

Exposing the Film Apparatus – the Film Archive as a Research Laboratory

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The technology of cinema demonstrates most avidly the Greek word *tehkne*, by combining the terms craft and art into the same word. The synthesis of tools and tool-making with creative activity is the investigative path taken by this group of authors and presenters at a 2013 Symposium, the Film Archive as a Research Laboratory on which this collection of twenty-nine papers is based.

Audience studies is a recent field of study related to the work of film archives drawing on both quantitative and qualitative data but does not form part of this collection other than by inference. The emphasis is on the projector and other tools for darkened rooms, like printers; in the showman days of fairground entertainment these were one and the same with the camera. It is these three tools of practice where attention is focussed, strung between the vastly different worlds of Hollywood and the amateur filmmaker.

In an event planned for film archivists, museum curators, film studies professionals and various students of intertextuality, the approach taken to diversity of subject in the book is like that of the contemporary exhibition – juxtaposition, channel and surprise. First up, not the Lumiere Brothers but the iPhone, described as ‘cinema in my pocket’, a screen available anywhere, anytime, so business can be enacted. (And now, since the paper was written, a commercial feature film has been made with a smartphone.) The digital era is the context from which we move forward through the ideas explored; we have returned to ‘the art of the miniature’ where the optical gaze is being superseded by the haptic gaze, our fingers manipulating what we see in the palm of our hand, the world as defined and touched through My settings. Touch we are reminded was critical to the operation of hand-cranked cameras, like the Debie Parvo (1908) for the professionals and the Cine-Kodak (1923) and Vitascope (1931) for the booming amateur market.

Tools such as these have a chapter devoted to them as way-markers in the development of cinema as a business and creative form. The item is described – even a Sears, Roebuck & Co catalogue features - and then, deploying a ‘theoretical framework’, discussed within a short to medium length essay.

The Tripod as it was marketed to the amateur market in 1922 leads to the introduction of a key term in the context of the book and media archaeology specifically – *dispositif*. The term was posited by the French thinker, Michel Foucault and developed by Jean-Louis Baudry to refer to projection and its subjective reception, a power relationship examined in this section in

relation to the aspirations of amateur filmmakers.

Dispositif is favoured throughout the volume, describing and analysing the many tools and methodologies applied during the making of cinema and its reception. The migration from the analogue record to its digital duplication raises nuancing issues for the indexical in the visual artist's work, though phenomenologically their essence can be retained, reinforced by documentation and interpretative texts. Conversely, proliferation of non-standard file formats and uncertainty for decoding them in the future leads to certain 'classic' digital productions like Avatar being taken back to the future and archived to three-colour separation master film.

This is no collection of anecdotes and opinion but based on well-established methodologies of collecting and analysing social science data, most evident in an engaging chapter on the role the modest video compact disc in preserving Indonesian cinema. Cheaply made, copied and distributed, every village in the far-flung populace shared the national stories and issues.

The post-War emergence of 16mm is curiously focused on the 1960s New York avant-garde scene, somehow by-passing the massive adoption of the gauge for television content of all kinds from natural history to news and current affairs, without which the artists would never have had tools or services.

The book's project is to move the objects of the moving image out of the archive and to experiment with them, practically, literally and theoretically, in order to move closer toward an understanding of the span between the phantasms of the past

and the image-torrents of the present. This eclectic series of essays avoids the danger of prescribing how we each experience but more likely *use* the moving image, whilst providing a matrix of approaches to thinking about how and why those experiences are the way they are; as such, they will engage graduate and post-graduate audiences. The Eye Filmmuseum in Holland is a leader in the field and their Framing Film imprint (see previous Leonardo review, January 2010: From Grain to Pixel: The Archival Life of Film in Transition), adds invaluable scholarship to the field.

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