

Les Collections de la Bibliothèque de l'Université Laval
Film Program of the Université Laval
TECHNES International Research Partnership
Université de Lausanne and Université de Montréal

Call for Papers

Materiality, Aesthetics and the History of Technology The François Lemai Collection as Laboratory

International Conference, Université Laval, Québec, 29 October – 2 November 2018

Organising Committee:

André Habib (Université de Montréal)
Louis Pelletier (TECHNÈS/Université de Montréal)
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Part of the François Lemai Collection at the Université Laval. Ph. : Roger Côté (all rights reserved)

The aim of this conference is to discover what technical objects and their materiality can teach us about cinema, in connection with other kinds of archives. Its corpus is the massive collection of cinematic and pre-cinematic apparatus given to the Université Laval by collector François Lemai in 2016 (see the list of items). This project wishes to further the recent developments on the “archive as a research laboratory” (Fossati and van den Oever 2016). Researchers will be invited to spend a day working with devices from the collection, assisted by technicians, restorers and archivists, and then share the results within the framework of a three-day conference. Our expectation is that researchers will draw important conclusions from this material access to the objects.

The crisis induced by the digital turn has made it necessary for film studies to turn to technological issues. Paradoxically, the so-called virtual, immaterial digital culture, has allowed for a rediscovery of the importance of materiality and its relations with aesthetic history—a rediscovery which was more often than not tinged with melancholy. We would like to take this analysis a step further, by examining the focal point of the cinematic dispositive, the machines, to see whether new resources for the understanding of the media emerge from this operation. While the study of film devices has tended to remain within the purview of technological history, as exemplified in the works of Barry Salt or Laurent Mannoni, it is also possible to study such devices from an aesthetic and epistemological perspective (Enticknap 2005; Turquety 2014). A given camera or projector presents different types of uses, which when exercised, exclude alternative uses. For instance, Vincent Bouchard (2012) has reconstructed the development of lightweight, synchronous recording equipment (“direct cinema”) by combining an analysis of National Film Board of Canada films with and a precise study of the apparatus used. Another example is the Bolex research project at the University of Lausanne, where the renowned maker’s high-end amateur apparatus are studied in connection with advertisements, patents, users’ manuals, and the films made with these cameras. We would like, with the help of the François Lemaï collection, to broaden these kinds of archaeological approaches. The intention is to reveal a history of film forms that has thus far remained hidden from view.

A film apparatus is not only an object. As a complex machine, it mediates a relation with the world, as well as between the real and aesthetic realities. It incorporates and materialises a whole series of uses, gestures, processes and discourses, as a contact point between inventors, industrial bodies, and professional or amateur users. As Gilbert Simondon wrote, “what lies in machines, is human reality, gestures fixed and crystallized in functioning structures” (2012), leading Benoît Turquety to characterize machines as “archives of gestures” (2014). The technical and mechanical nature of a cinematic apparatus, and the gestures that manipulate it, can unwittingly reveal a context of implementation at the level of production or reception (studios, shooting crews, or movie theaters). Moreover, because cinema constitutes an institution, an industry, a specific division of labour, a dream factory, and an amateur activity, each of which produce unique sociological effects, an apparatus can also serve as an entrance point toward revealing a whole social context.

Rather than focusing technological analysis on the usual key transitional moments in film history, this conference adopts the view that – to a greater or lesser extent – cinema devices are continuously in states of transformation. In early cinema, for example, it is difficult to distinguish between magic lantern projectors capable of producing sophisticated motion effects and film projectors. But even in the classical era, the stability of machines is never realized: each modification to camera models, projectors, editing tables, etc. is accompanied by changes in uses and expectations, among technicians and spectators alike. The analysis of each variant in the history of apparatus may ultimately reveal important cultural, economic or institutional transformations. This is why we think that the vast François Lemaï collection constitutes a potentially significant contribution to the understanding of previously unrecognized aspects of technological history, but also of the history of forms, theories, and film culture. However, these new sources for the writing of cinema history pose unique methodological and epistemological challenges, which thus require the elaboration of new research protocols.

In film museums, usually one is asked to look but not touch. The ill-founded belief that films bear no significant relation to material reality may in fact limit researchers to only working with paper or digital archives. Few researchers have had the opportunity to work with material archives. Still, the

handling of objects can teach us a lot about techniques and uses. Each camera possesses a specific structure, and internal coherence, a particular weight, inertia, and balance; its crank has a certain resistance; its viewfinder, more or less clarity and precision. These facts entail a certain position of the user's body and a specific array of possibilities as to the relation with filmed objects. Magic lanterns and projectors have various modalities: a type of lens or lighting equipment which favour specific types of uses, while preventing or limiting others. The design of the machine is also revealing of a commercial intention. It may signal a "high end" or luxurious positioning, or, conversely, a desire for functionality, and technical or economic accessibility.

Concretely, we would like this conference to function, foremost, as a laboratory. The process entails several steps. The first is carried out prior to the conference in the form of research on films and written sources (journals, patents, publicities). At the conference, a day will be dedicated for researchers to explore and manipulate devices in the François Lemai collection, which will provide a unique opportunity to test their premises and conclusions against the materiality of the film devices. After a day of reflection and revision based on this experience, which should bring to light new information pertinent to the participant's research, contributors will then present their papers. Scientific experiments or artistic performances may even be attempted, so long as they respect archival norms.

The organising committee is interested in proposals concerning, but not limited to, the following subjects:

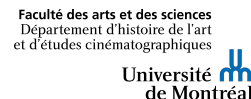
- Comparative studies between the objects in the François Lemai collection and those from other archives
- The various connections between technology and aesthetics
- The discontinuities within cinema history and their relations with technical inventions
- The relations between the body and its organs (hand, eye, etc.) and the body and organs of the machine (handle, crank, viewfinder, tripod, etc.)
- Rare formats (11 mm, 17.5 mm, 22 mm, 28 mm...)
- The implicit conceptual structures of machines
- Particular devices: drive systems, shutters, viewfinders, lenses, motors, slide holders, etc.
- The incremental evolution of a brand or of a type of apparatus (e.g. 17.5 mm cameras)
- Apparatus design and advertising discourse (distinction, aestheticism, functionality, ergonomics)
- Gender issues in the use of devices (in amateur cinema, for example)
- The differences between the uses foreseen by inventors and producers (in patents and manuals) and the innovative uses of filmmakers
- The missing links in the history of particular machines
- The kind of motion and the image loops of various optical toys.
- The magic lanterns lighting systems and types of illuminants
- The materials of various devices (wood, leather, metal, etc.)
- National technological histories
- "Gun cameras" and other military devices
- Various devices for sound-image coupling

- The methodological issues connected with machine analysis

The persons interested in presenting workshops, demonstrations and projections within the framework of the conference are also invited to submit their proposals to the scientific committee. TECHNÈS will take the opportunity to present, among others, a workshop on the 3D digitization of apparatus from the François Lemaï collection.

Proposals for twenty minute papers should include a title, a 300 word summary, a selective bibliography and a brief biographical note. They should be sent, either in English or in French, to colloque.francois.lemai@gmail.com before **15 April 2018**.

For more information: colloque.francois.lemai@gmail.com



Selective bibliography

- Michel Auer, *Histoire de la caméra ciné amateur*, Paris : Ed. de l'Amateur, 1979, 174 p.
- Christopher Beach, *A Hidden History of Film Style: Cinematographers, Directors, and the Collaborative Process*, Oakland, University of California Press, 2015, 248 p.
- Vincent Bouchard, *Pour un cinéma léger et synchrone! Invention d'un dispositif à l'Office national du film à Montréal*, préface de Michel Marie, Villeneuve-d'Ascq (Nord), Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2012, 284 p.
- Leo Enticknap, *Moving Image Technology: From Zoetrope to Digital*, New York, Wallflower Press, 2005, 208 p.
- Giovanna Fossati et Annie van den Oever, *Exposing the Film Apparatus: the Film Archive as a Research Laboratory*, Amsterdam : Amsterdam University Press, 2016, 478 p.
- Alan Kattelle, *Home Movies: a History of the American industry, 1897-1979*, Nashua, N.H.: Transition Publishing, 2000, 411 p.
- Laurent Mannoni, *Le Grand Art de la lumière et de l'ombre : archéologie du cinéma*, Paris : Nathan, 1995, 512 p.
- Barry Salt, *Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis*, Londres : Starword, 2009 (3^e édition), 453 p.
- Gilbert Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*, Paris : Aubier, 2012, 367 p.
- Gilbert Simondon, *Sur la technique : 1953-1983*, Paris : Presses universitaires de France, 2014, 460 p.
- Benoît Turquety, *Inventer le cinéma : épistémologie : problèmes, machines*, Lausanne : Éditions l'Âge d'Homme, 2014, 270 p.
- Jean Vivié, *Prélude au cinéma : de la préhistoire à l'invention*, Paris : Harmattan, 2006, 277 p.
- Jean Vivié, *Traité général de technique du cinéma. T.1 : Historique et développement de la technique cinématographique*, Paris : Bureau de Presses et d'Informations, 1946, 137 p.
- John Wade, *Lights, Camera, Action!: An Illustrated History of the Amateur Movie Camera*, Atglen : Schiffer Publishing, Ltd., 2014, 160 p.