

**Giovanna Fossati and Annie van den Oever (eds.)**  
***Exposing the Film Apparatus: The Film Archive as a Research Laboratory***

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Film archives can be understood as repositories of the historical experience of cinema; they are first and foremost places dedicated to the transmission of visual memory, and therefore testify to the importance of film heritage as an expression of cultural identity. Film archives emerged in response to a need for film conservation, caused by a series of historical events, not to mention the physical features of the carriers – i.e. subject to chemical decay. However, film archives are currently entering a radical, new phase: they are no longer merely the depository for visual cultural heritage, but moreover institutions that can dialogue with the current mediascape and new forms of audience experience, that are addressed to a projection of the future.

Among these kinds of institutions, the EYE Filmmuseum in Amsterdam has a leading role, and the book series *Framing Film*, launched by Amsterdam University Press in collaboration with EYE, is dedicated to studies of restoration, archival, and exhibition practices.

This eclectic collection of 29 essays is based on presentations at the *Film Archive as a Research Laboratory* conference, held in 2013 in Amsterdam and Groningen, and they discuss the role of the archive in current academic teaching and research on film. The editors are Giovanna Fossati<sup>1</sup> and Annie van den Oever.<sup>2</sup> With this volume, their aim is to research the history and development of film studies through a media-archaeological perspective.

This approach begins by reflecting on the etymology of the term ‘technology’, which comes from the ancient Greek *techné* and thus captured both concepts of craft and art. As such, cinema and media technologies face the complex challenge of their contemporaneity, deeply impacting the society in which they emerge. The authors are well aware of the theoretical background in media studies, established by Walter Benjamin, Marshall McLuhan, Friedrich Kittler, Bernard Stiegler, Paul Virilio etc. Nevertheless, here this study of media history and theory predominantly addresses the ‘exposure’ of devices and apparatuses

<sup>1</sup> Giovanna Fossati, *From Grain to Pixel: The Archival Life of Film in Transition* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Annie van den Oever, *Techné/Technology: Researching Cinema and Media Technologies, their Development, Use, and Impact* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014).

by reassessing the history of audiovisual media, and it focuses specifically on the practical applications of these epistemic objects.

In fact, media technology questions its own historical determination, while moreover investigating the role of the film archive: the main idea of this volume is to promote new forms of collaboration between academic and cultural heritage institutions, and thus invite media historians to interpret museums and archives as research laboratories. Film archivists today seek to reframe the meaning of their collections in view of this moment of technological transition, while film scholars are currently redefining the conceptual issues related to film history and to the so-called 'digital turn'. As such, practices of archival institutions become crucial in a rapidly changing 'mediascape', which in turn is connected to an ecosystem of apparatus advancements: for example, every tool for darkened rooms (projectors, printers, cameras) has made its mark in the moving image heritage. In this framework, the intertwined genealogies of art and media relate the cultural value of technological artifacts to an epistemological relevance, overcoming the traditional reticence for apparatuses in film studies. In the volume, apparatuses are re-conceptualized by film scholars and curators within a trajectory that goes from the small to the large: a first section, entitled *Small and Portable*, includes analyses of the portable devices, comparing the impact of smartphones, portable cameras – such as the hand-cranked Debie Parvo, which dates back early 1900s – and devices like the 16mm Movie Maker or Ciné-Kodak system, for amateur use. Histories of material objects and of amateur filmmaking practices are intertwined, with particularly original contribution focuses on tools like the tripod. From the iPhone back to the Edison Ideal Kinematograph, through the history of Bolex cameras, VCD and Sony Video Rover Ensemble, this section reflects on the crucial role of devices in the spectator's relationship with the moving image. The second section, *Medium and Not Easily Portable*, examines projectors (from Kinemacolor to a 2k DLP Digital Cinema Projector) and other machinery such as the 1909 Pathé Frères stencil-cutter or the Biophon sound-on-disc system. The final section of the volume, *Large and Not Portable*, is dedicated to bigger apparatuses used in post-production. From printers to editing tables, from 19<sup>th</sup>-century stereoscopy to 3D computer graphics, installations and databases, and from movie theaters to augmented reality, this expanded idea of cinema responds to the widespread presence of the moving image that has continually shaped our daily life.

The universe of visual arts and the spaces of modern life have been permeated by the functions of all these devices, which impact cinema both as an art form and an industry. With the introduction of digital technologies, the heritage of the moving image is becoming a more complex cultural object: it now reflects technological progress and its social impact, due to the status of contemporary media formats and their specific modes of fruition.

The theoretical framing of this research adopts Michel Foucault's definition of the *dispositif* – later used by Jean-Louis Baudry and Giorgio Agamben; according to this theory, the mechanics of representation in cinema engender a power

dynamic, connecting the audience and spectatorial practices within an ‘imaginary relation’, i.e. the immaterial effects of the work of the apparatus. But the cinematic medium does not involve only a transcendental condition: technology must be recognized as categorical in the epistemology of the media. Accordingly, this book engages in an analysis of the experiences activated by various devices by promoting scholarly awareness of the materiality of the apparatus. The heuristic methodology of ‘re-enactment’, already well-established in the field of experimental archaeology and in the history of science, directs the research of this edited collection towards an experimental approach, which focuses both on the discursive construction of epistemological structures related to the media, and the materiality of the various devices as well as their modes of use.

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