

Working Toward a True Sharing of the Cinema and Audiovisual Heritage

We have just spent a day discussing the fundamental change that digital technology and economy are causing in our professions and in our management of our film and audiovisual heritage: it is a genuine Copernican revolution. We must find new methods of preservation, accept new types of image consumption, implement a new economy - and, in all likelihood, we should learn how to share images and sounds. European archives and film libraries are tackling these problems which, if successfully solved, should guarantee the continuity of our missions and work. However, we tend to quickly forget that these issues are those of countries with a rich film and audiovisual tradition. This culture is far from innate and not universally shared. A brief look back at the recent history of our institutions (less than one century old) confirms it. The French CNC strongly believes in this, and is convinced that we must share this conviction with others: thus, a significant part of the cooperation and co-production agreements the CNC has entered into with partner countries to the East and South, and in the Middle and Far East, focuses on both expertise and training missions.

Recognizing one's own image is an acknowledged stage in the development of anyone's personality. The same is true for young countries that are in a stage of economic development and political stabilization. Film and audiovisual archives allow a country to reach its mirror phase. A perfect example of this is the success of the Bophana center in Cambodia. Having cooperated with the Phnom Penh center from the very beginning, the CNC is now attempting to go on making its know-how readily available. There are still many countries lacking in any sort of organized heritage, with no place to go and trace its history which, like ours, developed throughout the jolts of the twentieth century. These images of the past exist nonetheless, recorded either by a colonial power or by local elites, but they are yet invisible to most of the population. Scattered, precariously stored, non-indexed, non-catalogued, they simply do not exist for many people in these nations now searching for an identity, and incidentally for the international archive community.

To illustrate this, I would like to mention the relationship which has been built between Jordan and France in this area, through projects undertaken by the Royal Film Commission and the CNC, sponsored by the French embassy in Amman. Since the 1960s the Kingdom of Jordan has welcomed European and American directors in search of desert and wide-open spaces: just think of *Lawrence of Arabia* and *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*. But

restricting one's analysis of what this country has brought to cinema to these terms only would be ignoring the images recorded by the entourage of various members of the Hashemite family (mainly Faisal I and Ghazi, both kings of Iraq) in the 1920s and 1930s. Most of these images were kept in Iraq and have probably been lost today. We would also be ignoring the fact that although Jordan has not yet implemented the production infrastructure necessary for a true film industry, a documentary and news industry did develop from the 1950s through the middle of the 1970s, when Jordanian television was born. These non-fiction productions, supported by Lebanese technological infrastructures, led to the development of a melting pot, which is where today's pictorial memory of the country should be rooted.

Part of the CNC's mission, working alongside the French embassy in Amman and the Royal Film Commission, has therefore consisted of familiarizing Jordanian archivists with indexing practices and implementing an organizational scheme to collect, preserve, inventory, describe and promote these images to the Jordanian public. Promoting the material is part of the active pedagogical policy implemented since the Royal Film Commission's creation, and is in line with attempts to re-appropriate these images of the past to produce contemporary works, a buoyant industry in today's Jordan.

The diversity of the players involved in terms of technology, storage, and know-how makes the process more difficult; however, these players are determined, and work will soon begin on an inventory of the first lot of films preserved at the Amman National Library. The idea that has governed the project as a whole is to take into account the regional specifics as well as any special features of the collections. We believe that our own models cannot simply be transposed in Jordan, but must rather be used as a framework within which to reflect on and develop new institutions to foster a true sharing of images, both ours and theirs, in full compliance with the regulations on both sides.

In line with its founding principles in 1995, the CNC has maintained its support of the African film library in Ouagadougou. Based on bilateral agreements, it has striven to set up an inventory of the exceptional Algerian collections and drafted a heritage action plan to create film archives within the Egyptian CNC. All of these actions allow for organized and documented collections to be established and maintained, an essential prerequisite for any truly shared digital culture. It is also with this in mind that the French CNC has supported several training actions presented as part of the Euromed III call for projects.

Béatrice de Pastre, October 2010