

CURRENTS / PERPENDICOLARE AVANTI

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ABSTRACT

Currents / Perpendicolare Avanti is a 16 minute camera-less, hand-made, film collage, based on my experience as a transnational citizen who immigrated to Canada less than a decade ago. The film explores the feeling of inhabiting the in-between space of multiple countries and temporalities, and it does so by means of visual and sound abstraction. I began to shoot 16mm footage of Toronto in March 2020. However, I was unhappy with the results; the material did not resonate. Upon reflection, I realized that I had not fully interiorized this country within myself to be able to exteriorize it on film. Consequently, the film that emerged follows an experimental, non-linear approach using found footage, which reflects the fragmented nature of the immigration phenomenon (fragmented geography, time, and space). I borrowed from several archives and employed different languages to provoke a feeling in the audience of estrangement as opposed to empathy. Estrangement is a constant companion for me as an immigrant. I live within fluid and opaque identities, and see and experience the world as a place of shifting perspectives and fluctuating landscapes where I feel both at-home and, not-at-home. This is combined with a sense of vertigo, of being without a past in a new country, of not having participated in its collective memory, and seeing my homeland fade into the distance, only to reappear as echoes and flashbacks. I am a de-contextualized fragment. Visual artist Tacita Dean put it this way when describing her short film, *Girl Stowaway*:

My own journey follows no such linear narrative. It...has meandered ever since, through uncharted research and to no obvious destination. It has become a passage into history along the line that divides fact from fiction, and is more like a journey through an underworld of chance intervention and epic encounter than any place I recognize. My story is about coincidence, and about what is invited and what is not.¹

¹ Foster, H. (2004). An Archival Impulse. October. 110. 3-22. 10.1162/0162287042379847.
In-text: (Foster, 2004, p.12)

My immigration process is intimately connected to my filmmaking. Indeed, it is a reflection of it. As a result of this feeling of not belonging, of non-integration, I started looking for images of Canada and Italy that others had shot. I collected 8mm/16mm found footage films from disparate, unofficial archival repositories (eBay, vintage stores, private collectors). By August 2020 I had amassed about 50 hours of found footage. Half of it came from Italian sources and included home movies shot by tourists, a commissioned film promoting Marshall Plan aid, and assorted footage of Venice, Florence, etc. The Canadian material was of a similar assortment but most of it was shot outdoors, in a space that still feels foreign to me. I began to find ways to re-use these images, recycling and distressing them, re-writing them into a different context, in effect writing myself into Canada and, re-writing myself into Italy, so that I would not disappear from my home country. Looking for, and collecting, images of Canada, was a creative act of imagining a past that I did not have in this country. In effect, I was constructing my new identity. Processing old images of Italy allowed me to reconnect with a past I did not know I had. The re-writing of the self in *Currents* is produced through the archives of others, via associative montage and repeated performative acts on the surface of film. Canada assumes a presence in the materiality of the celluloid, melting with images of Italy, and vice-versa. Footage produced through the technique of emulsion lifting is used next to un-mediated found footage, underlining the uncertain nature of past and present, memory and recollection.

In December 2020, I started the process of emulsion lifting using film. This technique was initially used by the experimental filmmaker Cécile Fontaine, and it involves the dislodging of the film emulsion from its base and the re-placing of the said emulsion onto another base. As a result, the

dynamics of integration and immigration are reflected in the dynamics of the exteriorization and interiorization of pre-existing film materials, fragments of otherwise anonymous films. It is through the interiorization of the found image and the exteriorization of the re-written image that, as Judith Butler discovered, “an identity [is] instituted through a stylized repetition of act”.²

² Butler, J. (1988). Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory. *Theatre Journal*, 40(4), 519-531.
In-text: (Butler, 1988, p.519)

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the memory of my great grandmother, Giuseppa Tufano. At the age of sixteen she was uprooted from Marseille by her father. Separated from her fiancé and friends, she was relocated to a small town in southern Italy. Arriving from Marseille wearing trousers and sporting a very short haircut, she stood in stark contrast to the style of the region where women braided their hair and wore long skirts. She was considered scandalous, so much so that no man would marry her. To save face and protect the honour of the family, she was forced to marry Giuseppe Tufano, a first cousin, with whom she shared not only a bloodline and a surname, but ironically also the same first name. She ran away from her marriage several times, only to be returned by her father to her husband.

My departure from the south of Italy is a journey to gift her back her freedom.

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I was extremely fortunate to be supported by a stellar thesis committee which allowed me to find my story in total freedom. They provided unquestioned trust and solid advice, creating a space for me to experiment in an environment of spontaneity, placing no limits to my imagination, all this amidst the huge challenges of the COVID 19 pandemic. I am eternally grateful to my supervisor and mentor Professor Phil Hoffman, whose presence in this journey acted as a constant reminder of the essence of cinema. The gondolier in my film was shaped with him in mind - the consummate artisan who navigates canals in his wooden gondola, carrying poetry in his boat while chasing the muse of image and sound. I would also like to thank my reader Professor Manfred Becker, who has been present and constantly supportive through my entire MFA. He was full of insightful comments and sharp observations, prompting me to think and re-think my beliefs, helping me gain different perspectives.

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And last, but not least, to my dear family goes a very special thank you. My mother Anna, my father Antonio, and my sister Martina who has always been my first audience, sitting patiently through endless hours of experimental abstraction.

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INTRODUCTION: A Practice Inundated With Dreams and Magic



Image 1. Detail of 16mm film fragment from *Currents / Perpendicolare Avanti*, 2021

Most *accented cinema* (the cinema of migration) is narrative in form and content and structured around the human-centric approach that places mankind at the centre of the experience. My films do not reflect conventional narrative codes. They give agency to the non-human, the elements (water, earth), materials (celluloid, nitrate) and lost objects. This “requires that we resist and challenge anthropocentric perspectives and turn the act of representation into a radical gesture, allowing new experiences and new embodied understandings to emerge”.³ During the research and production of *Currents / Perpendicolare Avanti*⁴, I discovered the work of a number of female, immigrant, experimental filmmakers who produce found-footage collage films that mirror their displacement experiences. Their work – and mine - provides a framework that explores the thematics of immigration and displacement, deploying and investigating how archival film materials and found footage films are collected, remediated, and finally reassembled, with an emphasis on materiality and process.

³ Knowles, K. (2020). *Experimental Film and Photochemical Practices*. Palgrave MacMillan.
In-text: (Knowles, 2020, p.74)

⁴ The title of the film will henceforth be referred to as *Currents*.

My films are a reflection on these realities. Being a woman who has undergone the experience of immigration, I actively pursued encounters with others who were, unlike me, either forcibly removed from their homeland, or left for economic reasons. The most impactful experience being the time I spent volunteering in a Syrian refugee camp in 2016. The contact I had with displaced people, revealed similar states of transition I had experienced in my migration, albeit not nearly as intensely - the search for a new home, and double-consciousness. I have centered my creative practice on this quest for a new home, exploring the transitional state that people inhabit when they move from one country to another. While trying to comprehend displacement, I have always spoken from the perspective of my own lived experience, as each immigrant undergoes their own journey, influenced by personal and social factors (age, gender, race, economic status, etc).

Female, immigrant, experimental filmmakers have deployed found footage in unique ways: re-claiming, re-appropriating, and re-editing material unearthed from the scrap heap of history. Often dealing with collective traumas of our times: displacement, forced migration, immigration, genocide, environmental challenges, they have produced an alternative body of work that uses this footage in compelling and innovative ways. Remediating the material, we have discovered has freed us, even from the apparatus of the camera, and allowed us to work with minimal resources outside the conventions and constraints of the commercial industry, often deploying DIY techniques that utilize domestic tools to alter the film material, creating in Doreen Piano's words: "alternative feminine identities and media that resist mainstream representations"⁵. The immigrant woman filmmaker becomes not just the collector of fragments from the archives; she also becomes

⁵ Piano, D. (2002) Congregating Women: Reading 3rd Wave Feminist Practices in Subcultural Production.
<http://www.rhizomes.net/issue4/piano.html>
In-text: (Piano, 2002, para.7)

the interpreter of these lost objects, "a practice inundated with dreams and magic",⁶ allowing them "to speak back to us".⁷

The archive embodies key questions of whose archive, and for what purposes has it been assembled, who is invited into it, and who has been left out. Official archives are generally public and controlled by governments and institutions. However, in the past few decades, due to the proliferation of material available in the digital world, filmmakers with limited resources have turned to found footage now available and accessible to make their films.

A number of underground and unofficial archives have surfaced. What they have found there is not merely a source of inexpensive material, but a treasure trove that they have re-molded to their experiences. Academics and practitioners like Walter Benjamin, Jacques Derrida, Gianni Celati, Jan Verwoert, and Hal Foster, have shifted their attention over the decades from official archives – traditional, western, patriarchal, implicitly colonial - to its alternative: the para archive⁸, a place of forgotten, overlooked, and undervalued objects, often not even catalogued or collected.

My film, apart from depicting a very personal journey, also mirrors and reflects the experiential fragmentation that an immigrant undergoes. What does this experience “feel” and “look” like? If, as Bertolt Brecht articulated in *Fatzer Fragment* (1926-1930), only the fragment carries the mark

⁶ Russell, C. (2015) *Archiveology: Walter Benjamin and Archival Film Practices*. Duke University Press.
In-text: (Russell, 2015, p.45)

⁷ Verwoert, J. (2007) *Living with Ghosts: From Appropriation to Invocation in Contemporary Art*, *Art and Research: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods*, 1(2), 7.
In-text: (Verwoert, 2007, p.7)

⁸ Valdinoci, F. (2019). *Scarti, tracce e frammenti: controarchivio e memoria dell’umano*. Firenze University Press.
In-text: (Valdinoci, 2019, p.63)

of authenticity⁹, what does the female filmmaker who has undergone this process of displacement bring to film? How does she collect and re-contextualize the fragments? Have we sought new forms of expression to explore our sense of alienation, foreignness, and otherness? How have we re-arranged our imaginative worlds to bring an audience closer to the experience of crossing borders to start new lives? And, how do we fit into a discourse that has explored the margins and challenged accepted traditions?

⁹ Brecht, B., Rey, F., & Müller, H. (1992). *Fatzer, Fragment*. l'Arche.

IN THE COLLECTIONIST'S BAZAAR



Image 2. Detail of 16mm film fragment from *Currents*, 2021

The framework for my film combines both the personal and the theoretical. Two books, in particular, have been sources of inspiration - *L'Arrière-Pays* by Yves Bonnefoy and *The Invisible Cities* by Italo Calvino, both published in 1972. They are imaginary travelogues in search of utopian cities. In the case of Calvino, they are invisible cities – with Bonnefoy, imaginary ones.

What struck me in these two books was the sense of constant wandering and, the seamless melting of borders between the cities. The incipit of *L'Arrière-Pays* led to my first short film at York University, where I borrowed the title. “I have often experienced a feeling of anxiety, at crossroads”¹⁰ is the opening sentence of *L'Arrière-Pays*, an extended semi-autobiographical essay by Yves Bonnefoy. Implied is the notion of hesitancy. Which road should I take? And, what if I had taken the other road and not the one I have chosen? These dilemmas are universal, but for the immigrant, they take on a different meaning – the severing of connections with the place of birth, with family, and with the familiar. All crossroads imply this, as Robert Frost’s poem, “The Road Not Taken” attests, but arguably a different set of choices comes into play when it is an immigrant leaving one place for another. For Bonnefoy, the crossroads is connected to the *arrière-pays*, an almost idealized place of authenticity and abundance, full of the things he has encountered and the

¹⁰ Bonnefoy, Y. (1972). *L'arrière-Pays*. Seagull Books 2012.
In-text: (Bonnefoy, 1972, p.1)

knowledge gained, especially his experiences as a child. This elusive and not-exactly-back country, like a dream or a memory, is something I have tried to capture in *Currents*, especially in its final sequences. As the footage moves along the British Columbia coastline, taken from a boat that gently moves in the swell, I convey this sense of anticipation mixed with mystery. Confronted by the sheer scope of the unknowable, vast Canadian landscape, I am searching, looking, trying to grab and let go at the same time.

Italo Calvino's inquisitive and enigmatic philosophical fantasy about the cities visited by Marco Polo captures the dreamlike, shifting nature of memory, as they are retold for another, here the emperor Kublai Khan. One passage captures this idea perfectly:

With cities, it is as with dreams: everything imaginable can be dreamed, but even the most unexpected dream is a rebus that conceals a desire or, its reverse, a fear. Cities, like dreams, are made of desires and fears, even if the thread of their discourse is secret, their rules are absurd, their perspectives deceitful, and everything conceals something else.¹¹

This expresses a number of ideas that are connected with my film: fear, secrecy, absurdity, deceitfulness, concealment. As an immigrant, I underwent all of these feelings in one way or another, at one time or another. In another passage he talks about the city of Octavia, "a precipice between two steep mountains: the city is over the void, bound to the two crests with ropes and chains and catwalks...below there is nothing for hundreds and hundreds of feet"¹². This sense of vertigo, of being suspended in space, over a void, expresses the limbo of my experience.

¹¹ Calvino, I. (1978). *Invisible Cities*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
In-text: (Calvino, 1978, p.21)

¹² Calvino, I. (1978). *Invisible Cities*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
In-text: (Calvino, 1978, p.16)

Poetry is a form I often return to, as I have had some of mine published in the Giulio Perrone anthologies of poetry. The Nobel Prize-winning Italian poet, Eugenio Montale, has long been one of my points of reference. One of his poems has stayed with me through my life, but it was not until I had completed my film and re-read it that I became aware of how deeply it was embedded in my subconscious. The poem was written after the Second World War amidst a European landscape of disaster and death, and while vastly different in apocalyptic scope, not entirely dissimilar to what some are experiencing during the Covid-19 pandemic. Using vivid allegories, he describes what he sees looking through the colourful glass windows of a small tower in his home:

From a Tower

I saw the water-dipper
lift from the lightning rod:
by his gliding pride, by the trilling
Of his flute, I knew him.

I saw the merry, flop-eared
Piquillo leap from the tomb,
Bound up by the spiral
stairwell, and reach the roof.

I saw, filtering through stained-
glass windows and mullioned flowers,
a world of skeletons – and a blood-
red lip falls mute.¹³

I realized that his poem and my film share a similar structure, and concerns. Montale's poem, like my film, is structured in three stanzas. The triple anaphora of "I saw" marks the poet's gaze from the mullioned windows of his house, where he reclaims a series of childhood images: festive birds,

¹³ Montale, E. 1925-1977. The collected poems of Eugenio Montale, 1925-1977. New York : W.W. Norton & Co., 2012.

In-text: (Montale, 1922-1977, p.229)

the desolation of war, memories of the dead. *Currents* is viewed through my own eyes and traverses a structure of homeland, voyage, and new country, using fragments that capture childhood, youth, middle and old age. Montale's poem ends where I begin my film, and I end where he begins. As his poem concludes with images of death, my film begins with a funeral scene from the south of Italy. Conversely, as the poem begins in birdsong and the joy of flight, my film ends with images of the overwhelming, and somewhat ambiguous immensity of the Canadian landscape, highlighted by the haunting sounds of loons. However, the tripartite structure and the emotional states depicted, are similar, even if the structure is essentially reversed. The title of the poem speaks to both my state of mind as well as the physical conditions of making my film. I felt like a woman in a tower working in my editing room, alone, with a view of some trees through a window while the COVID-19 pandemic was unfolding outside. Another source of inspiration has been the Austrian, expressionist painter Egon Schiele. Last summer, I received a postcard of one of his self-portraits, *The Hermits* (1912).



Image 3. Egon Schiele, *The Hermits*, 1912

I used the postcard as a bookmark for Elena Ferrante's *L'Amica Geniale*, and in the pages of that book I found a passage that connected the warped shapes of Schiele's images, where boundaries dissolve, and borders melt, which was what I was attempting to achieve with my visual imagery:

...She used that term: dissolving boundaries [...] she said that the outlines of things and people were delicate, that they broke like cotton thread. She whispered that for her it had always been that way, an object lost its edges and poured into another, into a solution of heterogeneous materials, a merging and mixing. [...] A tactile emotion would melt into a visual one, a visual one would melt into an olfactory one.¹⁴

Schiele's warped figures and landscapes, where colours and shapes melt and blend into one another, vividly resemble the images found in the work of another artist who has inspired me, Louise Bourque's *Self Portrait Post-Mortem*. The amount of negative space that surrounds the figures in Schiele's painting is very similar to the negative space around Bourque's face in this film. The expressionism of his work has increasingly resonated with me. My professor, Phil Hoffman, offered a possible explanation: "You are moving into abstraction because the reality that surrounds you doesn't feel real to you."

Unhappy with the footage I had shot of Toronto, I turned to found footage shot by others. A key question I had to confront making a film of this kind centered around the role of the archive. As I explored further, my attention shifted to the alternative of the counter- or para-archive¹⁵. Francesca Valdinoci, in her book *Scarti, Tracce e Frammenti: Controarchivio e Memoria dell'Umano*, defines the counter-archive, or as she calls it the para-archive, as a place where fragments are not

¹⁴ Ferrante, E., & Goldstein, A. (2016). *My brilliant friend: childhood, adolescence. Unabridged large print edition*. Waterville, Maine: Thorndike Press, a part of Gale, Cengage Learning.
In-text: (Ferrante, 2016, p.175)

¹⁵ Valdinoci, F. (2019). *Scarti, tracce e frammenti: controarchivio e memoria dell'umano*. Firenze University Press.
In-text: (Valdinoci, 2019, p.60)

catalogued following the principles of indexicality. The final scope of these para-archives of forgotten fragments is not to formally catalogue or classify them. Para-archives are born out of protest against what is deemed classifiable, as an act of resistance to monumental history. The fragments collected in these imaginary archives and fluctuating spaces, accumulate one upon the other rather than being labelled. Italian writer and critic Gianni Celati refers to these spaces as the “archeological bazaar”, and he goes on to elaborate, “In the collectionist’s bazaar everything appears as a Heteroclitenean flux, an archeological bric-à-brac of rejects, as fragmentary images of an estrangement.”¹⁶

Elena Ferrante adds a feminist perspective to the meaning of the fragment. Her mother used a word from her dialect, “frantumaglia”, that described how she felt when she was troubled by contradictory sensations that were tearing her apart:

She said that inside her she had a frantumaglia, a jumble of fragments. The frantumaglia depressed her... The frantumaglia is an unstable landscape, an infinite aerial or aquatic mass of debris that appears to the I, brutally, as its true and unique inner self. The frantumaglia is the storehouse of time without the orderliness of a history, a story. The frantumaglia is an effect of the sense of loss, when we’re sure that everything that seems to us stable, lasting, an anchor for our life, will soon join that landscape of debris that we seem to see.¹⁷

¹⁶ Botta, A. (2018). *The Ali Baba Project (1968-1972) : Monumental History and the Silent Resistance of the Ordinary*. Smith College, USA.
In-text: (Botta, 2018, p.5)

¹⁷ Ferrante, E., & Goldstein, A. (2016). *My brilliant friend: childhood, adolescence. Unabridged large print edition*. Waterville, Maine: Thorndike Press, a part of Gale, Cengage Learning.
In-text: (Ferrante, 2016, p. 99)

Valdinoci also touches on another idea, the concept of the “archeology of silence”¹⁸, a term derived from Michel Foucault’s *Histoire de Folie*. The silence and invisibility of these fragments define the condition of what has produced this state. Because of its marginality, the discarded fragment occupies an alternative position, and as an alternative, it becomes central in imagining new, future possibilities.



Image 4. Still from *Currents*, 2021

Kim Knowles extends the implications of this idea in her book *Experimental Film and Photochemical Practices* when she talks about waste as being, “one of the key concerns of our time, even more so in the context of rising global population numbers and the parallel increase in the production (and rapid disposal) of consumer technologies”. Other writers have related the idea of the discarded to particular social groups who are perceived as having a “throwaway” status,

¹⁸ Valdinoci, F. (2019). *Scarti, tracce e frammenti: controarchivio e memoria dell’umano*. Firenze University Press. In-text: (Valdinoci, 2019, p.60)

which Knowles extends to “the spatially and geographically displaced – refugees, migrants and the homeless”. In *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Jane Bennett argues that “so-called inert or passive matter has agency and that objects ‘act’ as well as being acted *upon*, [which] upends traditional Eurocentric assumptions about the primacy and privileged place of the human in a world of multiple materialities.”¹⁹

Benjamin's focus on the collector, the flaneur, the ragpicker, and his extensive work on the archive's social meaning is central to the work of filmmakers who deploy found footage. Catherine Russell in her book *Archiveology* describes the collector as someone:

...who not only lets old works speak but enables them to speak a new kind of language. Collecting, for Benjamin, is a practice inundated with dreams and magic, through which the collector detaches the object from its use value and places it within a new order.²⁰

Collecting, or thrifting, has been a part of my life. I have been thrifting in vintage stores for years. My grandmother used to thrift, my aunts thrift. We would do weekly trips to the second-hand market and have a group get-together. While working on my thesis film I found a series of old American 16mm films produced to promote the postwar Marshall Plan in Italy. One of them, *Paese senz'Acqua* (1949) by Giuliano Tomei, depicts US engineers installing a new water system in a town in the south of Italy. It portrays the Americans as saviours but is oblivious to the sophisticated water system built by the Romans centuries before. I use some of this footage in *Currents*, most notably the shot of the young woman drinking at length from a tap, a scene that spoke to me of a

¹⁹ Knowles, K. (2020). *Experimental Film and Photochemical Practices*. Palgrave MacMillan.
In-text: (Knowles, 2020, pp.36-38)

²⁰ Russel, C. (2019). *Archiveology: Walter Benjamin and Archival Film Practices*. DURHAM, NC: Duke University Press, 2019.
In-text: (Russel, 2019, p.45)

simple primal need that contrasts with the way water is seen in the rest of the film – as sources of distress and discomfort or, play and pleasure. But, excerpted from an American propaganda film it carries even more complex implications.

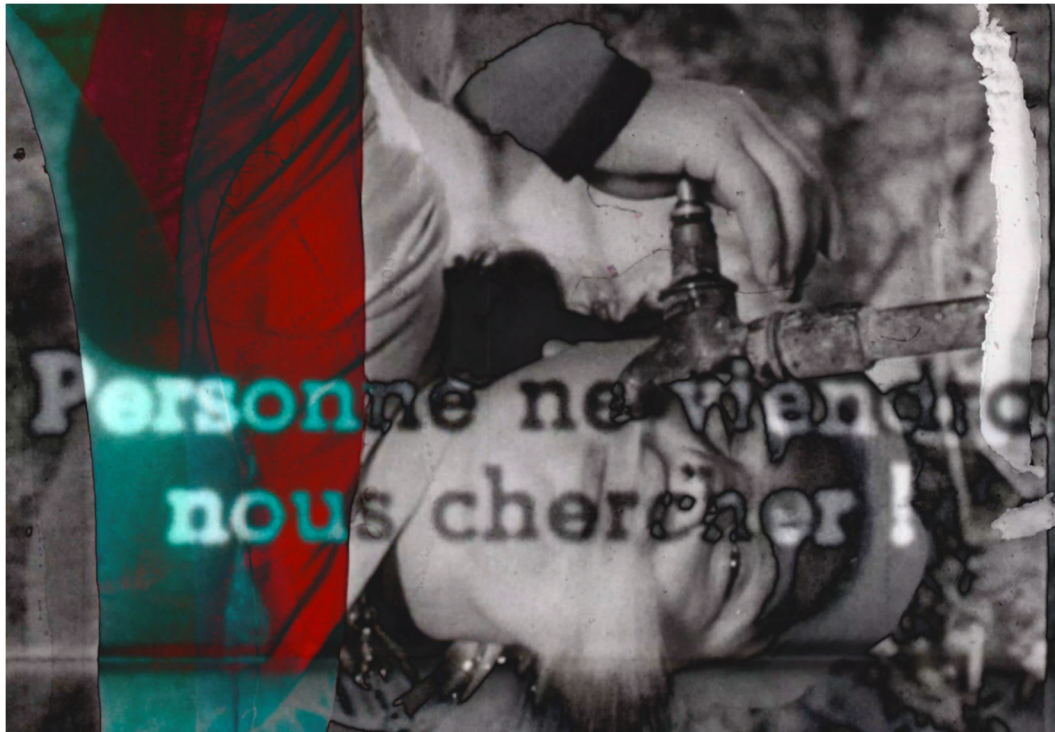


Image 5. Still from *Currents*, 2021

My use of The Andrews Sisters's "The Woodpecker Song" is weighted with similar intra-national connotations. Few know that it was originally an Italian song, "Reginella Campagnola", with music by Eldo Di Lazzaro and lyrics by Bruno Cherubini, written a year before the recording made famous by The Andrew Sisters, Kate Smith, and Glenn Miller and His Orchestra. It was brought to America by immigrants, appropriated and mistranslated into English, recorded, and went on to become a #1 single. The original song speaks about a woman working in the fields; the translation

replaces the woman with a woodpecker in love! My use of the song is laden with irony, left purposely inaccessible to an English audience who will be unaware of its specific background.

Another little-remembered part of the Marshall Plan was the shipping of second-hand clothes, known as “American rags” or, “pezze americane”, to post-war Italy. These clothes were often intercepted by Italian entrepreneurs and sold, even though they were meant to be donations. My grandmother was constantly rummaging through these rags, buying all sorts of cheap American goods for her family, as the low cost of these clothes allowed her to dress a family of eight. The most prized items were jeans with an American flag and red and black chequered shirts. When I moved to Canada I started thrifting in Toronto as well. In an ironic reversal, the most valuable “rags” now come from European designers! What excites me the most is to be able to find discarded gems and to grapple with the idea of “value” that each of us assigns to certain objects. I love to pick out items and give them a new life. These rags speak to the conditions of immigration, to things that are discarded or exist on the margins, and are not yet inscribed in the official social context. These momentarily displaced objects are waiting for the hand that will place them in a new context. It is only natural that my filmmaking has taken a detour into recycling old found footage that I find in this online bazaar of goods. Recycling comes from the Latin “cylus”, which in turn comes from the Greek “kyklos” (kyl-kyl-os) - to turn, to spin, to move, to circle. Su Friedrich reaffirms this notion in her own filmmaking practice, “I like the idea of recycling things and of finding new meanings, in a new context, for images that have appeared in earlier films.”²¹

²¹ MacDonald, S. (1988) Damned if you don’t, an Interview with Su Friedrich.
In-text (MacDonald, 1988, p.???)

For Benjamin “To write history...means to quote history. But the concept of quotation implies that any given historical object must be ripped out of its context”²². This notion of displacing the fragment from its original context, to provide a new meaning, is essential to understanding the work of found-footage filmmakers. In the case of female, immigrant filmmakers, this takes on a new urgency. Their films become mirrors of the experience of displacement that an immigrant undergoes, beautifully expressed by Ferrante’s mother, but just as importantly they become expressions of a range of associated ideas. Found footage is cheap and accessible, free of the apparatus of conventional cinema practices. Indeed in some cases, not even the camera apparatus is required. The films are “home-made”, require limited resources, can be made cheaply, and often need only the filmmaker, alone, to complete the work. Control over the art product is vital in a world where control is often denied the immigrant in their daily interactions with their new country.

While conducting my research I viewed some of the work of other immigrant women filmmakers: Frédérique Devaux, Gariné Torossian, Louise Bourque, and Cécile Fontaine. All of them share a similar *modus operandi* when confronting issues like displacement, immigration, migration, and the patriarchal forces in their lives. By collecting, reflecting and remediating found footage, these filmmakers have achieved a strategy for revisiting the past and conceiving a politics for the future, thereby building a counter-memory of their experiences. Their work is inscribed within the poetics of fragments. The collated nature of their found-footage films evokes the psychic fragmentation which trauma provokes. There are other theoretical concepts of the archives that align with the

²² Wees, W.C. (1994). *Recycled Images: The Art and Politics of Found Footage Films*. Anthology Film Archives.
In-text: (Wees, 1994, p.42)

immigrant and feminist discourse we find in the films of Bourque, Devaux, Fontaine, and Torossian. For Emily Cohen:

Derrida views the archive as a patriarchal construct motivated by a desire to domesticate and shelter memory while maintaining authority over its possible significance. The act of archiving is an act of destructive aggression, a repression and filing of memories enacted by marking dates on the body of archived objects, which Derrida describes as analogous to circumcision.²³

Derrida's thoughts about "maintaining authority" over the archive combined with Benjamin's notion of "ripping" the object away from its original context, are central concepts when it comes to constructing a theory around films made by immigrant filmmakers. The immigrant experience is the de-contextualized experience *par excellence*. Therefore, the immigrant/displaced woman is the most suitable collector and activator of discarded fragments which combine to construct a counter-memory. The un-archivable orphan film becomes an allegory of the figure of the immigrant woman who often inhabits the margins of the "official" collective history/memory. The creation of an immigrant counter-narrative is made possible through fragmentation and collage as immigrant stories circulate as a series of curves, detours, labyrinths, and mysteries. Through the artistic enhancement of these fragments, an ethical reversal occurs, whereby unprecedented visibility is given to the "insignificant."

Most female, immigrant histories have been mis-archived or excluded from the official archives. Women working in this tradition of re-writing the self via the fragments found and excavated in

²³ Cohen, E. (2004), The Orphanista Manifesto: Orphan Films and the Politics of Reproduction. American Anthropologist. <https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.2004.106.4.719>
In-text: (Cohen, 2004)

the archives are ultimately performing, as Verwoert puts it, “a political gesture.”²⁴ Furthermore, as memory studies scholar Alison Landsberg states, “memory would be required to play a crucial new role... With these movements of peoples came the rupture of generational ties, rendering the traditional modes for the transmission of cultural, ethnic, and racial memory—both memories passed from parent to child and those disseminated through community life—increasingly inadequate.”²⁵

The world of the immigrant is unique, specific, heterogeneous. In effect, a “diasporic optic”²⁶ is created, which forms an “inter-cultural cinema”, an optic where “plurality, multiplicity, and hybridity are foregrounded”²⁷, as Naficy argues in his book *Accented Cinema*. The immigrant filmmaker is placed between competing realities, a space where identity is called into question.

Amidst this uncertainty, the films construct, destroy, and call into question identities found in both the host country and the homeland. One of the central concepts that applies to the immigrant filmmaker is the constant process of negotiation, traversing, and living between the dual realities of the host community and the homeland. For Louise Bourque, “...a fissure... connotes the idea

²⁴ Cocker, E. (2009) Ethical Possession: Borrowing From the Archives. In Smith, I. R. (Ed.), *Cultural Borrowing: Appropriation, Reworking, Transformation* (pp. 92-110). Scope: An Online Journal of Film and Television Studies. In-text: (Cocker, 2009, p. 98)

²⁵ Landsberg, A. (2018). Prosthetic memory. In Grainge, P. (Ed), *Memory and popular film* (pp.144-161). Manchester University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7765/9781526137531.00014>
In-text: (Landsberg, 2018, pp.144-161)

²⁶ Moorti, S. (2003) Desperately Seeking an Identity: Diasporic Cinema and the Articulation of Transnational Kinship. *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 6, no. 3
In-text: (Moorti, 2003, p.359)

²⁷ Bayramian, S.P. (2019) Exploring Armenian Diasporic Cinema from the “Third Space”. University of Amsterdam.
In-text: (Bayramian, 2019, p. 19)

of the in-between. It suggests the idea of a gap... and this can bring up the idea that what we're missing can also be something that is rich as well."²⁸ The resulting films re-centre the immigrant experience, reclaiming and privileging it from the periphery, "using their diasporic consciousness as a creative tool to modify power relations."²⁹ Found footage, or in Devaux's words, "chosen footage"³⁰, becomes the perfect tool for the woman immigrant filmmaker.

Many of these same ideas are visible in Devaux's the *K-Exil* series, where a French-Algerian woman, who, perhaps unsurprisingly, like Torossaian, feels entirely misplaced, "I have always felt from nowhere, I do not feel French or Algerian. The found footage perhaps comes from there: it interests me because there is uncertainty about what made it, but at the same time it implies a choice; it would then be more appropriate to speak of it as chosen footage. I, myself, feel like a foundling."³¹

²⁸ Malone, M. J., (2006). A conversation with Louise Bourque. *Big Red and Shiny*.
In-text: (Malone, 2006)

²⁹ Bayramian, S.P. (2019) Exploring Armenian Diasporic Cinema from the "Third Space". University of Amsterdam.
In-text: (Bayramian, 2019, p.19)

³⁰ Panelli, M. (2016). La Réécriture comme Autoportrait. Università degli studi di Udine.
In-text: (Panelli, 2016, p.170)

³¹ Panelli, M. (2016). La Réécriture comme Autoportrait. Università degli studi di Udine.
In-text: (Panelli, 2016, p.171)

EMULSION LIFTING: Unsettling the Image

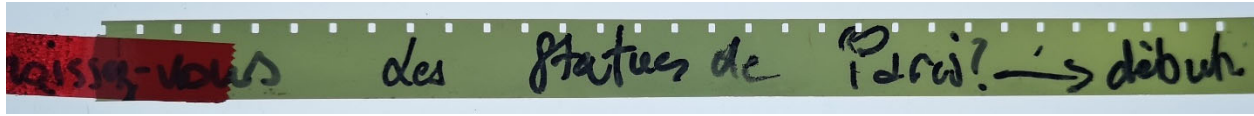


Image 6. Detail of 16mm film leader from one of the films that I re-appropriated for *Currents*, 2021

Currents has undergone many different shapes and forms since its inception, like an ever-changing river. I approach my filmmaking as an organic process with few preconceived ideas about how the story will be shaped. My films are often born in one way and then develop into something completely different. I work without the support of a script or a storyboard. My “script” is sometimes a drawing including arrows and words, showing the direction the images will take, and the colours I will deploy. Or it can be a series of photographs with poems attached. The reason for this specific approach is quite simple. The stories I tell in my filmmaking, and in particular the story I am telling in *Currents*, is the story of my life as an immigrant. This means that the story inhabits me. It’s an autobiographical story. I trust my lived experience and my memories, which will guide me through the making of the film in an organic and exploratory manner. Part of this process is analogous to what Nicomedes Suarez-Arauz, a poet of the Amazonian jungle, describes as, “amnesia time [which is] multiple, non-linear, fragmentary, and inclusive of past, present, and future.” For him “memory is a kind of lie since it offers as history what inevitably is the work of the imagination.”³² This freedom from narrative linearity suggested here is the way I made *Currents*. Harnessing my film to a fixed script would not do justice to the fluidity of the ever-

³² Blaetz, R. (2007), *Women’s Experimental Cinema: Critical Frameworks*. Duke University Press
In-text: (Blaetz, 2007, p.216)

changing immigrant experience. This organic process has resonances in what has been described as Process Cinema which:

...situates films that are made within this process-driven methodology and phenomenology and that are not tied to the simple replication of the real. This means that such films rarely rely on a script or screenplay as an overarching document that “guides” the work. Instead, the filmmaking process is replaced by a fluid integration of writing, shooting, and editing, and not necessarily in that order. This way of working “through” process has a comparative body of work in music, through improvisation, in art, through “action painting,” in the performative aspects of the sketchbook, or through “spontaneous prose” in beat poetry.³³



Image 7. Still from *Originate & Recompile*, 2020



Image 8. Superimposition test with 35mm slides

I did not actively pursue this abstract form; it was arrived at, or “revealed” through trial and error, experiments and tests on the film material. From the beginning, I needed to find a way to represent the multiple temporalities and the multiple landscapes that an immigrant inhabits. For these reasons, most of my classroom exercises and tests utilize a certain number of superimpositions.

³³ MacKenzie, S. , Marchessault, J. 2019. Process Cinema: Handmade Film in the Digital Age. McGill-Queen’s University Press.
In-text: (MacKenzie, Marchessault, 2019, p.4)

Emulsion lifting found footage, was the natural extension of these experiments. Lifting the emulsion from its celluloid base and placing it on another support (base), is the quintessential allegory of immigrant life: de-contextualized, misplaced, fragmented. The immigrant story is revealed in the form. It becomes the form. As noted in the previous chapter, thanks to my directed reading with Professor Janine Marchessault, titled “Women Re-writing the Self via the Archive of Others, or Cannibalizing the Archive” I encountered women filmmakers who work in the tradition of found footage and collage films. One of them, Cécile Fontaine, grabbed my attention and spoke to me through her beautiful superimpositions. I had recently attended a workshop at Pix Film Gallery, hosted by filmmakers Madi Piller and Alexandra Gelis, in which I learnt how to animate a 16mm film loop. The film that resulted from that experience was *Colonna Continua* (2020), an endless film loop of Italian archival footage that I had found on eBay. When I later looked at Fontaine’s *Histoires Parallèles* (1990), I noticed visual similarities. I recognized the bubbles on the film base created by the tape used to fix the images to the new base and noted her use of ink and paints. There was a common thread but most importantly, I felt a similar sense of displacement. When I researched further, I discovered she was also an immigrant.

Born in France, she moved to the Réunion Island, under French administration in the Indian Ocean, as a baby. She would stay there until she was eighteen, at which age she returned to France for her education. After obtaining her Master's degree, she moved to Boston where she was introduced to the world of experimental cinema.

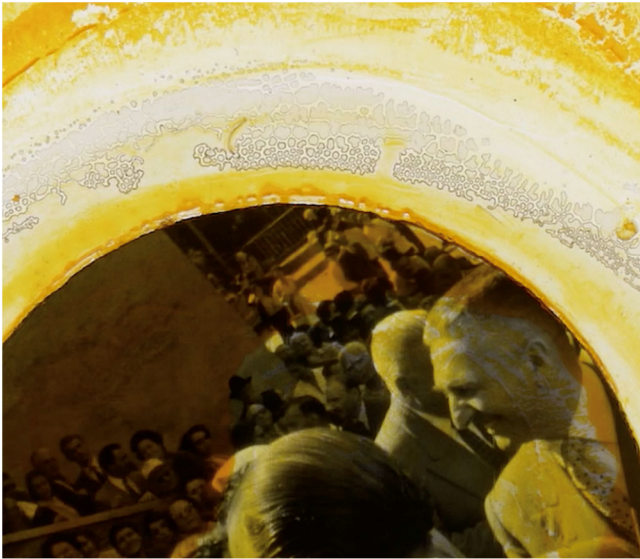


Image 9. Still from *Colonna Continua*, 2021

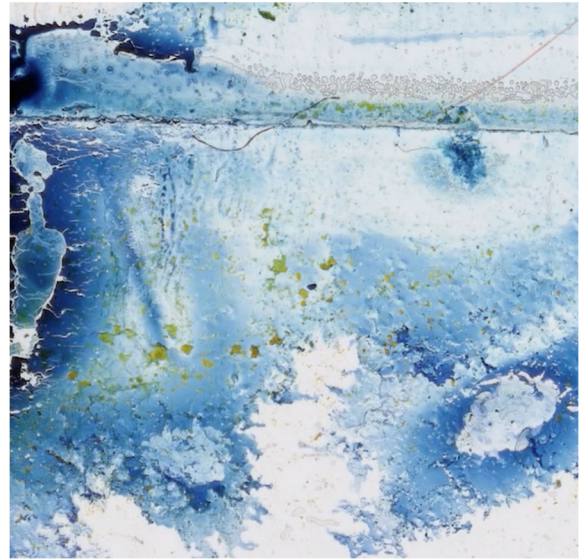


Image 10. Still from *Colonna Continua*, 2021

Fontaine discovered the emulsion lifting technique while there, finding that layers of emulsion soaked in an ammonia solution lost their cohesion, and came off easily if scratched with a knife. She next undertook a series of tests in which she dissociated layers of emulsion by means of two techniques, later described as wet-, or dry-lifting film. In the wet-lifting technique, the film is immersed in a detergent bath, of soap, linseed oil, ammonia, or bleach. Out of this bath, certain portions of the film can thus be unglued and exported from their support. Fontaine saw that if the images - once repositioned in a different place on the same medium or on a new medium - were not completely dry, they would distort during projection.

Dry-lifting involved detaching image-portions from their original support using a piece of tape, then re-glued to other portions of the film. This created various layering or transparency effects. Both techniques involved a high level of unpredictability, accident and surprise. As her technique

evolved, she began to search for these technical “errors” which became “the mark, the aesthetic principle characteristic of the filmmaker's style.”³⁴

Cécile Fontaine has described her impulse towards recycling found footage as a process that started out of necessity, with “ingenuity”, playing “on the economy of material, technical and financial means”. Although her initial leap towards this mode of filmmaking was ignited by practical concerns, it has now, “become the material of choice for a technique of recovery and transformation, that is, the ‘art’ of accommodating disparate remains as in a patchwork or mosaic”, an ‘art’, she continues “not intellectual, but rather based on sensitive intuition.”³⁵ On her process, Stefano Masi writes:

“...touch, the fact of ‘feeling instant after instant with your fingertips the physical aspect of creation’, produces in Fontaine an intimate and almost carnal pleasure made possible by the private dimension of ‘creation.’ This pleasure of working by hand, which exposes the artist to the possible imperfections of an unpredictable result, does not however prevent her from obtaining the same results by “home-made” work as by working in a laboratory.”³⁶

Kim Knowles extends this idea of touch and argues for an “aesthetic of contact”³⁷ and posits the idea of “*l’entre-objets* (between the objects) to describe an in-betweenness that manifests both as the self-reflexive staging of materiality through the presence of the film strip and the

³⁴ Brenez, N., McKane M., (1995) (under the direction of), *Poetics of Color. A history of experimental cinema*. In-text: (Brenez, McKane, 1995, pp. 149-151)

³⁵ Fontaine, C., & Beauvais, Y. (2021). *L’émulsion fantastique: Le cinéma selon Cécile Fontaine*. In-text: (Fontaine, 2021, pp. 113-114)

³⁶ Masi, S. (2003). *Décoller le monde*, *Cahiers de Paris Expérimental*. In-text: (Masi, 2003, p.7)

³⁷ Knowles, K. (2020). *Experimental Film and Photochemical Practices*. Palgrave MacMillan. In-text: (Knowles, 2020, p.42)

transformation of perception through proximal relations.”³⁸ Others have been equally captivated by this notion. Giuliana Bruno writes about the physicality of film, noting that it is a dense fabric, as porous as skin which like the human body shows wrinkles of age that become inscribed into its materiality.³⁹ Finally, Knowles summarizes the effect as being one of developing an oppositional strategy of perceptual difficulty to the omnipresence of the realist tradition in film, achieved through attacking the material surface of celluloid.

These ideas all deeply resonated with me as I was involved in the emulsion-lifting process, and touching and feeling 16mm celluloid almost every day. After completing the first rough cut of my film, I felt I needed to look at more of Fontaine’s work for inspiration and, to see what she had done with her technique that I could attempt to replicate in my film. *Cruises* (1989) astonished me due to the similarities of thematics and techniques. In this film, she uses documentary found footage obtained from disparate sources: old Italian films; tourism films about boat cruises; amateur 16mm film filmed by a Nazi soldier in 1941 that combined family images with those of the military; silent film sequences from the 1920s, and images of people swimming. I identified with the fact that another immigrant featured water and the sea in such a prominent manner in her film collages. Water, and the distances created by oceans, are at the core of my filmmaking. I was born and lived by the sea before coming to Canada. The Mediterranean is part of my identity, a place of beauty and happiness and childhood memories, but also recently as an underwater cemetery for those migrants and refugees trying to traverse its waters to find a safer life in Europe.

³⁸ Knowles, K. (2020). *Experimental Film and Photochemical Practices*. Palgrave MacMillan. In-text (Knowles, 2020, p.42)

³⁹ Knowles, K. (2020). *Experimental Film and Photochemical Practices*. Palgrave MacMillan. In-text (Knowles, 2020, p.43)

IMAGINARY HOMELAND(S)



Image 11. Detail of 16mm film fragment from *Currents*, 2021

As a woman and first-generation immigrant, I have explored through my own story and that of others, the reality and idea of migration, the displacement that is experienced and what this does to the individual and the community. These stories of migration are complex and multi-faceted, personal and universal, new - and as old as time. Today, they take on a different resonance as migration and displacement have become a political, as well as a personal issue.

It is not a coincidence that my filmmaking life started after immigrating to Canada in 2012. I made a series of short films which allowed me to process the alienation I felt after leaving Italy. My artistic practice became an avenue of integrating into a new society while staying connected to my roots, bridging gaps between identities.

My first short film *Exit/Entrance* (2015) is a hybrid fiction film that combined pieces of my diary as an immigrant with those of a fictional painter. It was shot in Italy and was a collaboration with a non-actor, Antonio de Luca. We both felt a shared sense of displacement. We improvised scenes and tableaux based on a loose script that was often written the night before the following day's shooting. The film dealt with my "exit" from Italy and my "entrance" to Canada, a process that deeply marked me and needed to be expressed artistically. It shares many semantic similarities

with *Currents*: superimpositions, displaced and abstract sound, and the thematic use of water imagery. Many of the sounds are in fact from *Exit/Entrance*.

After showing the film to several audiences, a common reaction surfaced: the film was neither fiction nor documentary, and it wasn't experimental enough to be labelled as such. In hindsight, this makes sense; I was neither an Italian nor a Canadian. The film reflected my transition from one continent to the other, a process that had just been set in motion. Transitioning between two countries has been at the centre of my filmmaking since, and it has affected the forms of my films: first a hybrid, then a documentary, and now, an experimental film.

My subsequent work has been strongly affected by a number of experiences. In 2016 I was a volunteer in the Syrian refugee camps on the Greek-Macedonian border, the most famous of which was located in Idomeni, where Ai Wei Wei shot part of *Human Flow* (2017). This trip resulted in the making of my documentary *Fantassút* (2016). It was set against the backdrop of a major political trauma, the civil war in Syria that had resulted in millions leaving their homeland for safety in Europe. I was living in Toronto, waiting for my visa to be approved so I could remain in Canada, a process that took over a year. Reading about the Syrian refugee crisis on the Greek island of Lesbos, I decided to use this time to help other people in distress, and volunteered, travelling to Greece where I contacted the NGOs on site. Working on food distribution, tent repairs, the building of a makeshift school, I had no intention of making a film but after 10 days found myself documenting what I saw around me with my Nikon DSRL camera. I built relationships with refugees from Syria, Palestine, Kurdistan, and Turkey. *Fantassút* was born on the spot, in an improvised way. It consists of interviews with several refugees who tell their stories in a

conversational and intimate way. If *Exit/Entrance* was centred around my personal immigration experience as a European immigrant with agency, *Fantassút* dealt with the experiences of refugees, fleeing a war, forcibly removed, confined in a European camp. The making of *Fantassút* left such an impact that I could not make other films for some time.

The spirit of this film is very much alive in *Currents*. Documentary footage, all found, none of which I have shot provided me with the raw material. While there was virtually no remediation of the material shot in *Fantassút* (only a couple of slow-motion sequences), *Currents* is a film of extensive remediation. I have moved from documenting the experience to re-imagining, re-constructing, and de-constructing it via the extensive interventions I have made. I have tried to visualize a visceral experience.



Image 12. Still from *Fantassút*, 2017

Returning from the Greek refugee camps, I was invited to appear and speak at Toronto City Council's Committee for Human Rights and UNHCR Refugee Day in Canada and the UK. *Fantassut* was also used in Italian public schools as an educational tool.

After exploring the topic of migration, refugees, and immigration through hybrid-fiction and documentary, I discovered the experimental form at York University. My encounter with a different migrant reality came through the films of Jonas Mekas, a European refugee, who had fled the Nazis in 1944. What he felt and described in his fragmented and diaristic *Lost, Lost, Lost* (1976); and *Walden* (1968) spoke in ways that resonated with me. I realized that the experimental form, and the choice of non-narrative, could provide an artistic platform for revealing “the unspeakable” in the experience of immigration. However, his films also pointed to very real differences. While he wandered freely with his camera outdoors, shooting what he saw, I never felt this kind of comfort in my new country. His diaristic films, composed of original footage, are quite different from my own, equally personal pieces which are composed of scraps from other people’s films. There is a hesitancy I feel in exploring Canada through my camera. Instead, I prefer, and am more comfortable, in the environment of my kitchen and home.

Through Professor Phil Hoffman, I became interested in found-footage and learned how this practice is inscribed in cultural theories of the counter-archive. This helped explain why an immigrant filmmaker like myself felt so comfortable working within this mode, reclaiming material that had been discarded, giving it new meanings, and using it as a tool to revisit history and re-contextualize collective memory of migration. Although the thematics are the same as

Exit/Entrance and *Fantassut*, with *Currents* I have abandoned conventional modes of storytelling and embraced the abstract and the experimental.

During my time at York University, I tested and explored a variety of visual solutions in my class exercise films, often superimposing images on top of each other. *Originate and Recompile* (2020) and *High Tide, Low Tide* (2020) both produced in the Process Cinema class, superimposed several layers of images. Aided by computer technology, I wanted to transfer images of Italy physically onto images of Canada and vice versa, a representation of my condition. This experimentation led directly to latter techniques, and ultimately to emulsion lifting.

My films have been described as mysterious and unsettling, a memory/mirror of contemporary economic, social and political disruption. The personal is tied to the universal, our stories are not unique. They have been and are still shared by many people. The circumstances may be different but the consequences are the same. We have lived through a shifting time of uncertainty and confusion, where identities are challenged and, in some cases, reconstructed.

For *Currents*, I collected reels of found footage from disparate archives and selected certain images. I worked with my hands to remediate, reassemble, and ultimately use these fragments as a memory-making tool for immigrant narratives. In *Archiveology*, Catherine Russel described how Benjamin:

...invested the cinema with the hope that it could yet heal the wounds inflicted on human bodies and senses predicated on the mastery of nature, the hope that film, as a sensory-reflexive medium of second technology, offers a second – though perhaps last – chance for reversing sensory alienation, the numbing of the human sensorium in the defence against shock.⁴⁰

My experience with Process Cinema, and the deployment of found footage, is my way of reversing this alienation and numbing. Recovering the waste products that have been discarded by others is in itself a project that echoes within today's eco-conscious world. Redeploying footage by distressing it, burying it in earth, or using natural elements like plants and flowers to create phytograms, emulsion-lifting it while avoiding chemical processes, all speak to a desire to avoid the conventional processes of cinema, and discover a new path forward. The camera is often erased. Making films this way is artisanal and becomes like a form of making bread or fashioning quilts, domestic traditions consigned to the female. Women have often through history had to express themselves either obliquely or through metaphor.

⁴⁰ Russell, C. (2015) *Archiveology: Walter Benjamin and archival film practices*. Duke University Press.
In-text: (Russell, 2015, p.46)

PRODUCTION: Fragments Reassembled

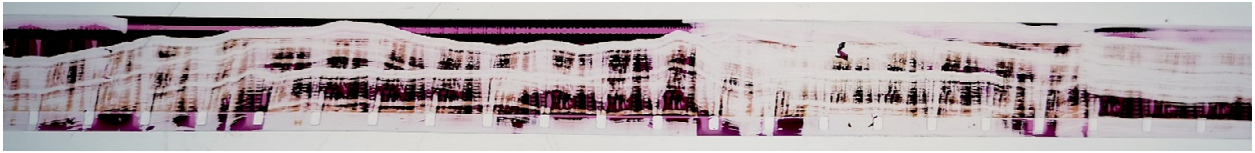


Image 13. Fragment of 16mm film after having been stripped of its emulsion, later used for *Currents*, 2021

From the embryonic phase of my thesis exploration begun in September 2019, I had a very clear objective in mind: to find a visual language that could represent the displacement of a transnational life, and the idea of being “in-between” continents, and how this affects identities, stories, and languages. I wanted to express visually what I felt as an immigrant. It was always clear to me that my film could not follow a narrative arc, nor a straightforward path. To reflect the experience of immigration I always envisioned a multitude of fragments that somehow reassemble. Fragments of memories past-and-present, flashbacks, and déjà-vu, of faces, physiognomies, bits of sound that reminded me of an old lullaby. The immigrant lives a life where there is not one home, one identity. It is lived simultaneously in two or more places, in two or more languages, and the overlapping is never linear or binary. This research into a form that allowed me to express the fragmentation of my life led me to the techniques I discovered for this film.

I started work on *Currents* in the summer of 2020, just after Covid-19 had entered our lives. Everyone was suddenly confined to their home, locked into their houses, working remotely, with the exception of front line and essential workers. As an MFA Graduate student, I had the fortunate opportunity to employ this time to study and reflect on my experience and the subject of immigration while in isolation.

In this digital environment of Zoom classes, Zoom meetings, and online workshops, I felt an opposite need, to immerse myself in the analog world and to be outside. I began filming outdoors with a 16mm Bolex camera. I filmed my surroundings: the shores of Lake Ontario, parks, Toronto's harbour. However, this footage didn't resonate with me. It felt flat and disengaged, as if I did not yet belong, or know how to film this new Canadian landscape. I had not been here long enough to be able to capture its essence on film. I started collecting footage from others who had filmed Canada and immersed myself in archival and found footage. One of the resulting films was *Self Portrait*, which “(re)constructs [my] dislocated immigrant identity through the home movies of others, enacting a search for the self and creating a work of striking filmic autopoiesis.”⁴¹

I took the Process Cinema class taught by Professor Phil Hoffman, discovering several techniques that manipulated film celluloid. I became absorbed in the phytogram technique which uses the internal chemistry of plants to create photographic images on the film emulsion,⁴² a process developed by Karel Doing. In the middle of lockdown, I found myself in my backyard, collecting flowers and leaves, manipulating film emulsion. It was therapeutic. This process allowed me to discover the physical composition of celluloid and opened my eyes to the fact that film was a living substance. It could be altered to respond to my physical intervention. Later I found out that film is made of crushed animal bones: “gelatine emulsion is a thin layer of organic matter. Gelatine.

⁴¹ Ali, J., 2021. Programme notes of *Self-Portrait* on Alchemy Film Festival online catalogue. <https://alchemyfilmmandarts.org.uk/festival-2021-shorts-chemical-potential/>
In-text: (Ali, 2021, para. 3)

⁴² Doing, K., 2016. From Karel Doing blog <https://phytogram.blog/>
In-text: (Doing, 2016, para.1)

Animal bones crushed and melted into a semitransparent layer intermixed with crystals of silver salts. It won't last: it can't." ⁴³

I began to experiment with bleach and started distressing the emulsion of old 35mm film slides I bought on eBay. As somebody who had never been in contact with analog filmmaking, I discovered the layers of colours that comprise a photographic image. It was an absolute miracle to see the layer of magenta, blue, and yellow as they started peeling away from the film base, thanks to a mixture of bleach.



Image 14. Emulsion lifting test with hydrogen peroxide on 35mm slides

I used the bleach I normally use to dye my hair blonde, as I thought it would affect the film surface. Later, I discovered that hydrogen peroxide is often used in the photochemical processes of experimental filmmaking. But my discoveries were connected to materials immediately available

⁴³ Cherchi Usai, P. The Death of cinema: History, Cultural Memory and the Digital Dark Age. London: British Film Institute, 2001
In-text: (Usai, 2001, p.6)

around me at home. The domestic aspect of the filmmaking mirrors the conditions under which this film has been made – in a lockdown, with no access to the tools of conventional filmmaking: actors, studios, crews, cameras.

Confronted with this challenge, I began to think of how I could tell my story through analog filmmaking, working at home, by myself, and using available, often small things. My filmmaking took a turn towards the artisanal, the do-it-yourself, the domestic. It turned into kitchen-counter cinema, or kitchen counter-cinema. Buying old films in 8mm and 16mm from all over the world, repurposing them for my story, was the only possible way of making a film during the pandemic. I was also fascinated with the idea and process of recycling old movies. During the pandemic, I became more attuned to nature, wanted to protect it. I thought about how I could reduce the toxic footprint of my filmmaking process.

I looked for ways to minimize the amount of chemicals involved in this process of remediation. Asking the question about how to alter an image without adding more toxic substances to the process, prompted me to do more experimentation. It was then that I arrived at the technique of lifting the film emulsion from its base, using only water. Commonly emulsion lifting is achieved by soaking the film in a chemical bath, but I managed to discover a process to lift the emulsion eliminating the chemical step altogether. As a result, the process became completely eco-friendly. This gave me the confidence to continue altering the emulsion, knowing I was doing so without poisoning the environment, building a system of sustainable interaction with my surroundings.

As an immigrant, I feel responsible for the way I interact with the land on which I am a guest. I concur with the thoughts of Dr. Cristina Delgado Vintimilia, part of the Common Worlds Research Collective, who maintains that we need, “to foster meaningful relationships with outdoor environments where the concept of “place” is a site not to be dominated but conversed with as part of an extended dialogue. The shift is to move away from regarding all earthly relations as based on human supremacy”⁴⁴

While I was immersed in this process I began to reflect at a deeper level on the ecological implications of the medium of film/cinema. Interest in celluloid, at a point when we have entered the digital era, has been the subject of much reflection on the part of filmmakers and academics. Being a child of the digital era who had only recently discovered celluloid, I came across ideas through my readings that were provocative. Scholar Tess Takahashi asks if film is closer to the natural world and, if so, does it allow nature to “speak” more directly to us.⁴⁵ This question was taken up by Gregory Zinman who maintains that the drowned films of a number of filmmakers draws, “our attention to the role of non-human actants in the creation of moving images and...enable[s] a political re-examination of the process and function of art.”⁴⁶ His analysis stresses the relationship of filmmaking to ecological issues, ideas that suddenly assumed a new importance to me during the pandemic.

⁴⁴ Deirde K., (2021). Entangled: using education to teach interconnectedness in a fragmented world. York University Magazine.
In-text: (Deirde, 2021)

⁴⁵ Knowles, K. (2020). Experimental Film and Photochemical Practices. Palgrave MacMillan.
In-text (Knowles, 2020, p.78)

⁴⁶ Knowles, K. (2020). Experimental Film and Photochemical Practices. Palgrave MacMillan.
In-text (Knowles, 2020, p.78)

I continued to collect more and more found footage from several vendors, most of them people with a visceral passion for old films. One of them, in Paris, has created an outstanding private archive, a bazaar in the middle of the 11th arrondissement. A former film set decorator, he was bitten by “archive fever”. Digging into these archives was an astounding process, full of so many orphan films, alone in the world, old movies from family estates that have no heirs, and end up on eBay. I started collecting reels of film from all over the world. Some would find me, and I would buy them without having seen them. A month into this process I realized that I had also succumbed to Derrida’s *mal d’archive* (archive fever):

We are all ‘en mal d’archive’: in need of archives ... [we] burn with a passion never to cease searching for the archive right where it slips away ... [we] have a compulsive, repetitive and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return of the most archaic place of absolute beginning.⁴⁷

In the midst of this feverish accumulation of old films, I discovered a past I didn’t know I had. My father shared the story of my great uncle Raffaele who built a micro-cinema in his garage. He went from cinema to cinema in the small towns around his house looking for trims and scraps of film, which he would splice together at home. His living room became a makeshift laboratory of film restoration. The garage was turned into a screening room with a hand-cranked projector where he showed these films to children, including my father and all his siblings. During the projection, the splices would often come apart, but he would improvise a repair and continue the projection. What was the spark that ignited this process in him? He was unemployed and living on the margins of society in a post-war climate. So, he sourced the so-called waste of cinema to create his own celluloid kingdom, as I find myself doing amidst the disruption of a pandemic.

⁴⁷ Derrida, J., & Prenowitz, E. (1995). Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression. *Diacritics*. In-text: (Derrida, 1995, p.57)

In my case, it is not the scraps from local cinemas, but eBay which has become my source, a repository of the memories of others that exist outside the official/institutional archives.

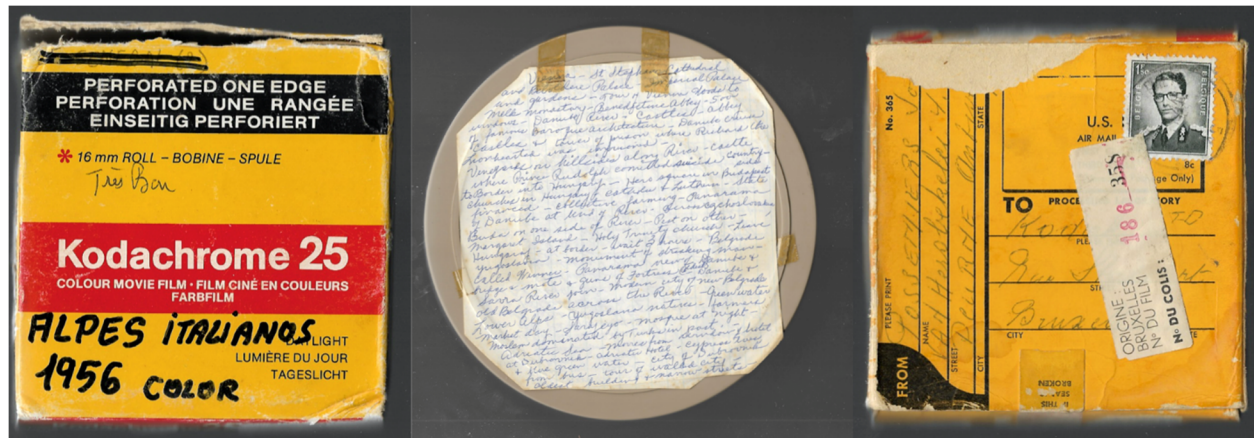


Image 15. Samples of the films collected from eBay, home movies/orphan films, with handwritten notes

As an immigrant, the unofficial and underground archive is a place where I feel most at ease. For the most, part I am not familiar with the official archives of my new country. Since my entry into Canada as an immigrant, I have been overwhelmed and haunted by the “officialdom”, of certain processes and events. It began with my entry visa, the first official document I received which states: “Not valid for employment in business related to sex trade”⁴⁸. Those words were a shock, a slight to my dignity. Subsequent encounters with the official system involved documents, lawyers, language tests, medical examinations to make sure I was completely healthy and not a “burden” to the system. For my Permanent Resident Visa, I needed to have blood tests and X-rays. I felt like an animal, catalogued, tested, and numbered.

⁴⁸ From my personal Temporary Work Visa issued by Canadian Immigration in 2012.

For Achille Mbembe archives, “are the product of a process which converts a certain number of documents into items to be judged to be worthy of preserving and keeping in a public place”. This speaks to the process put in place by the state when handling immigration. Immigrants, like fragments from the archive, are assessed, judged, deemed admissible (archivable), and are ultimately granted or denied status. Mbembe continues “[the archive] is the result of the exercise of a specific power and authority, which involve placing certain documents in an archive at the same time as others are discarded. The archive therefore is fundamentally a matter of discrimination and selection, which in the end, results in the granting of a privileged status to certain written documents, and the refusal of that same status to others...”⁴⁹

This can help comprehend why I feel at home with pirate institutions and unorthodox archives that are not involved with cataloguing and “the official”. These para-archives are places of dignity, mystery, blurred borders, and *mélange*, things absent in “the institutional.” In these para-archives, even the unhealthy are celebrated, and nobody asks for blood samples. The fragment is misplaced and de-contextualized, similar to the movies I am recuperating for my film. The movies I find on eBay are fragments separated from their past, films that have lost the connection with their original creator. These are displaced films, helping me tell my own story of displacement. Perhaps, together we can find our place again. The fragment that has been erased, or removed from the official archive, thus becomes an object of resistance. The silent, forgotten fragment is an object with no function, it is not site-specific anymore. It floats in space, so it is the most appropriate thing with which to create something else that becomes a counter-memory.

⁴⁹ Mbembe, A. (2002). The Power of the Archive and its Limits. In *Refiguring the archive* (pp. 19-27). Springer, Dordrecht.
In-text (Mbembe, 2002, p.20)

The most laborious part of the process was begun in June 2020. I organized an editing room at home as I had to hand-cut each film, selecting the footage I would use. I assembled tools I had never seen or used: rewind reels, a 16mm movie scope, a film splicer, splicing tape, and so on.

With the help of my supervisor Phil Hoffman, I managed to set up the editing room in a week and began hand-cutting the found footage. Another challenge arose, how to store the film footage I was selecting. I created makeshift editing bins, bought clothes hangers, used clothes racks, and suspended the film in cardboard boxes lined with beach towels. I had to develop a workflow and cataloguing system. For each film that arrived, I used the following steps: first, I would open the film can to see if the film had decomposed and was affected by vinegar syndrome. Being allergic to vinegar I had to be careful. Once I assessed that the film was safe to handle, I started looking at it.

As I was going through the footage, I would select the sections I liked, cut it from the reel, label, and hang it. After this process was finished, I started work on the emulsion lifting. Initially, it took me an hour to lift just one second of film, frame by frame onto 16mm film stock. I lifted both 8mm and 16mm footage. The former was very small and delicate, and I found myself using more 16mm footage as a result. Once the film emulsion had been lifted and then repositioned on another support, it was left to dry for a couple of hours.



Image 16. Side by side look of my makeshift editing room

After the emulsion had dried, I placed a strip of splicing tape on top of it, which allowed the film emulsion that was now dry to be sandwiched between the base and the tape, securing it forever and making sure that nothing would peel off during the scanning process.

As I worked on this technique, I became faster. I eventually produced 12 meters of film every 3 days. I worked on sections of approximately 30cms to 50cms in length. I would then splice these sections together to create a small reel of approximately 12-15 meters (about 40 seconds of film footage) and take it to Frame Discreet for scanning. There, Justin Lovell provided crucial help as he understood the process and how laborious it was. He facilitated my workflow with quick turn-around and extremely generous advice. Together we realized that I was going to have to work on the film in reverse, meaning the images had to be built like old glass window paintings from the inside out. Centuries ago, church paintings on glass were painted from the inside, in reverse, to be seen on the outside properly. I had to use the same system.

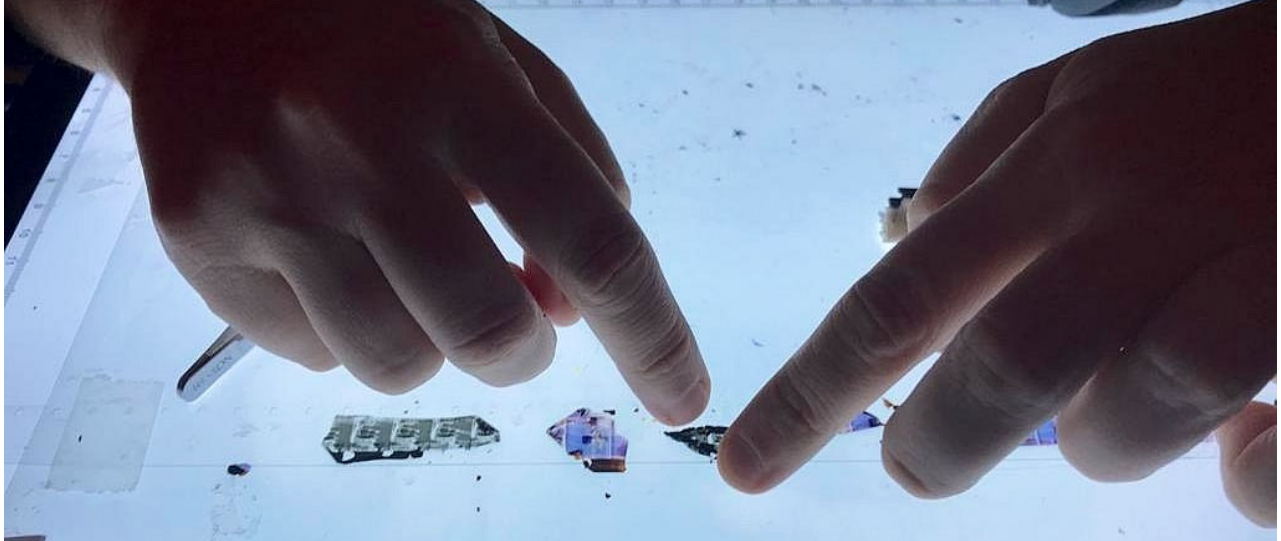


Image 17. My hands placing the wet lifted film emulsion onto a different base (transparent 16mm leader)

I composed the image in reverse on the film leader, so when it was scanned it was flipped. As a result, the image was produced in the way I envisioned it. There were a couple of failed attempts at scanning. At first, the magnetic soundtrack created problems. Then the image was upside down. Finally, I understood that I had to compose in reverse.

I would receive the scanned film from the lab and place it in my editing timeline. Seeing the new scanned footage involved an immense learning process as I could adjust future lifting depending on the results of my experimentation. The peculiarity of this process was that I couldn't really see the collage of images I was creating until after they were scanned, and I could view them on my computer. It is difficult to see 16mm film imagery with the naked eye. I had a sense of what the results would be, but it was only when the film was animated and in motion that I could see what I was creating. There was an element of surprise each time I received a new scan. As filmmaker

Greta Snider described it, “the motivation behind the film was not to use techniques to achieve a look, but rather to achieve a presence, and then see what it looks like”.⁵⁰

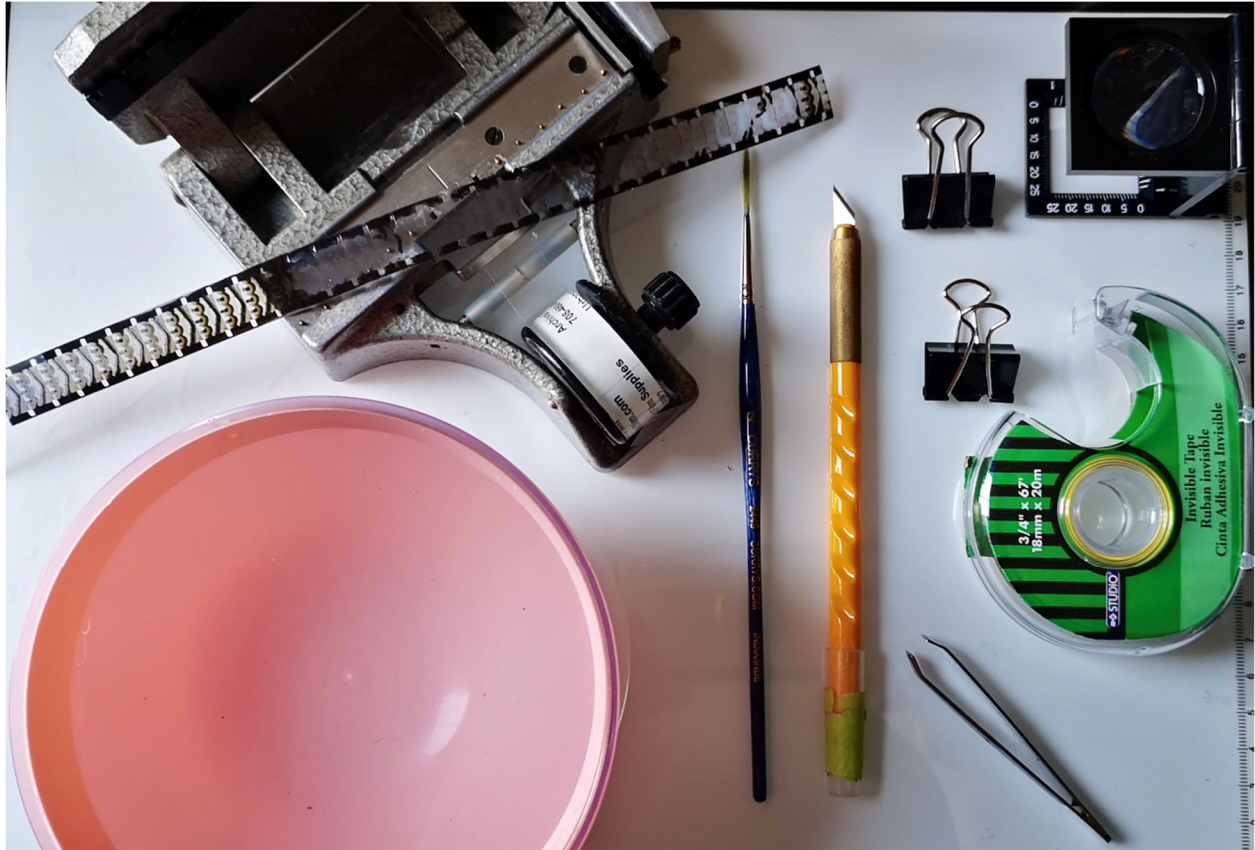


Image 18. Tools I used for the emulsion lifting treatment

As you can see from the photograph (Image 18), the tools to make this process are extremely DIY, accessible, inexpensive, and domestic. The most important tool for this technique were my hands, and being able to recognize by touch if the film emulsion was ready to be lifted, or if it needed more time soaking in the water.

⁵⁰ Knowles, K. (2020). *Experimental Film and Photochemical Practices*. Palgrave MacMillan.
In-text: (Knowles, 2020, p.79)



Image 19. Details of film emulsion after having been removed from its original base, ready to be remoulded

Unlike Cécile Fontaine, I utilized a wet technique that did not require the film to be soaked in a detergent bath of any kind. My technique relied solely on water, using my hands to manually lift the emulsion from its base, and then to reposition it on another film base. Overall, the process of peeling film emulsion from one base to hand-reposition it on another, is similar to painting on glass. However, instead of painting with oil colours, I was painting with film emulsion. Louise Bourque put it this way in her interview with Micah J. Malone:

I guess it's about trying to put your finger on something and it's very slippery. But I do think you put your finger on the idea that it is slippery. This idea of trying to get to something and it's something that you're not always clear about. And it's all so complex. You might have many feelings attached to a memory. And I think that it's also not just in the realm of the memory but also in the realm of the present and how we feel about past experiences.⁵¹

⁵¹ Malone, M. J., (2006). A conversation with Louise Bourque. *Big Red and Shiny*. In-text: (Malone, 2006, para. 3)

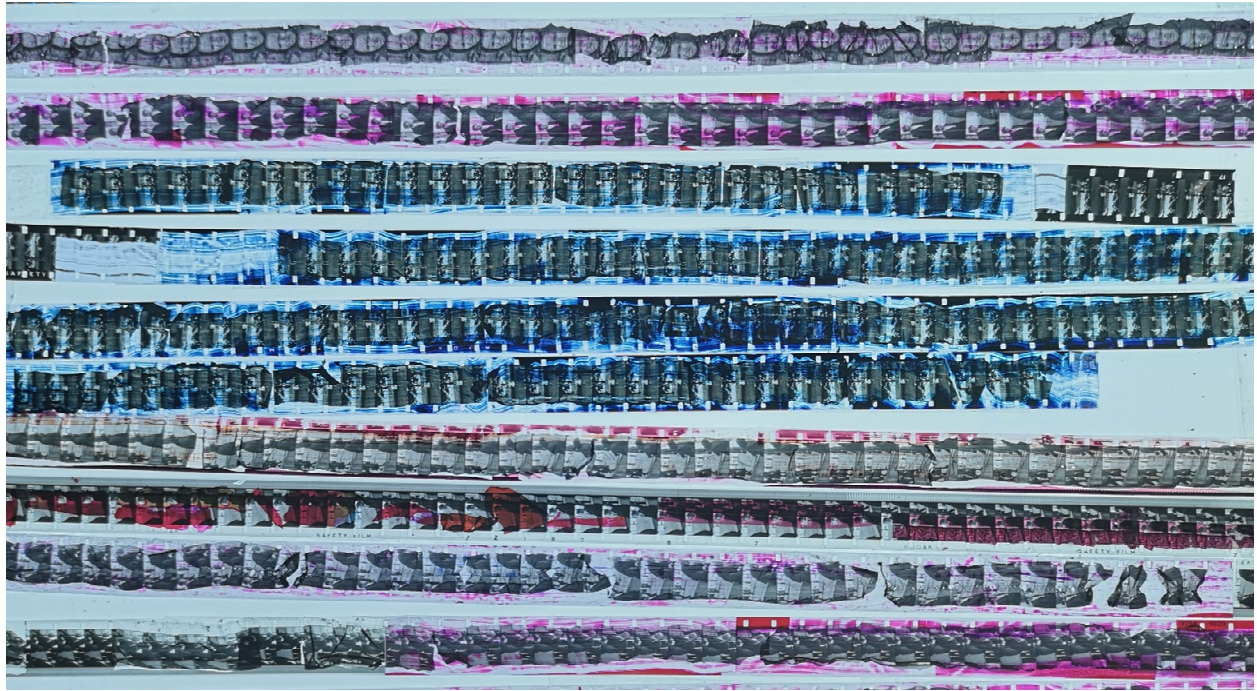


Image 20. Detail of several 16mm film strips. drying after having undergone the emulsion lifting treatment

“Putting the finger on something and it’s very slippery” exactly describes the process of emulsion lifting. In the process, the gelatine/emulsion becomes very soft and malleable, and slippery. I hold the film between my fingers and start shifting the emulsion around. I squeeze, I move, I re-position the gelatine, but because at that stage the gelatine is very fragile, I have to be delicate and assess from frame to frame what amount of pressure and how much movement to apply. It is a process of trial and error, but as I spent more time with the material, my hands knew what to do, decisions were now taken by my tactility and impulse. Barbar Hammer described it as, “My first experience with life was through touching ...what I see with my eyes I feel with my body”.⁵² At the end of the process, I had created and collaged a total of 700 feet of 16mm film and spent two months

⁵² Levine, M. 2016 Interview with Barbara Hammer, *Special on Barbara Hammer*. Found Footage Magazine: Issue 2. Paperback
In-text: (Levine, 2016, p.18)

working on it. The film was finger-printed frame-by-frame. During this time, I gained a great deal of knowledge of different film stocks from past decades.

The footage I bought from European sources was much more fragile than the American or Canadian material. The European footage, mostly from the 1950s and 60s, would also be in black and white, while the American and Canadian material was usually shot on Kodachrome stock. This created an eerie resonance with the story I was telling, of immigration from Europe, to the land of riches and opportunities of North America.

As an outsider, I am trying to find a way to get inside the process, inside the film material, and inside this country, literally and physically, by cutting up the film and bringing the ghosts of one country into the landscape of another. The process itself becomes one of reconciliation. I chose to approach this film using an aesthetic that breaks away from the Euro-centric model, and that breaks away from dominant storytelling models. I tried to make space for the language of the forgotten dialects used in the film, lost rituals, and immigrant temporalities. I wanted to create a place for the irrational, to value associative thinking as a way to break down the system and break down the image. With *Currents*, the process of making the film is itself the message and the story.

One of the crucial parts of this process was the fact that I was working with ingredients that were domestic, accessible, and not intimidating. They belonged to the realm of things that I knew. The bleach and the hydrogen peroxide were in my washroom drawer, while the device I used to wash the film was the one I used to dry lettuce for salads. There is a predisposition in institutions to condone a ‘professional’ working process that follows the procedures of the film industry.

However, artists often go beyond these industry parameters and are often admonished for not following industry protocols. Amateur films are perceived to have less value than commercial cinema. This idea has to be challenged.

In a film industry that favours men over women (13% of directors in the US are women [from the Celluloid Ceiling reports compiled by the Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film at San Diego State University])⁵³, it is no surprise that many women artists work within the experimental film community where they are more readily accepted. To cite my own experience. I grew up feeling that chemistry was a male domain. I had been socialized this way. In the simple act of discovering how hair bleach could transform celluloid, I realized that this notion was simply a preconceived mental construct. I had to eradicate the imbibed societal, hence patriarchal belief, that chemistry was a male domain. However, there is an interesting paradox here. During my great grandmother's era – approximately a hundred years ago –women were the repository of chemical, as well as magical, traditions. Men would often turn to them in need: for healing remedies and recipes using herbs, or magic spells to get rid of the “evil eye”. In my family, we still use healing remedies based on the internal properties of plants, which have been passed on from generation to generation. But, as science and technology began to predominate, areas where men thrived, women's relationship to chemistry was sidelined, relegated to the realm of the mystical, ancient and domestic.

⁵³ M. Lauzen, M., 2020. Living Archive: The Celluloid Ceiling. *Documenting two Decades of Women's Employment in Film*. https://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/2020_Living_Archive_Report.pdf

SUSTAINABILITY AND RECYCLING THE ARCHIVE



Image 21. Fragment of 16mm film leader used in *Currents*, 2021

During the making of *Currents*, I was faced with two ethical dilemmas: one practical and the other theoretical. The first issue was a very practical one, the environmental footprint of the toxic discharge of my experiments. When using bleach on found footage the results were quick and outstanding; the bleach quickly peeled away the emulsion layers leaving me with a very malleable substance. This fast workflow allowed me to create up to four minutes of film in just one day. The results of these first chemical experiments can be seen in my short film “*Green and Red, but Terracotta Red*” (2020).



Image 22. Still from *Green and Red, but Terracotta Red*, 2020

However, after the pandemic struck, working outside in my backyard, I began to concern myself with the bleach that fell onto the grass from my work table. It was a visceral feeling of knowing I was doing something negative to a garden that had been so dear to me, a garden that had hosted me and provided me with so much solace during the lockdown months. So, I started looking for ways to minimize the chemicals involved in this process of remediation and arrived at a process where I could emulsion lift without using chemicals, becoming in effect completely eco-friendly. This gave me the confidence to continue altering the film emulsion, knowing there would be no negative side effects. Extending this attempt to make environmentally friendly films, I became fascinated with the idea of recycling old movies, instead of purchasing new film stock, which would have to be developed thereby creating more chemical and plastic waste.

Instead of shooting my own material, I immersed myself in the overwhelming bounty of orphan film reels on eBay and consequently had to confront a second ethical dilemma. Who was I to appropriate and alter the traces of the memories of others? What gave me the authority to excavate somebody else's archive for the purpose of telling my own story? What was my role in this process? Film historians and archivists like Rick Prelinger, and filmmakers such as Ken Jacobs, have argued for the purity of the original material. In Jacobs's view: "a lot of film is perfect left alone, perfectly revealing in its un- or semi-conscious form. I wish more stuff was available in its raw state..."⁵⁴ Prelinger makes a similar point: "Many of us who collect or take care of moving images and sounds feel that original material tells pretty good stories on their own, most original materials don't reach the public without being run through the storytelling Cuisinart... Bits and

⁵⁴ Druick, Z., & Cammaer, G. (2014). *Cinephemera: Archives, ephemeral cinema, and new screen histories in Canada*.
In-text: (Druick & Cammaer, 1994, p.295)

pieces from our collection are being woven into works that don't really speak to the value of their components.”⁵⁵

It is not surprising that both these quotations have come from men. Here the term Cuisinart is deployed with derogation; the food processor is found in the kitchen, the traditional domain of the housewife. Furthermore, what does Prelinger mean when he says that the original material tells “pretty good stories on its own?” What does Jacob imply when he refers to film in its “un- or semi-conscious form”? As women filmmakers confront the archives, whose stories found there are “pretty good stories”? Good for whom? And what is to be found in the “un- or semi-conscious form”? Perhaps they don’t take into account the idea that historical visual documents are tainted with the ideology of the time, nor the context in which these documents were produced when men essentially controlled the cinematic apparatus. I, and other women immigrant filmmakers, suggest another position through the remediation process.

Along with challenging the dominant narrative, re-cycling old found footage is a way of preserving these stories from their imminent death, giving them a new cycle. I am not talking about film’s physical death, which is slowed down by archivists and film restoration techniques, I am talking about the stories contained in these rusty film cans that I am re-working; maybe these images can experience more than one cycle of life, like a cat with nine lives. Re-cycling and up-cycling gives them a new context. Instead of trapping them in an archive, untouched, hoping to preserve the

⁵⁵ Druick, Z., & Cammaer, G. (2014). *Cinephemera: Archives, ephemeral cinema, and new screen histories in Canada*.
In-text: (Druick & Cammaer, 1994, p.296)

material which they are built from, I feel the necessity of extracting them from the archive, taking them out of their glass case, touching them, cutting them, and reassembling them.

Parallel to this theoretical framework, there are practical issues of accessibility for minorities like women filmmakers. Generally women and immigrant groups have limited access to resources and economic power. The mainstream industry system marginalizes women filmmakers. They often find themselves working in isolation employing a DIY approach that does not require industry connections while being cheap and accessible. Much of Joyce Wieland's oeuvre, including such classics as *Rat Life and Diet in North America* (1968), *Dripping Water* (1969) and *Cat Food* (1967), were all made in this manner. In an interview with Michael Hoolboom about her experimental film *Visions* (1992), Torossian, studying English and Philosophy at York University at the time, talks about her experience of taking a film course there: "...I wanted to make a 16mm film but they wouldn't give me a camera. So, I found all this 16mm magnetic film in the garbage and pasted the super-8 onto it." She continues, "The teachers weren't supportive at all - they said it's impossible, it won't go through a projector, it's not a film."⁵⁶ DIY production processes are not uncommon for women immigrant experimental filmmakers. "Cherry-picking" the out-takes from cutting room bins, making films on kitchen tables using domestic household materials like nail glue, nail polisher, nail paint, bleach, washing soda, caffanol, sewing thread and so on, becomes the preferred practice. This home-made approach has become central to how women filmmakers working in the tradition of found footage are producing culture to create, as feminist theorist and writer Doreen Piano puts it, "alternative feminine identities and media that resist

⁵⁶ Hoolboom, M. (1997) Gariné Torossian: Girl From Moush (an interview) <http://mikehoolboom.com/?p=132>
In-text: (Hoolboom, 1997)

mainstream representations”⁵⁷. Things that initially escaped our collective social conscience will emerge in different ways when re-appropriating, re-mediating, and collaging found footage.

Nevertheless, the issue is a complex one and depends partially on the intent and motivation that lies behind the film. Sometimes I do feel like an archivist when I find these beautiful, old films – real, physical – often in pristine condition. When I come across a rare film on Agfa film stock, the archivist inside me respects this footage and wants to see it preserved. But, this archiving impulse is secondary to a stronger one, the need of the filmmaker, the immigrant, and the woman who needs to process the conditions of feeling marginalized as an immigrant, of living within a patriarchal society, of transition and displacement. My tool for dealing with these traumas is to re-contextualize and re-appropriate, thereby re-shifting, reshaping and redeeming this found footage in the hope of revisiting and rectifying past collective trauma as Benjamin described it. I am more aligned with those who see, in the material of found footage, things that escaped our collective social conscience in the first place.

French artist Christian Boltanski addressed the problems posed by preserving items within a museum setting:

Preventing forgetfulness, stopping the disappearance of things and beings seemed to me a noble goal, but I quickly realized that this ambition was bound to fail, for as soon as we try to preserve something, we fix it. We can preserve things only by stopping life’s course. If I put my glasses in a vitrine, they will never break, but will they still be considered glasses? ... Once glasses are part of a museum’s collection, they forget their function, they are then only an image of glasses. In a vitrine, my glasses will have lost their reason for being, but they will also have lost their identity.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Piano, D. (2002) Congregating Women: Reading 3rd Wave Feminist Practices in Subcultural Production. <http://www.rhizomes.net/issue4/piano.html>
In-text: (Piano, 2002, para. 7)

⁵⁸ McShine, K., & Museum of Modern Art (New York, N.Y.),. (1999). The museum as muse: Artists reflect
In-text: (McShine & MOMA, 1999, p.91)



Image 23. Still from *Currents*, 2021

In a new foundfootage film, we can reflect upon their original meaning while also creating new meanings and contexts for them that fully respect and revere the original. Prelinger's approach works for a collector who values the original object, but ultimately it is put away and onto a shelf. While I respect this position the social value for me lies in reclaiming this footage and giving it a new life.

CONCLUSION: I, As a Collage of Fragments

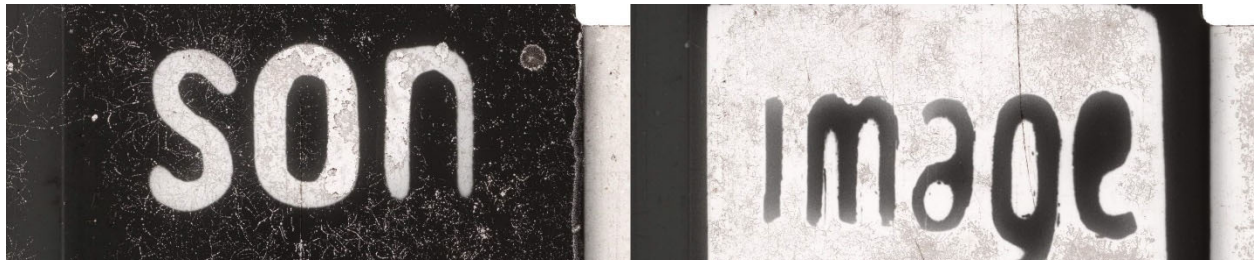


Image 24. Details of 16mm natural film decay from *Currents*, 2021

I set out to explore several ideas relating to my experience of moving from Italy to Canada, of becoming an immigrant. How does one digest this upheaval? What does it look like experientially when put on film? How can we make sense of what has happened? Can I find a form that externalizes my internal state of mind so that non-immigrants can gain an insight into what immigrants undergo? How have others, especially women like myself, dealt with their migrations in their artistic practice? Do our films resemble each other? I was also interested in exploring the writings of thinkers, philosophers, critics, and academics to further comprehend this phenomenon.

Immigration involves a physical and psychic severing and displacement from the homeland, family, memories, friends, childhood, and often language. This is not a unique voyage. It is as old as history itself, captured beautifully by texts as ancient and famous as Homer's *The Odyssey* and Virgil's *The Aeneid*. The process of integration, familiarization, naturalization, and assimilation is arduous and complex. Partially due to the pandemic, but also because of my dissatisfaction with material I had originally shot in Toronto, I turned to the archives of others. I became fascinated by the material properties of celluloid film and began to experiment with how I could utilize it to tell my story – to alter it with the possibility that it might begin to express the ambiguities I felt.

Recovering footage that had been discarded, that was anonymous, but which I could re-purpose, mirrored parts of my experience. I identified with the idea of abandonment, of loss, of the impersonal – and of re-invention. I could in effect play with my identity which was undergoing many changes anyway in reality.

The making of *Currents* has been crucial for understanding my journey of immigration. Through the metaphorical act of lifting, shaping, and arranging fragments from one film base to another, I was able to visualize, absorb and comprehend my current immigration status. I became the film, and the film became me. I was visually simplifying abstract concepts around transnational identities. The empty film base (ready to host the emulsion-lifted footage) represented the possibilities of a new life abroad. The fragments that I assembled and placed on it represented what I decided to include in this new life, either past, present, and future. I have used pristine footage as well because the process of immigration is full of disjunctions where some images are clear and recognizable, while others are unstable and in danger of disintegrating. The final film is an allegory of who I am now, and of the processes that led me here. Prior to *Currents* I understood my experience as an immigrant as a play on dichotomies that excluded one another. How could I be happy in Canada and at the same time sad because I was not in Italy? I now understand my position as living in a privileged space where I can simultaneously experience a multiplicity of feelings, spaces, and temporalities. I have gained a new awareness, of knowing that one fragment, one feeling, one identity doesn't exclude the other. They can exist alongside each other. I am both Italian and Canadian at the same time. I am at home and not at home. I want to go home, and I want to stay here. I have ceased to look for one clear narrative, but have rather embraced the

multiplicity of narratives, co-existing like fragments of old, lost films, spliced together. As an immigrant woman, I am a collage of fragments, of memories.

I realized through making my film that I was not alone. There were other female immigrant filmmakers who had preceded me and employed a form that we choose to describe as experimental to capture their experiences. The filmmakers who inspired me, Cécile Fontaine, Louise Bourque, Gariné Torossian, and Frédérique Devaux all deployed a combination of collage, intervention, and re-photographing of found footage excavated from disparate archives. Their films were non-narrative and radically altered the image by cutting, combining, and/or distressing it in some way. I identified with the way Torossian and Devaux used language to address the double identity of an immigrant, fragmenting it, muting, or using two languages competing with each other. Neither the viewer nor, indeed perhaps the filmmaker, can grasp all of what is being said or heard. I realized we share many commonalities, creating the “diasporic optic” as Moorti so aptly described. We look at the world through a different lens.

The immigrant filmmaker is placed between two competing realities, where identity becomes a site of negotiation and is in constant flux. The Japanese filmmaker, Daichi Saïto has referred to the technique of hand processing as being:

“...the aspect of negotiation between what’s controllable and what’s not, between predictability and unpredictability” where “some margin of error is inevitable, often yielding unexpected results. You strive to control the medium and the medium betrays your intention. When the medium invites you for a walk, you walk with it – vulnerable though you might be. A medium is never simply a tool for an artist to express themselves.”⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Knowles, K. (2020). *Experimental Film and Photochemical Practices*. Palgrave MacMillan. In-text (Knowles, 2020, p.102)

Amidst this uncertainty, our films construct, destroy, and call into question identities found in both the host country and the homeland. Our unique image and soundtracks become components of memory and dislocation. One of the central concepts that the immigrant filmmaker depicts is the constant process of negotiation, traversing, and living between the dual realities of two countries. The films re-centre the immigrant experience, reclaiming and privileging it from the periphery, “using their diasporic consciousness as a creative tool to modify power relations.”⁶⁰ The “chosen footage” becomes the perfect tool for the woman immigrant filmmaker as she places herself in the position of becoming Benjamin’s ultimate “collector”.

As I read deeper into the literature, I realized that there was a rich vein of thinking that resonated with me – from Benjamin’s idea of the collector, Valdinoci’s exploration of the para-archive, Celati’s notion of the archeological bazaar, Bennett’s theory of vibrant matter, Brecht’s concept of the fragment, and Landsberg’s thinking around memory, to name a few.

My research and the experience of making my film made me conclude that the woman immigrant filmmaker is a fundamental figure in the work of the archive. She shares in and identifies with, the discarded fragments of found footage. But the role of the immigrant woman filmmaker is not limited to simply the collection of fragments; she is also the interpreter of lost objects, “a practice inundated with dreams and magic”, allowing these objects to “speak back to us”. In this network of archival borrowings, the female immigrant filmmaker becomes collector, activator, and

⁶⁰ Bayramian, S.P.(2019) Exploring Armenian Diasporic Cinema from the “Third Space”. University of Amsterdam. In-text: (Bayramian, 2019, p.19)

medium. By turning the archive into “a site of séance”⁶¹ in Cocker’s words, she is perfectly positioned to channel the voices of those objects. By doing so, she re/interprets them for us, allowing us to revisit history and build the foundation for future politics, and a new historical consciousness.

⁶¹ Cocker, E. (2009) Ethical Possession: Borrowing From the Archives. In Smith, I. R. (Ed.) (pp. 92-110). *Cultural Borrowings: Appropriation, Reworking, Transformation*. Scope: An Online Journal of Film and Television Studies.
In-text: (Cocker, 2009, p.111)

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