

Book Review by
GIACOMO NENCIONI
 Università per Stranieri di Perugia
 giacomo.nencioni@unistrapg.it

F. Giordano, B. Perron (eds.): *The Archives* *Post-Cinema and Video Game between Memory and the Image of the Present* [Mimesis International]

The volume is the product of the studies presented during the Postcinema section of Gorizia Magis Annual Spring School, held during Udine Filmforum, but this is a case where the value of the contributions exceed the simple proceedings of a conference: the ambitious aim of this book is not only to investigate what is an archive in a time of transition from analog to digital media, but most of all to understand the relation between the notion of archive and contemporary items such as user generated contents, video games, digital art or webseries.

This kind of objects often resist any kind of preservation, or at least pose some relevant questions on the continuity between old and new media, the role of the users in the building of an archive, the concept of memory in the contemporary media landscape.

As Bruce Sterling states in the first essay of the collection, we walked through the looking glass that separates us from the previous order before media transition and nothing can ever be the same: even though this is a dark, resigned vision of our era in which we have to accept the instability of the archive and the impossibility to describe what's happening, it's true that the Internet has become a place of mutations that we can't control, where the new productive processes put an enormous amount of variable in the traditional productive system (the studio system vs. Augmented Reality, for example) that challenges every category we had.

Augmented reality, hybrid digital art (as in Spielmann's essay), mobile consumption practices (Odin), interactive documentaries (Odorico) are just a few examples of a new relationship between us and the media: art can involve humans within a new living archive; mobile phones force us to think of a democratized archive; the new non-fiction contents offer a new way of collecting and rewriting memory that includes user experiences, emotions and participation.

The "human factor" in the contemporary archive notion seem to be one of the main points of the volume, as clearly pointed out by Jean Chateauvert who

gives us an overview on a second level of archive: the reactions and comments to the episodes of a popular webseries like *The Guild*.

Observing the vast world of the social platform related to the series we can understand how social media enhance our experience as viewers: with different rules and targets for every different platform, from the series' official site's forum to Twitter, Tumblr and Facebook, users enjoy the experience of taking part on an archive of activities, being it related to fandom practices or simple comments on the episodes. These new forms of archive, or network of archives, are filtered only by sites and forum administrators, in a contract with users. These examples enlighten us on what has become of the potential of participatory culture, including human activities, albeit volatile, in what will be the future archives of our era.

The first part of the book concludes with an analysis of the preservation problems linked to the obsolescence of digital storage techniques, which leads to new strategies like emulation and to a constant monitoring of the archiving tools in a future constant flux (Alessandro Bordina), stressing once again the "living" feature of a new idea of archive; but it's in the second part of the collection that the focus moves from a general analysis of the audiovisual archive in the contemporary era to a specific focus on video game.

The result of this focus shows us how the video game universe can be a rich and useful resource to observe the actual form and practices of archiving.

We can enjoy different original and fruitful approaches to the issue, like a comparison between silent films and video games (Garin/Salvadò), where we see how the silent era shares with games a strong stress on visuality, playfulness and gags: their languages seem very close, so that we can talk about games as metaphorical archives of our medial past; another productive comparison is that between old book series and the serialization of video games on the Microsoft Xbox Live service (Fassone), which leads the author to talk about re-circulation and re-contextualization.

The contributions go further focusing also on the issue of practicing the video game, with the rhizomatic and "creative" expansion of the archive in a community of modders (Caruso), the instability and the potentially infinite paths offered by a game like *Neverwinter Nights* (Fornasiero), not to forget the question of the preservation of gameplay in contents like "Let's Play" or the "Playthrough", which represent, according to Dor and Perron, practices with specific archiving needs, linked to the experience of the gamer and difficult to preserve in cases where the game has no ending.

Is it possible, then, to talk about archivality in video games? Yes, if we accept an inevitable loss of the game identity, according to Federico Giordano's contribution: a game is a social object, and its identity is strongly intertwined with the gamer experience and its relation with an interface in a specific time and space. The need to transfer or emulate a game to preserve and archive it will necessarily mean the impossibility to spot an "original version" of the game

itself. The conclusion of the volume, with its last essay, presents not only a more volatile and fragmented idea of a videogame archive, but also a new idea of the archivist who will have to consider this kind of inevitable loss and imagine critical editions and new forms of preservation, being able to follow the “traces” left by the game and its users’ past experiences.

It’s fascinating to see how many of the contributions find inspiration in the history of media, like the magic lantern of Etienne-Gaspard Robertson, the early cinema archiving issue in FIAF activities, the relation between cinema of attractions and videogames, or between literary series and games: all these examples tell the story of a thread that bonds media through history, showing how we manage remediation processes and the complexity of the participatory variables that emerged in the last twenty years.

We have old tools to manage new objects, and we have to adapt them considering how the notion of archive, as shown by this book, has and will become increasingly volatile, living, changeable. This volume clearly points out that we, as users, are one of the more unpredictable variables in this new notion, with our experiences, with our contribution to media content with participation and creativity, with our choices when we operate in potentially endless worlds and stories in video games.

The modern archive is indeed an unstable one, so that we can talk about an anarchive, where traditional rules and criteria of preservation do not work anymore. We just have the duty to observe what is happening, trying to understand and accept the gigantic mutations we found through the looking glass and the inevitable losses that our era is imposing to the enormous amount of cultural products offered by the Internet, always aware that, as historians say – and Sterling quotes – “Much is gone and much remains”.