

On the Concepts of *Film Preservation, Conservation, and Restoration: the Case of the Cineteca Nacional de México through the Approach of Paolo Cherchi Usai*

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ABSTRACT

In this *ESSAY*, the concepts of *film conservation, preservation, restoration, exhibition, and screening* are studied from the perspective of the issues that arise in the everyday practices of a film archive. The basis is the observation and documentation of some of the activities carried out at the Cineteca Nacional de México, from an analysis guided by the theoretical approaches of conservator Paolo Cherchi Usai.

KEYWORDS

film preservation; film conservation; film restoration; cinema exhibition; Cineteca Nacional de México

INTRODUCTION

In the use of concepts found in film archives and libraries' daily work, there are multiple implications that are not exhausted or limited by the definition of a concept but rather become an issue in practice. From this, categories of analysis can emerge that broaden and complicate concepts. The study of this process uses the case of the Cineteca Nacional de México¹ and the use of the concepts *film conservation, preservation, restoration, exhibition, and screening* applied to its exhibition work in film and documenta-

¹ Henceforth Cineteca Nacional.



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ry conservation rooms, as well as digital film restoration, research, and screening, which have been studied through observation, documentation, and analysis.

Over time, specialists have worked on the concepts of *film museum*, *conservation*, *preservation*, and *restoration*. There are organizations such as the Audiovisual Archiving Philosophy Interest Network (Avapin), dedicated to the research and exchange of knowledge on the philosophy of audiovisual archives. There are also institutions like the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) that, among the members of its technical commission of concept research and analysis, includes researchers, archivists, historians, conservators, and restorers such as Paolo Cherchi Usai², who is also a member of the National Film Preservation Foundation (NFPF), created by the U.S. Congress to save the film heritage of the country.

Through discussions and agreements between their members, these organizations have defined what they understand in their work as *conservation*, *preservation*, and *restoration*. However, the different languages used by the specialists, the nationalities of those engaged in these tasks, and the specificity of the processes carried out at each site—film museum, library, or archive—have made evident the difficulties in reaching an agreement regarding the meaning of this plurality of concepts that, in practice, contain multiple conceptual categories, both theoretical and practical.

Returning to the figure of Cherchi Usai, his ideas form the basis for this essay, as he was a researcher and conservator dedicated to the academic and practical study of film preservation, and because his work has had a visible impact in both Europe and the Anglo-Saxon world. In the case of the Cineteca Nacional, his influence lies in the application of his concepts and in the training of the professionals who work there, as explained by the restorer Paolo Tosini³—one of the principal founders of the work processes carried out in the Laboratorio de Restauración Digital “Elena

² Paolo Cherchi Usai was director of the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia (NFSA) and of the Motion Picture Department of the George Eastman House, associate professor of cinematography in the University of Rochester, and director of the L. Jeffrey Selznick School of Film Preservation, created in 1996. He was also a deputy member of the National Film Preservation Board and of the Executive Committee of the FIAF. He was a cofounder of the Pordenone Silent Film Festival and of the International Society for the Study of Early Cinema (Domitor) (Cherchi, 2005, p. 137).

³ Born in Rome, Paolo Tosini studied film restoration in the Università degli studi di Udine and in the Bundesarchiv in Berlin; he worked more than 11 years in the Perdenone Silent Film Festival. He is an advisor to some national and international film archives, such as the Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas, in Mexico, and the Archivo General de la Nación, in the Dominican Republic. He has overseen the Laboratorio de Restauración Digital of the Cineteca Nacional (Simposio Internacional de Preservación Audiovisual y Digital [SIPAD], 2014).

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Sánchez Valenzuela” of the Cineteca and colleague of Cherchi Usai in the Pordenone Silent Film Festival. Tosini, together with Edgar Torres and the heritage director, Dora Moreno, among others, started an internal pedagogical process in the laboratory and coordinated, through seminars and workshops, the methodological, practical, and theoretical approach to film restoration, raising the concepts mentioned above. According to Tosini, “[the] Laboratory is an unprecedented space in this sense, because it not only aims to restore film material but also to investigate film stock and create restorers, professional figures” (Notimex TV, 2013).

FILM CONSERVATION

The creation of the FIAF in 1938⁴ began with questioning the concept of *film conservation* at the institutional level toward the establishment of international practices and exchanges for film preservation. The foundation of this institution is closely linked to the concern felt by film club managers, cinephiles, film scholars, and archivists, such as Henri Langlois, at the beginning of sound cinema at the start of the 1930s, which would mean the neglect of silent film materials, most of which was in nitrate stock⁵.

Most of the films produced during the silent film period suffered a sudden devaluation that, in practice, left them out of the market. As they were no longer of any economic interest,

⁴ The institutionalization of film preservation occurs in the constitution of film archives as spaces specifically dedicated to preservation efforts related to cinema; the organization that has shaped these archives since 1938 is the FIAF, dedicated to the preservation and access to film heritage at the international scale, as stated by the preserver and founder of the Cinémathèque Française, Henri Langlois: “Only when general exchanges between film archives in different countries are established will we know the true history of cinema.” (Dupin, 2013, p. 43). Therefore, soon after its creation, the FIAF started the exchange of its film heritage with four archives: the Cinémathèque Française, the Reichsfilmarchiv of Germany, the British Film Institute, and the Museum of Modern Art Film Library. In 1935, this latter archive, under the direction of John Abbot and the curator Iris Barry, recognized cinema as part of the activities of the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) and that among its actions were the “appropriate and necessary [practices] to have an international projection” (Dupin, 2013, p. 43).

⁵ Celluloid also refers to nitrate (cellulose nitrate). The development of transparent celluloid as flexible stock for photographic emulsion in 1889, intended for roll film cameras such as Kodak, by the Eastman Company, and Hawk-Eye, by the Blair Camera Company, was the last key element needed for moving images in modern photographic film. Although no longer used in films, and rarely in other fields, celluloid continues to be a potent symbol synonymous with the world of cinema. Used at first as a synthetic substitute for ivory, turtle shell, the horn material and the rubber in billiard balls, combs, buttons, and electric insulators, it was the first plastic and it opened a new field of organic chemistry that would quickly develop throughout the 20th century. Its discovery came about from experiments in the saturation of the cellulose fibers of wood chips, plants, paper, or other natural materials with sulfuric and nitric acid in combination with a solvent (Abel, 2005, p. 152).

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they were left to disappear. This nitrate crisis made evident the fragility of the structures on which films were preserved [Álvarez, Del Amo, Ortiz, & Piqueiras, 1991, p. 15].

If the regularization of film conservation institutionally began in the context of the 1930s with the replacement of nitrate with acetate⁶, from the reflections on the fragility of film materials and their content, it can also be seen that as 1995, the year of the centenary of the invention of cinema, approached, researchers, conservators, and filmmakers took up the topic for analysis once more. In this context, in the early 1980s, conservators gave the name of vinegar syndrome to the deterioration in acetate film caused by unregulated preservation conditions, such as humidity and temperature. It is not that this deterioration had not been present before, rather that it was so named after the overwhelming deterioration in color and form observed in the films made in the 1970s. In this regard, in the preface to the book *The Death of Cinema* (2005) by Paolo Cherchi Usai, filmmaker and conservator Martin Scorsese writes:

However, how could I imagine that the colors of *Taxi Driver*, made only five years earlier, were already fading and needed urgent restoration? How were we to know that contemporary cinema was in as much danger as the films made in the first half of the 20th century? At the time, the term *vinegar syndrome* (now commonly used to designate the deterioration of acetate film) had not even been invented by film archivists. All we knew was that the copies would start to shrink, curl, and become non-projectable when their degradable acidic smell reached almost unbearable levels [Scorsese in Cherchi, 2005, p. 9].

In this way, Scorsese showed his concern for the materiality of film. At this point, it is worth addressing the agreed terminology toward a definition of the concept of what is understood as *film conservation*. Michele Canosa writes: "Conservation (in the sense of procedure) is part of preservation: it provides for all precautionary measures and systems to ensure the survival of a film document and to prevent further deterioration" (Canosa, 2001, p. 1073).

There are physical and chemical research processes on film documents; the birth of the first film collections gave rise to the need to create spaces with the appropriate physical conditions

⁶ Known as acetate, cellulose triacetate is obtained through systems similar to celluloid; it was non-flammable and had better stability characteristics (Álvarez, Del Amo, Ortiz y Piqueiras 1991, p. 47).

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for their conservation. Therefore, film libraries implemented the safeguarding, classification, cataloging, and access conditions to different film materials. Conservator Alfonso del Amo briefly explains the history of these materials: “In the 1940s, almost simultaneously, two new plastics became available, both suitable to substitute celluloid (nitrate). Cellulose triacetate, obtained through systems similar to celluloid, and polyester⁷, a completely synthetic material. The industry opted for triacetate” (Álvarez et al., 1991, p. 16).

The solution for conservation at the start of the 1970s —referred to by Scorsese— was duplicating the material from nitrate to acetate or transferring more copies of a film to a more stable material, such as polyester, for exhibition. However, archivists, filmmakers, and film conservators, aided by new technologies, have made considerable advances in the set of conservation actions, working on the content-image duality characteristic of film material.

Therefore, in this *ESSAY*, following Paolo Cherchi Usai, *conservation* is understood as the research, practices, and procedures that focus on identifying and safeguarding the physiognomy, physical and chemical components of film material (as well as film-related elements such as posters, photography, and production material preserved in venues such as the Cineteca Nacional), its structure and original formats in which the filmic image is presented, in addition to knowledge of the factors involved in the modification of its form and contained image:

Conservation (Spanish: *conservación*; French: *conservation*) is part of the preservation process that complements all activities aimed at preventing or minimizing the physical deterioration of archival material, whether an object created by the film archive (e.g., an internegative) from a pre-existing entity acquired by the institution that already has mechanical damage or signs of physical and chemical instability. Conservation work entails a minimum of intervention or interference in the object that contains the images. For example, the decision to place a copy of cellulose nitrate film (or a polyester copy) in an air-conditioned space is a part of all the implications of the conservation process [Cherchi, 2001, p. 1038].⁸

⁷ A completely synthetic material, it was much more stable and resistant than other plastics; so resistant that its introduction required changing the maintenance conditions of most of the film machinery, because if it jammed or came off the reel it could damage that machinery (Álvarez et al., 1991, p. 47).

⁸ All quotations throughout the text of this reference are editorial translations of the author’s translation in Spanish from the original Italian text.

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The fragility of nitrate and the presence of various types of deterioration on acetate materials, such as vinegar syndrome, have made film libraries resort more often to duplicating or migrating films from one format to a more stable one—for example, from 35 mm to 16 mm, or from nitrate to polyester—which are then called conservation, safety, or exhibition copies. The use of digitalization to conserve film in its original material and to have a copy that, in the digital format, provides new possibilities for exhibition and restoration, was done sporadically in the 1990s and currently is done regularly. Digital conservation is also useful when the film’s biological materiality militates against all conservation efforts, whose basic principle is the least amount possible of alteration of original material.

Before theorizing the concept of *film restoration*, conservation activities in film libraries reduced these tasks to stabilization of stock (which entails repairing and, to some extent, a first degree of film restoration) and film reconstruction. That is to say, when assembling pieces of film considered lost or unknown to film scholars, or when a copy was found in a better state of conservation than the original, a montage was made with that material, using fragments of negatives, positives, discarded materials or copies for its screening. The purpose was to have all the material to constitute the version of the film closest to that conceived by the author. Cherchi Usai defines this process:

Reconstruction (Spanish: *reconstrucción*; French: *reconstruction*) is the montage operation by which a copy is produced, whose external appearance is as close as possible to a version considered as a theoretical reference point. The reconstruction is possible through the interposition, replacement, or reassembly of segments derived from common sources of these segments (such as the subtitles in a silent film), sometimes created *ex novo* by the film archive. Given the apparent similarity with writing the critical apparatus of a manuscript or a printed text, the practice linked to this method is sometimes presented as “philology,” by a reductionist approach of equating the moving image with literature [Cherchi, 2001, p. 1039].

These types of reconstructions are part of the restoration process, which involves a thorough investigation that begins with the conservation of the film documents and the taking of an ethical stance by the restorers: as stated by Alfonso del Amo, “The question is: what version must be reconstructed? The debate focuses mainly on two options: the version the author wanted or the one the



public saw for the first time. According to auteur theory, it is clear what criteria should be adopted” (Álvarez et al., 1999, p. 19).

In the course of her observations and analysis, the author of this essay has noted that the term *preservation* is used as a synonym for *conservation*. However, the complexity of activities added to the work of the film archives did not remain at a minimum degree of interventio. In other words, the conservation processes were carried out not only to maintain the physical integrity of a film: activities such as film reconstruction, which derive from conservation knowledge, involve interdisciplinary research processes before restoration, and require historians, restorers, and archivists. These interdisciplinary collaboration processes in safeguarding practice lead to the inclusion (but not the delimitation) of conservation and the methods that derive from its processes as part of the concept of *film preservation* and its applications.

FILM PRESERVATION

Among the definitions of the differences and similarities of the terms *preservation* and *conservation* are the following contributions that vary according to their original language. On the concept of *conservation*, according to Avapin:

It may be said that [...] it is the set of elements necessary to ensure the permanent (indefinite) accessibility of an audiovisual document in the maximum state of integrity. It may consist of a long list of procedures, principles, attitudes, facilities, and activities. For example, the conservation and restoration of the film stock, reconstruction of the definitive version, copying and processing of visual and sound content, maintenance of the stock in appropriate storage conditions, recreation or emulation of obsolete technical procedures, equipment, and presentation environments, and research and information gathering to support these activities [Edmondson, 2004, p. 22].⁹

In this definition proposed by Ray Edmondson as coordinator of Avapin, conservation is understood as the set of access, restoration, and preservation practices in the sense of processes for the maintenance and safeguarding of audiovisual materials. It is important to note that the text was originally in French and has

⁹ Editorial translations of the author’s translation in Spanish from the original English text.

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been translated to Spanish for use in the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). This definition illustrates the intra-linguistic differentiation between the concepts of conservation and preservation. However, for this essay, the definitions of preservation used are those that include conservation among its practices, as outlined in the FIAF definition of preservation in its handbook entitled *Technical commissions Preservation Best Practice*:

Preservation means duplicating, copying, or migrating analogical and digital films to a new format, generally in the cases in which the life expectancy of the original elements is limited or unpredictable. Any duplication of analog material will inevitably create a new element different from the original. However, the process must try to make a duplicate that adheres as closely as possible to the original. It is of utmost importance that the newly created elements retain the authenticity of the originals. Maintaining authenticity is not only a matter of image quality but also of frame ratio, aspect ratio, etc. [FIAF, 2009, p. 1].

In this approach, preservation is understood as a safeguarding and reproduction activity through technical and technological processes that include storage, controlled temperature (conservation), and training of personnel handling original film materials and copies. However, that final point, by mentioning that film authenticity does not only depend on image quality, proposes the diversity of practices and disciplines involved in the exercise of preservation, from which the methods of conservation are derived. The original text is in English; however, the FIAF recognizes English, French, and Spanish as its official languages. As for the NFPF, which, because of its origin, uses English as its base language, it defines its concept of *preservation* in *The Film Preservation Guide: The Basics for Archives, Libraries, and Museums*:

Preservation. For many years, in practice and casual discussions, the term preservation was synonymous with duplication. When the archivers asked if a film had been “preserved,” they were generally asking if it had been duplicated in new and more stable film stock. However, in the last decade, a broader definition of preservation has gained acceptance. It is increasingly understood as the complete continuum of activities needed to protect the film and share the content with the public. Film preservation now embraces the concepts of film handling,

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duplication, storage, and access [...] Film preservation is not a single operation, but a continuous process [FNPF 2004, p. 3].¹⁰

This definition of *preservation* is more inclusive than the previous one since it does not limit the use of the term to the film duplication processes and instead explains it as the complete continuum of technical and intellectual activities that include public access to the content, as well as the concept of *film handling*, which refers to the accessibility and dissemination of the archives, since the definition is aimed, as referenced by the FNPF in the title of its handbook, at archives, film libraries, and museums that work with film materials.

From this more inclusive definition, which extends the work done in a film archive such as the Cineteca Nacional, the use of the ideas of Paolo Cherchi Usai has been determined due to his contributions to film archive studies in countries such as Italy, France, and the United States, which is where most of the texts on this topic come from. Cherchi Usai has emphasized the need to establish an agreed terminology for the work and operations within film institutions and film preservation institutions, not to fix a dogmatic terminology that classifies the nomenclature of the activities in these venues but to make the activities they perform understandable to the public (this includes researchers, spectators, programmers, and film lovers).

As mentioned in the previous approaches on *conservation* and *preservation* concepts, it is possible to identify the indiscriminate use of those available in the various languages used for this terminology, mainly English, French, and Italian. Therefore, the title of the text *La Cineteca di Babele* (Cherchi, 2001, pp.965-1064) can be understood because, as in the myth, the plurality of languages makes complex the communication of the work between film archives and the information for their audiences.

Here the use of the concept of *preservation* has been determined to refer to the set of technical, intellectual, and creative activities that include conservation, restoration, and exhibition in a film archive with museum activities. Cherchi Usai defines it as follows:

Preservation (Spanish: *preservación*; French: *conservation-restauration*). In a film archive, the set of procedures, criteria, techniques, and practices necessary to maintain the

¹⁰ Editorial translation from the translation of the author in Spanish from the original English text.

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integrity, restore the content, and organize the intellectual experience of a moving image permanently. Although fairly broad, this definition recognizes the existence of three specific objectives: ensure that the material that contains the image does not suffer further damage; bring it to a condition as close as possible to the original; make it accessible in a consistent manner with the technological system originally used to produce and present it [Cherchi, 2001, p. 1037].

The first of the conservation objectives listed by Cherchi Usai is: “to ensure that the material that contains the image does not suffer further damage;” the second objective is “to bring it to a condition as close as possible to the original,” which refers to film restoration; and the third objective alludes to the exhibition or screening for the public that relates to museum or gallery exhibition, in the sense that both are means for a film “to be accessible in a manner consistent with the technological system originally used to produce and present it.” Preservation, therefore, inscribes within it a set of practical, intellectual, and curatorial procedures for “the organization of the intellectual experience that is part of the moving image” (Cherchi, 2001, p. 1037): multiple actions occur in the field of cinema, where conservation and restoration are not only final actions. Cherchi Usai also explains why film preservation does not conclude at the time of restoration:

It would be a grave mistake to assume that it ends at the time of restoration. The latter is a preservation procedure followed by a set of initiatives that are no less important, which can redeem it at first and, therefore, allow it to spread and endure [Cherchi, 2001, p. 1027].

For example, in the history of world cinema, there are cases of conserved and restored films that, beyond the intellectual experience of exhibition, have given rise to initiatives that redeem the significance of the author and their work such as research, museum exhibitions, and post-screening discussions. These types of initiatives allow for the work to spread and endure, together with the conservation and restoration work carried out by some film libraries.

FILM RESTORATION

It could be said that, as far as the theory and methodology of film restoration goes, there is constant construction since each case

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is particular in terms of the problems, needs, resources, and techniques that will be used in restoration. To establish the agreed terminology in this essay, the definition taken of restoration is that of Cherchi Usai:

Restoration (Spanish: *restauración*; French: *restauration*). It is the system of technical and intellectual procedures designed to complement the loss or deterioration of moving images to return them to a state that is most likely close to the hypothetical initial qualities. Eliminating alterations or manipulations identified in the material, finding missing elements, eliminating the effects of time, wear, color degradation, and (in the case of moving sound image) degradation of its audio message—all of this is an integral part of restoration work. Taken individually, however, none of these actions are enough to satisfy the requirements of real restoration. The term *restauration* concerning the moving image is incompatible with its use in other artistic disciplines [Cherchi, 2001, pp. 1038-1039].

The term *restauration*, as Cherchi Usai stated, applies to cinema differently than in other disciplines. In the field of cinematography, it is a theory and methodology that comprises various bases, concepts, and tools derived from the restoration of art, mainly from the ideas of Cesare Brandi and how they have been developed by the so-called Bolognese school of film restoration¹¹, whose work, which began on the eve of the centennial of cinema, has influenced the practical and theoretical training of Western film restorers who work in different film archives, such as the Cineteca Nacional, as acknowl-

¹¹ The Bolognese school of restoration is based on three institutions: the film archive as a place of conservation and dissemination; the laboratory as a place of practice, reflection, and development of a method; and the university as a place of discourse development—criticism and theory development. It is also based on three personalities: Gianluca Farinelli, who works in the film archive; Nicola Mazzanti, who is the director of *L'Immagine Ritrovata* (The Rediscovered Image); and Michele Canosa, who teaches at the university. The gradual development of a theory and methodology of film restoration in Bologna depends, particularly, on them. That theory and methodology materializes in three main stages, corresponding to the production of each publication. First of all, on November 30th, 1990, the international conference *Toward a Theory of Film Restoration* was held with sections dedicated to the “original” in the “reconstruction of the text,” the “relationship between philology and actualization,” and the “problem of fragments and gaps.” Some contributions were published in 1994 in the book edited by Farinelli and Mazzanti, *Il cinema ritrovato: teoria e metodologia del restauro cinematografico* (Rediscovered Cinema: Theory and Methodology of Cinematographic Restoration). The book includes the contributions of an art historian, a philologist, and a musicologist, and is enriched with a section titled “Film restoration methodologies and techniques: a practical and real restoration handbook” (Frappat, 2013).

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edged on its website¹². Therefore, researchers of film restoration theory such as Marie Frappat observe the reference to Brandi:

The references to Cesare Brandi and his work, *Teoria del restauro*, are, therefore, omnipresent, as with many tools, they are borrowed from the discipline of literary text philology [...]. A glossary is progressively built based on this double theoretical reference framework, and it comes to define the fundamental terms of cinematographic restoration: “film,” “duplication/reproduction,” “damage/errors/defects,” “gaps,” “versions,” “preservation/reconstruction/restoration” [Frappat, 2013, p. 2].¹³

A technical and intellectual decision-making process forms the basis for the restoration efforts, aiming to restore the film to give it back its original aesthetic qualities; always seeking, even if the result is not always from the original material, to preserve the film as a document of the time of its creation and as part of its initial aesthetics. Therefore, within the terminology of restoration, as Frappat writes, one speaks of *reproduction*, and the version that refers to an original, speaking of an authentic film, could be understood from the concept of *aura* proposed by Walter Benjamin:

The authenticity of a thing is the quintessence of all that is transmissible in it from its origin on, ranging from its physical duration to the historical testimony relating to it. Since the historical testimony is founded on the physical duration, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction, in which the physical duration plays no part. And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object, the weight it derives from tradition.

One might focus these aspects of the artwork on the concept of the aura and go on to say: what withers in the age of the technological reproducibility of the work of art is the latter’s aura [Benjamin, 2008, p. 14].

It is possible to understand the idea of “Benjaminian aura” in cinema when speaking of the image contained in the original ma-

¹² Laboratorio de Restauración Digital: “The specialized training of restorers trained in film material, an unprecedented task in the country and at the international forefront, considering that there are few spaces dedicated to this vocation in the world (Amsterdam, Bologna, Gorizia, Rochester, West Anglia)” (Cineteca Nacional de México, 2019).

¹³ All quotations throughout the text of this reference are editorial translations of the author’s translation in Spanish from the original French text.

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terial as the whole of the aesthetic form of the film and the unit as a work of art. For example, films produced in nitrate and acetate contain an aura that carries information about the time and context in which they were created, together with their maker's aesthetic intentions. Film restoration considers these elements in terms of the uniqueness and authenticity of the work (image and material). The researcher Giovanna Fossati writes on the matter: "Although the idea of uniqueness can be associated in several ways with silent films—with the uniqueness of a film, or the uniqueness of the colors of a particular copy. Seen this way, a nitrate copy becomes like a painting" (Fossati, 1997, p. 105). Hence the complexity of the term *authentic* in cinema, since the aim is to preserve the original material; however, restoration, due to its organic conditions being subject to degradation, focuses on returning—even if not from the material considered as original—the qualities of that uniqueness, taking into account for exhibition purposes the perspective of the time of the film and the vision of the author.

The concept of the authenticity of restoration is a value judgment and not an empirical reference model. Based on this ideology, restorers willingly give themselves the right to make changes several times in the same film, even after a short period, under the pretext of improving the result achieved in the procedures. If, in the field of fine arts, Cesare Brandi states that in painting, only the matter of art is restored, in practice in film archives, the material (copy) is only the starting point, which aims at the utopia of an original version, rescued from the dictatorship of time [Cherchi, 2001, p. 1034].

Restoration practices in film archives have shaped the idea of "authenticity" in nitrate and acetate copies (especially in the first 50 years of cinema). Since the film is placed in these materials as it was originally conceived, restoration aims, as a "utopia", to return the film to its original version in content and image, even if this restoration is not carried out with the original material.

For example, in the restoration of the film *El automóvil gris* (Rosas, 1919), carried out by the Cineteca Nacional between 2012 and 2015, reconstruction was chosen based on the version that the public saw for the first time, which coincides with the serial designed by its director, Enrique Rosas, divided into 12 episodes lasting a total of 6 hours and 30 minutes (Miquel, 2016, p. 268).

For example, there is another theory that affects film restoration: the so-called *auteur* theory. These postulates come from a school

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of film thinkers who do not see directing as a trade but as an art in which the filmmaker invests intellectual, creative, social, and cultural implications. As E. H. Gombrich states in the introduction to his *The Story of Art*, “there is no art, only artists” (2012, p. 5). Film scholars have taken up this theory, and one of its leading exponents, André Bazin, wrote: “François Truffaut likes to quote these words by Giraudoux: ‘There are no works, just authors’” (Bazin, 2003, p. 98). According to this principle, in the 1960s the group of French critics from the magazine *Cahiers du Cinéma* began an in-depth analysis of the style, the form, and the creative, narrative, and stylistic constants of some film directors, making them authors, owners of a body of work that was able to build aesthetic, ethical, content, and formal contributions to language and image in the history of cinema.

As part of their work, these critic-theorists dedicated themselves to interviewing filmmakers, engaging in dialog, and getting involved in their conception of cinema and how this was reflected in the staging of their films and the iconographic elements (costumes, makeup, lights, and shadow). “Auteur theory is one way to appreciate and defend the work of certain filmmakers by a vision and an understanding of their talent as directors” (Beacque, 2003, p. 20). This result comprises the auteur theory, based on research into directors’ statements and writings about their work and their moral and aesthetic stance.

Therefore, for the purposes of this text and the analysis of some restorations carried out in the Cineteca Nacional, the starting point is film restoration based on auteur theory, since, with the restoration of a film, the aim is to arrive at the version that the director conceived in the context of its making. For example, in the case of the digital restorations that the Cineteca Nacional has carried out for some Mexican cinema titles from the 1940s and 1950s, such as *La otra* (1946), *La diosa arrodillada* (1947), and *En la palma de tu mano* (1950) by director Robert Gavaldón, the advice of cinematographer Toni Kuhn, who was a student and assistant of Alex Phillips in the cinematography of the films mentioned above, has been sought. “Therefore, in 2016, Alejandro Pelayo, director of the Cineteca Nacional, invited Kuhn to supervise the stabilization, correction, and color restoration of six films photographed by Alex Phillips, which are considered as touchstones for the national cinematography” (Lozano, 2018, p. 15). The consultation was proposed because, as a student of Phillips, Kuhn knew his working methods, his perception of light, and the type of film he used. These elements helped shape an author’s restoration with an ethical and aesthetic

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stance. Thus, auteur theory is visible in the initiatives arising from the restoration work, such as complete retrospectives of a particular director, academic publications and activities for the purpose of exchange with the public, and activities carried out by film archives such as the ones in Bologna and Mexico.

In addition to auteur theory, an element that affects film restoration is the study of philology, as in the case of the reconstruction of the intertitles that the Laboratorio de Restauración of the Cineteca Nacional carried out in the digital restoration of *El automóvil gris* (1919), which involved a philology-based methodology in the treatment of the texts and the written language used in the film. Rossella Catanese explains: “film restoration is the work of exegesis of filmic texts. It is based on practice and deals with problems of a technical nature; at the same time, it involves philological research based on the most advanced methodologies and the restitution of the *oeuvre* to its original form” (2014, p. 2-07-18). Regarding this practice, the aforementioned laboratory states in a video-documentary about its work:

The digital reconstruction process of the intertitles consisted of the transcription of the texts, their harmonic composition with the original typography, and the application of a decorative frame that adopts graphic elements from the original advertising cards. This work required investigating the historical context of the production and analyzing the technical and aesthetic processes of the time. Only in this way was it possible to achieve a result that approaches the essence of the original intertitles [Moreno, 2016].

The restoration work affects the historicity of the film and aims to restore, although from other types of film stock, the aesthetics of filmic materiality (image and matter) so that this restitution is perceptible at the time of screening. These ethical and theoretical issues have led to the concept of *restoration* being used in the cinema recently. Marie Frappat posits the beginning of the use of the term *restoration* in the 1980s:

During the year of the 80th anniversary of the invention of the Lumière cinematograph, the commissioner of the French Film Archive, Vincent Pinel, wrote a seminal article titled “Film restoration.” In this article, he provided a summary of techniques, practices, methods, and guidelines on the topic. Now, in addition to technical issues, what are the ethical and artistic issues



at the center of the debate? In 1986, in Canberra, this was the theme of the FIAF congress [Frappat, 2013, p. 46].

This debate is, undoubtedly, still open. Each film represents a particular case for the film archive that performs the restoration and the tools at its disposal, as in digital laboratories. The work of the restorer in the case of silent films and, in general, of the first 50 years of cinema, can be said to have acquired authorial character since the decision-making takes place through research, knowledge of the history of cinema, the recognition of the filmmaker as an author and, it is worth repeating, through the decisions taken in the film laboratory, in addition to a link with the material, its organic form, and its performativity process that begins from its first screening.

Therefore, in the words of Cherchi Usai, “It would be a great error to assume that [film preservation] ends at the time of restoration” (2001, p. 1027). For the public, the screening of a film is a fundamental point of film preservation; all the work of conservation and restoration is made manifest in the projection and transmission to the film’s spectators and scholars. However, a film screening can go hand in hand with other initiatives such as museum exhibitions and research activities.

SCREENING-EXHIBITING

So far, it has been mentioned that, according to Cherchi Usai, restoration is not the final stage of the film preservation objectives. The exhibition—or *film projection* or *screening*—is when all the work involved in conservation and restoration is revealed to the spectators as an aesthetic and intellectual experience of reception. Furthermore, the functionality of a film is projection, that is, the screening of a restored film fulfills the presentation of its unity as a work of art.

The act of screening refers to the projections of filmic material of various formats that film archives organize to present to the public, which require a programming exercise—for example, for a retrospective of some filmmaker. In other words, it is the act of programming, within their projection spaces, the films that form part of the filmography of a director. Screening practices are included in the film preservation objective of organizing the intellectual experience to ensure access to the film. Gian Luca Farinelli and Davide Pozzi (Treccani, 2004) wrote: “The unity of the work of art does not exist without its projection. After saving films, there is another ur-

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gent priority: to save cinema in its entirety in the collective experience.” Screening contributes to bringing a film back to the present; it could be said that in each projection there is a reactivation of the film in which its unity as a work of art becomes manifest.

In the case of cinema that has undergone a conservation and restoration process, and whose objective in the projection is to bring to the present gaze, in the most authentic way possible, the aesthetic conditions of the time in which the film was made or as its author imagined it, commonly, there is a brief explanation of its restoration process at the beginning of a film, since that moment of screening is part of the purpose of preservation. However, in some cases, the conservation and restoration work performed is not immediately evident in the projection, despite being mentioned at the beginning of the film; screenings do not usually have a detailed explanation of this work.

Therefore, one more resource can be used to make a film “accessible in a manner consistent with the technological system originally used to produce and present it” (Cherchi, 2001, p. 1037), namely, exhibition in a museum. The reiteration of this quote is because, in terms of preservation, presenting a restored film refers not only to its dissemination and projection but also to the transmission and presentation—both to spectators in general and to film lovers in particular—of the technical, intellectual, and interdisciplinary processes involved in restoring the film. This transmission can occur through museum exhibitions, as they offer interdisciplinary possibilities for researchers, curators, and archivists. One of these would be, for example, presenting cinematographic topics related to preservation and, thus, through graphic and written resources and the exhibition of cinema equipment (cameras, projectors, filmic materials), explain the original technological system used to produce a film in more detail.

Therefore, a museum exhibition is a preservation practice inside an archive that works as a film museum. According to Cherchi Usai:

Film museums tend to have cameras, projectors, posters, costumes, sound systems, scripts, advertising material, stills of scenes, and generally any object related to the production or distribution of moving images, as well as holdings related to times before the invention of cinema [2001, p. 1019].

According to Cherchi Usai, the phrase film museum refers to film archives that preserve unique copies or those relevant to the history of this art, mainly silent cinema, due to the aforementioned particularities of its materiality. Also, it recognizes the historical

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and conservation value of the materials that form part of the cinematographic whole; for example, to have a greater understanding of the technical and material processes used in the history of cinema: photographs, posters, projection equipment, infrastructure elements of the staging, elements that function as documents and comprise the collections deposited in some film libraries or archives that have museum functions.

For this reason, not only is screening considered an act of preservation, but also of exhibition, which is an initiative to present a film as a document, thus providing spectators with a broader knowledge of its initial production conditions. This essay concludes that the programming (projection) and exhibition (museum) activities are acts of preservation; and that those undertaken in the screening rooms of a film archive communicate with those curated in a film exhibition space, as described by the curator Dominique Paini:

The future of cinema is, in fact, the museum, its facilities, and the particular character of the institution, which consists of joining two acts that can seem contradictory—preserve and exhibit. There are two reasons for this: a strategic and conceptual reason, and a reason for the sociological evolution of disseminating the arts in general [2013, p. 17].¹⁴

Such is the case of the exhibition on the filmmaker Stanley Kubrick, titled *Stanley Kubrick: The Exhibition*, shown in 2012 in the EYE Film-museum in Amsterdam. According to its website: “Parallel to the exhibition, EYE is presenting a retrospective of Kubrick’s films, from *Killer’s Kiss* (1955) to *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999). Moreover, through special programs such as debates, interviews, and conferences, it will approach both Kubrick’s work and his driving force” (EYE, 2012).

This exhibition is mentioned because, from December 2016 to July 2017, the Cineteca Nacional, in collaboration with the institutions that hold the archives of the filmmaker such as Deutsches Filmmuseum, in Frankfurt, and the Kubrick Archive of the University of Arts, in London, presented this exhibition in “La Galería” of the Cineteca Nacional, which also implemented initiatives described in the exhibition website:

The Cineteca Nacional, through its Academic Director, will present a series of talks and conferences on Stanley Kubrick’s

¹⁴ Editorial translation from the translation of the author in Spanish from the original in Italian.

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films, which will accompany the major exhibition on the filmmaker. In this series of talks and conferences, various cultural figures will address the work of the filmmaker from different academic perspectives (history, semiotics, philosophy, psychoanalysis), through film and art criticism, design, visual arts, narratology, and reception theory, among other analytical fields [Cineteca Nacional de México, 2018].

Due to these types of complexities in terms of conservation, exhibition, screening, and exchange with the spectators, as part of the preservation work that film archives assume, in the case of the museum of cinema in Amsterdam or the Cineteca Nacional, for example, it can be stated that the concept of *preservation* is expanding and becoming more complex as a result of these practices in which new channels and media are established to carry out and transmit film preservation.

CONCLUSION

The observation and analysis of some of the practices carried out in the Cineteca Nacional are examples of how the study of the concepts as regards *film preservation* can expand and become more problematic according to the activities and needs that emerge in an archive. This essay highlights that, in addition to the conservation and restoration activities performed in an archive, the application of means such as screening and exhibition can have an impact on the objective of preservation, the purpose of which is access to and transmission of knowledge of the original conditions of projection and screening of a film.

This essay does not claim to fit in a single definition the activities that take place in the Cineteca Nacional, but rather to take the ideas of Paolo Cherchi Usai because of his experience in various archives, his specialization in the restoration of silent cinema—particularly the digital restoration of *El automóvil gris* (1919)—, and his participation within academia, in order to guide the analysis of the activities of this film archive. It is worth mentioning the influence, visible through documentation, that the Summer School of Film Restoration in Bologna—also organized by the FIAF—has had on several of the restorers and conservators of the Cineteca Nacional¹⁵, also part of the FIAF since 1975.

¹⁵ The participants of the summer school of restoration since 1973 can be consulted on the website of the FIAF.

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This analysis of practices through the study of concepts and their definition illustrates that activities that could be considered as pertaining to dissemination, such as screening and exhibition in a museum, are part of the objective of preservation and the result of a conservation process. Besides, it concludes that it is crucial to show the general public the preservation (conservation, restoration) work that the film archive performs through an exhibition as an interdisciplinary medium that contributes to the presentation and transmission of the practices that give access to the archives preserved in the Cineteca Nacional.

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