

Film as a Living Archive

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Since its inception, cinema has been more than just a way of storytelling. It is a vessel for memory, a living archive where fragments of the past are kept, sometimes challenged because they are never neutral, and transformed as they are shaped by filmmakers and audiences. They can reflect the power structures and ideological choices of certain times, as well as cultural values, social norms, collective fears, and aspirations, determining whose stories are remembered and whose are silenced. In this sense, cinema documents the entire life (politically, socially, and emotionally) and shapes collective memory, inviting us to reflect, challenge and see the past in new ways. Moreover, in a world defined by rapid technological change and virtualization of images, archives are no longer static repositories, but create a dynamic performative space—a space for interaction, creativity and collective reimagination.

This issue, *Archives, Cinema and Collective Healing: Preserving Memory Through Film*, emerged from the conference with the same name, held during the fifth edition of the Film O’Clock International Festival, in partnership with The I.L. Caragiale National University of Theatre and Film in Bucharest, a festival with a strong focus on classic cinema and film heritage. By bringing together filmmakers, researchers and scholars, the conference fostered an international dialogue on how archives and cinema intersect in the processes of preserving memory and addressing collective trauma. This issue extends that dialogue, examining the shifting relationship between image, history, and identity.

At the heart of these essays lies the concept of *collective healing*, which, in this context, does not mean a simple process of closure or reconciliation. It is an ongoing negotiation with painful histories, silenced voices and contested truths,

archives—whether institutional, personal, or intangible—playing an important role in this process. They are spaces where trauma is preserved but also reinterpreted, where marginalized communities can reclaim their power to act and where cinema can create new forms of understanding. Bringing together filmmakers, theorists and researchers, this issue shows how moving images can both provoke and sustain collective memory.

The articles unfold along four interconnected pillars: first, theoretical and conceptual reflections that explore how archives function as instruments of memory and critique; second, investigations into history, truth and the ethics of representing the past on screen; third, studies of trauma and collective healing, underscoring how cinema can bear witness to suffering and foster reflection; and fourth, explorations of cultural memory in marginalized/peripheral communities, where film becomes a tool for recovering silenced or overlooked voices. Together, these four strands trace a common thread: cinema as an active participant in preserving, questioning, and reshaping collective memory.

The issue opens with Mihai Ghiță's essay *The Archiving Film: a Pharmacology of the Media Flux*, that explores the idea of the “archiving film” as a form of resistance and poetic intervention. Drawing on thinkers such as Walter Benjamin, Michel Foucault, and Giorgio Agamben, Ghiță examines how films constructed from the operational flux of images can rescue the ephemeral and overlooked, transforming them into cultural artifacts. His argument foregrounds the political dimension of cinematic archiving and prepares the ground for a deeper exploration of how cinema engages with memory.

The next essay, Ruxandra Maria Ghițescu's *A Diffractive Approach to Archive Film Performativity* reframes the discussion through a feminist lens. Inspired by Karen Barad, Donna Haraway, and Judith Butler, she develops a diffractive methodology to examine how archival images, voiceovers and subtitles disrupt linear histories and open up new feminist temporalities. Her analysis of Vlad Petri's *Between Revolutions* and Maryam Tafakory's poetic works demonstrates how archival material is not only representational but also performative—actively shaping the ways we see, remember, and imagine.

From these theoretical considerations, the issue moves toward the question of truth and historical responsibility. Alexandru Sterian's essay, *Archival Effect, Found Footage, and Photographic Dichotomy. Truth and Truthfulness in Historical Documentaries*, addresses one of the most pressing challenges of our digital age: how to preserve the authenticity of historical footage amid the proliferation of

manipulations, reenactments, and mock-documentaries. Sterian examines the shifting boundaries between reality and fiction, asking whether contemporary audiences can still trust the images they see and what is lost when the link to historical reality is fractured.

This concern resonates with Raul Ștef's *Opposition to the Communist Regime on Screen: Representations of Intellectual Dissidence in Post-1989 Romanian Cinema*. Through close readings of three key films—*Fox: Hunter* (1993), *12:08 East of Bucharest* (2006) and *The Case of Engineer Ursu* (2023)—, Ștef traces the evolution of aesthetic strategies from the solemnity of early post-revolutionary works to the ironic reflexivity of the New Romanian Cinema and the justice-seeking urgency of contemporary documentary. His study shows how cinema shapes public attitudes toward the communist past, offering a space for ethical engagement and collective reckoning.

The middle section of the issue turns to trauma and its cinematic inscriptions, expanding the notion of archives beyond textual and institutional contexts. In *Superposition of Trauma: Temporal and Spatial Displacement in The Brutalist*, Teodora Crișan-Matcăbojă argues that trauma is not merely remembered but materially embedded in space and cinematic form. Through the lens of the film *The Brutalist* (2024), she proposes a dual-layered model of trauma as both temporally suspended and spatially inscribed, demonstrating how cinema itself can become an archive of unresolved suffering.

Complementing this perspective, Ifigenia Dimitriou and Asimina Grigoriou's *Land of Salvation: A Cinematic Journey Through the History of the Fight Against Tuberculosis* offers a practical example of how cinema and museology intersect to address difficult medical pasts. Their docufiction film, produced for the Sotiria Museum in Athens, reinterprets the history of tuberculosis treatment through patient voices, archival objects, and monumental spaces. This project illustrates how museums and films can collaborate to reframe trauma, fostering dialogue and collective healing within contemporary communities.

The final section brings the discussion to marginalized and peripheral memories, examining how cinema can make visible the experiences of communities often excluded from dominant archival traditions.

Elroy Pinto's *Caste & the Archives in India: Cinematic Representation of Bombay Catholics Through the Structural Elements of Film* interrogates the structural exclusions faced by Catholic communities in Bombay, linking issues of

caste and class to the politics of memory. Analyzing his own filmmaking practice, Pinto argues that the formal elements of cinema—such as lenses, sound, colour, light, and movement—can become tools for a "liberatory practice" that lets marginalized voices resist *symbolic annihilation* (upon Michelle Caswell's theory) and reclaim their history.

Closing the issue, Lucian Țigănuș's essay, *Vâlva Băii – Link from Folklore to Societal Structure of the Mining Community in Apuseni Mountains*, explores Romanian mining folklore as an oral archive and a form of social regulation, bringing a poetic and anthropological layer of the topic. By combining field research with cinematic representation, Țigănuș shows how myths like Vâlva Băii preserve collective memory and moral codes, offering insights into the invisible social structures of isolated communities. This final essay brings us back to where we started, reminding us that archives aren't just written or visual records, but also include living traditions and stories, paving the way for more research on the intersections between folklore, cinema, and collective memory.

Taken together, these articles trace a multifaceted journey from theory to practice, from global reflections to local case studies, and from traumatic histories to possibilities for healing, revealing cinema's dual role: as a keeper of memory and as a creative force that reshapes how we understand the past. As these authors demonstrate, cinema is not a passive witness. It is an active participant in the construction of history, a space where communities can confront trauma, reclaim silenced voices, and imagine alternative futures. By reading this book, we are invited to consider how every frame, every cut and every archival fragment holds the potential not only to document what has been but also to challenge and to transform.

Healing, in fact, is understanding. Cinema turns into a living archive, which bridges the delicate distance between memory and hope.