To get around the difficulties associated with the Nigerian archive, I contacted the film archivist Didi Cheeka, who informed me that he could provide some footage

404 from his personal collection. I waited patiently but futilely. Cheeka had good reasons for his inability to deliver the footage. I blamed Nigeria's postcolonial governments for the neglect and inaccessibility of film archives and the continued extraction of audiovisual materials from the country by Europeans. This led to a disagreement between Cheeka and me, which inspired the conversation below. Amongst other things, Cheeka believes that many archives in Europe and North America hold some Nigerian films and should be repatriated. I rejected the call for repatriation, since given my recent experience, the material conditions of such works are neither guaranteed nor would they be accessible to researchers. After all, what would be the purpose of archiving or preserving disintegrating analog film if they could not be accessed on-site or remotely by the public? Instead, I called for copyright co-ownership between Nigerians and the Europeans holding the preserved films but with maintenance and management of the films left with the European institutions. Didi Cheeka called my approach a pessimistic one and partially rejected the blame on postcolonial governments. The conference panel therefore provided an opportunity to address the controversy and question other issues around access that have to do with storage, discovery, and copyright ownership. In August 2022, at the University of Lagos Senior Staff Club, Cheeka and I picked up the conversation from the conference to discuss our different perspectives, iron out the tensions, and study how archives can be made more accessible to interested publics.

In 2015, Didi Cheeka stumbled upon rusty film cans in the storage rooms of the Nigerian Film Corporation in Lagos. With support from the Arsenal—Institute for Film and Video Art and Goethe University, Frankfurt both in Germany, the process of digitizing films began with the digital restoration and screening of Adamu Halilu's *Shaihu Umar* (1976) in 2018. DVDs have been made available to Nigerian universities, but the question of its wider availability and access remains. The conversation with Cheeka, which

began during the Visible Evidence panel session, has continued and some of it is reported below.

Añulika Agina

Accessing the Archive

Añulika Agina: Didi, are there private efforts to grant access to your restored materials? Some would argue that granting access once audiovisual material is restored is not their cup of tea, so what is the purpose of restoring and archiving such materials if not to make them widely accessible to the public? Or is access less important than restoration and restitution?

Didi Cheeka: No, access is no less important than digitization and restitution—it's the goal of both. We digitize and call for restitution to make previously inaccessible material accessible. There are, of course, challenges that arise from working with institutional archives. The London-based Nigerian scholar and researcher, Onyeka Igwe, approached me some time ago concerning her intention to research the Nigerian film archive and I referred her to the archive staff members at Jos. She researched the archive and even digitized materials for her documentary—I believe she was the last person who interviewed the Nigerian cinematographer responsible for most of the works in the archive and who taught all the graduates of the National Film Institute (NFI)¹ who now handle Nollywood productions' cinematography. So, to restate: I don't oppose access to digitization and restitution—the one is not complete without the other. The whole of my attitude is not to antagonize or frighten the government to shut-down or restrict access to this archive—I've had to curtail my usual combative attitude.

AA: Why is that? Why have you reined in your combative attitude? While I hate to make uncomplimentary comments about my

1 Editors' note: a training arm of the Nigerian Film Corporation.

beloved Nigeria, I find that it would be a great disservice to ourselves to ignore the wrongs of postcolonial governments in Africa broadly speaking and blame it all on the West. You refer to archives as “being complicit in the violence inherent in primitive extraction of raw materials” and you challenge scholars to adopt a more critical perspective to archives, but you seem to exonerate postcolonial governments from their neglect in preserving Nigeria’s cultural heritage. Why is that?

DC: I think I should state that I’m opposed to post-colonialism as a theory—it is no longer valid in the Nigerian experience of today (I tend to use the term post-war—in the sense that not only was the Biafra-Nigeria war of 1967 to 1970 the most traumatic event of our national life, but it was also the collective crime that birthed modern Nigeria and not colonialism). Vincent Hiribaren had pointed out that prior to the war, Nigeria was a perfect example of how to keep a modern archive in the former colonies.

But the issues you raise are good, and I hope it would trigger further conversation around archival practices in a former British colony. I don’t put the blame for this on foreign or national governments—rather, my challenge is to researchers and scholars who approach archives of former colonizing countries as benign sites of knowledge as opposed to being complicit in the violence inherent in the primitive extraction of raw materials, in this instance, audiovisual raw materials. Why have I reined in my attitude? Consider that we entered this archive in 2015, just a few years ago, after many years of being locked out.

AA: Here at the University of Lagos Senior Staff Club, Didi, we have been talking about your work with the Nigerian film archive and your efforts to make the place more accessible to researchers. You once spoke about a copy of the 1972 Nigerian film, *Bullfrog in the Sun*, which you saw but which is

not accessible to everyone yet. Can you please tell me who made that film accessible to you and in what context?

DC: I think it was in 2018 or thereabout when *Shaihu Umar*, by Adamu Halilu, was screened at the Berlinale Forum. We first encountered positive prints of this film in the rooms of the Nigerian Film Corporation in Lagos in very bad condition. After a really difficult process, we managed to find some really good image and sound negatives of the film at the main location of the National Film, Video and Sound Archive in Jos. The digital restoration of the film was then undertaken in collaboration with the Arsenal. After the screening at the Berlinale Forum, a German curator, Mareike Palmera, walked up to me to invite me to dinner because she had found a film in a German archive called *Bullfrog in the Sun*, which she wanted us to talk about.

AA: That's interesting. I know and follow Mareike's work on Twitter.

DC: Because I had been looking for that film, of course, I accepted her invitation. We had dinner and had some conversation around the film, which we kept going. Some months later she told me she got some funding from the German Federal Foreign Office and she wanted to bring the film to Nigeria. I had created this Berlin-Lagos Archive Film Festival. But then we tried to screen this film in October 2020 at the festival, but it was disrupted by the EndSARS police brutality protest so we couldn't do that. The film is supposedly based on the novel by Chinua Achebe, *Things fall Apart*, but was changed to *Bullfrog in the Sun*. I just wanted Nigerians to see this film, not because it is that good or faithful to the source (as a matter of fact, the film is problematic, because the Biafran War has nothing to do with *Things Fall Apart*, but the European lady who wrote the script in 1970 when the war ended (and was still in the news), decided to tie the Biafran War to *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease*, another novel by Chinua Achebe.

408 AA: And what's the name of this lady? Do you recall?

DC: Unfortunately, I don't recall her name right now, but I think she's the wife of the producer, who has the copyrights to the film. She found her way to Chinua Achebe, who gave them the rights without probably reading the screenplay because when the film came out, he rejected it.

AA: So it was anachronistic. The events in *Things Fall Apart* were placed in the war (1967–1970) at a time when they didn't happen?

DC: Exactly! The writer muddled up events, centering everything on the Biafran War, which frankly did not make sense to me. But I screened it here in Nigeria last year because I wanted to kick-start a conversation around the issues she mixed up or should I say chronologically misplaced. Before I accidentally discovered the Nigerian archive, I wanted to create a space in which we would show not just commercial cinema, but also art house cinema in Nigeria. And that was how we found ourselves at the former Colonial Film Unit building between Obalende and Ikoyi, near Voice of Nigeria.

AA: I want to go back to this question of access, of accessing *Bullfrog in the Sun*, as an example. The lady who gave you the film in 2018 to screen for a small audience, would she be willing to make it accessible to others, even at a price?

DC: Yes, I'm sure she would. We screened it in Lagos last year. In 2021, she gave a copy to Lanre Oladele, the son of the producer, Francis Oladele.

AA: Obviously, there is still a very big question mark around access, which of course has to do with copyright ownership, isn't there?

DC: Oh yes, big questions around access and copyright.

AA: And I'm talking about accessing the films in order to teach with them. I'm not talking about festivals because, while they have their value, you can't teach and research films that way.

DC: I'll have to admit that festival attendance is for an elitist audience. The man on the street doesn't get to attend film festivals. But after film festivals, what happens to these films? What happens to those who don't see the films at festivals? For instance, to really look at the gravity of the situation, when we discovered Shaihu Umar, I said to myself, what if a filmmaker, a student, or a researcher wants to research pre-Nollywood cinema, where do they go to watch these movies?

AA: Brilliant! That's the question of access that I have been asking you about, which I hope you and your sponsors continue doing something about.

DC: Well, when you reach out to the archive staff, the archives don't have them. The filmmaker does not know where the films are at the moment. They are probably in some laboratory abroad that nobody knows about because ownership or their location keeps changing. So, what do you do as a researcher? Because it was a dilemma I encountered. How do I use secondary material from someone who watched the film years ago?

DC: You tap into someone else's memory which is not the same as yours. So, how do I research this material? Or should we just say there's nothing to see, which is also really bad because this film was/is existing somewhere. Who has got this film? Who knows where the films are at the moment? If a filmmaker does not know where his or her film is at any given time, who do you ask about the production process?

AA: Exactly. Your questions are the reason I raised objections to repatriating audiovisual materials to the Nigerian government.

Discovery and Cataloguing

- AA: Didi, much of your work has been accidental. You accidentally stumbled upon the Nigerian film archive. You also accidentally met Mareike Palmeira, who offered you *Bullfrog in the Sun*. That's not a sustainable or even a strategic way of locating lost films and making them accessible to wider audiences. What then is your game plan?
- DC: It's an ongoing search and discovery process. Access is very crucial. But side by side with access, you have to discover the film to make it accessible. So, who knows where a film is? Most of these films are outside Nigeria, in Europe, America, but oftentimes the archive staff don't know they have these films because there is also a problem with cataloguing. When the film is not properly catalogued or documented, it gets lost. How do you look for things, especially in a situation in which archives are not putting up a proper catalogue of every film title they have with them? We have to first of all look for these films, negotiate rights, and bring them to the archive. And then we begin to tell you about how to make it accessible to the public.
- AA: In an enduring manner. How to make it accessible in an enduring manner? Because generations over time would want to see it. So, what was this film like? Who featured in it? Who worked on it? When I was making my own documentary, I had to go to British Pathé. Well, I didn't go physically, I found them online and with the exchange of a couple of emails, I got the footage of former President Obasanjo inaugurating the National Art Theatre in Lagos. They told me how much I had to pay. It was close to £1,000 but I asked for a discount since it was for educational purposes. They granted it, sent me a contract, and after signing it, they sent me a link and that was it. That's the sort of thing I'm after when it comes to access, because I have used those clips in my documentary

this year. Anyone else who needs footage from British Pathé follows the same process and moves on without frustration.

On the contrary, I went to Jos in October 2021 to look for footage of any of the directors of the Nigerian Film Corporation at work. I was also looking for footage of people watching films as I had asked, but they could not provide any. And that was after travelling 1,041 km to Jos. Before then, I sent an application by email and a secretary told me that the Managing Director had to approve the request before anyone could respond officially to me. He did, and my request was passed on to the archive staff. They all read my email, saw what I was asking for, but nobody told me that they did not have the materials in the archive. They were allowed to travel from Lagos to Jos, found nothing, before telling me they didn't have my requests. Can you believe that?

DC: You went into the archive?

AA: I did. So you find my story difficult to believe?

DC: I do, when was that?

AA: October 2021. I started my documentary in January 2020, but by March the lockdown came into effect, so I had to pause. What infuriated me about the Jos experience is that the archive officials knew what I was looking for; they had read my request letter, but they could not and did not tell me that the materials were unavailable because the MD had to approve my request first. I spent money on travel and accommodation for a couple of days only to be told that the archive did not hold the materials I needed. When I pressed for recent footage, I was told that they were on an absentee's personal hard drive. So, when I talk about blaming postcolonial governments for this bureaucracy, our sense of loss and the lack of appreciation for audiovisual material, I hope you can see where I'm coming from? Because I was not asking for too much. I was not asking for things that were

shot on analog film. I was asking for what was shot eight years ago and no one could give me that. What then are your comments on the Nigerian Film, Video and Sound Archive today because as far as I'm concerned, the place is useless.

DC: Right now, I'm not talking about yesterday or a year ago. I'm proud of the archive. I mean there's still a long way to go, but right now, I'm proud of what is being done. For the past couple of years, I've dedicated myself to trying to make that archive come alive. Compared to where we were some few years back, we've taken a big step forward because what you say about access also goes to the heart of the problem we are having with digital storage, the problem we are having with digital archiving. The digital type is a little bit different from analog type because oftentimes you have files in the hard drive. Somebody can delete something when he is under pressure to find storage space. So, there is no clear idea of what to do with digital production or how to store it, which is probably why they could not give you any footage of a recent though past MD of the Film Corporation. With analog film, it was easy. They just kept what was produced originally and you saw them there in the archive, albeit in poor condition, but with the digital, there is still the problem, which is an international one. It's not just in Nigeria. How to store different materials in the digital era remains a challenge globally.

AA: Okay. Before you carry on, you said that you are proud of the local archive that we have in Nigeria. Can you tell me what exactly you are proud of?

DC: That was where we discovered the film that was listed as being lost, *Shaihu Umar*, although the material we found in Lagos was quite terrible. Then we went to Jos and we discovered copies in very good condition and that was what we digitized. When I first entered the archive in Jos, I was surprised because when I first knew it as a student, it was in

very poor condition, but now I can see that it has benefitted from some sort of funding. Originally, there was no proper storage but now it is electronically controlled and has fancy shelves. But I'd question why it is electronically controlled when there is usually a shortage of power supply in Nigeria.

AA: So what happened when I visited that archive and could not find anything?

DC: Well, after the Lagos discovery, and before going to Jos, we applied for funding in Germany. We got this funding to digitize the film *Shaihu Umar*. And then we passed the message to Jos that we were looking for this film. They brought incomplete archival materials of about 30 cans of film and said that was all they found. We got to Jos by ourselves and after spending a whole day in the archive, we left with at least 80. We got enough cans to put the film together. My experience, and to answer your question directly, is to rely on my search, not on what the archive staff tells me.

AA: But you have to be authorized to search and preferably with some kind of guide because you have limited time for your research, which is tied to your funding and the amount of time you can afford to stay away from your university.

DC: No, I always insist that we go in together and search shelf by shelf because I discovered that the staff fear their own archive. The place was not properly maintained for long and the vapor from decaying film material can get toxic and injurious to health at a certain concentration level. We went in with facemasks and combed every single place until we were sure that we had found every reel of the film that exists in the archive. If we had accepted the copies they gave us, we would not have been able to complete the film. Now, there is ongoing training of the archive staff, so they are beginning to pay attention to proper cataloguing and some of the archive staff have gone to do this exchange program in Germany.

414 AA: Getting storage devices that can hold them for so long is tied to funding, isn't it?

DC: Yes, in a way it is because you have to upgrade occasionally, especially when you are using the LTO and the things were stored in a different material. I refuse to accept the explanation of the NFC that they cannot give access to footage of their past MD or that they don't have copies of the director on film. It's a question of this improper storage. It was only a few years ago that we started trying to give the archive priority. There's also the challenge of working with an institutional archive as an outsider.

There's a film I keep asking them for but which they have not been able to provide. It's the last film I think that was shot on celluloid by the Nigerian Film Corporation, entitled *Zenani* and shot in 2004-2005. It was a UNESCO-funded project, but they cannot tell me they gave everything to UNESCO without keeping a copy in their archive. What happened to that film? Did somebody take it away? I realize that this sounds scandalous, I mean, this is not *Bullfrog in the Sun*, which was shot before I was born. This was shot when I was a film student, when I came in 2004-05, but it is not in that archive. So who took it away? And in whose private archive is this film being held?

AA: I sense your frustration and I hope you can now appreciate mine. Could the film be with UNESCO?

DC: UNESCO will have a copy because they paid for it. This question goes to the heart of the problem I'm having with the Nigerian film archive. Because, as you know, Nigerian film history goes beyond *Bullfrog in the Sun* and *Kongi's Harvest*. It goes to the colonial film period. Since in film, they tell you that whoever pays for the film has copyrights. But when the colonizers filmed this stuff in their former colonies, did the natives sign any consent form for them to use their images? You filmed them and then you took it away, which

is scandalous. The British government filmed colonized people without their permission and then they took this film and they put it at the Overseas Film and Television Centre at Ironmongers Row. The Ironmongers Row closed down in 2003. The British government now took this film and gave it to AP. AP is a commercial archive.

So AP is making profits from images that were produced as a result of colonial conquest without the consent of the people who were filmed. And when a native of these former colonies wants to use any of the images, you say they have to pay large sums of money. We are, therefore, questioning and negotiating ethical ownership with those holding the images in the West. Granted that it's their money that produced the films, but can they not share the rights? This is not the Mona Lisa painting or the Benin bronze that you can repatriate from where it was looted. Technically, these films can be reproduced and the rights co-owned. So, we don't have to come to beg you for something that also belongs to us. Therefore, the question before us is how do we share rights given the different stakeholders like UNESCO and AP?

AA: You just draw up another contract, isn't it?

DC: Well, because money and politics are involved, it's not so straightforward. I've been searching for answers and that led me to Tom Rice, who was the senior researcher on the colonial film project. We are still discussing the demand for the decolonization and restitution of film archives from various parts of the world. This conversation around restitution has ignored audiovisual materials. Nobody is talking about audiovisual materials, which I think should be among the mentions of valuable items to return. As a matter of fact, I think it began in the 1980s, at least, with a Beninois filmmaker, Paulyne Vyeira, who first began raising this issue. So people have been talking about this before, but it has not been resonating. But now the conversation is being triggered

by new voices demanding restitution of audiovisual material held mostly in European archives.

Government's Role

AA: Well, I cannot speak for the government, but I do know that there was and perhaps still is a huge amount of ignorance, lack of training, underestimation of the value of art and culture in the country by people who decide national expenditure. Which is why I always come in a combative way when I'm asking the government questions. But you said after *Visible Evidence* in 2021 that you are less combative when it comes to these things. Why is that?

DC: Yes, because it's simple and straightforward. I didn't want to touch any politically problematic subject so that I will not be kicked out of the archive like my colleagues in Indonesia. They got access to the archive, then at some point they were researching the massacre of communists and workers in Indonesia, which Joshua Oppenheimer turned into a film in 2012. I don't want the government to lock the place up again. I know that at some point, we will reach a point in which it will be impossible for the government to conceal the archive again because [globally] there is a shift from strictly content generation to copyright generation. What you have in the archive could earn money for the country. Once the contents of the archive become common knowledge, it becomes difficult for the government or anyone else to shut it down.

AA: Yes, but Didi you're forgetting that a strong maintenance culture is not our forté. Even when you announce to the world that this material, for example, the Aburi Accord, is in the Nigerian film archive, who maintains it? Who keeps it in a way that is usable for the generations to come? That's the question.

DC: That's why I said that right now I'm proud of the Nigerian film archive. In 2018, a film scanner could be installed at the archive in Jos with funding from the German Federal Foreign Office. I think in the whole of Africa there is one in Cairo. There's one in Sudan. I think South Africa had its own before, but courtesy of the visionary project of the Arsenal in Berlin, we now also have one in Nigeria. Until three years ago, there was no means of digitizing the analog film holdings, but we have it now. And then alongside having this material and as part of the MoU signed by the Nigerian government with the German government is that the archive, the scanner should be put to use.

The students who are studying film culture and archival studies are supposed to be using the scanner to digitize materials in the archive as part of their training process. Now there is the possibility of seeing what was previously absent. The clips I have in my external hard drive were digitized in Jos. Shaihu Umar on the other hand was digitally restored in Germany. Within another collaboration, some of the soap operas that NTA used to air were digitized from tape by a German company. There is an organization that takes from tape, not celluloid, and transfers and converts them to digital. And there was a ceremonial handover of the material—of the digital copies of *Ripples* and *After the Storm*—to the NTA by the director of the Nigerian Film Corporation some ago when the first cohort of the Nigerian students came back from Germany.

AA: In addition to giving it to the NTA, why don't they give it to a university or an institution that will make it accessible to the public? We know what happens with NTA.

DC: Yes, because NTA will say the copyright belongs to them.

AA: But for educational purposes, give it to a university or even to a private enterprise to make it accessible on the cloud and people pay a token to see it.

418 DC: Well... Right now the Nigerian Archive said there will be no fees for using the archive...

AA: If we leave the government to its own devices, you know that nobody will get to see anything out of that archive. But, there was a statement you made I want to bring you back to: you refer to archives as being complicit in the violence inherent in primitive extraction of raw materials and you challenge scholars to adopt a more critical perspective to archives. Can you say more about that?

DC: Yes. I'm also in consonance with Ariela Aïsha Azoulay. I mean, most of what was produced in the colonial period are with the former colonies and there is this idea that archives are just innocent sites of knowledge. And that is not true. Some Europeans use archives uncritically, without questioning how the materials there were obtained. When I was collaborating on a book publication as part of the Configuration of Film series, I saw this article written in the Guardian UK by Afua Hirsch around the time that George Floyd was killed. The title of the piece was "The racism that killed George Floyd was built in Britain." Although I agreed with the content of the article, my thoughts on the title are different. I thought that the violence that killed George Floyd was born in the colonies because European people first began seeing African people on the screen and colonized people were photographed and filmed in derogatory ways.

So over time people adopted this idea of seeing colonized bodies as something which violence could be inflicted upon or something that is savage and dangerous that should be curtailed by force. It was cinema that gave them the impression that this is what the colonized body looked like, and you should be wary of them, thus implying that they are dangerous and have to be tamed. I don't think any policeman in the US or UK would wake up today and say I want to kill a black man. It's always an unconscious threat that looms

around the danger linked with black bodies. They got it from cinema, specifically from colonial cinema.

I argue that when the colonial forces came to the colonies and extracted tin and extracted oil, they also used their cameras to extract images and then took these images with them back to their country. Those images were extracted as a part of colonial conquest. It was not just raw material extracted by force, audiovisual materials were also extracted in a similar way. So if you keep on using the archive in Europe today and you don't question how these materials came to this archive and why these materials are not in their country of origin, you are also participating in unethical extractive activities. You are treating the archive as if it were politically innocent of violence. Why are the images photographed or filmed in this way? So there is an unconscious participation in the violence.

I'm trying to make a case for restitution so that European scholars raise their voices also. In Lisbon we had an international conference and an Angolan filmmaker I met there told how he was trying to research the Angolan civil war in the Portuguese archives. He kept on searching and typing Angolan freedom fighters, Angolan civil war, and there was no result. But he wondered how Portugal can fail to have anything of the war they fought against their colony in their archive. He then typed Angolan terrorists and all the images appeared. So the colonial power archived this war of independence in Angola as terrorism. It's an act of power. You have the power to categorize us. There is still violence embedded in the use of archives in Europe.

AA: That is so interesting. I want to ask one final question and I will leave you to drink your beer because it's getting hot. This is just something to do with the time. When did you start this archival work? When did you enter this archive the first time? I know it's something you said before, I guess.

420 DC: 2015. I'm an accidental archivist. I just wanted to open a space to show art house cinema because when I entered cinema as a film critic I fell in love with cinema, but not from a commercial point of view. I wanted that space just to show arthouse films. We were mostly showing films from Europe, hardly anything from Africa, and when we stumbled on the archive it all changed.

AA: So, when did you start the Lagos Film Society?

DC: In 2014. And one year after, we (the director of Goethe-Institut at that time, Marc-André Schmachtel, another film critic in Nigeria, Oris Aigbokhaevbolo, and Derin Ajao, who was a program officer at Goethe-Institut) took a trip to the back and stumbled on the archive in some rooms of the NFC's compound in Lagos since the door was broken. We applied for funding and got some from the British Council while the Goethe-Institut brought a matching grant. Then, we had the first symposium on the subject, which was titled "Reclaiming History...". That's how the archival business started.

AA: That's excellent. There's the project Mediateca Onshore in Guinea Bissau that Filipa César spoke about at Visible Evidence. For me it was just private enterprise, private people using their own money to create some kind of mediateca and that's commendable. If you wait for the government, you and I know that nothing will happen.

DC: The Nigerian Film Corporation is willing to lease the back of the building for me to carry on with the work I've been doing there. Their caveat is that they are not going to spend money refurbishing the space. So, you could use that space where you would even have a residency. As long as you're the one bringing your money, you can expand from one African country to the other African country, so we could have a residency there. My goal actually is to use that building to

organize what I have discussed with the Goethe-Institut, a pan-African conversation on archiving here on African soil.

AA: It is so important that we do it here because even location is power, location is politics. Whenever I talk about the archive, or African, or audiovisual material, I talk about it in Germany, in the UK, but I hardly do so in Lagos, and they give so many flimsy reasons why the conversation is not happening on the continent. We know what our shortcomings in Nigeria, in Africa are, but I think that the more we begin to deal with these Europeans on an equal basis, the better for us. We have the knowledge, we have the people, we have everything. Let's say to them, bring your money and even use it to repair all the damage of the years of colonization.

DC: Exactly. And it goes also to my goal of archiving, because ever since history was abolished from the classroom as a stand-alone subject, what I'm trying to do is to use archival practice as a sort of memorialization, of coming to terms with the past. I'm thinking of a program in which we will use archival materials on a step-by-step basis to negotiate past hurts or trauma without pointing accusatory fingers at anyone. Where we are today is because of what has happened in the past. Since you have materials from the past, you can use these materials as a sort of negotiation of trauma, so we can enter into the future.

Remnants of the Central Film Library and the Rethinking of Ghana's Audio-visual Heritage

Rebecca Ohene-Asah

Introduction

Current discourse on audio-visual heritage amidst questions of long-term preservation, restitution, and ownership appears to exclude conversations on long-term preservation of video native films. These video films are as a result of a large amount of video production within the Sub-Saharan African region, with Nigeria's Nollywood leading the field (Haynes 2016, 5). Described as a new world order of cultural production, (Hediger, Cheeka, and Campanini 2021, 56), video films are predicted to be threatened with total extinction. This is most critical in Ghana, especially when video preservation culture is examined against the management culture of the celluloid film material stored at Ghana's premier audio-visual storage center, the Information Services Department's (ISD) Central Film Library (CFL).

The (ISD) of Ghana is one of the colonial appendages that remained significant even long after Ghana's political independence in 1957. Kwame Nkrumah, the first leader of Ghana, had observed the useful role of the ISD in colonial information

424 dissemination and sought to leverage a similar usage for information and education aimed at promoting a nationalist posture, for whipping up patriotism in the newly independent state (Hess 2001, 61). The ISD was the main government agency that exhibited films, audios, prints, and audio-visual materials publicly throughout the country. Similar to the way colonial governments used local commentators to run commentaries and engaged in discussions during and after exhibitions, (Rice 2011,135–53), the Nkrumah regime and successive governments used the services of the ISD to communicate government policies to the populace on national, continental, and international issues (Ohene-Asah 2021, 5). The reliance on the ISD for this national assignment made the agency's film library (CFL) a hub for all audio-visual materials produced by national agencies such as the Ghana Film Industries Corporation (GFIC) and the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC).

Regardless of the vital role played by the ISD's Central Film Library in national development, the library is today in ruins. The dearth of maintenance at the facility for decades has reduced the facility to a place of a faint memory of a once vibrant national heritage. Relying on my own observations as a researcher, I recount my discovery of the CFL collection. With interview data from key gatekeepers at the CFL and notes from other researchers who worked previously on the collection, I discuss the maintenance culture of the CFL to foreshadow the current production, collection, and preservation culture of video films produced in Ghana. This article takes its purpose from a preventive conservation thought to evaluate storage culture as a means of investigating the preservation culture of video films currently produced in the country. I first present a historical account of film storage and archiving within the mandate of the ISD and proceed to discuss the storage and preservative practices of current private video producers before making some concluding notes on the way forward.

The ISD's Central Film Library

The Information Services Department was established in the year 1939 with the aim of facilitating the propagation of key information about WWII and the progress of Britain to the people of the Gold Coast. This was done mainly through audio news and photographs, however with the rise of cinema activities, which came with the establishment of the Colonial Film Unit, and the subsequent setup of the Gold Coast Film Unit (GCFU) in 1947, the ISD began utilizing cinema vans to exhibit educational films on colonial activities, expounding British imperialism to the people of the Gold Coast (Smyth 1989, 389). Copies of exhibited films were naturally kept and managed at the ISD's libraries and storage spaces.

The library collection began with films produced by the London-based Colonial Film Unit, which consisted of a three-man crew led by William Sellers, who traveled across the colonies to produce mostly health films for educational purposes (Sellers 1953, 832). After the decentralization of film production ensured the establishment of the GCFU, film production became more tailored towards the informational and educational needs of the Gold Coast, and the ISD collection continued to grow. Titles such as *Amenu's Child* (1950), *Towards New Farming* (1953), *Three Red Boys Left for Sabey* (1951), *New Horizon* (1950), *Dangerous Waters* (1951), *Progress in Kojokrom* (1953), *Mr Mensah Builds a House* (1953), and *The Boy Kumasenu* (1952) encompassed indigenous narratives that resonated with the cultures and traditions of the people of the Gold Coast. Colonial exhibition of films was mainly through the use of cinema vans moderated by indigenous film commentators, who would run commentaries alongside screenings. Although mostly non-theatrical, the shows were successful in whipping up public interest towards British cultural hegemony and colonial power at screenings (Rice 2011). These screenings were under the control of the Information Services Department and led to further growth of the audio-visual collection.

426 After attaining political independence, the nation state Ghana, through the initiative of its first leader Kwame Nkrumah, continued to use film as the main governmental communication mouthpiece. He therefore restructured the existing GCFU by investing in film equipment, film laboratories, exhibition centers, and libraries and renamed the GCFU to the Ghana Film Industry Corporation (GFIC). Regardless of a library collection center within the GFIC, country-wide film screening and exhibition continued to be the mandate of the ISD-thus, further cementing its position as a central point for film storage and archiving in the country (Hesse 1995, 6–9).

Whereas some of the holdings are unique and may only be available in Ghana, the library also collected materials produced in other parts of the world. For instance, copies of documentary and newsreels produced on Nkrumah's continental and international travels as well as films collected through diplomatic relationship with other countries were stored in the library (Ohene-Asah 2021, 4).

By 2009, the CFL had an estimated audio-visual collection numbering 5,568. This consisted of 35mm and 16mm film reels, and some quarter inch open reel audiotapes (Blaylock Report 2009, 6). Whereas the Blaylock report suggests that some of the materials date back to the 1940s, the only catalogue seen documented films from only 1970–72. After an appraisal and preliminary salvage work the Blaylock team found only 626 audio-visual materials to be salvageable. It eventually came up with a number of recommendations. The first was for the ISD to develop a sorting, collection, and retention policy. This was to ensure that resources were committed to only those materials that were of utmost importance to the collective histories of Ghanaians. As indicated earlier, the CFL collected widely. Part of the ISD's mandate to classify all films exhibited in Ghana led to their interaction with films brought into the country by private marketers and exhibitors. Whereas bound by copyright issues, this collection network led the CFL to store films from different parts of the continent

and beyond, including Europe, Asia, and the Americas. The case of limited funding opportunities also makes it imperative for archivists to adopt strategic curatorial practices to select and preserve only the materials unique in contents and found only in Ghana. The second was to develop an efficient macro environment with the capacity to store and preserve film materials at the right temperatures. Another recommendation had to do with the micro environment and the film containers. They recommended a storage system that could ensure enough ventilation to ensure optimum preservation. The last major recommendation was for the reformatting of the important materials to make them easily accessible (Blaylock Report 2009, 14–19).

Indeed, reformatting salvageable collections would have made the material contents easily accessible. This would have bridged the disconnect between the cultural knowledge of the historical audio-visual contents and cultural producers, leading to a desire to advocate for long-term preservation of the materials. Reformatting through digitization, for instance, has the potential to create opportunities for recontextualizing and re-interpreting historical film materials within current audio-visual cultural expressions. This will be useful for an active memorialization and repurposing for current generations. The Blaylock recommendations, though largely temporary, are useful reminders of the ephemeral nature of audio-visual archives, which thus demand an active commitment from a holding by employing a trained archivist tasked to manage materials and engage in programs that liaises with different stakeholder groups to constantly keep the collection in use. An inactive or inaccessible archive is as good as a mere storage, which should have no place in audio-visual preservation. An archive is only of value when it is accessible, and active engagement with stakeholders is of high priority. Perhaps the Blaylock team's caution about the possibility for complete destruction if the recommendations on salvageable materials were not adopted has come to pass.



[Fig. 1] Materials in the CFL (Source: Ohene-Asah 2022, 5)

This researcher found the library and the audio-visual materials in complete chaos, thus raising key questions on the management conservation strategies that the library was implementing. Clearly, none of the professional conservation recommendations had been implemented. As of the year 2022, there was no librarian nor archivist with knowledge on the management of the collection, no visible reformatting actions had been undertaken, and the materials remained in a deplorable state (fig. 1 and 2).

Preservation Within the CFL Operation

When Nkrumah took over the top management of Ghana, he sought to situate cinema at the center of the education and re-orientation of the Ghanaian people into a patriotic group. To properly manage films used in this re-orientation mission, Nkrumah resourced the GFIC to establish a functional celluloid library and archive that stored and made accessible film materials for national and private exhibition purposes. The basic management and conservative activities included the storage of



[Fig. 2] Researcher going through remnants of CFL materials (Source: Ohene-Asah 2022, 5)

produced materials in a functional cold room with archivists and librarians who catalogued and made materials easily accessible.

The collection in the storage included black-and-white 35mm and 16mm negatives and positive films and color positives on mostly 35mm. Color negatives were, however, developed and kept in a British laboratory, where prints could be ordered anytime positives wore off as the macro storage environment for color demanded more financial commitment than black and white. Whereas the GFIC spearheaded audio-visual productions in the country, nation-wide exhibition was the responsibility of the Information Services Department of the Ministry of Information. Positive copies used in these outdoor screenings were preserved in the CFL's air-conditioned rooms to ensure proper ventilation for preservation.

The GFIC and CFL relationship vis-à-vis film collecting ensured that there were two major institutions in the country where films of significance to the nation state could be accessed. Their

430 combined role was effective through all the political regimes of the country until the late 1990s, when the GFIC was diversified.

With the GFIC diversified and turned into a private television organization, the audio-visual materials collection in its care became at risk. The television network, TV3, found no immediate use for the celluloid materials it found in the library and archive as it only concerned itself with broadcasting on video formats. This was also worsened by the lack of transfer and playback technologies that could provide access to celluloid contents. This inaccessibility eventually made the storage obsolete, which necessitated its eventual destruction to make spaces for television production activities (Meyer 2015, 61–62).

Stakeholders and government agencies could only turn to the state-owned ISD for historical audio-visual contents, thus turning the CFL into one of the most useful government agencies archiving audio-visual materials on Ghana. This did not last, however, as convoluted factors including lack of policy, political will, and funding, occasioned by rapid technological changes in audio-visual formatting affected the management of the ISD audio-visual collection. The ISD library and archive appeared almost forgotten by its mother agency—the Ministry of Information. Years of neglect and lack of financial commitment was visible in the physical structure of the organization, evident in worn-out walls, old furniture, and unrelated private business activities on the property. This lack of financial support eventually affected the effective management and preservation practices of the CFL collections.

Preventive conservation, however, is thought to include all “strategies, actions, skills, and decisions adopted to balance heritage protection and public access” (Lucchi 2017, 1). Whereas preventive conservation ideals aim at preventing future losses, these dictates were clearly missing in the storage pragmatics of the CFL. Indeed, one can only describe the system run at the CFL as mere storage, lacking preventive conservation. Again, in

defining preservation, Mnjama cites Harvey (1994) as suggesting that preservation of cultural heritage is a conscious integration of managerial, storage, financing, as well as staffing policies to be considered in order to achieve optimum preservation of library and archived materials (Mnjama 2010, 140). Yet, with the CFL materials caught in a technological conundrum, most useful contents could no longer be accessed. Fast changing technological advances made attempts to reformat onto accessible modes an expensive venture.

A National Film Library Comes to an End

In 2021, as part of a field study of the CFL, we observed a completely abandoned storage room with many de-caned celluloid materials on different celluloid formats in a near deteriorated state. The two storage rooms had been sealed off and virtually abandoned by the ISD. The macro environment had little ventilation and a set-up completely inappropriate for audio-visual preservation. The rooms were dusty, had broken windows, and the roof leakages was visibly evident in the water stain on the ceiling. The boxes serving as the micro containment for celluloid materials were filled with mold, cobwebs, and dust. The team found scattered paper documentation on film exhibition in a disorganized state. There were also video materials that suggested that the CFL had begun to collect films on video formats, with labels that suggested they were materials on Ghana's political history, transcending different political administrations.

Interview responses suggest that the CFL became less useful following a decision to acquire new cinema vans, which had no capacity to play celluloid reels. The change from celluloid reel vans to video (analog and digital) cinema vans contributed to making the CFL storage obsolete, as the new cinema vans no longer had use for film formats in the collection. With the adoption of video format by the entire country for audio-visual cultural production, it appears it made no economic sense to



[Fig. 3 and Fig. 4] Materials on video formats found at the CFL (Source: Ohene-Asah 2022, 9)

authorities to invest in celluloid accessories that could only play historical materials but not current video formats. This decision eventually led to most materials in the collection trapped in a technological quagmire, making most inaccessible.

As budgetary allocations to the ISD from the Ministry of Information became inadequate, effective management of the CFL became a daunting task. And since the many recommendations by different organizations who had appraised the library involved funding that the economically deprived ministry of information also did not have, the materials simply remained locked up and continued to deteriorate. Attempts by gatekeepers and stakeholders to attract the needed attention failed to yield the necessary support, since the salvage, conservation, and preservation of the materials was not viewed as a venture that could be self-sustaining. Other attempts to salvage the materials with external funding were met with resistance from some stakeholders who cited backend issues of multiple copies that accompany digitization and the interests of external funders as a threat to the copyright and unique ownership of the materials. At one point, the materials deteriorated to a degree that strong vinegar syndrome and mold was viewed as an environmental and security threat to the setting. There was therefore a recommendation for the materials to be discarded following an environmental assessment.

By the middle of 2022 therefore, a waste management company was contracted to dispose of the film materials to prevent a potential health hazard. The research team, however, managed to salvage most of the video materials collected with the hope of finding a sustainable way of accessing and salvaging the contents (fig. 3 and 4).

The Future of Video

Video technology became the default format for audio-visual production in Ghana from the mid-1980s. This was after the cost of

434 celluloid became an economic hurdle for both state and private film ventures. Video film production was, however, marked by a high sense of creative independence. Its affordable nature made it easily accessible unlike celluloid formats. Whereas celluloid was positioned as an elitist/colonial legacy, video appeared to be the post-colonial version. For instance, while established and trained filmmakers resisted video technology for filmmaking, many amateur and self-trained people adopted the format and expressed themselves freely, outside the canons of state control and traditional restrictions. Video technology brought diversity and democratized the film production industry in Ghana. By the beginning of the 1990s, a large amount of video films produced by budding video filmmakers had positioned the industry as a dominant popular culture in Ghana. Titles included *Zinabu*, *Kanana*, *Sika Sunsum*, *Diabolo*, *Who Killed Nancy*, *Step Dad* among other titles. These drama narratives were bolder in their expressions and experimented with flamboyant effects and exaggerated scenarios. Yet, they to a large extent the visually expressed characteristics of the collective experiences and dreams of the middle and lower-class members of the Ghanaian society (Meyer 2015).

When the Nigerian Nollywood influx into the West African sub-region threatened the quantity of Ghanaian video productions, a new strategy was devised by indigenous video producers to confront this cultural domination. Most producers employed the local Akan language rooted in the city of Kumasi for films in a bid to reverse Nollywood's hegemony in Ghana. At the onset, Akan language video producers' prolific activities turned Kumasi into a video production hub, overtaking Accra's video production enclave, most of which were made in the English language. As of 2011, out of an average of 5 films released each week onto the market, 4 were from the Kumasi enclave and produced in the Akan language. This resulted in over 200 video films being churned out from the Kumasi industry alone each year, at the peak of its production output, from 2009 to 2016 (Garritano 2013,

172–73). The industry produced perhaps the largest chunk of video films in the history of audio-visual cultural production in Ghana. Most of the films from Kumasi encompass themes on contemporary events, folktales, and stories of historical significance to their audiences. With contents reminiscent of Ghanaian socio-cultural heritage, the preservation of these videos presents an obvious concern to different publics and stakeholders.

Nonetheless, preservation of video films in Ghana is largely a private affair, as there is no active national strategy for video film preservation like what existed with celluloid film formats. Earlier video film materials are perhaps more at risk than recent productions. Most video producers appeared unconcerned with the preservation of their master copies after they had distributed and recouped their investments. They simply kept copies on VHS, VCD, DVD or at best, Betacam copies, which eventually could not playback. Often, duplication companies kept glass master copies but producers rarely went back for more prints after their investments have been recouped. Most simply went on to the next project and forgot about the future of their cultural productions (Ohene-Asah 2018).

Current audio-visual cultural producers, however, appear to operate a better storage/preservation practice, although they may not be considered ideal. Most films are now distributed online so it's easier to keep soft copies on hard drives and online. The hard drives, however, often fail filmmakers because they are prone to malfunction. Perhaps, apart from the films stored on the online cloud system, those stored on hard drives are at risk of loss unless they are constantly played and/or transferred onto newer data drives since hard drive storage is considered quite transient. Indeed, some filmmakers who relied on drives and often transferred to newer drives still lost useful contents, which reaffirms the unreliable nature of hard drives.

Concluding Thoughts

In the absence of a national film library, current video film producers may be facing a more dire situation. Clearly, most current video producers are engaged in non-sustainable practices for storing and preserving their cultural products. This chapter has relied on a historical account of audio-visual preservation practices from colonial to post-colonial Ghana to discuss the state of audio-visual materials once kept at the CFL to predict the futures of video film materials. The discussion has spotlighted how the once vibrant national audio-visual library and archival institution from where the ISD coordinated national film exhibitions via cinema vans and community wide screenings is currently a faint memory of a nearly forgotten era and the implication for video format futures. The fact that some video tape formats were found amongst the rubbles of the CFL means the country never adopted a conscious preservation policy for its audio-visual past regardless of the format. Indeed, the situation raises more questions when the ISD's cinema section still exists but with no secured collection to augment its activities. The absence of state interest and commitment to the long-term preservation of audio-visual materials from Ghana's past is enough reason for workers assigned to work with the collection to be demoralized. Ghana would need an entire national re-orientation on the importance of audio-visual materials as intangible heritage. This is not to say that stakeholders do not already recognize the importance of such materials. There are many workers within the CFL who continue to push for reforms but to no avail. Though some filmmakers kept copies of films on drives and would often transfer to newer drives, they still lost useful contents, which reaffirms the capricious nature of hard drives. The fact that some of the materials found after the appraisal of the CFL were unique to only that collection means Ghana could have leveraged on these unique materials to contribute to world audio-visual heritage. Regardless, the recent establishment of the National Film Authority (NFA) is perhaps the foundation of

the national action that was needed decades earlier to properly manage Ghana's audio-visual past. The NFA, established in 2016, has in its mandate to organize and collect remnants of Ghana's audio-visual past. Luckily, negative celluloid copies of most of the CFL titles may still be available at the Iron Mountain Group, a UK-based laboratory and archive company. Thus, there may still be hope for Ghana to access most of its celluloid materials for its current and future stakeholders. The hope is also that films and audio-visual materials on video formats would also take center stage in the NFA's mandate to make audio-visual materials an active component of Ghana's intangible heritage.

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Phenomena of Ukrainian Cinema: Director's Cut by Ukrainian Film Archive

Olena Goncharuk and Mariia Glazunova

The largest archive of Ukrainian cinema is located 20 minutes away from the center of Kyiv. After the Revolution of Dignity, Dovzhenko Centre¹ established itself as a cultural and artistic center and—during the war—as a powerful player in cultural diplomacy. The team preserves, restores, researches, and promotes the art of Ukrainian and world cinema—through film screenings, lectures, exhibitions, publications, books, professional discussions.

It's hard to believe now, but until 1994 Ukraine did not have its own film archive, despite the existence of Ukrainian cinema. It was unknown even to Ukrainians themselves.

Until the 1930s, Ukrainian cinematography developed in unison with the world, freely and competently competing in experimentation, artistic language, and global distribution. By the beginning of the 1930s, there were Ukrainian filmmakers, stars,

1 See <https://dovzhenkocentre.org/en/>.

440 film studios, film institutes, print publications, and even a film copying factory.

This rapid growth, however, was interrupted by the Stalinist regime. With the cancellation and destruction of the All-Ukrainian Photo-Cinema Administration (VUFKU) in 1930, analog film carriers were taken out of Ukraine to Moscow, and significant amounts of data and evidence were hidden or destroyed. The repressive machine of the 1930s undermined education, art, science, and above all, the people themselves. Archives and museums served this system—documents, books, publications, and artistic works were placed under the “special fund” label to never become accessible. Ironically, at the same time, in 1936, leading film archives—the Cinémathèque française, Germany’s Reichsfilmarchiv, the British Film Institute, and the Museum of Modern Art Film Library—recognized the need for an international network to ensure communication, exchange, and protection of cinematographic heritage for the understanding and development of the art of cinema. Thus, in 1938, FIAF—the International Federation of Film Archives—was established. Due to a deep ideological gap, the USSR was not invited to join.

For a long period of time, Ukrainian cinema disappeared as a phenomenon. In general, the entire history of Ukrainian intellectual tradition and art consists of continuous ruptures. The architect of these “damages” was and remains Russia, which actively worked on the ruptures, and then on new “montages” and collages. The result was the loss or blurring of identity and integrity.

Its revival became possible when Ukraine regained its independence in 1991. The National Oleksandr Dovzhenko Centre was created in 1994 to collect all the “ruptures” of cinematic history and assemble them independently. To finally become the director of their own identity.

The primary task of the Dovzhenko Centre was to gather and research all film materials that could be considered Ukrainian

cinematic heritage. Ukrainian films were partially preserved in local film studios, in a closed archive of film, photo, and phonographic documents, and by the filmmakers themselves—all of them became the basis of the collection, as well as copies of films that miraculously survived at the film copying factory.

A large part of the films shot in Ukraine with the participation of Ukrainian filmmakers are still in the territory of Russia. The problem is that all Ukrainian-produced films were transferred to the State Film Fund of Russia, and since some of them were censored and did not reach the screens, no copies were preserved in Ukraine. Since the beginning of the 2000s, active work has been carried out to repatriate Ukrainian films, with peak activity falling in the period after 2010. Among the found films are those by Dovzhenko, Kavaleridze, Mikhail Kaufman, and Dziga Vertov. Along with them, hundreds of names of actors, screenwriters, cinematographers, and artists who remained unknown were discovered. However, a significant part of the films and related data remain inaccessible, which has become exacerbated by Russia's aggressive policy and the war it unleashed against Ukraine. In the near future, these films and related documents, as well as artistic materials, will be waiting for restitution.

The world film archives played a significant role in the search for and return of Ukrainian cinematic heritage to the Dovzhenko Centre, where Ukrainian-produced films were preserved. For example, *Taras Trysilo* is kept in the French Cinematheque, the popular science film *Man and Monkey* is in the National Film Archive of Japan, and the comedy *Pigs Are Always Pigs* is in the German Bundesarchiv. This search is ongoing, and discoveries are made possible thanks to the solidarity of film archives and museum institutions.

Nowadays, the Dovzhenko Centre is located on the territory of what used to be the only film copying factory in Ukraine, which stopped mass-producing films in the late 1980s. The factory itself has become an invaluable source of replenishment for the

442 collection of Ukrainian-produced films from the 1960s-1980s because its employees wisely preserved copies. This object is valuable not only because it is evidence of an important part of the film process but also because rare film experts still work in the Film Fund. The construction of the film factory began immediately after World War II, and it marked the beginning of the development of the Holosiivskyi district in Kyiv. The factory was a “city within a city” with its infrastructure, an essential city-forming element.

After February 24, 2022, when Russian forces invaded a significant portion of Ukrainian territory and began massive shelling, the collection was under threat of physical destruction. On the first day, a Russian missile was shot down over the Centre, and debris damaged the building. The risk of looting and vandalism increased. However, this did not signal the need to protect the film archive for the management authorities in charge of the Dovzhenko Centre. Moreover, the situation was used to deprive it of support and start the reorganization process.

Nowadays, this cultural object has become attractive not only in the eyes of the culturally engaged community but also developers. They are trying to deprive the Centre of its premises, and the refusal of the managing authority to recognize the collection, as provided by law, radical cuts in funding, and a movement contrary to protection, weaken its potential and limit its opportunities. The Dovzhenko Centre team, together with the community, is doing everything, including seeking international support, to prevent another “break” in Ukrainian cinema, because restoring what has been lost will be incredibly difficult.

Despite these obstacles, the national film archive holds sold-out screenings in its native Kyiv, reveals the uniqueness of Ukrainian cinema to the world, and builds relationships with the local and global film community. The audience at Arsenal had the opportunity to watch Dovzhenko’s masterpiece *Zemlya* accompanied by the band DakhaBrakha and an introduction by the head of the

Film Archive Oleksandr Teliuk, as well as a recent retrospective of Kira Muratova. **443**

And despite everything, we have become convinced that Ukrainian cinema is not just “breaks.” It is the ability to self-preserve and find the strength to live; it is a cinema that survived totalitarianism and de-subjectivation (deprivation of subjectivity and identity). Therefore, the Dovzhenko Centre must act to ensure that the life of Ukrainian cinema continues, and its strength enriches the world’s heritage.

Fragments of Our Memories: On the Incompleteness of Broken Nostalgia

**Lynhan Balatbat Helbock
and Laura Kloeckner**

Speaking, writing, and discoursing are not mere acts of communication; they are above all acts of compulsion. Please follow me. Trust me, for deep feeling and understanding require total commitment. — Trinh T. Minh-ha, Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism

Working with archival material that is connected to the colonial period of Germany means being surrounded by racist and dark objects that speak of a time that seems to be distant, but the mechanisms of that violence are sadly not. How to work and live with objects that bear witness to the mad superiority of a few leading to the organized extinction of communities? To find the space to deeply generate a consciousness for such disturbing realms, one needs to go beyond the mere acts of critical theory and performative alliance towards the affected bodies.

Decolonial practice as a verb means to operate beyond labels and superficial engagement; it is a long-term process of perpetual encounters with the darkest sides of the human condition.

446 We need in collective formats in order to develop the tools that allow us to live with archives and give us the confidence to embrace incompleteness as the reality we are working with. Essays, concepts, and guidelines are two-dimensional structures that are freed from consequence and action. This is embodied in our thinking with and through the practice of archiving. Through various formats alongside school classes, performances, and collective listening sessions we try to linger with the stories and use the tool of repetition as one of many forms of intervention.

... I proposed that we need to look at the archive, in the spirit of Foucault, less as a container of the accidental trace and more as a site of a deliberate project. The archive as deliberate project is based on the recognition that all documentation is a form of intervention ... This further means that archives are not only about memory (and the trace or record) but about the work of the imagination, about some sort of social project. These projects seemed, for a while, to have become largely bureaucratic instruments in the hands of the state, but today we are once again reminded that the archive is an everyday tool. (Appadurai 2003, 24)

When the archival project Colonial Neighbours was invited to join the project "Archive außer sich" alongside fellow projects in 2017, we were very much looking forward to not only presenting this fragmented attempt to archive histories, but were interested in processing the archive from different perspectives.

Colonial Neighbours, a project by SAVVY Contemporary—The Laboratory of Form Ideas, was initiated in 2009 via an object that was found in an attic. The object held unknown memories that were tied through family constellations, a photo album with innocent descriptions written below images that held places of violence.

The material or immaterial objects in the archive, which are connected to the colonial past, are not the main focus in this archival attempt. It is the histories, both shared and unknown,

that are of importance in this journey of drawing a fragmented map of our collective memory in regards to our stories here and then. It is a research project investigating the colonial history of Germany, including its ongoing impacts upon the present, aiming to address gaps in Germany's politics, education, and media in order to question dominant knowledge structures and historical narratives. The archive, being activated by discussions, performances, and collaborations with actors from various fields, should serve as a platform for exchange and research.

Today, knowledge of this history and its impact is hardly present in the German public sphere. Official German "collective memory" actively displaces, silences, or denies this history. Many schoolbooks, media outlets, and politicians ignore this period, downplay its importance, or portray it as if it evolved in isolation from an alleged "core" of "German history." As a consequence, colonialism is often seen as part of the "distant" past. As some are now trying to say, however, we cannot understand Germany without understanding its role as a colonial power. The act of remembering should not be the burden of an individual but one's story read in context of its time and in a perpetual collective attempt. Both, archival structures and our own memory are fragile entities to house stories that are living beings.

How can we open discourses on colonial entanglements without creating a fetish regarding a specific time in history, but think along the threads in time and connect ourselves with this distant past? How can personal stories, which are often multilayered, allow us to remember our own past, encompassing the brokenness and dark periods of time. And how can we exit a perpetuation of these violences in the deliberate project of the archive?

When thinking about our tools, then we need to start with our bodies. In our practice, we acknowledge the fact that the human cognition is not only shaped by the brain, but is indeed encompassed in the body, which performs cognitive tasks like conceptualization, reasoning, and judgment. Human cognition is

448 formed through interactions with the environment or the world at large. Alongside Esiaba Irobi's writing we are thinking of the body as a site of discourse and a platform on or through which histories can be transmitted or narrated.

They went there from 1441 to 1856 as kinaesthetic/ phenomenological and iconographic literacies. They got there because the body is a site of discourse. And just as some cultures privilege the dissemination of information and knowledge through writing, oral cultures of the world privilege the encoding and decoding of precious information in the body and the expression of these knowledges through performance. (Irobi 2008)

Fossilized Sonicities

The body as a site of discourse turns the archive into a performative practice, an activation of embodied knowledge through the senses. Cinema too finds its roots in oral storytelling practices. It's a somatic experience that lives through the reverberations of the sonic and the visual in a collective setting. Like archives, films are performative practices. They can be fragments in a collection, and a collection/remix of fragments. When we think about strategies of non-perpetuation of violences in sonic archives, what does it offer us to think of the material practice of filmmaking as a form of critical archiving?

Colonial Neighbours organized a workshop by the title "Fossilised Sonicities: On Mapping Lessons and Sonic Archives" as part of Archival Assembly #1 at the Arsenal—Institute for Film and Video Art in September 2021. At the heart of the workshop and sonic mash-up was the quest to understand how we can think of film as a sonic archive. The idea of fossilized sounds was borrowed from *The Urban Feral*, whose sonic investigations are inspired by the Sufi understanding of the healing properties of sound vibrations (SAVVY Contemporary 2022).

The challenge of engaging with film as sonic archives also bears the risk of reproducing the histories of domination and extraction that are being challenged. How do we deal with toxic sounds that forever live in the body of a film? How do we confront the ghosts in this archive? At epistemic and material levels, the questions of who “speaks” for whom in the conversation matters (Mhishi 2023).

Imagine a de-speaking cinema: wandering towards an unknown place, a place that isn't *already* there, that isn't *yet* there. Imagine a cinema like a performance of preparation, a speculative gesture to welcome what comes or could come from the outside of these visible worlds, worlds that are cleared (*habitués*) by and for a particular eye. (Marbouef 2021)

Let's take a short detour and turn to the question of what cinema is or can be. In his essay “Towards a de-speaking cinema (A Caribbean hypothesis),” Olivier Marbouef calls for a phenomenal shift by postulating a new, de-speaking cinema, a cinema in which “all presences flee towards the margins. ... A cinema of dispersion by flight, but also a cinema of excess, cacophony, and explosion. For it removes itself from the centre of the scene as much as it atomizes the centre itself, by making it impracticable, inaudible, untranslatable” (Marbouef 2021). Critical of centralized perpetuations of representations (and the expectation of the margins to ‘speak up’ against the center), a de-speaking cinema is a space “where ‘it’ spoke,” understanding “it” as a “wider spectrum of the speaking image to forms of matter, environments, that spoke from assemblies and alliances between existences and phenomena placed at the margins of the scene of dominant human representations” (Marbouef 2021). The idea of the de-speaking cinema offers us a space, a speculative gesture and hallucination, to reimagine how we can think of cinema, film, and the material practice of archiving. It opens a pathway beyond the binary production or counter-production of a centralized canon, but rather calls for a porous, hallucinated space that can hold a pluriverse of knowledges and rhythms in simultaneous

450 existence. It thereby revokes institutionalization. In this new space, the idea of film as a sonic archive finds an anchor. In it, film practices of disobedience, appropriation, and decentralization find their echoes to subvert the trap of colonial reproduction and representation.

The film *Mapping Lessons* (2020) by Philip Rizk is a conversation between political struggles across time and space, from anti-colonial battles against the French and British in the 1920s to the Syrian revolution in 2011, 1936 Spain, a revisionist memory of Russian Soviets, and the Paris Commune amongst others. It questions Eurocentric historiographies and narratives by drawing a map of fragmented autonomies. The film's musical score features a recording of a 1972 free jazz session between six musicians in Egypt, one of the first of its type in the region, and undoes something important. It undermines what was formalized at the Arab Music congress in the 1930s, which set out to Europeanize and standardize Arab music. The 1972 session deliberately subverts this standard. The film *Mapping Lesson* utilizes this recording session as a basis and an essential element of the soundtrack. Sequence by sequence, the mini essays on autonomy that make up the film place the sonic scores in juxtaposition, dissonance, reversal of the image. This creates an uneasy tension between the archival fragments.

What happens if you exit the gaze and listen? What kind of knowledges are produced and revoked? The film offers a space for short lived moments that don't necessarily claim to be part of a longer narrative because many of them have come to an end. The sonic offers a beat for a new reading of experiments of autonomy that have been misinterpreted, silenced, or completely overlooked. The practice of filmmaking then becomes a deliberate project of archiving, a site of cannibalizing historicities and canonical violence.

While doing so, cinema as a hallucinated space, a "performance of preparation" offers to the archive a different circulation practice

and forms of exhibition making. It is a space for a multiplicity of simultaneous experiences, to de-speak, rethink exhibition making, to focus on untraining the ear and deep listening in collective practice.

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EPILOGUE

Cine-Animism: *The Return of Amílcar Cabral* and Many Returns

Filipa César

we are a society of dead and living — Amílcar Cabral

War of Ontologies

On August 3, 1959, workers at the port of Pidjiguiti in Bissau organized a strike demanding better working conditions and wage raises. Seamen and dockworkers, particularly those working for Casa Gouveia, the local import-export arm of the Portuguese commercial monopoly of the Companhia União Fabril (CUF), were violently repressed by the company's security forces, colonial officials, the police, and the military. Around 50 people died, and about a hundred were injured. According to the accounts of the survivors and other witnesses, a military commander shot at the heads of those who had taken refuge at sea. For the anti-colonial party PAIGC—just founded in 1956 and from which some militants had been involved in the strike—this was a turning point for the resistance that had been as continuous as the Portuguese occupation of the West African coast. A political

456 and diplomatic way to independence, unlike in the neighboring Republic of Guinea, seemed to be off the table. The Portuguese colonial order and its mercantile companies managed necropolitics with the clear assumption that through legal abstractions, the production and distribution of death, it would be possible to continue to capitalize on overseas territories and its human and natural resources. Uncannily, these mechanisms of violence and force were coevally corrupted by the way different media, subjectivities, ontologies, epistemologies, and technologies operated in the same place—the animistic imaginaries of permanently situated resistance. The courageous demands made by the women at the port to the governor prevented the burning of the bodies and had them returned to their families for the necessary mourning ceremonies. Besides artillery and manpower, other forces were deployed to the same battleground in a conflict of imaginaries and its means of (re-)presentation. It is as if the Portuguese colonialists tried to subdue something that cannot be subdued, something ungraspable that escaped their own understanding of life and codes of existence. As Amílcar Cabral, African liberation leader of the PAIGC and agronomist, claimed at the 1972 funeral of Kwame Nkrumah: “We, Africans, firmly believe that the dead continue living by our sides, we are a society of dead and living” (Cabral 2012). This anti-colonial declaration counters western ontologies—you may force and kill, but even the dead have agency beyond your grasp. This multi-voiced essay revisits *O Regresso de Amílcar Cabral* (eng. *The Return of Amílcar Cabral, Guinea-Bissau/Guinea/Sweden, 1976*), the first film produced collectively by Guinean filmmakers in the aftermath of the war of liberation of Guinea-Bissau from Portuguese occupation in 1974.¹

1 Guinean cinema evolved within the 11-year-long war for independence from Portugal (1963–74), when Amílcar Cabral, the leader of PAIGC (African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde), sent four young Guineans—Flora Gomes, Sana na N'hada, Josefina Crato, and José Bolama Cobumba—to the Cuban Film Institute (ICAIC) to learn how to make film. Cabral and the movement's propagandist vision was to make his people and the world aware of the ongoing struggle, and to build their own national

It draws on my reflections and recollections, and those of cine-kins engaged with the remains of the Guinean archive. The film itself celebrates the life of Amílcar Cabral and how his presence remains vital. It documents the solemn ceremony of the return of Cabral's remains to Bissau in 1976 from Conakry where he had been assassinated in January 1973.² According to Sana na N'hada,

imaginary. Amílcar Cabral was murdered on 20th of January 1973 and did not live to witness either the Proclamation of the Independence in September 1973, which was envisioned and prepared for over two decades of struggle, nor its visionary film documentation. Guinean film production had begun during the last phase of the liberation war and was subsequently aided by the active solidarity of filmmakers like Sarah Maldoror, Lennart Malmer, Ingela Romera, Chris Marker, Anita Fernandez, and others. The founding of the National Institute for Cinema and the Audiovisual (INCA) in Bissau took place under the patronage of Angolan poet and liberation fighter Mario Pinto de Andrade, then Commissioner for Culture of Guinea-Bissau. Cinema, along with the Creole language and militant education, were tools of political imagination. They were the means to establish the pillar of a collective memory and unity to promote the rise up of the newly liberated Guinea. For some years, cinematic practices thrived in Guinea-Bissau, but with the coup d'état ignited by Nino (Bernardo) Vieira in 1980, cinema stopped being a governmental priority and production decreased. Two, now classic, fiction films—*Mortu Nega* by Flora Gomes in 1988, and *Xime* by Sana na N'hada in 1994—were precious exceptions. In 2012, all the fragmentary remains of the INCA archive, including the film *O Regresso de Amílcar Cabral*, were experimentally digitized by the Arsenal—Institute for Film and Video Art in Berlin in the context of the accompanying research project, *Luta ca caba inda*, led by Filipa César, Sana na N'hada, Tobias Hering, and many others. This collaborative and ongoing project, named after an unfinished film in the archive, focuses on experimental ways of keeping the archive open, giving access to its kaleidoscopic imaginary and refracted potencies.

- 2 Until today, the orchestration of Amílcar Cabral's assassination remains unrevealed; although the *de facto* murders are known, there are controversial theories about the authors of the plan that led to his death. On the 13th and 14th of January 2023, the Colloquium Amílcar Cabral the History of the Future was organized at the Auditorium of the Portuguese Parliament to commemorate 50 years of Cabral's death. As part of the speakers, I was witness to contradictory positions, on one side from Portuguese journalist José Pedro Castanheira denying any Portuguese involvement based on his decade-long field and archival Cape Verdean research, and on the other from theorist Angela Coutinho, claiming that she herself observed that the absence of archival material in Portuguese archives about the



[Fig. 1] Still from *O Regresso de Amílcar Cabral* (Source: 1976 © Sana na N'hada)

who was responsible for the production and editing, the original aim of the film was first to call upon the Guinean diaspora to return to the newly liberated nation and second to create a “slow film” as a placeholder for reflection. The funeral documentation was edited with Guinean songs and archival material channeling several of Cabral’s addresses to freedom fighters during the guerrilla war.

This essay acts as a “séance,” full of impossibilities and limitations that start already with its written form, corrupting the insistent orality and the sonic reverberant agency operating in the film. Without wanting to explain the film or counter its opacity, my path is to follow the mediality experiment that this film presents. The essay embraces the intrinsic nature of cinema as an animistic medium and attempts to show how this film, as a mourning ritual,

subject continues to be an indicator of Portuguese involvement in the plan. Interesting enough, just a few days after the conference, on January 26, 2023, the Portuguese Parliament rejected the left-wing proposal to declassify Colonial War documents with the argument that “one cannot dismantle myths like the imperial myth at the expense of creating contemporary myths,” while on the other side the extreme right wing argued against any “attempt to denigrate and vilify the Armed Forces ... opening the wounds of the [Colonial] War that Mozambique and Portugal would rather see healed” (Bacelar Begonha 2023, my translation).

offers an accurate example for convening spectral, political, and epistemological troubles in order to think through cinema in and beyond modern anti-colonial gestures: cine-animism.

Animist Medium

If Africa has been imagined from the outside, those who remain there continue to imagine new ways to subvert the images that have fictionalized them, and create their own representations.

Achille Mbembe

Sana na N'hada, who produced and edited *The Return of Amílcar Cabral*, is a member of the Balante community whose animistic cosmogony he grew up with and was initiated into. "I would say that animism is not a fixed religion. It is practised everywhere, and it is based on natural phenomena. There are things about us that we cannot understand. But it is not a religion" (César, Hering, and Rito 2017, 351). What happens when the medium of cinema is in the hands of a practitioner with an animistic ontological understanding, who was initiated into filmmaking during the armed struggle?

Guinean sociologists Miguel de Barros and Mónica Sofia Vaz articulate the animistic understanding of death in Guinean creole cosmologies:

Thinking about death is an act in life. ... In traditional African societies it is particularly interesting to verify the dialogue and closeness between the living, the dead and ... that the human dimension is more than physical and biological. ... The soul or the mind may, however, occupy another space and time ... The living may then have the role of helping the soul in this transition, in the beginning of a new path, which one wants to be appeased, and with meaning, through rituals associated with death. (2020, my translation)

Referring to the Judeo-Christian tradition in the film *Les Statues Meurent Aussi* (1953), Chris Marker posits: "We put stones over

460 our dead in order to prevent them from escaping." Cinema, with its specific qualities between material, spatial, and temporal projection, is a medium propensive for animist technologies. This echoes Teresa Castro's definition of animistic media:

a medium that *animates* still images, turning stillness into motion and virtually endowing photograms with "self-motion";

a medium that is capable of animating the world, as well as the things and beings that inhabit it;

a medium, finally, that came to be envisaged, by means of the camera as its embodiment, as an autonomous agent evincing a form of (machinic) "intelligence" or "consciousness." (2016, 248-49)

Simultaneously, the medium of cinema jeopardizes the concept of linear time because of its capacity to collapse many presents and presences onto the audience's timescape, rendering a layering of different temporalities sensorially.

Seeking to overcome the hold that the postcolony continues to exert over lives, Achille Mbembe also attempted a way out of the generalized "circulation and exchange of death as the condition for becoming human" and enunciated how the "disposing-of-death-itself" could be in the core of a "veritable politics of freedom" (Mbembe and Hofmeyr 2006).

The very title, *The Return of Amílcar Cabral*, is a bold announcement of a cinematic gesture meant to defeat the finitude of death, the animistic aspect to what is humanely present otherwise. In Romance languages, present (time), presence (matter), and gift (sociality) are the same word: "presente." Somehow through this "return," film history was presented with an animist, anti-colonial cinematic event where an imaginary of liberation and emancipation is attempted within a conjuration that makes a present of many agencies (time/matter/sociality) at stake, including all contradictions (some tragic) that African



[Fig. 2] Still from *O Regresso de Amílcar Cabral* (Source: 1976 © Sana na N'hada)

nationalist constructs embody. In this birth of Guinean cinema, a magnetism between the flow of the animist ontologies and the potential animist mediality of cinema takes place.

Opening Ritual

We have come up with ways how to speak about spectres but we haven't learned yet how to speak to them.

Tobias Hering (2015, 74)

The film opens the cinematic mourning ritual, summoning viewers with the harmonious sound of the kora announcing a spiritual spread.³ The chords swell in all directions in a cosmic expanse, as if the sonic waves were spreading everywhere, convoking communion and attention. Slowly, like a spill being absorbed in reverse, the notes align back into harmonic organization to allow for the voice of the griot to describe what the notes are already doing “Dear Quade is playing the kora in honor of the PAIGC.”⁴ The verticality of the kora strings make the

- 3 Kora is a string instrument used extensively in West Africa, often accompanying the *griot's* tales. Its harmonious resonance is believed to promote harmony and unity.
- 4 PAIGC: African Party for the Liberation of Guinea and Cape Verde.

462 link between above and below—the cosmic and the terrestrial—as does the first image, a vertical pan from the trees' canopy tilting down to the middle of an empty paved road decorated with pennants, to a solitary sentinel stands alert and armed on the sidewalk, protecting the path for what is about to pass as the griot and kora continue “the work achieved ..., the struggle for emancipation and Independence. ... I am announcing the PAIGC’s message about the death of Cabral. But what’s immortal? Cabral’s struggle is immortal” (my translation).

With the introduction of the word “immortal,” a spell is cast for the duration of the film and the actions that follow—the making present of what is there otherwise. The bodily and the immortal agency is a combination that the animistic medium of film can make both graspable and opaque. The animist coding of matter is not a form of resistance, but a force of existence that operates humanity beyond the body and is therefore, not colonizable matter, not reachable to the oppressors.

The filmmakers appropriate the modern cinema technology and make a collective film of an apparently secular mourning ritual for the leader of the anti-colonial struggle. They operate a participant objectification, while at the same time encoding various elements of the montage to hint at the animistic culture to retain its own agency through the celebration of the immortality in death: the griot, the strings, the drums and the traditional weaving on the ground. As Christina Sharpe convokes the multiple meanings of wake within Black struggles to surviving imperialism, this film is also a space enabler for awareness, awakening, mourning, alert, and water and air trail (see Sharpe 2016).

Transfers: Body and Celluloid

*Where the presence of your mortal remains will
fertilise the radicalization of the revolution of
all our people with whom you so wonderfully
identified.*⁵

Sekou Touré

It was precisely this film that we were hoping to find when we started cataloguing the Guinean film archive in Bissau.⁶ Within the dozens of film cans of 16mm reels in various states of decay, three were identified as containing *O Regresso de Amílcar Cabral*. We, myself and a group of cine-kins, opened them one by one, and found that the celluloid had dissolved into a brown-black-redish vinegared paste. But when I passed the sad news on to Sana na N'hada, he told me that he still had a few cans in his home that he had rescued from the 7th of June War in 1998. In fact, there it was, the last known copy—*The Return* had returned as it promised. After almost 30 years of not being accessed or shown, the celluloid copy of *The Return of Amílcar Cabral*, returned through another transfer—the digital scanner reading the inscribed surface. In 1976, the celluloid got exposed to the light matter through the photons: “Doesn’t a breath of the air that pervaded earlier days caress us as well?” (Benjamin 2006, 390). Now other photons, cast by the shadows of that air, get processed into little squares of red, green, and blue colors saved as ones and zeros on a hard disk. In this transfer, both the distance of the time span between the two exposures and the nearness of the surface of transfer collide. Maybe that awkward experience of Benjaminian aura, “A strange tissue of space and time: the unique apparition of a distance, however near it may *be*” (Benjamin 2008, 23). In the purposeful absence of any attempt at restoration, along with the images are transferred the inscriptions of time, neglect, war, decomposition, corrosion, mold, vinegar syndrome,

5 Seku Toure's obituary speech for Amílcar Cabral, in *O Regresso de Amílcar Cabral*, INCA, 1976.

6 See footnote 2.

464 and projection scratches on the animal gelatin of the celluloid. Now pixelated and projected again—can fireflies heal scars?

In 2011, before seeing any of the content of the archive, we had titled the first project proposal addressed to institutions and possible funders, “Animated Archive,” a name with a premonition of what would unfold—the return of a body, the return of a cinema, the return to a soil, the animation of an archive and the chemistry of shadows; continuous erosion resisting erasure. Everything was trying to recover and reclaim something on the verge of disappearance. “An object dies when the living glance trained upon it disappears.”⁷

The digital transfer was just one of the various transfers that have already enchanted *The Return of Amílcar Cabral*, and those that are being called upon. Cabral’s body returns, and his body and spirit can “fertilize the land” as Sekou Touré declares in his obituary speech in the film. Death is no end, but rather a means for collectivizing existence and continuing the struggle beyond concepts of finitude. The humus is the metabolization of the commons through earthing and soil reclamation. As an agronomist, Amílcar Cabral had a privileged relation with soil sciences, conceptualizing environmental phenomena agency as witness of mercantile extractivist accumulation (César 2018).

This humus of the film’s posthumous state of decay makes film an agent capable of different understandings of time and presence. Sana na N’hada explained that the film was made to document the return of Cabral’s body—to re-member Cabral (to bring him back into body parts “members,” limbs, meaning arms and legs, in Romance languages) and to send a message to the Guinean diaspora—we can bury our dead in our soil so we can also return to inhabit it. Sana na N’hada wanted to present the Guineans with the presence of the spirit of liberation Cabral embodied in his

7 Ghislain Cloquet, Chris Marker, Alain Resnais, *Les Statues Meurent Aussi*, 30mins, 1953.



[Fig. 3] Still from *O Regresso de Amílcar Cabral* (Source: 1976 © Sana na N'hada)

metamorphosis. The chosen medium to operate all these complex communing agencies is cinema. Let us never freeze history in this archive, instead let's allow it to decompose and recompose, so we can understand the fertile potentiality of the active involvement of cinema and death in life.

Cabral's body grounded on his own soil by plane, film-body line-of-flight, Conakry-Bissau. The body of the plane becomes strangely reminiscent of a womb as the coffin emerges from a cargo door in a clumsy, unrehearsed, unrehearsable maneuver marking the birth of Cabral's death. The ritual not only shows the burial of the leader on his own land; it is not about bringing the body to rest in peace, but about allowing death to operate in the living world. In a piece of unedited footage that Swedish filmmaker Lennart Malmer shot of this very occasion, a person dressed in a sky-at-night fabric enters the plane/womb. Speaking in Guimarães in 2015 at a conference dedicated to the reemerged archive from Bissau, artist and curator Ala Younis described this image as follows: "Universe stretches its head into the basin of the airplane, and prepares itself to step into its darkness. When the coffin comes out, we know it is not that of the universe, but we do not see the universe come out either. The images are cut,

466 we follow the coffin, people march behind it, gather around it. Salute the image. Drop their tears at it"⁸

Lion, Abel Djassi, Cabral

Wake: ... it is the air currents behind a body in flight; a region of disturbed flow.

Christina Sharpe (2016, 3)

When the coffin has finally found its place on top of a military tank, the griot is interrupted by an animated Cabral. As the first moving image completing the spiral of time-travel to the living dead, we are presented with Cabral addressing a large group of teachers in military uniform. The scene is black-and-white and was filmed by Swedish journalist Rudi Spee in 1969 in a forest setting during the liberation struggle:

Comrades ... weapons are not sufficient to liberate a country. It is not only military or political work that frees a land. The greatest battle we must engage in is against ignorance. Only when men and women understand this can they overcome their fear:

Fear of the flooded and fast-running river,
fear of the thunderstorms,
fear of the lightning,
fear of the thunderbolt,
fear of the kapok tree,
fear of the dark path,
fear of the Cobiana bushland,

8 Lennart Malmer is a Swedish filmmaker who collaborated with Ingela Romare in documenting Guinea Bissau between 1972 and 1980. Ala Younis used this image in her contribution for the Guimarães conference *Encounters Beyond History*, 2015. In the same session, Jean Pierre Bekolo noted in a conversation with Sana na N'hada (on an experiment he did taking Sana's images of Cabral's burial and sonorizing them with Cabral's obituary speech at the Kwame Nkrumah funeral): "A film is shot against the script, and a film is edited against the shooting."

fear of the Quinera bushland,
 fear of the fortune-tellers,
 fear of the sorcerers,
 fear of the healers,
 fear of the cipaio [sipahi],⁹ or the police,
 fear of any political leader,
 fear of the armed men,
 fear of the forces that lie ahead

... To liberate our people from fear, we must liberate them from ignorance. ... That is why the teacher's work is the frontline of our struggle, the vanguard. Its outcomes might not be visible immediately, but it brings great consequences for the future of our land. (my translation)

These declensions of fear convoke the entities at stake in the African liberation struggle then and now. The struggle for education and the acquiring of the tools for emancipation. Using an auto-critical device that he also employs in "The Weapon of Theory" (Cabral 1966), Cabral searches for strategies of liberation in the freedom of one's own self in the first place: self-liberation through class suicide. The focus is not on an external enemy, but on the enemy we carry within ourselves.

The coffin, mobilized by the military tank, makes a stop at the Presidential Palace. The procession of cars is led by a Volvo driving towards the camera. The streets are crowded, and the griot continues with his strings at a trance-inducing rhythmic speed:

Ah! Demba lion.
 Lion, lying down.
 Hear the lion on the ground.
 Ah, lion overthrown.
 A great leader, a great man,
 is lying dead.

9 Native person recruited by the imperial forces.

The lion is lying down.
 I swear the lion is overthrown.
 Do you hear how we grieve the lion?
 The country that defended itself.
 The lion is dead but his spirit lives.
 Don't you know
 Abel Djassi is lying down?
 So, don't you know
 Abel Djassi is down?
 No wonder I'm not afraid of anything.
 No wonder he is not afraid of anything.
 Our militants won.
 Our militants won.
 I ask myself who revolted?
 They say our great Cabral.
 The lion is lying down.
 (my translation)

Those who know the tale and the cipher can decode "Abel Djassi" as Cabral's *nom de guerre* and the shapeshifting tool. Cabral, an agronomist working overseas for a Portuguese ministry who became a leader of the liberation struggle and of various subversive agencies, has given up his human shape to become the lion that is the embodied fearless force managing the jungle war. The lion is down but its spirit continues to struggle. As Denise Ferreira da Silva notes in "Toward a Black Feminist Poethics" addressing Octavia Butler's time travel and shapeshifting tools as forms to "traverse the linear time, efficient causality imposes onto our connections of Time, the one that remains in the historical materialist categories, which prevent us from appreciating how slave labor and native lands live in capital" (2014, 93). While the jeopardizing of linear time brings politics to the present, the "metamorphic abilities," more than a mere shift in form, are "one of substance through which she changes both form and content, as when returning to her own shape, or after curing someone, she holds in her flesh/body what/how the other person or animal



[Fig. 4] Still from *O Regresso de Amílcar Cabral* (Source: 1976 © Sana na N'hada)

also is" (Ferreira da Silva 2014, 94). Writing about metamorphosis in Amerindian cosmologies, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro describes "[t]he animal clothes that shamans use to travel the cosmos" as "not fantasies but instruments: they are akin to diving equipment, or space suits, and not to carnival masks." (1998, 482). In the same flow, Cabral's embodiment of the lion is an operation that unlocks the lion's powers eminent in the jungle rather than a comparison or metaphor.

Women's Gaze: A Premonition Portal

Frankly, have you ever heard of anything stupider than to say to people, as they teach in film schools, not to look at the camera?

Chris Marker, Sans Soleil, 1983

Tugas n'barka ê bai, tugas di terra fika, ê na soronda, imperialismo na regua...!to

Super Mama Djombo

The lion song is accompanied by a series of close-ups of faces of women gazing directly into the camera. They just look

10 Super Mama Djombo, in Ramédi Cu Kata Cura, album Na Cambança, 1980. "Portuguese colonialist left, the native colonists stayed, in our tree stump imperialism is being watered (to re-flourish)."

470 sovereignly into the lens, creating an intriguing distance-dissolving uncanniness. Rather than grieving or sadness, their steady expressions are curious, inquiring between skepticism and unrevealing wisdom. Sana na N'hada told me that these women, aligning with the crowd along a road of the procession, were either from Bissau (a place that experienced little direct contact with the war) or had recently arrived from war zones in the jungle and did not know much about Amílcar Cabral beyond the myth or a voice on Rádio Liberdade. Their reaction contrasts with that of the political and international elites moved to tears at the airport ceremony (fig. 1-5).

Chris Marker was invited to Bissau in 1979 to work with and “evaluate” the skills of the young Guinean filmmakers instructed in Cuba. Sometimes they spent entire nights looking at images they had shot during the war and discussed montage. Cine-kin Diana McCarty speculated later that among these were those shots of women looking serenely into the camera and that they inspired Chris Marker’s cinematic reflection on women gazing directly at the camera in the film *Sans Soleil*, made a few years later: “And at the end, the real glance, straightforward ... that lasted a twenty-fourth of a second, the length of a film frame” (*Sans Soleil*, 1983). Then Marker reflects on the complexity of the strength, wisdom, and oppression of women: “All women have a built-in grain of indestructibility. And men’s task has always been to make them realize it as late as possible.”

The medium of these women’s gazes knows more than what the filmmakers themselves could intend. Their skeptical gazes and film agency is both the announcement of women’s matriarchal power and the premonition of the violent oppression against African women in the aftermath of liberation. Their gazes predict the unfolding of the post-colonial expression of hegemonic masculinity, based on the complicity between three theoretical domains—gender, violence, and political instability—Joacine Katar Moreira conceptualized this as *Matchuandadi* culture in order to study this specific form of patriarchal masculinity and

its role in the engineering of conflict and instabilities that have plagued the formation of the Guinean state (Katar Moreira 2017).

The awareness of the gaze of the women inscribed on film also allows the prosopographic ability of the celluloid material to show the timeless perspective of feminine materiality:¹¹ the film looking back at us with the knowledge of collapsed time, as women carry with them the burden of oppression beyond their bodies' mortality. The film perspectivism goes beyond what it is exposed to and what is projected onto it, complicating notions of *future remains*, as if a present tense is producing a multiplicity of pasts for the future.

Sonically, the sequence of close-ups of women coincides with the moment in the film when the griots and the koras are substituted by the military snare drum, thus image and sound both announcing the looming descent to transcolonial assimilation into patriarchy. The militarized patriarchy is already lurking between photograms betraying Cabral's vision of a struggle of armed militants (non-soldiers) who upon decolonization would replace their weapons with construction and farming tools. The military in these images, parading in synchrony with the sharp, strident sound of the snare drum and an out-of-tune trumpet, have not laid down their arms. The agnostic ritual, the presence of the Catholic church and the military parade are all witnessed by women's timeless gaze (Mbembe 2001).¹² This is also the premonition of the brutal repression of the Kiyang Yang, a women's socio-religious post-war movement, evolving from Balante

11 I'm using here a derivation of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro *prosopomorphic* agency—from the Greek *prosopopoiia*, “the putting of speeches into the mouths of others” or “an imaginary or absent person is made to speak or act” (Viveiros de Castro 1998, 469).

12 The Mbembe idea of colonial phallogentric modes prevailing in post-colonial Africa.



[Fig. 5] Still from *O Regresso de Amílcar Cabral* (Source: 1976 © Sana na N'hada)

culture, as a healing response to the social ostracization of the guerrilla women traumatized in the war.¹³

The women's gaze is a portal returning to the place of trauma and from there accessing pain and collectively caring for it. The absence of healing or intention of healing creates the monstrosity chain for the violence to flow on and transmutate bodies, and the women knew this. This gaze disrupts that flow, fearlessly defying the objectifying camera shutter and its mutations and splits (see Azoulay 2019).¹⁴ The gaze, the mourning, the sonic, and the mourning film are tools for reorganizing pain and putting it in the place of inquiry, research, and awareness. Before becoming a filmmaker, Sana na N'hada had served as a nurse in the guerrilla

- 13 "In 1984, a healing cult for young barren women in southern Guinea Bissau developed into a movement, Kiyang-yang, that shook society to its foundations and had national repercussions. 'Idiom of distress' is used here as a heuristic tool to understand how Kiyang-yang was able to link war and post-war-related traumatic stress and suffering on both individual and group levels" (de Jong and Reis 2010).
- 14 The concept of the camera shutter as cinema as the objectifying media of the imperialism enacts a series of temporal, spatial, and differential splits—present/past, here/there, citizen/non-citizen, perpetrator/victim.

war and was to become a doctor. Through his films he found other ways of healing.

Mediality Otherwise

Even the Cobia bush, we have been inhabiting it safely, especially since the "iran" (guinean sacred entity) is as well a nationalist, it "said" clearly that the "tugas" (the Portuguese colonialists) have to go away, that they have nothing to do in our land.
Amílcar Cabral (1979, 59)

The cinema seems poised to leave behind its function as 'a medium' (for the representation of reality) in order to become a 'life form' (and thus a reality in its own right).
Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener (2012, 12)

While the griot was singing the lion, the film has followed the coffin to the presidential palace where guests queue for the last mourning vigil. Between spectacle and spectator the film comes in and out of itself. Cabral's spirit not only lives but also speaks—on the soundtrack is his last recorded radio speech, the New Year's address of December 31, 1972, three weeks before his assassination:

The new state will be legitimized by our people. ... This will be the most important act of our people's lives: the affirmation to the world that our African nation, forged in struggle, is irreversibly determined to march to Independence, without waiting for the consent of the Portuguese colonialists.¹⁵

Spectators of the film become wake attendees and radio listeners in their own and in Cabral's present. Anticipating the liberation of the country in 1974, this speech has become something of Cabral's testament—he bequeathed freedom to the country, as a first step, to be followed by the healing process and then

15 Amílcar Cabral's New Year's address in Conakry, December 31, 1972, Rádio Liberdade as shown in *O Regresso de Amílcar Cabral* (my translation).

474 re-construction. In that spirit of patience, Sana na N'hada made this "slow film" become a place for reflection and awareness: "The idea [of the film] was that the Guinean militants should think about the past, ... to give people time to think about it" (na N'Hada 2017, 230). A film ritual as an environment for reflection, healing, and mourning.

Towards the end of the film, the griots repeat oral history over the images of the vigil: "In '56 you went to Angola. When you came back you founded the Party ... In '59 the Portuguese killed them: 50 brothers in Pidjiguiti ... Amílcar Cabral: you left early, you died early" (my translation). At last, freedom fighter Carmen Pereira is shown paying her tribute to Cabral, standing on ground covered with the traditional fabric, *panu di pinti*, comb cloth (Semedo 2019). The weaves are part of the life of Guinean communities, in the many ceremonies of life and in death. The doings of this collective film go beyond what would be expected from an anti-colonial propaganda film; it is as if its agency were not fully controlled by its producers and actors.

Walter Benjamin has recognized the significance of "an artwork's auratic mode of existence [as] never entirely severed from its ritual function" (Benjamin 2008, 22). The ritual aspect of performance comes into play when considering the collective dimension of the film's dissemination and projection. Turning on a projector has actualized the kaleidoscopic potential of this film in specific and unique temporal and spatial set-ups, summoning the medium for the medicine to *do*, to act on bodies. The rhythmic and machinic unfolding of the film—the space hold, the expanded time span, the care given to a setting for awakening—perform what Christina Sharpe placed "in the wake, the past that is not past reappears, always, to rupture the present" (2016, 7). The film becomes a ritual of convoking, transferring, transmitting continuity and sociality.

The anti-colonial film is the animist-medium that jeopardizes the linearity of the colonial timeline, reminding us of the algorithms

of violence embedded in the Aristotelian linear tragic plot of past (blame), present (value) and future (choice). When according to this logic what is in the past is not present, what is dead is not here—what then is cinema? How account for its visitations? What are the doings, undoings, and services of cine-animism? Like *Mortu Nega*, a Creole expression for “those whom death denied,” cine-animism channels a rift in perspective where death is the vantage point from where life is a *survivance* stratum (Vizenor 2008).¹⁶

I’m not sure if there is such thing as an animist film being able to access this other ontological conjuration and presence-making predispositions of freedom, but perhaps, while projected, this film opens a seance to allow what cannot be represented to be present otherwise. Cine-animism drifts through cinema to hint at the traversing capacities of matter, tangling sonic waves with photons, swapping time with rhythm, to convoke ancestral and living entities to breathe the same air and share temporalities. It is a lab of medialities that look at us with disarming feminine healing knowledge of communing.

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16 “Mortu Nega” is a Creole expression derived from balante language that means: those whom death refused or those whose death is denied by death itself, and also the title of the first film of Flora Gomes from 1988. As if death would be a condition one has to deserve in order to be taken by it.

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Kelas Liarsip is a virtual study group with special focus on film archiving, restoration and feminist historiography within the context of cinema in the Indonesian archipelago. The classes started in March 2021. Liarsip is jointly organised by six women and non-binary individuals with various backgrounds, bound together by similar concerns and interests. They are Efi Sri Handayani (film archivist and illustrator), Julita Pratiwi (scholar and researcher), Lisabona Rahman (freelance film preservation technician), Umi Lestari (scholar, historian, curator), Imelda Mandala (photographer), the late Siti Anisah (film archive manager). The name is inspired by the tradition of epistemic disobedience in the region called “wild schools” which was a part of organising strategies against colonialism in the 20th century. Kelas Liarsip is a blend from ‘kelas liar’ (eng. *wild classroom*) and ‘arsip’ (eng. *archive*).

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in Berlin. He studied film, interdisciplinary arts and visual communication design in Istanbul and Berlin. He gave lectures on film and video production, curated various programs and events on film and migration, and took part in numerous exhibitions. He is co-editor of *Bitte zurückspulen – German-Turkish Film and Video Culture in Berlin* (Archive Books, 2020). As juror and consultant he has worked for the Berlinale Forum, International Short Film Festival Oberhausen, Duisburger Filmwoche and the DAAD Artists-in-Berlin Program, among others. Since 2023 he is curator for filmic practices at HKW in Berlin.

THIEME, Clarissa

Clarissa Thieme is a filmmaker and artist combining documentary and fictional methods to explore the fissures between the languages of individual memory and their translation into processes of historical objectification. In collaboration with the Library Hamdija Kreševljaković Video Arhiv and the UnWar Space Lab, she has developed [ɑ:kɪ'pələgəʊ]—a trans-national archival platform for public space first to be launched in the Post-Yugoslav context.

TURAJLIĆ, Mila

Mila Turajlić, born in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, is a filmmaker and visual artist whose documentary works draw on a combination of oral histories, film archives and found footage to fabricate a new reflexive language that confronts memory and ruins with the disappearing narratives of history. Her films include *Cinema Komunisto*, IDFA-winner *The Other Side of Everything* and the documentary diptych *Non-aligned & Ciné-Guerrillas: Scenes from the Labudović Reels*. Her video installations were commissioned by MoMA, curated for the 2022 Berlin Biennale and international exhibitions. She is a member of AMPAS (Oscars) Documentary Branch, and a Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres.

VASUDEVAN, Ravi

Ravi Vasudevan is a film and media historian. With Ravi Sundaram, Vasudevan directs Sarai, the media research

492 programme of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies. He co-founded *Bioscope: South Asian Screen Studies*, and is a coordinator of the media module of the International Centre for Advanced Studies: Metamorphoses of the Political (ICAS:MP).

VENTURINI, Simone

Simone Venturini is a full professor at the University of Udine, one of the founders of its La Camera Ottica lab, and the coordinator of the Udine Film Forum. His research areas include cinema history, film preservation, media archaeology, and production studies.

YOUNIS, Ala

Ala Younis is an artist working on curatorial, film and publishing projects. She curated Kuwait's pavilion at La Biennale di Venezia (2013), co-curated the Singapore Biennale in 2022, and co-founded the publishing initiative Kayfa ta in 2012. She is co-director of Berlinale's Forum Expanded, Artistic Director of Akademie der Kunst der Welt (Cologne), and Research Scholar at al Mawrid Arab Center for the Study of Art, at NYU Abu Dhabi.

Stefanie Schulte Strathaus and Vinzenz Hediger (eds.)

Accidental Archivism: Shaping Cinema's Futures with
Remnants of the Past

In the digital media ecology, archives are changing. Artists, curators, critics and scholars assume the role of accidental archivists. They shape cinema's futures by salvaging precarious repositories and making them matter in new ways. In the process, the cinema's public, a democratic body seemingly scattered about platforms and niches in a post-pandemic world, re-emerges as a political force.

"Accidental Archivism" brings together programmatic statements and proposals to explore an artistic space between archiving and activism, a space where remnants of the past become the building blocks of new ways of making, showing, teaching and thinking cinema.

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