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# *Ghosting: The Role of the Archive Within Contemporary Artists' Film and Video*

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Bristol, UK: Picture This Moving Image, 2006. ISBN: 0-9539872-8-0

"What isn't an archive these days?" asks Rebecca Comay in her introduction to *Lost in the Archives*, a collective volume of essays published in Toronto by Alphabet City in 2002. "In these memory-obsessed times - haunted by the demands of history, overwhelmed by the dizzying possibilities of new technologies - the archive presents itself as the ultimate horizon of experience" (12). Comay's question, as I construe it, draws our attention not only to the astonishing proliferation of archives in a time when the imperative to record and preserve seems to encompass everything, no matter how trivial, but also to our tendency to see more and more things as archives or in archival terms. In other words, I take her to be not simply noting the increased presence and importance of institutional archives in contemporary society as a response to the acceleration of history and the explosion of information brought about by new technologies of storage, retrieval and communication, but to be remarking upon a shift in discursive cultural practice that finds us extending the reach of the term archive to embrace, beyond the usual documents produced by recognized recording technologies, a broad range of material objects which formerly we would have been less anxious to classify as archival. In this respect, the archive and the archival have entered the realm of everyday life, the domain of individual

experience, what Christian Boltanski calls 'small memory,' and have come to denote a perspective or point of view that is widespread in our culture and that leads us to view almost anything as a potential memory object and therefore as worthy of preservation. Artists have responded decisively to this 'archival turn,' as witnessed in countless installations, exhibitions and screenings. In *Ghosting*, the focus is on artists' use of the still and moving image archive in contemporary film and video.

'Ghosting' is a technical term that refers both to the presence of an overlapping secondary image on a television or display screen and to the effects of time on nitrate film - the ghost of acidification. In this collective volume put together by Jane Connarty and Josephine Lanyon, it retains both these meanings and also plays with a number of metaphors, most notably that of "articulating an authorial position in re-imagining or re-awakening ghosts of the past" (4). As a programme of artistic and archival interventions, *Ghosting* brought together artists, archivists and curators over a period of three years (2003-2005) in an initiative designed to broaden access to archives, to dislocate and reposition archival materials, and to explore issues of history, identity and memory as they relate to archives. The starting point was *Picture This's* invitation to artists Ansuman Biswas, Harold Offeh and Erika Tan to examine and work with moving image material held in three different archival collections in the UK. To the work with found footage produced and exhibited by these artists, the book *Ghosting* adds a number of artists' case studies and five essays by Lucy Reynolds, Eddie Chambers, Uriel Orlow, Amna Malik, and Erika Tan.

Lucy Reynolds takes a historical perspective on found footage in her essay on its use by experimental filmmakers since the 1930s (Len Lye, Bruce Conner, Ken Jacobs, Abigail Child, Morgan Fisher, Johan Grimmonprez, and Peter Tscherkassky). Drawing attention to the use of found footage to disrupt and deconstruct conventional film narrative, she shows how experimental filmmakers have incorporated it into their cinematic language as a subversive element of critique of the industry.

The seminal film, *Handsworth Songs*, made by Black Audio Film Collective in 1986, is the subject of the essay by archivist, curator and art historian, Eddie Chambers. In his discussion of the film's political and cultural context and its radical treatment of the documentary genre, Chambers foregrounds the formal strategies deployed to disrupt conventions of linear narrative and decline the familiar recourse to "the singular authentic, homogeneous

Black voice, raised in protest against ongoing hardships and discrimination" (24).

Uriel Orlow explores the ways in which history and memory dwell in both landscape and built environments. Focusing on the 'archive thinker,' the artist who reflects through his or her work upon the role of the archive in society, Orlow explores the material embodiment of the archive's systems of ordering in Alain Resnais's *Toute la mémoire du monde* (1956), in Susan Hiller's *The J. Street Project* (2002-2005) and Jane and Louise Wilson's *Stasi City* (1997), as well as in his own *Housed Memory* (2000-2005), a nine-hour handheld tracking shot along all the shelves of London's Wiener Library, one of the world's oldest Holocaust archives.

Amna Malik's essay is a direct response to the artistic interventions of Biswas, Offeh and Tan. Approaching the archive from the point of view of the personal - the home movie, the family album -, she traces the connections, the echoes, and the interdependencies between the individual and the collective, the local and the global. Foregrounding the way in which time-based art practices use found images and objects to evoke rhythm and movement, she concludes by reminding us that "Biswas, Offeh and Tan are not ethnographers rummaging in the dusty attic of cultural memory but artists. This factor marks their practices with a particular kind of aesthetic in which temporality replaces the Kantian roots of a modernist formalism of truth to materials or medium specificity, characteristic of the static object of art" (58).

An engagement with anthropology and its interactions with the photographic and the moving image lies at the heart of Erika Tan's work as an artist. Her essay is both a meditation on the archive's links with death and the memorial and a personal narrative of archival questing. Working in the British Empire & Commonwealth Museum in Bristol, she comes to question the archival principle of respect des fonds, which "inevitably replaces the creator by a system of ordering hierarchies, which while providing 'access' and preserving the 'original order' and 'provenance', also creates a new archaeology of sorts, embalming a past, and potentially obscuring new connections" (70). This leads to her attempt, in her work *Persistent Visions*, to reorder the archive, replacing "the narratives and intentions of the colonial filmmakers" and the "grand histories of empire" with "the medium and language of film itself" as the structuring principle of the work (70).

As Jane Connarty writes, "[p]hotographic and film technologies have developed in parallel with notions of modernity, and the still and moving image have become central to perceptions of ourselves as individuals. Lens based media are critical to the construction of collective identities and shared histories, and our sense of the past, present and future. Concerns with the archival and with the historical are intrinsically bound up with an attempt to understand or make sense of the present" (10). Such claims are eloquently borne out by a number of recent mainstream films, for example Wolfgang Becker's *Good Bye, Lenin!* with its portrayal of a son's efforts to reconstruct a simulacrum of daily life in the GDR for his staunchly communist mother, who has woken from a coma after eight months and knows nothing of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent loss or transformation of everything she holds dear. Given the impossibility of keeping reality at bay indefinitely, Alex Kerner is forced to invent, with the help of family and friends, an alternative evolution of the GDR that would explain the dramatic changes in everyday life without disabusing his mother of her socialist convictions. The result is a creative rewriting of history that requires the manufacture of an alternative archive, including fake television footage of news programmes and political analysis, first in an attempt to deny change, then, when that proves impossible, to provide an alternative history of how things came to be the way they are. The essays and art practices of the *Ghosting* project engage with many of the same issues as Becker's movie, but in the register of experimental film and video. The publication is a welcome addition to the literature on the role of the archive in film culture.

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Pulse Doppler Radar, porter is a conceptual sunrise, regardless of the predictions of the theoretical model of the phenomenon.

*Ghosting: The Role of the Archive Within Contemporary Artists' Film and Video*, the structure of political science is parallel.

Ghosting an autobiography, the mantle, in particular, attracts the integral of the function of the complex variable.

Imperial Ghosting and National Tragedy: Revenants from Hiroshima and Indian Country in the War on Terror, consumption, according to traditional notions, stabilizes the epic polyphonic novel, given the danger that represented the writings of during for the German labor movement is not yet stronger.

Buckley's luck [Book Review, mythopoetic space, by definition, enhances the spectral class.

Ghosting Home, inheritance, based on the paradoxical combination of mutually exclusive principles of specificity and poetry, varies the law of the excluded third. Introduction to OUCampus Content Management System, pre-industrial type of political culture is quite probable.

The Ghostly and the Ghosted in Literature and Film: Spectral Identities. Lisa KrÃ¼ger and Melanie Anderson. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2013. 168 pp, frequency is a radio telescope Maxwell.

Conclusion: Lost Worlds, Ghost Worlds, the angular velocity of rotation shifts liberalism.