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From Moving Images to Archival Films: Contemporary Uses of Non-fiction Cinema in the Promotion of Rebuilt Cities

Abstract

The article analyzes how some non-fiction films (institutional documentaries, newsreels, and amateur films) produced between 1945 and the late 1950s in France are featured as archive images in contemporary documentaries on the post-WWII era. These post-war non-fiction films depict the challenging reconstruction of cities that had been heavily damaged during the end of the war. Meanwhile, the uniqueness of this architectural heritage seems to have been forgotten despite the inventiveness of the modern architecture of the 1940s and 1950s. The recent decades have even witnessed a net outflow of inhabitants from the rebuilt city centers. By promoting this architectural heritage, cinema plays a key role in reconnecting the inhabitants with the history that shaped the local identity of these rebuilt cities, such as Dunkirk or Lorient. Indeed, documentaries produced on the singular living experiences like the *Unité d'Habitation* designed by Le Corbusier in Marseille or the *Cités Castors* ("Beavers" cities) built by and for their inhabitants allow these small communities to share a sense of belonging and to maintain a collective identity. Besides, the digitization and the re-use of amateur films allow us to rediscover everyday life during the post-war reconstruction.

Keywords

nonfiction cinema, collective identity, modern architecture, France, post-WWII reconstruction

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The increasing accessibility of archival images available online, enhanced by regular collection and digitization campaigns, seems to offer contemporary viewers and producers an ever more extensive and richer catalog of moving images. While the centenary of WWI has recently given rise to numerous film projects drawing on these image reserves (from big-budget television series to medium-length documentaries and virtual exhibitions),

the newsreel images of WWII and the post-war period had already been the subject of a long French-German television series, *Histoire parallèle/Die Woche vor 50 Jahren*, presented by Marc Ferro and produced by La Sept and then Arte from 1989 to 2001. More than twenty years after the end of this series, these newsreel images, as also the amateur films and documentaries produced between 1945 and the end of the 1950s, are regularly used in various contemporary productions. This article will look more specifically at the role of these filmed images in safeguarding the memory of a local or regional history that is sometimes forgotten or under-valued: how do archival images make it possible to revalorize an architectural heritage that has fallen into disuse? How does the use of archive images in contemporary film productions contribute to linking the present to this past marked by the upheavals of the post-war period? How does this new writing of local history take place? This is what the article proposes to study through the exploration of different examples, essentially from the North and West of France. These are regions whose cities were largely shaped by post-war modern architecture.

When the armistice was signed on May 8, 1945, France immediately embarked on a new battle, that of the post-war reconstruction. In addition to insalubrious housing conditions, which had been a serious concern since many decades, the destructions caused by the German offensive in 1940, the sabotage carried out against the occupying forces, and the bombing during the Liberation had left millions of citizens without proper homes. If the stakes of the post-war reconstruction were national¹⁾ and of course European²⁾, some regions like the coastal ones and some cities³⁾ have been particularly devastated: cities like Le Havre, Saint-Lô, Brest, or Royan are still closely associated today with this period of the immediate post-war era, so much the destruction and the impressive construction works of the period have durably shaped them. The buildings marked by the traces of their renovation and especially the modern constructions designed by the architects are now constituting an integral part of the identity of these cities. The town hall designed by Auguste Perret in Le Havre, the France-United States Memorial Hospital in Saint-Lô, the *Place de la Liberté* in Brest and the central market in Royan are public spaces that are inseparable from the identities of the rebuilt cities. Nevertheless, beyond these emblematic public spaces, a large part of the work carried out during the post-war reconstruction concerned the construction of modern housing, both comfortable and accessible to the highest number of inhabitants. The speed with which these new houses were built, the use of new construction materials that were easier to implement on a large scale, and the rapid change of standards of living in the following decades necessarily lead to the increasing degradation of these housings, and to their progressive abandonment. Nowadays, the inhabitants tend to neglect the rebuilt urban centers to rather settle in the outskirts, where it is easier to

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- 1) W. Brian Newsome, *French urban planning, 1940–1968: the construction and deconstruction of an authoritarian system* (New York, Washington, D. C. and Baltimore: Peter Lang, 2009).
 - 2) Esther Ruth Charlesworth, *Architects without frontiers: War, reconstruction and design responsibility* (Amsterdam and London: Architectural, 2006); Mark Clapson and Peter J. Larkham, eds., *The Blitz and its legacy: Wartime destruction to Post-War Reconstruction* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2013); Jeffrey M. Diefendorf, ed., *Rebuilding Europe's bombed cities* (London: Basingstoke, 1990).
 - 3) John R. Yarwood, *Urban planning after war, disaster and disintegration: case studies* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publ., 2010).

build more energy-efficient houses that are besides more in line with contemporary design's standards. Given this risk of the city centers' desertification, which could possibly lead to the disappearance of social and economic life, municipalities are faced with a dilemma: how to preserve the heritage of the post-WWII reconstruction, which so profoundly defines their local identity, while confronting the realities of a growing disaffection with postwar housing?

These contemporary issues recall some of the problems of the post-war era: how to preserve the vestiges of the past, sometimes heavily damaged, or even impossible to rebuild, while complying with the standards and requirements of contemporary architecture? After some towns and neighborhoods had completely disappeared under the rubble at the end of the war, how to convince the inhabitants that a better future awaited them? From the beginning of the post-war reconstruction, cinema appeared to be one of the most important media used by the institutions to respond to this ambition, in particular by promoting the work already accomplished. The Ministry of Reconstruction and Urban Planning (*Ministère de la Reconstruction et de l'Urbanisme*, MRU), for example, launched a film library in 1945 to document the ongoing progress.⁴⁾ The aim of the films produced and commissioned by the MRU was first and foremost to restore the confidence of the inhabitants and to affirm the belief in a brighter future. Faced with the enormous extent of destruction throughout France, and while the many roads still not completely re-opened made it difficult to bring food and raw materials to the population, film operators managed to make their way through the rubble to capture moving images of landscapes undergoing a profound metamorphosis. The MRU is not the only institution to surround itself with film professionals. The SNCF (*Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer*, the national railway company) also started a significant cinematographic activity by producing not only short, medium and feature-length films documenting many construction sites (e.g. *La reconstruction définitive du pont tournant de Caronte*, André Périé, 1956, or *Voie libre*, 1947, on the reconstruction of engineering structures in the northern region after WWII) or actions which were undertaken throughout the territory (*La Renaissance du rail*, 1947), but also by launching its own newsreels magazine, entitled *Le Magazine du rail* (Rail magazine) (see Figure 1. *La Reconstruction du viaduc de Caronte*, documentary produced by the SNCF cinematographic department © SNCF Médiathèque SARDO). Created on the eve of the Second World War as a fusion of five regional railway companies, the SNCF embodied the upheavals that were taking place in French society at the time of the post-war reconstruction: the railway infrastructure had been heavily damaged throughout the country during the war, and therefore, work had to be carried out simultaneously throughout France. Thus, professionals were required to travel to all regions to work on the construction sites, and these travels and professional collaborations shaped the SNCF as a national company.⁵⁾ The films directly contributed to this unity by showing both the specificities of a particular site and by detailing the solutions invented by the engineers with the aim of

4) Camille Canteux, "Les grands ensembles en images: Les ministères en charge du logement et leur production audiovisuelle (1944–1966)," *Société française d'histoire urbaine* 3, no. 20 (2007), 55–76.

5) Michel Ionescu, *Cheminots et cinéma : La représentation d'un groupe social dans le cinéma et l'audiovisuel français* (Paris, Budapest, and Torino: l'Harmattan, 2001), 32.



Figure 1. *La Reconstruction du viaduc de Caronte*, documentary produced by the SNCF cinematographic department © SNCF Médiathèque SARDO

training or inspiring other engineers working on similar construction sites. Today, while efforts are made to revive interest in the modernity of the post-war architecture and to make people realize the need to preserve this heritage that is sometimes falling into disuse, cinema once again plays a major role, which this article proposes to explore further.

Moving images telling the story of the post-war reconstruction: from the trauma of destruction to the “rebirth”

The moving images shot after WWII are essential for telling and shaping the history of post-war reconstruction,⁶⁾ alongside other visual sources. The cinematographic traces of the destruction and the immediate post-war period, consisting of newsreels, institutional documentaries, and amateur films, show the extent of the work that had to be carried out in the immediate post-war era and reveal the historical turning point that the vast reconstruction presented. The exploration of this cinematographic corpus allows to cross all the successive stages of the process of reconstructing the cities, from the observation of ‘martyred’ cities — a strong adjective used in the titles of several documentaries (*Rouen, mar-*

6) This contribution is based on French non-fiction films produced between 1944 and 1956 and analyzed within the frame of the ViCTOR-E. “Visual Culture of Trauma, Obliteration, and Reconstruction in Post-WWII Europe”, international research project ViCTOR-E, accessed January 11, 2022, <https://www.victor-e.eu/>.

tyre d'une cité, Louis Cuny, 1945; *Royan cité martyre*, 1945) and newsreels (*Le ministre de la Reconstruction à Nantes et Saint-Nazaire, villes martyres*, 1948) — to that of a possible rebirth, passing through a phase of mourning (for example the report *Ci-gît le Havre/Here lies Le Havre*, 1945). Produced in very precarious conditions and with limited material means⁷⁾, the first post-war French documentaries and newsreels use processes that are repeated from one film to the other. Despite the aerial, panoramic, and general shots, they hardly manage to encompass the entire extent of the ruins. The music and a voice-over detailing the inventory of the losses are also systemically present. The editing sets often a parallel between images from 'before' and images from 'after' the destruction, accentuating the contrast to recall the existence of the disappeared places, which are then similar to phantom limbs. This process especially appears in *Royan cité martyre*, where the montage parallelizes certain buildings or emblematic places of Royan before the war, like the casino or the beach. After the Liberation, the city is reduced to a rubble-strewn landscape with corpses. This shift between 'before' and 'after', the use of still shots, as if they were stunned by the ravages of war, perfectly embody the general trauma that gripped the inhabitants of these cities in 1944/45. These first representations make the energy mobilized to overcome this trauma appear all the more significant. The destroyed cities were quickly transformed into vast construction sites, which would mark out the urban landscape for more than twenty years sometimes. Beyond the rebuilt houses, this geographical and chronological scope of the post-WWII reconstruction profoundly reshaped the cities and pervaded their identity.

From 1945 onwards, the French non-fiction films combine a cinematographic grammar of loss, trauma, and mourning with that of rebirth and renewal. The titles of the newsreels devoted to towns (*La renaissance de Condé-sur-Noireau*, 1948; *La renaissance d'Aulnay-sur-Odon*, 1951) and economic sectors (like the maritime sector, with *Renaissance du port de Marseille*, 1945; oil, with *La renaissance de l'industrie pétrolière*, 1949; or agriculture, with *Renaissance agricole*, 1953) are enough to reveal a peak in the use of the term *renaissance* (rebirth). While the traces of destruction are still very present on the screen, the comments repeat with conviction the imminent arrival of better days. This projection into the future, as the only remedy for the destroyed past, shapes the identities of these cities: the modern architecture completes the shift into a new era, that of the belief in progress.

By describing the audiovisual history of large housing estates, Camille Canteux shows the speed of the changeover.⁸⁾ In fact, at the end of the war, the accelerated construction of large public housings is presented as a miracle solution to remedy the housing shortage and to provide unprecedented modernity and comfort. But from the late 1950s onwards, these same buildings are then represented as dehumanized, and start to be no longer attractive. More globally, this reversal characterizes the perception of the modern architecture of the post-war period. The technical prowess, the construction sites that cover entire

7) Sylvie Lindeperg, *Clio de 5 à 7: Les actualités filmées de la Libération: archives du futur* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2000), 69.

8) Camille Canteux, *Filmer les grands ensembles: Villes rêvées, villes introuvables: Une histoire des représentations audiovisuelles des grands ensembles (milieu des années 1930 – début des années 1980)* (Paris: Creaphis Éditions, 2014).

towns, the modern districts that emerge from the ruins initially attract the onlookers (and the cameras), before gradually falling into disuse, once the enthusiasm has subsided. Besides, the modernization did not always keep its promises. Indeed, the scale of the construction work to be carried out makes the post-war reconstruction seem endless, and the speed with which construction is carried out does not always guarantee quality. For example, the *Cité Rotterdam*, the very first large industrialized housing complex built in 1953 in Strasbourg, which was the topic of numerous newsreels produced by *Les Actualités françaises* in 1954, required improvement work as early as 1957, therefore very quickly after the first residents had moved in.⁹⁾ Post-WWII construction works continued into the 1960s and some traces of the last construction sites or inauguration ceremonies can be found almost twenty years after the end of the war.

Reconnecting with the past

This almost uninterrupted succession of construction sites therefore always postpones the end date of the reconstruction of bombed cities. Unlike the D-Day Landings and the Liberation, whose date was easy to identify and commemorate, the long period of the reconstruction also deprived it of its dimension as a potential media event. It is precisely to compensate for this lack of a spectacular dimension and media visibility that several municipalities have launched media campaigns to promote their post-war reconstruction heritage. Beyond the urban and economic aspects, the aim is, through branding certain labels¹⁰⁾ and organizing cultural events, to engage the inhabitants in a re-appropriation of the reconstructed neighborhoods, to make them places that carry a collective identity, spaces that allow the reactivation of a shared community experience. In this respect, the initiatives led by the municipality of Lorient present a case that reveals the central role played by the cinema. Located in Brittany and nearly 85% destroyed at the end of the war, Lorient is often considered as a city that was 'sacrificed' at the end of WWII. The military *Keroman* submarine base became the center of the 'Lorient pocket' occupied by German troops in August 1944. The resistance was fierce and the surrender was only signed on May 10, 1945, two days after the official armistice. Moreover, the city has been heavily bombed and the inhabitants were not allowed to return immediately because Lorient had first to be cleared of mines and rubble. The filmed traces of this long post-war period reveal its particularly militarized dimension. Unlike other destroyed towns, about which the most moving images can generally be found in the collections of newsreels or in documentaries produced by the Ministry of Reconstruction and Urban Planning, there is a large number of films shot in Lorient by the teams of the film department of the French army (*Service Cinématographique des Armées*). In 1945, the latter produced a short documentary film on the Lorient submarine base and the city also appeared in several military

9) Danièle Voldman, *La reconstruction des villes françaises de 1940 à 1954: Histoire d'une politique* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997), 390.

10) In 2019, the creation of the regional label *Patrimoine de la Reconstruction en Normandie* (Reconstruction Heritage in Normandy) aims to protect the post-war buildings and to take into account their specificity during renovation projects, while also seeking to seize their tourist potential.

newsreels. These moving images, archived in the French military audiovisual collections,¹¹⁾ were later re-used on several occasions in documentaries produced by the municipality of Lorient. They were first re-used for the short documentary *Lorient 333 ans* (1999), then for *Tous en baraque!* (Christophe Hoyet, 2006) and finally in *Soixante-cinquième anniversaire de la Libération* (Christophe Hoyet, 2010). In these documentaries, the moving images provided by the military audiovisual archives are all the more important as they represent a place (the submarine base) which is both decisive for the history of the cities (as a strategically important place), but about which no inhabitant of Lorient can speak, since the submarine base was then occupied by the Germans. Unlike other archival images of the destroyed town reused in these recent films, which are underlaid with matching eyewitnesses' accounts, these are not used as simple illustrations, but as visual sources for writing the local history.

On the other hand, this collection of documentaries recently produced by the municipality of Lorient was also started during a turning point in the writing of the city's history. Produced during the 2000s, these films punctuate the city's anniversaries (the titles show it: "333 years", "65th anniversary of the Liberation"), and also reveal the passage of time. The witnesses are logically fewer and older as of the documentaries progress, and the entry into the new millennium breathes new energy, with, for example, repeated references to the construction of a new cultural center which is characterized both by its very post-modernist architecture and its regionalist dimension. Like this cultural space which marks the return to a claimed local/regional identity from Brittany, the documentaries also embody Lorient's reappropriation of its history.

A similar phenomenon of reappropriation can be observed in Dunkirk, where in 2020 the filmmaker Frédéric Touchard produced the documentary *Dunkerque, se reconstruire...* The use of the reflexive pronoun (*se reconstruire*, to rebuilt "itself") clearly shows the shift in the issue at stake: it is now a matter of making the post-WWII reconstruction's history the inhabitants' own one. The film concludes with the major facade renovation project recently carried out in the city center of Dunkirk (which was destroyed in 1944 and then rebuilt). The city's consultant architect, Steve Abraham, recalls the previous feeling of embarrassment and even shame of the inhabitants caused by the dirtiness of the facades, while Catherine Hélin, in charge of the Dunkirk's heritage department, speaks of "housings that were unloved for a long time". The restoration of the facades and the cultural activities carried out with the inhabitants (visits to the rebuilt neighborhoods, exhibitions of photographs or archival documents, ephemeral artistic installations, etc.) therefore help to create a new link between the inhabitants and the history of their city. The voice-over uses the term "pride" and even speaks of "loving" the city. These words are accompanied by a carefully aestheticized presentation of Dunkirk, with frames and lights aiming to highlight the architectural beauty of the city: close-ups on certain elements of the facades, tight shots showing the symmetry of a modern building, panoramic movements accompanying the dynamism of a facade, the low-angled light of a late-day accentuating the angles and curves of a street... This is in sharp contrast to the way the participants are filmed

11) Établissement de communication et de production audiovisuelle de la Défense, accessed January 11, 2022, <http://archives.ecpad.fr/#>.



Figure 2. *Dunkerque, se reconstruire...* © Frédéric Touchard/Production Le Grain de Sable

(with camera frames that sometimes tend to cut off their bodies), which further accentuates this special search for aestheticism regarding the architecture (see Figure 2. *Dunkerque, se reconstruire...* © Frédéric Touchard/Production Le Grain de Sable).

Contemporary documentaries on the *Cités Castors* and *Unités d'Habitation*

In the case of cities such as Lorient and Dunkirk, which were razed to the ground and then almost entirely rebuilt after 1944, moving images make it possible to connect this sometimes-forgotten history with the issues of the present time. In the case of neighborhoods built not on ruins, but from green fields, to respond to the shortage of decent housing after WWII, cinema also plays an important role, but with slightly different implications. In the case of the *Cités Castors* (“Beavers” cities), houses built by inhabitants’ cooperatives after the war, as in the case of the *Unités d'Habitation* erected by Le Corbusier from the late 1940s onwards, these modern housings do not follow the trauma of destruction, they do not replace old housing and they are not built in the middle of the rubble, but in previously empty spaces. From the outset, the *Cités Castors*, like the *Unités d'Habitation*, were not anchored in the ruins of the past, but the future. The films produced during their construction show them in a very different way than the previously destroyed and then reconstructed cities. The short documentaries and newsreels highlight their originality, creativity, and liveliness. For instance, in September 1956, a report with a hand-held camera follows the presenter Micheline Sandrel on a *Castors* construction site in Montreuil, where she interviews the workers in the manner of street interviews.¹²⁾ Given the shortage of

12) “Les chantiers des ‘Castors’ de Montreuil,” accessed January 11, 2022, <https://www.ina.fr/video/CAF89022889/les-chantiers-des-castors-de-montreuil-video.html>.

housing and the slow pace of reconstruction, individuals looking for new housing were allowed to join together in the form of cooperatives to collectively build their own houses. On the other side of the spectrum, Le Corbusier was the most filmed architect of the period.¹³⁾ His appearances always present him as a visionary, ahead of his time.

The singularity of these *Cités*, which, at the time of their construction, were considered as certainly inventive, but also somehow unconventional initiatives, is now sometimes threatened to be erased. This is particularly the case for the *Cité Castors* in Pessac-Alouette, built between 1948 and 1951 near Bordeaux and made of 150 self-built houses. Initially located away from the city center, on uncultivated land, and without any water supply, the *Cité Castors* in Pessac today offers an enviable living environment, each pavilion of at least 80 m² being surrounded by a private garden of 500 m². Besides, Pessac is close to Bordeaux, a city that has become increasingly attractive in recent years. The proximity of Bordeaux, the university, and the cultural dynamism make Pessac particularly attractive and have put pressure on the real estate market during the last decades. The children of the builders now live together with residents who are not connected to this *Castors'* past and who are primarily interested in the life's quality in the neighborhood. This change of inhabitants also weakens the link with the collective origin of this project and even leads to forgetting its unique history. In an attempt to remedy this, the *Cités Castors* built in several French towns have come together to organize meetings and events to share this common history, to maintain a connection with the past, and to enhance this heritage. In 2016, the *Cité Castors* from Pessac obtained the 20th Century Heritage's label created by the French Ministry of Culture to promote remarkable architectural and urbanistic achievements.

Among the actions carried out to keep this heritage alive, it must be emphasized that there is a fairly large number of films made on this subject, since four documentaries have been produced in less than ten years: *La Cité des Castors* (Fabrice Marache, 2007), *La cité des abeilles* (Marion Boé, 2008), *L'utopie de Pessac* (Jean-Marie Bertineau, 2011) and *Pays Castor* (Samantha Yépez, 2015). Despite the diversity of their perspectives and the portrayed cities, these filmmakers all share the same experience of having grown up near or in a *Cité Castors*. A similar approach has been chosen by Gilles Coudert in his recent documentary on Le Corbusier (*L'Esprit Le Corbusier*, 2018). The film director looks at how the famous architect inspired artists from a wide range of disciplines and countries, but above all, he draws on his personal background, since he grew up in the *Unité d'Habitation* in Firminy. Therefore, it does not seem to matter whether the building filmed was designed by an internationally renowned architect or by a cooperative of anonymous builders: in all these cases, it is above all a matter of personal memory, often a childhood spent in a special urban complex. In all these cases, the filmmakers share the same feeling of having lived in a unique place.

It is worth remembering that, although Le Corbusier's architectural work has been listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2016, the first *Unité d'Habitation* he built in Marseille did not only raise enthusiastic reactions, but also controversy. The short docu-

13) Perrine Val, "Filmer les architectes de la Reconstruction : rendre présent un 'futur passé'?", *transversale. histoire: architecture, paysage, urbain*, no. 5 (2020), 48–56.

mentary film *Le Corbusier travaille* (1951), whose production Le Corbusier entrusted to his friend and lawyer Gabriel Chéreau, served as a “defense tool in the trial of the Société de l’Esthétique Générale de la France (SEGF) concerning the visual nuisance of the housing unit in the Marseille landscape”, as Véronique Boone explains.¹⁴⁾ One of the first inhabitants and an active member of the association of inhabitants of the *Unité d’habitation Le Corbusier Marseille* describes the very contrasting reactions to the building: either the people of Marseille completely rejected this architecture, or they subscribed to it with great enthusiasm and even passion, which is still the case today.¹⁵⁾ The observation is much the same among the inhabitants of the *Cités Castors*. Among eyewitnesses interviewed in February 2020, two sisters, the daughters of a couple who took part in the *Castors’* adventure, shared the same curiosity and interest for the history of the *Cité*, but are heirs to it in two very different ways: while one of them has settled in one of the houses of the city to keep the “*Castor’s* spirit” alive by participating in the local association and maintaining the close link with the other inhabitants, the second one explained that she was looking forward to moving out, in order to escape this quasi-collective life that she considered being too restrictive.¹⁶⁾

The recent documentaries on the *Cités Castors* and *Unités d’Habitation* are therefore part of this contrasting perception. It is interesting to note that these films were almost exclusively screened within the communities they depict, thus in a very local framework, and did not find national distribution. This is particularly surprising in the case of Gilles Coudert’s film, given Le Corbusier’s international reputation, the recent inscription of his architecture on the UNESCO World Heritage List, and the participation of the famous French actor Charles Berling (who provides the voice-over commentary) in the film. Nevertheless, *L’Esprit Le Corbusier* has been screened only by one independent cinema in Paris. Regarding the documentaries produced on the *Cités Castors*, they are mainly screened during meetings and events organized by the cultural associations for residents or former residents of the *Cités Castors* and are rarely seen outside this framework. This very limited circulation has still not discouraged the filmmakers, especially those who made several films on the same topic. A possible explanation for this motivation is that these documentaries, conversely to the films on the reconstructed cities, do not aim to work towards a general recognition of these *Cités*. Unlike the documentary film on Dunkirk, the issue is not to encourage the inhabitants to rediscover their *Cité*, nor to renew a link of esteem or attachment. It is rather a matter of preserving a way of life that is ‘apart’ by recording stories of increasingly small communities. By enhancing the stories collected and by highlighting the architectural beauty of these complexes, these documentaries help to strengthen the feeling of belonging to a community that has been narrowed down to the scale of a neighborhood, rather than a city or a region.

14) Véronique Boone, “La médiatisation cinématographique de l’unité d’habitation de Marseille : de la promotion à la fiction,” *Massilia : Annuaire d’études corbuséennes*, no. 1 (2004), 192–199.

15) Interview with Gisèle Moreau, conducted in Marseille (February 22, 2020).

16) Interview with Martine Bourgelas and Sylvie Despujols, conducted in Pessac (February 21, 2020).

The heritage's rediscovery through the length of amateur cinema

The emergence of these individual and personal perspectives is also part of the (re)discovery of a hitherto private corpus, that of home movies. The dynamism of recent research on this topic¹⁷⁾ goes hand in hand with campaigns to collect and promote these films. For nearly two decades, archives or associations with regional roots have been collecting 'unofficial' images, shot for family or friends, and not intended for wide circulation. Carrying the promise of even greater authenticity than documentary images or newsreels that have become archival images, amateur films find a growing interest among researchers as well as archivists and the public audience. The publications that have multiplied on this subject in recent years offer fruitful analyses, notably by crossing disciplines to better understand the role these films played in the local or family life. The organizations involved in collecting and preserving these films are also often actively promoting them. In France, the *Cinémathèque de Bretagne*¹⁸⁾ or the *Cinémoire* association (dedicated to audiovisual archives from the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region and the former French colonies),¹⁹⁾ for example, regularly organize film screenings, aiming as much to highlight their collections as to collect new films or new personal stories that would shed light on these home movies. It is important to mention that these activities have sometimes even continued during the successive lockdowns in 2020–21, which demonstrates not only how well these institutions master digital tools, but also how important it is for them to maintain the link with their audiences and depositors. These already abundant collections are still developing: the *Cinémathèque de Bretagne* has a total of 7.200 films, *Cinémoire* collected 5.800 films, and other regional structures such as *Ciclic* (regional film archives in *Centre-Val de Loire*),²⁰⁾ *Mémoire Normande*²¹⁾ or *Mémoire des Images réanimées d'Alsace*²²⁾ are continually enriching their regional holdings through permanent collecting activities. The exploration and development of these vast collections, holding films of varying quality and characteristics, is facilitated by their digitalization and by putting them online. The local structures also encourage the creation of artistic projects based on their collections, for example, film concerts, montages, or screenings during shows, to contribute to the circulation of these amateur films.

These home movies' collections are also used in recent documentaries devoted to the post-WWII reconstruction. In *Dunkerque, se reconstruire...*, reports produced by the

17) Roger Odin, *Le film de famille, usage privé, usage public* (Paris: Méridiens-Klincksieck, 1995); Laura Rascaroli, Gwenda Young, and Barry Monahan, eds., *Amateur Filmmaking: The home movie, the archive, the web* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014); Paolo Simoni, "The Amateur City: Digital Platforms and Tools for Research and Dissemination of Films Representing the Italian Urban Landscape," *The Moving Image* 11, (2017), 111–118; Susan Aasman, Andreas Fickers, and Joseph Wachelder, eds., *Materializing Memories: Dispositifs, generations, amateurs* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018); Annamaria Motrescu-Mayes and Susan Aasman, *Amateur media and participatory cultures: film, video, and digital media* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2019).

18) Cinémathèque de Bretagne, accessed January 11, 2022, <https://www.cinematheque-bretagne.bzh/>.

19) Cinémoire, accessed January 11, 2022, <https://cinememoire.net/>.

20) Ciclic, accessed January 11, 2022, <https://ciclic.fr/patrimoine/les-actualites-du-pole-patrimoine>.

21) Mémoire normande, accessed January 11, 2022, <https://www.memoirenormande.fr/>

22) MIRA, accessed January 11, 2022, <https://www.miralsace.eu/>.



Figure 3. *Dunkerque, se reconstruire...* © Frédéric Touchard/Production Le Grain de Sable

Actualités françaises, photographs from the post-war period, and filmed interviews with eyewitnesses or historians are shown alongside images from amateur films. In Frédéric Touchard's documentary, several brief sequences also show a young boy walking through the destroyed city or walking on the dike (see Figure 3. *Dunkerque, se reconstruire...* © Frédéric Touchard/Production Le Grain de Sable). These amateur images have a poetic rather than a documentary function, since the viewer does not know who the boy is or what year the images were shot, and even the city only appears briefly in the background. The mystery surrounding this young boy highlights the new dimension that amateur films bring corpus of non-fictional archival images today: These amateur images show everyday life and are, *a priori*, free of any spectacular dimension. Through their digitalization and their online availability, the less 'extra-ordinary' aspects of the post-war reconstruction are rediscovered. The prism of everyday life reveals elements that seemed more 'ordinary', more commonplace than the launch of a new construction site or an inauguration ceremony but today receive the full attention of archivists and historians.

A particularly interesting example to illustrate this shift is the new attention that is brought to barracks. Omnipresent in the documentaries produced during the post-war reconstruction, barracks are never the main subject of the non-fiction films. They always appear as a provisional element, embodying the transitional stage between the ruins and the rebuilt housing, the first step in the reconstruction that is beginning. The voice-over often does not even mention them, as their presence seems to be only temporary. Yet, in retrospect, the barracks have become a symbol for the long duration of the post-war reconstruction, as a temporary solution that finally lasts. Initially aimed to be destroyed, some of these barracks still exist today. They are sometimes still inhabited and some people even undertake to restore them.²³⁾ In Lorient, the longevity of barrack housing is such

23) That is one of the projects led by a local association in Normandy (Vire).

important that it has given rise to book,²⁴⁾ conference, exhibition, and film projects (*Tous en baraque!*, Christophe Hoyet, 2006). Initially relegated to temporary settings destined to disappear, the barracks constitute the heart of these projects and this film in particular.

How did this shift take place? One of the answers can be found in amateur films. Within the collection of the *Cinémathèque de Bretagne*, from the early 1960s, an amateur filmmaker chose barracks as his main cinematographic subject. Jean Lazennec, in *Baraques au Bouguen* (1961),²⁵⁾ uses all the amateur means at his disposal to underline the multiplicity of the ‘faces’ of the barracks and no longer confines them to a simple background. His film (shot in Brest) opens with an ambitious traveling shot in a street of barracks, filmed from a car, followed by a wide panoramic movement overlooking the neighborhood and revealing its extent. By using codes directly inspired by ‘professional’ cinema, the amateur filmmaker places the barracks on the same aesthetic level as the reconstructed cities. They appear as a subject equally worthy of being filmed, explored, and appreciated by the film viewers. In the same way that this amateur film shows an often marginalized and depreciated reality, the platforms that make these films freely accessible allow this amateur cinema to reach a wide audience, and even to resonate with other films and find its place in the cinema. This interest in amateur filmmakers and the campaigns to collect their films conducted by various organizations encourage individuals to collaborate more actively in writing local history.

Online audiovisual platforms and web documentaries: an ‘active’ viewing?

This incentive to actively (re)discover the history is also present in many audiovisual formats that have emerged over the last decade, with the appearance in particular of web documentaries and online audiovisual platforms. These ones encourage their users to be active viewers, by letting them navigate independently through the resources made available online. They are free to select the films they want to watch, to scroll through the texts they want to read and to click on the objects they want to explore. These new online platforms are certainly characterized by their protean dimension because they combine very different objects (texts, sound documents, films, photographs, etc.) and are sometimes interactive (with quizzes or with the possibility of writing comments), but films are almost always part of these presentations. The web documentary *Une balade au Merlan* (A stroll in the Merlan) provides one first example. Located in Noisy-le-Sec, on the outskirts of Paris, the Merlan neighborhood was destroyed at the end of the war and then selected to become an “experiment city”, exhibiting all types of modern housing designed by architects from all over the world to cover the need for new housing. In 2015, as a continuation of her doctoral research, Caroline Bougourd co-created this web documentary, *Une balade au Merlan*, which explores the neighborhood by using archival images (photographs, advertising

24) Elizabeth Blanchet and Sonia Zhuravlyova, *Prefabs: a social and architectural history* (Swindon: Historic England, 2018).

25) “Baraques au Bouguen,” accessed January 11, 2022, <https://www.cinematheque-bretagne.bzh/Base-documentaire-Baraques-au-Bouguen-426-13089-0-5.html?ref=f57aff6bdd88f069bc18db9b5d103c45>.



Figure 4. *Noisy-le-Sec, le laboratoire de la Reconstruction* © Fonds ministère de la Transition écologique, ministère de la Cohésion des territoires et des Relations avec les collectivités territoriales

brochures) and filmed interviews with residents or local stakeholders (from the municipality, the general council or the archival department).²⁶⁾ The only film shot during the post-war era included in the web documentary is the one produced by the Ministry of Reconstruction and Urban Planning in 1948, *Noisy-le-Sec, laboratoire de la Reconstruction*²⁷⁾ (see Figure 4. *Noisy-le-Sec, le laboratoire de la Reconstruction* © Fonds ministère de la Transition écologique, ministère de la Cohésion des territoires et des Relations avec les collectivités territoriales). In the example of *Une balade au Merlan*, the film is used within a set of visual sources and is thus an extension of a multitude of photographic images documenting the reconstruction of the neighborhood. In other examples, films are the starting point for online platforms dedicated to a specific subject. This is particularly the case when the archives holding the rights are themselves hosting these online platforms. In this respect, the INA (*Institut National de l'Audiovisuel*) stands out for the multiplicity of its audiovisual platforms accessible online. A policy of partnerships has been established with a wide range of partners (with other organizations such as the SNCF, with cities or regions such as Nantes, Normandy, and Alsace) to create websites that present the history of these partners while enhancing the value of the collections held by the INA. Initiatives such as *Normandy for Peace*,²⁸⁾ the websites *Nantes, the metamorphosis of a city*²⁹⁾ and *SNCF, two*

26) “Une balade au Merlan,” accessed January 11, 2022, <http://unebaladeaumerlan.fr>. See also: Caroline Bougourd, “Une cité d’expérience entre patrimoine et récits: étude critique de la patrimonialisation, le cas des maisons préfabriquées de Noisy-le-Sec” (Unpublished PhD dissertation, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2015), 420.

27) “Noisy-le-Sec, laboratoire de la Reconstruction,” accessed January 11, 2022, <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/xwytkc>.

28) “Normandie pour la paix,” accessed January 11, 2022, <https://sites.ina.fr/normandie-pour-la-paix/>.

29) “Nantes, la métamorphose d’une ville,” accessed January 11, 2022, <https://fresques.ina.fr/auran/accueil>.

*centuries of history*³⁰⁾ offer their visitors the opportunity to (re)discover these stories through newsreels, documentaries and archive photographs selected by the documentalists. The aim is both to offer visitors content that is sometimes new and easy to explore, and to enhance the value of audiovisual collections in an original format. But despite the creativity displayed, these various initiatives (web documentaries and online audiovisual platforms) sometimes struggle to find their audience. For example, the producers of *Une balade au Merlan* regretted that no municipal or departmental stakeholder had agreed to take over the web documentary (which has now been somewhat neglected), while the SNCF media library notes that the audiovisual platform co-created with the INA is only very rarely visited.

Audiovisual otherness and identity

“One is not born an archival image, one becomes one” are writing Julie Maeck and Matthias Steinle.³¹⁾ By recalling the vagueness that surrounds the notion of archival images, they show that it is above all the use that is made of these images, their reuse in later film production, and therefore their destiny that is of primary importance. Maeck and Steinle also write that “the archival image, as we perceive it, exists because it claims, within heterogeneous montages or not, its otherness.”³²⁾ In contemporary documentaries about the post-war reconstruction, the use of archive images from documentaries, newsreels, and amateur films confronts the viewer and inhabitant of these reconstructed cities like Dunkirk and Lorient or of modern *Cités* designed by Le Corbusier in the post-war period with this part of otherness that is also part of his identity. To paraphrase the philosopher Roger Pol-Droit, there are always others in one’s identity, and one’s identity in the others.³³⁾ These contemporary films, by incorporating these images of otherness, allow then people to accept this otherness and to re-associate it with their identity.

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30) “Deux siècles d’histoire,” accessed January 11, 2022, <https://sites.ina.fr/sncf/>.

31) Julie Maeck and Matthias Steinle, eds., *L’image d’archives: Une image en devenir* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2016), 11.

32) Ibid., 14.

33) Roger Pol-Droit, ed., *Figures de l’altérité* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2014), 169.

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Filmography

Baraques au Bouguen (Jean Lazennec, 1961)
Dunkerque, se reconstruire... (Frédéric Touchard, 2020)
Here lies Le Havre (Ci-gît le Havre; 1945)
La cité des abeilles (Marion Boé, 2008)
La Cité des Castors (Fabrice Marache, 2007)
Le Corbusier travaille (Gabriel Chéreau, 1951)
Le ministre de la Reconstruction à Nantes et Saint-Nazaire, villes martyres (1948)
L'Esprit Le Corbusier (Gilles Coudert, 2018)
Lorient 333 ans (1999)
L'utopie de Pessac (Jean-Marie Bertineau, 2011)
Noisy-le-Sec, le laboratoire de la Reconstruction (1948)
Pays Castor (Samantha Yépez, 2015)
Reconstruction définitive du pont tournant de Caronte (André Périé, 1956)
Renaissance agricole (1953)
Renaissance d'Aulnay-sur-Odon (1951)
Renaissance de Condé-sur-Noireau (1948)
Renaissance de l'industrie pétrolière (1949)
Renaissance du rail (1947)
Rouen, martyre d'une cité (Louis Cuny, 1945)
Royan cité martyre (1945)
Soixante-cinquième anniversaire de la Libération (Christophe Hoyet, 2010)
Tous en baraque! (Christophe Hoyet, 2006)
Voie libre (1947)

Biography

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