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Lost Media: Collecting and Archiving of Artefacts from the Digital Era

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Prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci vypracovala samostatně a že jsem řádně citovala všechny použité prameny a literaturu. Tato práce nebyla využita v rámci jiného vysokoškolského studia či k získání jiného nebo stejného titulu.

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Keywords

Digital artefacts, archive, Walter Benjamin, digitalisation, gimmick, star wipe

Abstract

Archival theory and practice still tend to hierarchize between audiovisual artefacts worth preserving and those that are not, and the increasing amount of images, screens, and interfaces in the digital sphere has only broadened the number of objects that risk disappearing without a trace. One of these lost audiovisual objects is the star wipe, a type of film transition that connects two images or sequences through a wipe in the shape of a star. Despite the excessive character of the star wipe, the editing gesture is no longer to be found in the current audiovisual field. Which leads us to a question: how to archive something that does not have a material substance, that exists only as a connection of two or more images? To postulate a sufficient answer, we need to create a theoretical perspective that views and understands digital artefacts as archivable. Through the figure of the fetishistic collector, based on Walter Benjamin's (1969) articulation of collecting, we aim to offer means for understanding the star wipe as a challenge to the prevailing epistemological biases of the archival world against immaterial, ephemeral, hybrid, and supposedly "low-brow" cultural elements.

Klíčová slova

Digitální artefakt, archiv, Walter Benjamin, digitalizace, gimmick, prolínačka hvězdou

Abstrakt

Archivní teorie a praxe stále mají tendenci hierarchizovat audiovizuální artefakty na ty, které stojí za to uchovávat, a na ty, které za to nestojí. Rostoucí množství obrazů, obrazovek a rozhraní v digitální sféře jen rozšířilo počet objektů, u nichž hrozí, že zmizí beze stopy. Jedním z těchto ztracených audiovizuálních objektů je prolínačka hvězdou, typ filmového přechodu, který spojuje dva obrazy nebo sekvence pomocí prolínačky ve tvaru hvězdy. Navzdory své viditelnosti se toto stříhové gesto již nevyskytuje v současné audiovizuální oblasti. Což nás vede k otázce: jak archivovat něco, co nemá hmotnou podstatu, co existuje pouze jako spojení dvou nebo více obrazů? Abychom na tuto otázku odpověděli, musíme vytvořit perspektivu, která onen digitální artefakt chápe jako archivovatelný. Prostřednictvím postavy fetišistického sběratele, vycházející Waltera Benjamina (1969) a jeho reflexe sběratelství, se snažíme nabídnout prostředky pro chápání prolínačky hvězdou, která je výzvou pro převládající epistemologické předsudky archivního světa vůči nehmotným, efemérním, hybridním a údajně “nízkým” kulturním prvkům.

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1. Introduction

The impact of digital technology on our notions of audiovisual media is becoming more and more visible each year. New processes, structures, mechanisms, formats, and apparatuses have been introduced in every media sector, from production to distribution to archiving. Due to technological developments, audiovisual archives have acquired advanced tools for preservation, restoration, digitization, storage, and circulation of their collections that consist primarily of film stocks (Müller, 2021; Fossati, 2018; Brunow, 2017). The theory and practice of audiovisual archives were founded on an analogue¹ medium, which dominated the global audiovisual industry until the early 2010s (Edmondson, 2016). However, digitalisation has formed objects that exceed the set archival categories, as they do not belong to artworks, equipment, or material groups. As a result, there is a discrepancy between the recently developed digital artefacts² and the archival paradigm based on analogue materiality. This rupture is the starting point of this thesis.

Can the archival prism that emerged from the materiality of analogue motion pictures capture a digital artefact? Hence, the main task is aimed at expanding the archival imagination of audiovisual archival institutions.³ The term could be described using the words of film scholar Cosetta G. Saba (2013: 104): “it pertains to the selection of what, within a specific historical context and with regards to historiographic sources, can be made archivable and what cannot.” Simply put, archival imagination structures the concept of audiovisual media – of the past, in the present, for the future. At the same time, the imagination has been structured by digital technologies, which define possibilities of storage, curatorship, and preservation.

¹ The task of the archives is to preserve moving images, which until recently was mostly associated with analogue material.

² To illustrate, among such artefacts we could put flash animation, which is both the medium in which animation is created and the file format; the star wipe, an editing effect which refers to the visual transition as a technique (practice) as well as being part of the final television or audiovisual data (object).

³ The archival imagination can be applied in the context of other archival institutions, for example, archives linked to another medium (music, theatre, literature) or the history of a given area or group (defined based on profession, nationality). However, in the context of this thesis, the archival imagination is linked primarily to audiovisual archives. This type of archive delineates the field in which we operate.

Efforts in this area of research have sought to extend the archival imagination by addressing blind spots (from the perspective of postcolonial critique (Kumar, 2013; Strub, 2015), feminist (Callahan, 2010), and queer critique (Hohenberger, 2011; Kirste, 2007)); empty spots, such as archiving of video art (Noordegraaf, 2013), and family or amateur moving images (Hetrick, 2006; Barstow, 2011); or focusing on archival research (re-examining primarily early cinema (Anger, 2022)); and last but not least, theoretical research, which can be understood as postulating speculative perspective, re-framing the archive as a research laboratory (Fossati and van den Oever, 2016), or through re-reading writings of Walter Benjamin, Jacques Derrida, and others who re-articulated the potentialities of the archival imagination and suggested different archival modalities (Russell, 2018). The path of theoretical research is to be followed in our experiment to introduce digital objects into the archival imagination as distinct and preservable items.

In the essay “Unpacking my Library”, Walter Benjamin (1969 [1931]) proposed a collector who fetishistically seeks, acquires, and collects items that would be unnoticed and lost. The collector focuses on peripheral, ephemeral, and marginal items. This strategy might be seen in media archaeology that works with an “insignificant” media object as the foundation for re-framing the dominant narrative (Sobchack, 2011: 324). Media archaeology’s central strategy – to look beyond established systems, narratives, and metaphors – is an integral part of this work. In our case, the current definition of what is (and is not) considered an archivable object is the dominant narrative that the fetishistic collector confronts.

As the title of the thesis suggests, some audiovisual artefacts from the digital era may be considered (already) lost. Before it would be possible to develop processes and procedures for archiving and preserving digital artefacts, objects, images, and systems, there is a necessary step to first establish the digital medium and its specific manifestations in the archival imagination. The fetishistic collector is a conceptualisation of a different archival modality – inspired and determined by digital technology – that enables us to see digital artefacts as archivable objects.

The collector cannot exist without collecting artefacts, and artefacts cannot be visible as archival without a collector. The case study is based on a marginal digital audiovisual artefact – the star wipe – which is a digital editing effect and simultaneously a visual fragment. At first glance, this particular editing transition appears to be a unique artefact; however, it shares similarities with other digital artefacts. Digitalisation has brought a multiplicity of corresponding objects that are present in the audiovisual sphere as parts of larger ensembles – artworks, apparatuses, interfaces – yet seem to have no existence of their own. The star wipe exists both as a visual detail and a specific technique. However, in neither character it is seen as a possibly archivable artefact as it cannot be reduced to a single technological-material level (hardware, software, interface); it is a gimmick, connecting and revealing the materiality that constitutes it (Ngai, 2020: 3).

The goal is to establish the fetishistic collector as a potential archival modality that, on the one hand, exceeds the horizon of archival imagination but, on the other hand, remains connected to digital objects. As previously stated, this is a theoretical experiment whose purpose is to articulate the existence of a previously unexplored (and vast) territory that has emerged with the advent of digitalisation in the archival field rather than to provide a practical “how-to” method for preserving digital artefacts.

The structure of the thesis is divided into three key sections. Chapter 2 introduces the context and addresses how digitalisation has transformed the materiality of audiovisual artefacts, thus suggesting why digital objects pose a problem for the contemporary archival imagination. The second half of this chapter outlines the theoretical background for creating the figure of the fetishistic collector as a functional archive perspective to see and address digital artefacts. Chapter 3 focuses on archival theory and practice. This segment describes approaches to the preservation of digital audiovisual media. Chapter 4 attempts to establish the figure of the fetishistic collector in the archival discourse. Chapter 5 offers a summary of the most important takeaways of the thesis.

2. Context and Theoretical Background

“Don’t blink. Don’t even blink. Blink and you’re dead. They are fast. Faster than you can believe. Don’t turn your back. Don’t look away. And most of all, don’t blink. Good Luck.” *Doctor Who* (“Blink”, 2007)

2.1 In Constant Motion

Do not blink; one blink of an eye and a medium – or at least a media fragment, part of a mechanism or a device – might disappear (Fisher, 2014). In one second: a film format could become irreproducible, a special cinematographic effect could no longer be found, and an audiovisual apparatus could lose compatibility with the standard. There is a relatively short time interval between the opposite states: the operating and the non-functioning, the visible and the lost, the new and the old. They may converge faster than expected: a functioning media configuration turns into an unusable artefact, and vice versa, a forgotten object finds reuse in a new media landscape. Although this description might sound like an exaggerated statement, it does, to some extent, illustrate the ephemeral condition in which (not just audiovisual) media find themselves in the digital age. If we could maintain a theoretical gaze without blinking, would we be able to capture the moment in which a media object is disappearing?

Would it be possible to capture the last fragments, shreds, and scraps of media artefacts that have (almost) disappeared? Maybe a flash animation could be captured. Or the interface of a television screen from the end of the last century would not only be captured on VHS by a lucky accident but intentionally as a media artefact. Archiving similar audiovisual formats (flash animation, early instances of 3D CGI animation), digital interfaces or artefacts (the star wipe) appears to be an achievable task. This is not a question of whether it is a doable task, but when and

how quickly it can be accomplished. Fragments fade all too easily from collective and individual memory.

The global network of digital media artefacts is subjected to never-ceasing transformations. It can be on a macro-level that gradually transforms the whole network, such as changes centred on technology or materiality and other possible modifications determined socially, culturally, technologically, and energetically. Similar tendencies also permeate the local micro-level: different cultural approaches could encourage usage of the medium that was not intended in the original design; or scarcity of material might lead to partial adaptations of a mechanism. Everything is in constant motion. The modularity and ephemerality of media artefacts have always been present; nonetheless, digitalisation has accelerated them. Media objects have become easily translatable, portable, compatible (Manovich, 2001), and perishable (Crofts, 2008).

2.1.1 Digitalisation Makes Everything Complicated

Conceptualising technological advancements⁴ has been derived mainly from their performance in the audiovisual industry, particularly in the archival sphere⁵ (Fossati, 2018). The transformation can be evident to the extent that it transforms the definition of medium specificity, both at the level of theory and practice. For example, the implementation of a sound track to a filmstrip opened debates about how to define motion pictures (Bordwell, Thompson and Staiger, 1985; Gomery, 1976), or whether moving images share more similarities with radio or visual art

⁴ Outside the archival sphere, in audiovisual history and theory, the relationship between technological improvement and implementation in industry, amateur production, or the arts depends on what is identified as the key actor. Conceptualizations of technological change could unfold based on "the big" inventions (Williams, 1975; Fielding, 1980) and names (Hendricks, 1961; Josephson, 1959). A more recent theoretical historical paradigm is, for example, the economic theory of technological change (Mansfield, 1968; Gomery, 1975; Buscombe, 1977), which understands change as the result of certain economic decisions made in the broader field of the audiovisual industry. Alternatively, the New Film History (Hansen, 1993) tries to get underneath the big narratives, names, and inventions and asks again whether broader cultural and social tendencies determine technological change.

⁵ The archival sphere is connected to industry or the arts, as partial technological improvements become an integral part of the creative process or, on the other hand, never go from patent to practice. While this may seem to be a simplistic statement, it is more likely that objects that have been an integral part of culture are destined to become part of audiovisual heritage. Although this perspective has been reflected on the level of archival theory (Gracy, 2007), the implementation into practice is a long-term process determined by issues related to finances, obligations, and possibilities of a given institution.

(Sczepanik, 2009). However, additional sound modulation or new sound systems (such as the Movietone) have been perceived as enhancements to already established mechanisms and practices. What type of change occurred with the advent of digitalisation? Was it a transformation or just a modification of already existing processes?

The advent of the digital age was not one big homogeneous event but a series of fragments, mechanisms, and procedures that made digitalisation an integral part of contemporary culture (Sito, 2013; Denson and Leydam, 2016). Since the second half of the 20th century, technological improvements have been emerging and gaining attention in commercial or creative fields (Gaboury, 2021). Digital advancements have resulted in a progressive alteration of everything involved in moving pictures: the invention of non-linear editing devices,⁶ the advent of multichannel audio coding systems in cinemas, the construction of digital worlds using computer-generated images, the establishment of standardisation and protocol for digital film (such as the digital cinema initiative, or DCI, as well as JPEG 2000 and digital cinema packaging, or DCP) (Venturini and Santi, 2013: 216). During the 1990s and the turn of the millennium, digital motion pictures became an inseparable part of the industry (but not yet the dominant form) and simultaneously found a way into the hands of amateur creators (Kim, 2016). Over the last half-century, digitalisation has spread from information laboratories into the space of our everyday screens.

The media environment has changed at all levels: production, distribution, exhibition, consumption, and archiving. New channels are constantly emerging: cinema houses, VHS, television, DVDs, Internet, mobile phones, tablets, gallery walls or spaces, museums, arcades, YouTube, and TikTok (Strauven, 2013: 61). As Malte Hagener (2008: 16) describes the current state, “cinema is in fact ubiquitous, it is everywhere and nowhere at the same time.” Technological advancement does not imply a loss of materiality, which assumes a different form than that of the

⁶ Editing a filmstrip, or any other format of analogue media, allowed working only according to the linearity of how each image was sequentially captured over time. In contrast, non-linear editing does not have this limitation and allows an editor to work on any segment in an audiovisual piece.

analogue. The next part covers the key differences as well as the theoretical discussion, since digital materiality varies from the analogue one.

2.1.1.1 Materiality in the Digital Age

Digital technologies have signalled a rupture in understanding the relationship between the audiovisual medium and the technological background. Benoît Turquety (2014a: 51) notes that “at the time of mechanization, technique and technology were cinematic notions; in the digital era, the link between the cinema and those concepts has changed, because the paradigms have changed around them, perhaps the episteme itself.” In other words, analogue materiality is linked to media specificity; the interplay of photographic filmstrips and camera apparatuses (or other mechanisms: projectors, scanners, and copiers) has been imprinted in moving images as scratches, cracks, and marks. In the past, the medium was associated with one given technology, but with the advent of digitalisation, this determinant seems to have disappeared. With digital media, there is a different connection between materiality and technology.

Digital representation and technology have become the dominant actors of the contemporary audiovisual landscape (Allen, 2002). The primary principle of digitalisation is converting motion pictures and sound into a digital form that can be read, processed, and transformed by a computer (Manovich, 2001). The digital form is not constrained by a particular material format, unlike analogue means of representation (Rodowick, 2007). The grain was converted into pixels; precisely, analogue form, consisting of film grain as optical texture on celluloid filmstrips, still exists in its specificity. The primary materiality of the post-cinematic era⁷ (Denson, 2016) is represented by pixels. To the viewer’s eye, the pixel appears as a key materiality that determines the qualities and possibilities of a digital image.

⁷ “If cinema and television, as the dominant media of the twentieth century, shaped and reflected the cultural sensibilities of the era, how do 21st-century media help to shape and reflect new forms of sensibility?” ask Denson and Leyda (2016). The term “post-cinema” suggests that even if the audiovisual medium is not the dominant prism, as it was in the 20th century, it remains ever-present and visible. New media is considered as an essential logic, a metaphor, and a 21st-century system into which the cinematic or televisual medium has become intertwined. Shane Denson and Julia Leyda (2016) have postulated post-cinema to address the audiovisual medium in the current state, in which both the continuity with the past and the acceptance of the broader digital network play critical roles.

Digital representation is a result of the hardware-software-interface-format dynamic. Visible marks of interaction between technology and materiality might be visible in moments of lapses, corrupted export (or a compression artefact), and other glitches⁸ that could be considered as imprints of a digital dispositif.⁹

2.1.1.2 Definition(s) of Materiality in the Digital Age

The attempt to propose a single definition of how digital differs from analogue materiality is a matter of debate, both in the academic and archival spheres. Which actors enter into the process of specifying the material character of an artefact? What influences digital materiality? How exactly does it differ from the analogue? The complexity of the digital form has led to the emergence of several compelling discursive viewpoints that approach materiality from diverse conceptual standpoints. The articulation of materiality in the digital age could be summarised into four groups: media continuity, ontological rupture, software prism, and digital materialism. All four perspectives are briefly described in order to understand how they differ and how they define materiality.

The first approach, media continuity, sees digital matter as a different form of the already known analogue medium. Analogue formats are no longer dominant; however, digital images are similarly used within the industry: production processes follow the same pattern (Westcott, 2010: 253–259; Casetti, 2015); the image is constructed based on the convention of realistic register¹⁰ (Darley, 1997: 16–24;

⁸ A glitch is a minor, transient malfunction that happens in a system for unclear reasons.

⁹ Jean-Louis Baudry's apparatus theory (1986a, 1986b), originally coined in the 1970s, presents the identity of moving pictures as modulable and dependent on the specific periodical dispositif thought the film presents to its viewers or users. Dispositif is a term to describe the mutually interacting dynamic between the figure of the viewer, the mediated content and the situation in which the content is consumed. The technological element influences this whole dynamic. While this is a configuration first articulated in the ideological critique of the cinematic apparatus and how the subject of a spectator is sutured into the fictional world of moving images, it later found use in media archaeology. Thomas Elsaesser (2016: 111) opened the term to function as an archaeological device through which the specificity of various dispositifs – the 'dispositif cinema', 'dispositif photography', 'dispositif video', 'dispositif television', and 'dispositif telephone' – can be grasped in their difference and their temporal, material, media determination.

¹⁰ Realistic registries have a vague definition. Computer-generated realism is predominantly defined as imitation based on the representational strategies of cinematography and photographic images. Achieving a realistic effect is not a matter of either/or, but instead finding a balance between the different actors (render detail, image depth, movement, light). As the term is ambiguous, there are several definitions of a realistic register: second-order realism (Darley, 1997), synthetic realism (Manovich, 2001), and perceptual realism (Prince, 1996). The film image's rendering and structuring

Manovich, 1997; Prince, 1996: 27–37); the projection situation in a cinema (or via television) has remained almost unchanged (Casetti, 2015). Media continuity does not consider the digital transition as a turning point in articulating the materiality of the audiovisual medium, because moving images (media industry and audiences) still operate on the basis of previously developed categories, forms, and procedures.

The second perspective, based on the notion of ontological rupture, emphasises what is different from analogue, what is new. Ontological rupture tries to articulate potentialities of the digital: aesthetics of digital images (Sobchack, 2000), special effects (Gurevitch, 2016), simulations of the unimaginable (Shaviro, 2016), or different temporalities (Sudmann, 2016). The emphasis is on new materials, new possibilities, and new apparatuses. Nonetheless, the essential reference point for theoretical analysis remains the final image rather than the processes that create it. The first and second approaches look for the definition of materiality through examining the final form (either a digital image or the final design of an apparatus) when it could be observed by a viewer-user-theorist. Thus, beginning with the conception of the interplay of materiality, technology, and content after its structuring, it is impossible to examine the matter as it is being created, at the moment of becoming.

In contrast, the third category, software prism, focuses on code as the central principle through which everything is created (Manovich, 2001; Denson, 2020). This perspective examines code as the main layer of materiality, in opposition to media continuity and the ontological. Digital content is therefore composed of code, and it is essentially content writable in numerical representation that can be manipulated. The materiality is defined by its code, which sets boundaries but also potentialities. This approach raises the question of what is the code to be archived, as Kjetil Jakobsen (2010: 144) is asking, “the source code level with which programmers work, or the machine code, legible only to machines?” While this direction may work for future archiving of contemporary digital artefacts, this

continue in the cinematic tradition, emphasising a believable simulation of pre-camera reality. This aesthetic continuity could be understood as the fulfilment of Bazin's myth of *total cinema*, a dream of accurate and believable imitation (Bazin, 1979). Accompanying this argument is the aesthetic promise of a more realistic register given by technological developments. This line of theoretical thinking postulates mimetic capacities of the medium as a primary aesthetic goal.

approach is not relevant for our efforts to find and establish digital artefacts that date back several decades or even longer. To find at least an imprint of the star wipe in a television series or film is a process, and to find even its code that would be readable and usable is beyond the limits of this thesis.

The last group, digital materialism, generally concentrates on a final form – of how an artefact appears to the observer’s eyes – but acknowledges the dynamic between the interface and the software-hardware base as the key factor (Wood, 2015; Reichert and Richterich, 2015; Bruno, 2014). Considering the above, digital materialism is the background for our theoretical experiment. This approach allows us to work with the form of artefacts – to focus on how they appear to us as viewers/users – but recognizes that it is the result of a dynamic interplay between hardware, software, and interface (Galloway, 2004). Thus, our digital artefact – the star wipe – is the result of a certain material-technological configuration, in which it matters whether it is digital or analogue, even though it looks the same on the level of visual representation.

2.2 The Artefact

It is necessary to explain what the star wipe is, since it serves as a case study for the entire thesis. The star wipe is an editing effect that connects two moving frames or scenes through a wipe in the shape of a star. A wipe transition is a post-production editing transition method in which one shot wipes one image (or a sequence of images) away while bringing about a new one by moving a boundary line (of different shapes: heart, circle, square, matrix) from one side of the frame to the other (or from the centre to the edges and vice versa).

Transitions have become increasingly crucial in visual storytelling, with directors relying on the audience’s understanding of the transition “code” (Wosky, 2008: 133; Brenneis, 2006: 473; Gaskell, 2003).¹¹ Wipes are part of the cinematic grammar that has slowly evolved across films, television series, new platforms (such as Youtube or TikTok), and their audiences. There have been changes; some

¹¹ In the wider editing transitions family, we could find simple cut, fade out, fade in, dissolve, cross-fade, and other variations.

were of a short-term nature, and some set new long-term trends (Dancyger, 2007: 184–223).¹² Despite that, the classical Hollywood tradition of invisible (or non-distracting) editing remains the conventional rule (Dancyger, 2007: 361–372). Nevertheless, this does not mean that deviations appear.

Instead of being part of conventional editing, the star wipe might be defined as an effect that was meant to disrupt, emphasise, or ridicule the scene's tone, and was therefore not utilised more than once throughout the whole production (Millerson, 1985: 117). The star wipe cannot be overlooked. "A wipe is a line pattern moving across the screen like a sponge across a blackboard. It appears to erase the foregoing action, leaving a new scene in its place. It is particularly effective in suggesting the passage of time between two scenes," as Hans Fantel (1990) notes. The star wipe ostentatiously shows its presence in moving images – both in terms of visual frames and temporal duration it takes a few seconds for a star shape to disappear, and hence to finish the transition from one frame to the second one. And yet, it is the object that remains unseen. The star wipe is indeed visible, but also forgettable, irrelevant.

2.2.1 From Analogue to Digital

Similar to many digital objects, the star wipe originated in pre-digital times. It surfaced sporadically in old television series such as *The Guiding Light* (1980–1989), in which star wipes were employed for the opening sequences. At least to a limited extent, the star wipe was present in Anglo-American television production. And like other artefacts, the star wipe has reappeared in digital form. It was an editing effect that became part of the early digital culture in the audiovisual sphere, and it became an effect that could be inserted into the footage with a single click. This accessibility of the effect (see in Figure 1) is shown in contemporary television productions, *The Simpsons* ("Alone Again, Natura-Diddily", 2000) or *Better Call Saul* ("Off Brand", 2017).

¹² Short-term changes include the use of sound effects, lavish fonts, or no longer used camera angles. On the other hand, transformations that have remained integral to the audiovisual include invisible editing, synchronisation of the sound component, the stabilisation of the subtitle format, and more.



Figure 1: A still from *Better Call Show* to illustrate how the star wipe can look like © AMC

Retaining its character across analogue and digital media, the star wipe is a wipe that blends shot A with shot B through the outline of a star. For Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (2000: 15), there is no single medium or media detail that exists in isolation from other media; older media remain present to a certain degree in new media, and they can manifest at the level of mediating content, gesture (the layout of the letters on the keyboard and the writing gestures associated with this pattern) or visual icons (including, for example, a razor blade in the editing software that represents tools from the analogue film editing table era). This process, which Bolter and Grusin (2000: 47) call remediation, suggests that the new medium “remains dependent on the older one in acknowledged or unacknowledged ways.” The star wipe seemingly has the same effect in analogue images and in digital motion pictures – the star still looks like a star. However, we could use the principle of remediation to question how the old is remediated by the new or, despite the appearance of no change, what material differences the new version acquires. In our case, the editing effect has changed once it has become part of the new medium.

2.2.2 The Digital Star Wipe

In the analogue era, materiality was linked to the apparatus; captured moments were imprinted on a filmstrip, which were later reproduced and projected. In the analogue medium, we could theoretically take a razor blade or scissors and cut the star wipe out of film frames. In contrast, the materiality of the digital object is a dynamic interplay between hardware, software and interface. If this dynamic is disturbed, the object may cease to exist, and may not be readable or recognisable. On the other hand, would it be enough if we just took a screenshot of the star wipe (could it be understood as the equivalent of scissors)? At first glance, the screenshot strategy seems functional; in this section, we focus on the character of the digital star wipe, thus suggesting why neither scissors nor screenshots are enough.

The star wipe's dual character is simultaneously presented as a distinctive visual object (a star-shaped outline that is part of an audiovisual content) and an editing technique. Postulating digital artefacts as objects is a bit metaphorical, as they are different from physical items and other non-digital records. They are editable, interactive, modifiable, and accessible (Kallinikos et al., 2013). Thus, it is problematic to determine what is original: to define what form (or version) the artefact, audiovisual data, can be archived in.

The star wipe is an editing effect based on the technological determinations and potentialities of the material configuration in which it is created. The wipe is a fragment that exists only at the moment of transition from one segment to another. Therefore, it remains tied to the hardware-software-interface dynamic. As Cosetta G. Saba (2013: 113) concludes, "giving these works a specific type of "scriptural" materiality that should be preserved." In other words, we conclude that the star wipe exists at the moment of becoming.

Even if we only work with a single fragment, our selected lost digital artefact combines signs that can be found across other digital objects: minority position, ephemerality, and the dual identity (in our case, as an object and as a technique). As previously stated, the goal of this thesis is to examine how one specific artefact stimulates the archival imagination rather than categorise all digital items that the

archive has not yet collected. The star wipe is an important case study as it disrupts what we expect from an archival object, which does not have to be something that has a defined form; it does not have to be a work of art. The star wipe is a puzzle for the archival imagination. The question is how to capture audiovisual objects that take on different material configurations.

2.3 Archival Imagination

In the archival context, remediation can be understood as the continuous return of memorable images, symbols, documents, and artefacts (Erl1 2008: 392) that helps to maintain, stabilise and preserve cultural memory. As Astrid Erl1 (2008: 393) describes, “remediation tends to solidify cultural memory, creating and stabilising certain narratives and icons of the past.” Gestures, techniques, practices, and symbols are stabilised and imprinted into memory. While repetition is conducive to the formation of cultural heritage, we need to ask about what has not been repeated (Hall, 2002). How does the archival imagination, created on the basis of the analogue configuration, allow the repetition of digital artefacts?

2.3.1 How Archival Imagination Works

Archival imagination is a term used in post-colonial archival theory, for which the archive symbolises an institution whose structure not only shapes the past but also indicates the future as it forms the basis for the imagination of forthcoming narratives (Hochberg, 2021). Archival imagination describes the dynamic between archives and archivable objects. The archiving system is established and confirmed by validating an archivable object’s possible form(s). The notion of archival imagination indicates how archives constitute what is considered audiovisual material and, concurrently, moving images, objects, and documents reinforce archives. It is a constant dynamic in which one actor affirms the other and vice versa. “The archive is the basis of what can be said in the future about the present when it will have become the past,” as Aleida Assmann (2008: 102) recapitulates the power of archival institutions. Archival imagination is the integration of images of past forms with those of current versions of audiovisual media. The past confirms the present and the present confirms the past (Ernst, 2015).

2.3.2 Stable Imagination and Flickering Images

In archival practice, digital media have not been adapted as adequate replacements for celluloid film, which remains the standard (Lee and Bard, 1988; Fossati, 2018: 271–323). This step is explained by the extended compatibility and functionality of the analogue material, as opposed to the digital, whose new types of data storage formats may have a relatively short lifespan. It may become obsolete and unreadable faster. On the level of practical archiving, analogue has remained present as the dominant medium on which digital film can be transcribed as one of the options for preserving digital materiality (Lenk, 2014). Nonetheless, there is a distinction between the preferred format for preserving audiovisual data and asking if digital fragments are considered part of the audiovisual heritage.

Moving pictures have been tied to technological change since the first attempts to capture and reproduce movement. Advances in machinery and equipment development have affected constructions and mechanisms of recording devices (such as processes of stabilisation image, noise reduction, standardisation), projection apparatuses (increasing projection quality, safety, or accessibility), and reels (switching to stable chemical substances, adding an audio track, or rendering a digital version). The mass-produced audiovisual image cannot be separated from its technological basis on which theoretical conceptions of the medium, artistic techniques, industrial practices, business strategies, consumption habits, and preserving efforts are based.

To illustrate this, we can outline¹³ how the definition of moving images has changed from the end of the nineteenth century to the present day. In pre-cinematic times into the early twentieth century, moving images were associated with optical toys or illusionary machines, which presented audiovisual loops of movement as a trick, magic, and temporal gimmick (Gitelman and Pingree, 2003). Early cinema was an

¹³ This sketch is not intended to be a comprehensive presentation of the development of the audiovisual medium. To portray a coherent historical development would be to accept the homogeneous narrative against which this thesis sets itself. On the contrary, each sentence is meant to indicate the specific technological-material configuration of the medium at a given time. Thus, to illustrate that we are dealing with a constantly changing medium, this character should be reflected in the archival imagination.

inherent part of the audiovisual culture of the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a technological invention that soon turned into art for the masses (Kracauer, 1995). In the 1930s, the birth of sound pictures represented the next step towards stabilisation and systematisation; the configuration of the silent film had become a relic of the past (Spadoni, 2007). Less than two decades later, the crossover with television broadcasting emphasised the prospect of the temporal simultaneity of television transmission between a studio and a viewer (Zielinski, 1999). Appearances of other types and formats of audiovisual media contributed to a more visible intermediality, dissolving the fixed idea of media specificity (Balson, 2017). Furthermore, digitalisation has transformed audiovisual content into a data sphere, which has raised ontological concerns due to the presumed loss of indexicality (Doane, 2007). All these instants (and others that did not make our list) have been part of a never-ending process of constant re-modulation. As Giovanna Fossati (2018: 21) notes, “[audiovisual media] their inherently transitional nature” keeps returning stillness into constant motion; ergo, the audiovisual medium is a technological medium par excellence.

2.3.3 Archivable Objects and the Rest

Audiovisual media in 1922, 1972 and 2022 are different media configurations. Moving images as a medium do not exist in a singularity – as one clearly defined object that would remain unchanged across the century. The definition is affected by the interconnection of motion pictures, recording devices, projectors, materials, and artefacts that constitute the audiovisual medium at the particular moment in history. Thus, the concept can be understood as a network of elements: film reels, recording apparatus, reproducing mechanisms, projection machines, and dispositifs (a term describing the dynamic between a viewer, a mediated content, and a situation in which this dynamic is happening).

Among the archived objects we could notice a certain hierarchy. As one of the clearly defined groups, one could include photographic filmstrips¹⁴ (regardless of

¹⁴ Depending on archival acquisition policies, films may be accepted in other formats, such as 8mm, Super-8, 16mm, Betamax, VHS, laserdisc, HD DVD, or obsolete professional video formats (2”, 1”, ¾” U-matic, ½” reel-to-reel, etc.).

the length¹⁵) or projection apparatuses, which are stable elements of audiovisual culture (from cinematography to television). Other dominant groups include apparatuses, promotional materials, or documents¹⁶ (scripts, contracts, photographs, patents, etc.).

In addition to big categories, the configuration of the audiovisual medium – from technology to aesthetics – is shaped by peripheral artefacts. These are part of the primary objects, perhaps as fragments, such as a mechanism, an editing tool, or an effect. Their presence is part of the given technological configuration of the audiovisual medium. This category of artefacts may be linked to locally specific media, a short-term update that is immediately replaced by another, or a response to a change in the production of a component. These are objects subject to constant updating; they can disappear unnoticed from culture, practice, and memory regardless of whether they are objects associated with analogue or digital material.

The archival sphere does not exclude partial artefacts. The collecting of these items, however, is typically not guided by an acquisition policy, and they find themselves in the archives by accident, as a component of a film, a camera, or a projector, or there is a note about their existence in the documents. Although not a dominant category, similar artefacts play a role in re-articulating the archival imagination. These fragments offer potentialities of audiovisual media that are not visible without their presence or a more detailed view of the contemporary practice of production, distribution, or exhibition.

2.3.4 (Digital) Blind Spots of Archival Imagination

Through the revision of the archival imagination and subsequent research, forgotten artefacts can be recovered. For instance, Kinemacolor was a colour motion picture process in early cinema which added colour to black-and-white films. This

¹⁵ If we move from the abstract to the practical, audiovisual archives have a partial hierarchization of film genres. For example, the Academy Film Archive does not accept educational, amateur, industrial films, or audiovisual productions made for Internet distributors. Available at: <https://www.oscars.org/academy-film-archive/about-archive> (accessed 20 July 2022).

¹⁶ While documents generally form an integral part of archival collections because they provide historically valuable information, again, the types of documents that end up in archival collections can vary.

mechanism altered the understanding of colour in early films; colour grading, tinting, adding processes were expected to be a part of film production (if at all). This in-cinema technique included adding colour¹⁷ during the projection (Lewinsky and McKernan, 2017). Or an example of several film frames of a girl at the beginning of each filmstip (the so-called ‘china girl phenomenon’(Yue, 2020)) used to calibrate colour sensitivity in a camera before the filming began. Nevertheless, these frames were not part of the finished work, thereby suggesting that the film reel includes frames that were intended for the camera eye, thus decentering the human perspective. These two examples were replaced and later forgotten, although they formed an integral part of the configuration of the audiovisual medium at the time.

Film archives have many empty or blind spots, whose existence, if left without theoretical or historical response, creates an incomplete or even misleading conception of what moving pictures are and what belongs to the audiovisual heritage. When being continuously updated (as is the attempt of the current study), they can offer space for encouraging the archival environment to redefine what an archivable object can be. How is a digital artefact defined? Is it a blind spot of archival imagination or an established archival object?

When archivists, preservationists, and theorists discuss digital artefacts in the context of archives, they either address the instability of digital media and the constant need to migrate audiovisual data (Giuliani and Negri, 2011), or the digital restoration, which is a process of making a digital copy of analogue film to provide contemporary viewers with access to it (De Klerk, 2017). The transformation of analogue images into a digital form is carried out on the basis of the scanning technique, in which details outside the frame of the scanner camera can escape digital capture (Flückiger, 2012). The process of disconnecting the image from its carrier raises questions: for example, the historicity of the newly created digital doppelgänger (Negri, 2016) or the epistemological rupture between analogue and digital (Lundemo, 2014). Born-digital artefacts remain in the audiovisual archival field rather non-visible (Cave, 2008). Nevertheless, as we argue, the digital artefact

¹⁷ More about colour in moving images: <https://filmcolors.org/timeline-entry/1214/> (accessed 20 July 2022).

could be perceived in relation to the characteristics of digital culture, thus existing outside the predefined status as a double – as something that only multiplies the already known from the pre-digital era.

2.3 Theory from Below

Our situation is as follows. We have outlined the transformations digitalisation has brought into the audiovisual field, which has resulted in digital forms of established media objects as well as peripheral digital artefacts that are not yet seen through an archival prism. Thereafter, we have focused on one of the “insignificant” pieces, which is taken as a case study to challenge and broaden the archive imagination. We have not yet described the strategy through which the star wipe can be captured and brought into the archival imagination. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss a theoretical perspective that works with overlooked and seemingly irrelevant objects.

The attachment to an almost forgotten artefact has been inspired by media archaeology. As Jussi Parikka (2012: 3) notes, “media archaeology sees media cultures as sedimented and layered, a fold of time and materiality where the past might be suddenly discovered anew, and the new technologies grow obsolete increasingly fast.” The theoretical strategy tries to reframe how media configurations were constructed in the past and are understood in the present. Media archaeologists have argued that generally accepted narratives of modern media culture, media histories, and media genealogies frequently describe just particular aspects of the story, which might lead to simplifying conclusions or eliminating “irrelevant” details to fit the narrator’s perspective (Strauven, 2013). Thomas Elsaesser (2004: 80) concluded, media archaeology works against the danger, the comfort, the power of homogenisation that can erase, or unintentionally hide, destroy the existence of ruptures and cracks. This theoretical approach emphasises the appearance of a given media object foremost as a result of a specific discourse. Archaeology is thus concerned with the ever-changing relations and connections between media objects and historical, technological, or archival discourses (Parikka, 2013).

Media archaeology is the amalgam of several theoretical shifts of the 20th century. Sources of inspiration have included: Walter Benjamin's take on modernity; Aby Warburg's collages created from visual topoi and gestures across art history (Vollgraff, 2019); Michel Foucault's re-framing of archaeology (2002) which, as a result, has become the analytical tool to uncover histories that have not been articulated through the systems of thought, and hence have not been inscribed into the discourse (Ernst, 2013: 23); New Film History has symbolised the fruitfulness of cooperation between archives and audiovisual theory and history, thanks to which myths around the early spectatorship were questioned. To conclude, media archaeology cannot be reduced to a coherent school with one methodology (Huhtamo and Parikka, 2011). Rather, it is a collection of different approaches that have been formulated as a response to understanding the constantly changing media network(s).

For our understanding of archivable artefacts in connection to the theoretical gaze, one gesture, present in media archaeology, is essential: the object of research is not a mere illustration for theoretical thinking but a material partner to theory. A theory "from below," defined by Jiří Anger (2022: 12) as doing theory differently, less filling categories with audiovisual objects "and more "from below," from the perspective of a film object, if its multifarious details and facets, however marginal, unintentional, or aleatory they might be." In other words, the proposed strategy that can be applied to work with archival materials, which are not just waiting to be classified but are partners for the theorist.

Some similarity in approach can be found in some instances of media archaeology. The approach focuses on only a single artefact. Because of this limitation, one of the outcomes could be to go outside the established metaphors connected to the selected media object that may not be entirely accurate. Therefore, this strategy looks beyond the horizon of metaphors to cables, batteries, and switches to articulate the different characteristics of a given technological medium, machine, or object (Ernst, 2021). Searching for zombie media and indicating their specificity, principle, and limitations is the second strategy (Hertz and Parikka, 2012). The third strategy would be framing an object in its specific social culture of the economic

system and asking how its viewers used it (Crary, 1992). If this thesis aimed to create a new categorization of media archaeology, we could continue with this list.

To conclude, the theory from below emphasises one artefact as the point through which theory can unfold since an artefact itself postulates counter-arguments for theory to work with. Hints of this approach can be found in media archaeology, for which the fragment symbolises the possibility of disrupting a homogeneous narrative. Anger's approach (2021, 2022) suggests a more detailed view and work with the object which could be a single frame, on filmstrips created by Jan Kříženecký, the first Czech filmmaker. Due attention to one single frame, he shows the material-technological determination and its implications. We try to embody this attention to detail in the figure of the fetishistic collector, who is supposed to capture the digital detail, not just the analogue.

2.3.1 Fetishistic Collector

Returning to the metaphor of ephemerality and instability of media constellations that have been further replicated by digitalisation: in the blink of an eye, the star wipe disappeared from editing programs in 2014; since then, it has only sporadically appeared on screens. All that remained were a few mentions in the tutorials of the existence of various editing effects in the transition section, but often without specifying or describing the exact form of the effect, whether it was a star wipe, heart, or matrix effect, and a couple of comments from users on internet forums.

When all contours are lost, and only a flickering image remains in the memory, the Reddit forum Lost Media¹⁸ offers help, be it fragments on the content plane, specific hardware add-ons, or various not only audiovisual effects. Some media fragments have disappeared from audiovisual and individual memories due to the lack of traces; their existence is more akin to a dream than an imprint of what was once natural and functioning. However, the primary object of our theoretical interest has

¹⁸ Online space where people try to find media items that have been lost, disappeared, deleted. Gradually, the community expanded to other platforms such as YouTube. Available at: <https://www.reddit.com/r/lostmedia/> (accessed 20 July 2022).

maintained its contours. The star wipe is neither a fragment from a dream nor an internet Fata Morgana caused by exhaustion and imperceptible flickering of digital screens.

Our aim is not to sketch the historical genesis of the artefact as a confirmation of its existence in constantly changing media networks, as would be the case with the community of internet searchers. The star wipe has different materiality in each of its instances; when it is part of the analogue medium, it is defined by the celluloid filmstrip, the editing table, Panasonic video editing models,¹⁹ and hands of the editor. Thus, it is a different character than the digital star wipe. Our task is to touch, capture, and archive the digital star wipe.

Instead, our defining moment would be when we, as fetishistic collectors, encounter the object: when we actively intervene with the artefact.

“And for the true collector, every single thing in this system [the collection] becomes an encyclopaedia of all knowledge of the epoch, the landscape, the industry, and the owner from which it comes. It is the deepest enchantment of the collector to enclose the particular item within a magic circle, whereas as a last shudder runs through it (the shudder of being acquired), it turns to stone,” Walter Benjamin’s (1973: 205) understanding of collecting.

Following Benjamin’s argument, the fetishistic collector implies an acknowledgement of the difficulty of capturing the media network in its vastness and ever-changing nature.

As has already been said, the fetishistic collector has been influenced by media archaeology, in which some authors obsessively hold their object, searching for its proliferating profiles and forms while transcending the sphere of rigid media hierarchies, thus going against the established idea and taste of what is theoretically graspable within audiovisual culture.

¹⁹ To edit VHS.

Nonetheless, this theoretical figure does not reject the archive; rather, it represents an archiving strategy developed from the current digital sphere to complement the current archival network. Following Lawrence Lian's (2015: 10) words, "an archive actively creates new ways of thinking about how we access our individual and collective experiences." Hence, the fetishistic collector could be understood as a version of an autonomous archive – as an archival modality. Like a theory from below, it can only exist if it has an object of interest from which it can be derived. Hence, the fetishistic collector cannot be separated from the collected artefacts (Benjamin, 1969).

2.4 Summary: Stop and Do Not Blink

The second chapter described how the advent of digitalisation in the audiovisual culture created new digital artefacts that do not fit into the archival imagination defined by analogue material. These are tiny, ephemeral artefacts, which often do not have to be perceived as artefacts in themselves. Because of their ambiguous character, they might be perceived rather as visual data, as well as procedures, methods, and outcomes. Moreover, materiality has lost the straightforwardness of the analogue; as it has already been said, digital materiality is more like a dynamic between technology, materiality, and an interface that renders and mediates an object. Thus, the primary task is to bring digital artefacts into the horizon of the archival perspective as preservable objects. To capture artefacts that can disappear in the blink of an eye, we have suggested a different perspective: that of the fetishistic collector. Before we start illustrating another modality of archival imagination, the following segment addresses the dust and shelves of audiovisual archives.

3. Audiovisual Archive

Audiovisual archives are institutions that manage and preserve the audiovisual heritage of a specific region.²⁰ However, archives are not neutral storehouses that accept everything related to audiovisual culture (Brunow, 2015: 40). On the contrary, they are active agents creating an idea of what can be considered a historical source “through selection, classification, and categorization, for instance through metadata,” as Dagmar Brunow notes (2015, 40). Storing artefacts that are historically, artistically, or technologically significant according to a given archival organisation is fruitful for the continuity of collecting, which establishes audiovisual archives as institutions that preserve film heritage.²¹ Through repetition of the practice, archives confirm the audiovisual medium – the character, the technological configuration, the position in art production, and at the same time the role of the media in society. One actor confirms the other, and vice versa. It is a loop of constant reinforcement. Nevertheless, if the institution is validated by the item and the object is recognised by the institution, this might result in homogeneity and possible displacement of what does not belong, what does not fit, and what is different (Elsaesser, 2016: 86).

3.1 Archive as Performative

²⁰ The primary focus of this text is to be on archives whose primary task is the archiving of audiovisual culture. Various institutions create the audiovisual archive network, and in addition to the archives themselves, it may include other organisations. It should be mentioned at this point that the powers and responsibilities of the sub-institutions may vary from region to region, so the following overview is purely indicative of the size of the archive network. In addition to archives, technical museums are involved in archiving and usually have apparatus and mechanisms in their depositories but may also have film media as part of the history of technological development. There are also cinematheques, which focus primarily on screenings, or film museums as exhibition spaces, which may or may not be linked to an archive. Whereas for technical museums, audiovisual is another example rather than a priority. Film museums and cinematheques, on the other hand, emphasise presentation.

²¹ Archival approach and practice are determined by the origins of the institution, the era in which it was founded, the size of the archive, funding, affiliation to the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) or with another archival organisation, as described by Penelope Houston (1994: 5). Whether these are public archives, privately owned collections, ranging from art collectives to political parties and ending with archives under global media conglomerates, also plays an integral role. Most institutions acquire and preserve audiovisual mediums and materials – and objects related to cinematography (and/or television, video) such as various apparatuses, projectors, posters, scenarios, photographs, and diaries – under their policies and financial resources that may differ significantly.

Collecting items that fall under the definition of archivable artefacts results in a continuing affirmation and reinforcement of the archival categorisations and ideas, which shows that archival imagination is a product of a particular discourse which may not be as stable as one might think. According to Michel Foucault (2002: 146, 170), an archive is not a stable set of collections, procedures, definitions but “the general system of the formation and transformation of statements.” His conceptualisation is based on understanding the institution as a syntactic structure that prescribes what can be seen. Laws emerge at the moment of articulating what can be said and shown. Rules are materialised through objects which they help render into being. A similar situation could be found in a grammatical structure that is present, but visibly materialises only when a sentence is formed on its basis. Following this argument, the archive should be perceived as a structural frame of relations that allows the artefacts to emerge. The categorisations are not permanent but are subject to change from both inside and outside the institution. Archival performativity is manifested in the presence of archivable objects and in the absence of non-archivable objects.

To address archival imagination is to look at what is archived. As Fossati (2018: 142) describes, “different assumptions about what film is lead to different approaches to what film is becoming and, consequently, to what film archives should become.” Film archives define the understanding of moving images through preserving previous film formats and cinematic forms and reconstructing damaged audiovisual fragments; thus, simultaneously establishing historical narratives of the medium to reinforce the archival imagination of what character the medium – film, artefacts, apparatuses, dispositifs – might obtain. The following section presents how the era in which archives were founded affects the understanding of media character. At the same time, the subchapter suggests that even a relatively short period is enough for the archival imagination to forget previous audiovisual configurations, which thus must be rediscovered.

3.2 Reformulation of Archival Imagination

Audiovisual archives were created to store and preserve the moving-image media and the apparatuses, mechanisms, and various other objects or texts connected to

the specific material configuration: the analogue. It was an outcome of the institutionalisation of motion pictures on a broader scale. The 1930s saw the start of this endeavour on the European continent, at a time when the moving picture had already become an essential component of social groups, commerce, and government organisations, in addition to the cultural sphere. The majority of film archives were established by the 1980s.²² The film has become the main archivable object. Hierarchisation of film materials and artefacts was already taking place at the time of the archive's creation. The national archives receive primarily local productions supported by regional film institutions, companies, and organisations. Specific types of audiovisual images may be given to different archival institutions. Experimental audiovisual pieces, such as avant-garde films, have been archived in private collections, archives of filmmakers or artistic collectives, and in galleries. Film productions that did not fit ideologically were placed in underground archives or archives founded by parties.

The audiovisual medium is in constant motion; the character of moving images undergoes a never-ending spiral of updating: what it can be and what form it can take. Still, the analogue film has acquired many variations over a century. Some transformations became part of the archival imagination (for example, the colour or sound as an integral part of film material), while others remained outside (such as different techniques and practices, amateur DIY improvements, and some formats). Specific filmstrips have been created for enthusiasts and amateurs but also for commercial production; there has been a broad portfolio of film materials that has differed in having or not having a soundtrack, light-sensitive layers, and types of film perforations to meet the needs of audiovisual industries (film or television) and amateur filmmakers. The above-mentioned objects could be classified as a group of fragments connected to a very specific audiovisual configuration, which was more of a contemporary curiosity than a dominant form of moving image. Sometimes, even insignificant details can play a role in making moving images

²² It is mostly about the history of archives on the European continent. Although audiovisual archives have emerged along a similar trajectory around the world, for example in South America. Due to colonial structures and upheavals during the 20th century, there are different fates for film or television archives: they were created later, they are not public institutions, or, on the contrary, they did not emerge at all in a given region. For a simple timeline of the evolution of archival institutions across the world. Available at: <https://www.fiafnet.org/pages/History/FIAF-Timeline.html> (accessed 20 July 2022)

different, which was the case in understanding early cinema. Early cinema was perceived as a developmental stage, moving towards narrative long-form filmmaking. Thus, it was not perceived as a specific configuration at the time.

The most visible transformation of the archival imagination occurred around the 1980s. Previous conceptualisations portrayed early film production as the first developmental stage of audiovisual production, which had technological, practical, and artistic flaws in contrast to the narrative feature film, which eventually became the industry standard. This idea was confronted by the emergence of New Film History that benefited from access to archival materials. Theorists were able to see early films in their fragmentary form, look at the materiality of the analogue medium, and approach moving images as frozen stills. Thus, a new understanding of early moving pictures was created and spread into academia and the archives (Gaudreault and Gunning, 2006). This breakthrough occurred half a century ago, but new research continues to emerge, suggesting that the moving images of the early 20th century were in no way primitive or naive.

The early film was a specific variant of the analogue medium, which took place in a different dispositif: soundtracks from musicians accompanied projections of moving images (Campanini, 2016); different projection speeds (Brownlow, 1980); different image quality. For this configuration of moving images, it was given the term “cinema of attractions” (Gunning, 1990), which characterises production and exhibition of moving images in conditions of the early 20th century. This example illustrates how ephemeral the partial versions and forms of the audiovisual medium are. Hence, the re-actualisation of archival imagination demonstrates how a relatively short period is enough to forget specific elements of the audiovisual medium – in this case, the entire phase of early cinema from 1895 to the 1910s.

Suppose the notion of early cinema could almost disappear from the archival imagination and collective memory without the intervention of new film history. How long will the early digital era in audiovisual production take to disappear from collective memory? When will it be introduced in the archival imagination? Using one digital artefact – the star wipe – from the early digital era of audiovisual production, the turn of the millennium, as the case study is to investigate if such an

artefact is perceptible to the archive imagination and whether it is possible to understand it in its technological and material originality.

3.3 Archival Object Theorisation

What tools does the archival imagination offer for grasping digital media? Film theorist and archivist Giovanna Fossati (2018) defines five archival frameworks – audiovisual medium as *dispositif*, art, original, state of art,²³ and performance²⁴ – each of which views moving images as results of slightly different mechanisms and processes. The following text discusses each approach to indicate how archives perceive an archival object. The question is whether the current archival theory provides a perspective that would allow one to see the star as an object that might be preserved, and if so, in what form.

3.3.1 As Art

The audiovisual medium as art prism played a crucial role in the justification for the establishment of audiovisual archives, which protect a type of art that offers distinct aesthetic potential from other genres – such as visual art, music, theatre, or radio (Slide, 1992). The view of audiovisual creation as a medium-specific art constitutes moving images as valuable archival objects; however, motion pictures are a technological art whose materials and techniques are constantly actualised. Therefore, Fossati (2018: 168) goes outside the classical definition of art as found in Gotthold Ephraim *Lessing*, in which each art has its stable placement, and posits a different argument that “medium specificity, [...] offers the grounds for film archives to preserve the film material artefacts as the medium-specific manifestations of different phases of an art form in transition”. Thus, it would be possible to make an argument that all instances belong to the audiovisual archive, from analogue to digital material, as specific shards of media specificity. Although

²³ The state of art approach is linked to the film industry and primarily to private archival institutions that belong to media companies. Thus, it is not entirely usable for our task to acknowledge a fragment as the star wipe is not understood as a commodity to be owned.

²⁴ As performance perspective is tied to early cinematography, which deals with the context of early visual culture and the phenomenon of film projections. This perspective is linked to a specific version of audiovisual culture, which deals with the interaction and dynamics between various actors during the projection of early images.

in practice, this argument may not be so easily and quickly implemented, as it depends on funding, defined archival obligations, and institutional and human capacity. Medium specificity is a broad term that can encompass many potentialities and possibilities of a given material technological configuration of the medium. Research related to the extension of media specificity is often associated with early films or other technological transformations of analogue media rather than with digital media (Gunning, et al, 2015).

The other side of this approach is linked to the figure of an artist, who supports a particular form of the audiovisual medium known through distribution channels: cinema, festivals, and television. By reflecting the position of an artist through feminist (Förster, 2017), or queer (Eichhorn, 2018) suggests various ideas of what authorship can entail. As a result, more objects by different authors have been added to the archive, or artefacts created by a previously unseen artist were discovered in the archive. However, these were always clearly defined works, objects, artefacts. The very notion of the character of an archivable work was not disturbed.

Approaching audiovisual artefacts as art can be beneficial with the advent of the digital age, where there is still a need to articulate a new form of audiovisual media in an archival environment. However, this perspective does not offer ways to capture fragmentary objects that defy being categorised: media specificity, aesthetic tradition, authorship.

3.3.2 As Original

The term “original” is a fluid concept that can refer to various artefacts based on the original definition: a camera negative, a distribution print, or a rough cut that never reached the audience. The concept of the original may seem almost naive concerning the technological medium whose essence stood in the process of copying. From the archival perspective, the notion of originality is a tool that allows us to outline life in its multiplicity of the print, the artefact, the apparatus (Hediger, 2005).

A particular artefact's materiality grounds it in history since it leaves an imprint of certain procedures, devices, materials, technologies, and human hands from a particular era. In the case of analogue material, the image is the result of chemical processes that are subject to the influence of the environment as well as sufficient exposure to light. In addition, both a camera and a projector can leave scratches, cracks, and static electricity marks on the filmstrip. The analogue medium is literally an imprint of the given moment, both in terms of what was captured intentionally and what was brought into the picture as a result of the work of technology and material.

However, this perspective is not fully suited for digital artefacts because they are still variable, malleable objects that do not seem to bear the imprint of the machine through which they were created or seen. Thus, Braxton Soderman (2007: 163) argues that "digital images are produced under such circumstances that they are physically compelled to correspond point by point to a symbolic algorithm." Although the materiality of digital artefacts may appear unstable, ephemeral, and elusive, this does not mean that they are objects without a material aspect.

Every type of film footage used in film or television production is subject to a deterioration process caused by natural causes such as temperature, humidity, and light exposure. For digital footage, there are disadvantages of unreadability or incompatibility for contemporary software (Matthews et al., 2009). Unless the material is damaged to such an extent that its content becomes unrecognisable, the star wipe should be part of the material. The editing aspect is part of the audiovisual material: for an analogue film, it is a literal connection of two parts of a filmstrip; for a digital movie, it is a connection of two segments but without the need for adhesive tape. The star wipe is embedded in the material; if it is implausible to evaporate or disappear without a trace from the material it was once in, where is it?

Nevertheless, it is only the archival institution that performatively promises authenticity to objects by collecting and storing them (Elsaesser, 1998: 207–208). That is why some artefacts have been left outside the archival walls, as Katherine Groo's (2019) analysis of early ethnographic films shows. These moving images have remained fragmented without the possibility of arranging these pieces into a

narrative, chronological understanding. Ethnographic cinema does not fit into archival and historical disciplinary taxonomies because of genre ambiguity, unclear authorship, and unpreserved documents. It is impossible to categorise these films, to classify them, to write their cinematic history, which makes them a challenge to the contemporary conception of the archive, which relies on historical work, creates genealogies, and thus draws a map of audiovisual history. Groo (2019: 259) argues that “the historical meanings of film and filmic historicity itself are not things that we discover (in the archive or on the image) but rather properties that we confer upon film artefacts.” This not only criticises the discursive power of archives but also confronts the notion of originality. Therefore, Groo (2019: 288) suggests that these “bad” film objects persist because of their marginality as they remain, “fragmented, anonymous, and incomplete,” and thus preserve the specific characters, forcing us to revise our approaches to film history so that archival fragments could be validated in their incompleteness.

Digital artefacts, such as the star wipe, could be understood as a similar example as they usually exist as parts of a whole. They are anonymous fragments; they have their function within the whole of which they are part. If they exist on their own, as if they were incomplete, they have no function, whether it be an editing technique without shots to connect or a CGI surface without images to create. These “bad” film objects seem to have existed without their historical trajectory, even though they were part of the audiovisual culture, but thanks to their marginality, they never attracted the attention of archivists. However, the step towards articulating the star wipe as a “bad” audiovisual artefact is to be taken in the last chapter dedicated to the fetishistic collector.

3.3.3 As Dispositif

That being said, moving beyond a film print (mechanism, apparatus, or in other words, one isolated piece) as a vehicle for audiovisual legacy Giovanna Fossati (2018: 171–174) elaborates on Jean-Louis Baudry’s apparatus theory defined in the 1970s²⁵ that presents the identity of moving pictures as modulable and dependent

²⁵ Baudry’s notion of *dispositif* and his ideological critique of it is connected to the film apparatus at the particular period (1986a, 1986b) when watching the film would be possible in dark cinemas

on the specific dispositif through which the audiovisual piece is presented to its viewers or users. The dispositif is a temporally determined phenomenon that is subject to profound transformation determined by technological changes.

The approach focuses on the changing understanding of historical dispositif – to reconstruct past variations of dispositifs in order to properly digitalise a specific component (Fossati, 2018: 171). For instance, digitalisation of sound quality usually depends on the question of where the motion picture was projected (Verscheure, 1995). As cinema in different historical stages presented different dispositifs, some had sound sources placed behind the screen, some were placed around the hall, as the architecture of the cinema hall was not standardised, and sometimes the screening included a performance by a presenter or a musician. All these details define a distinctive configuration of the dispositif. Furthermore, each dispositif has a slightly variable sound (and image) quality, which plays a role in archiving and digitalising motion pictures, which result from a particular dispositif, to maintain historical accuracy.

The second path would turn this premise around and ask how the contemporary digital dispositif²⁶ influences our viewing of archival footage or classical films (Fossati, 2018: 171–174) or what the potentials but also the attractions of watching analogue film on a computer desktop are, how these advantages can be used for archival research, but without forgetting that formerly analogue material is being watched (Rosen, 2001). This means reflecting on how the quality of the image has changed, what has happened to the sound, how the situation of watching originally analogue moving images on a computer monitor affects our perspective and attention.

As Thomas Elsaesser (2016: 111) mentioned, there are many dispositifs within history and each of them represents a particular variation of the relationship between the material aspect and the mediated image through the interface. One

without the possibility to fast-forward, stopping the film, or grasp one film frame as it could be done in the contemporary digital dispositif.

²⁶ The current digital dispositif could be defined through individual experience, distracted attention, a structuring of the image that is invisible to the viewer, but also a different quality of image and sound compared to previous dispositifs (Kessler and Lenk, 2016).

could talk about the dispositif of the mobile phone, ask how the small screen constitutes the spectator position, similarly one could ask about the dispositif of streaming services, digital cinema, watching movies on a plane, and so on. Over the last decades, countless specific dispositifs have emerged that have had different ways of conveying audiovisual content to the viewer, thus constituting a viewing situation of a content for a viewer in different ways (Kessler and Lenk, 2016). These are problems that are addressed in theory but remain unseen in archival practices.

3.4 Digital Archive

Archival theory, both analogue (Fossati, 2016, 2018; Usai, 2001) and digital (Chun, 2011; Manovich, 2013: 225–228), tends to focus on the preservation of material objects with distinctive contours. What if we attempt to archive an editing technique? Something that always involves before and after. Even though the star wipe might be associated with television production, the aesthetic of early digital culture has become part of digital editing applications. There has been a shift from the star wipe as a detail of a finished audiovisual work that could be viewed on screens into a technique that could be available to everyone as part of the transition's portfolio in editing applications. How to work with the fact that the visual object has become a technique available to anyone? The task is to grasp the star wipe within the dispositif²⁷ through which it was created.

Digital technologies were firstly understood merely as partial technological adaptations. Initially, it was a tool that was occasionally used in creative work, whether commercial or artistic. Devices were created to enable a faster production process, distribution, and exhibition. Towards the end of the last millennium, digitalisation was making its way into audiovisual production. However, it was not viewed as a mainstream transformation. From an industry point of view, film distribution and projection were still primarily analogue in the first decade of the new century. Most films, including those made digitally, were printed on film rolls and delivered to movie theatres for projection (Dean, 2011). The digital transition began in the second decade of the present millennium. The year 2012 was the

²⁷ It is the digital dispositif through which cinematographic language is extended (Manovich, 1995; Galloway, 2012). It is a permeable membrane that incorporates earlier visual traditions (Huhtamo, 2006).

moment. The number of analogue film projectors in movie theatres became a rarity. Since then, digital projectors have become the standard (Fossati, 2018: 83). On the European continent, cinemas show digital projections.

This transformation did not go unnoticed. The archival community, some filmmakers, historians, and theorists of the moving image saw this technological shift as the death of celluloid film (Cherchi Usa, 2001; Dean, 2011), i.e., the death of one technological singularity of the film medium. The most dramatic changes impacting archival film practices in the last decade have been the so-called digital rollout, which has replaced analogue film with digital film in the distribution and exhibition in most Western countries. The disappearance of film manufacturing as an industrial practice, the consequent closure of many film laboratories,²⁸ and the end of mass production of analogue material were among the most visible changes that have affected industry practices as well as the archive field. Simultaneously, the growth of digital archives built for the long-term preservation of digitised and born-digital films and open digital platforms, or curatorial exhibitions have become trends (Giannachi, 2016). The advent of digital matter has often been framed as the end of celluloid, and thus the “death of cinema” as we know it (Anger, 2020; Grusin and Szczepaniak-Gillece, 2020).²⁹

“In our current moment of conceptual uncertainty and technological transition, there is an urgent need for a pragmatic, historically informed perspective that maps a sensible middle ground between the euphoria and the panic surrounding new media, a perspective that aims to understand the

²⁸ For example, Czech Television is planning to close its film laboratory. While this thesis seeks to establish digital artefacts in the archival imagination, this does not mean forgetting the analogue audiovisual medium. Because the analogue medium has archival value just as much as the digital version. Although the effort to close the film laboratory at Czech Television is allegedly motivated by the financial situation of the institution, this act of moving away from analogue archiving is a result that is often used as an argument for a primary focus on analogue versus digital in the archival community. More information regarding the film laboratory in Czech Television, available at: <https://www.mediaguru.cz/clanky/2022/06/kameramani-zadaji-ct-at-nerusi-sve-filmove-laboratore/> (accessed 20 July 2022)

²⁹ Perhaps the death of cinema discourse is not entirely accurate, because the audiovisual medium has always had an air of death and loss that was part of the whole technological and material aspect. Following Rodowick’s words (2007: 19): “Cinema is inherently a destructive medium itself [...] Each passage of frames through a projector – the very machine that gives filmographic/projected life to the moving image – advances a process of erosion that will eventually reduce the image to nothing.” Death was always present in the materiality of the analogue, so a more accurate description for the state of the replacement of the analogue by the digital would be rather “the transition to the periphery”.

place of economic, political, legal, social, and cultural institutions in mediating and partly shaping technological change,” as David Thorburn and Henry Jenkins (2003: 2) note.

The conceptual uncertainty is still present twenty years later. The critique of the death of cinema discourse as a panic mode that prevents us from seeing the current situation in proper contours is valid. Audiovisual archives were built with the task of preserving audiovisual heritage. A great part of the production throughout the twentieth century was created using the analogue medium (in partial variations). This meant that the archival imagination was not subjected to changes that would threaten it, forcing it to react and redirect. On the other hand, taking the advent of digitalisation as a transformation of “everything” should be subjected to critical reflection. The archiving of digital artefacts should not be blurred by the fear of the end of audiovisual media, but as another technological instance.

The impact of new technologies is framed in several ways in the archival space. The first, as already suggested, is the vision of simplifying the process: getting new tools, programs, and systems (Olesen, 2014). The second change concerns extending platforms for research-based exhibitions of archival materials (Brand, 2012), which leads to questions of power dynamics between archives and the public (restrictions, secrets, access), to which legal issues (den Kamp, 2018) are connected (copyright³⁰, laws, fan remediations). Digital technologies have initiated debates across the archival space, though in the audiovisual field the perspective has largely turned to digital restoration (Flückiger, 2015; Wallmüller, 2007) rather than representing an epistemological shift in the archival field. Which means asking what has been selected (the question of memory) and how it has been archived in the digital age. Finally, the emphasis on information technology itself, which needs constant attention, periodic software upgrading and data migration.

The so-called “archival turn” influenced by Jacques Derrida’s *Archive Fever* (2002) redirected scholarly attention from the contents, dusty shelves, and closed files to

³⁰ To prevent the ever-present risk of data loss, information technology itself needs continuous monitoring processes, ongoing maintenance, and periodic software upgrading. Moreover, the absence of shared protocols, systems, processes can be understood as a problem in storing and later accessing archived documents.

the archive as an apparatus, a mediated body. Derrida (2002: 16-17) describes the technological determination as the indicator of potential but also of limitations: “the technical structure of the archiving archive also determines the structure of the archivable content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future”. The archive can be seen as a medium for producing a memory machine that writes and rewrites the past – a medium that has its own processes, mechanisms, tools, and practices to work with. However, the medium is also affected by technological changes that may bring new potentialities but also epistemological questions about the archival process and methods. What is archival practice in the digital age, then?

3.5 Summary: Archive and Dust

This chapter sought to deepen the archival context outlined in Chapter 2. The first part mainly concerned itself with the archival imagination. It was suggested that the imagination could be disturbed or partially transformed despite its supposed stability. In the second part, we elaborated on the possibility to grasp the digital artefact according to the archival theory. Groo’s notion of bad film histories emerged as an inspirational source in thinking about digital artefacts as archivable objects. The last section was devoted to the archive and digitalisation, which brought new items and rupture practices: what the archival apparatus signifies in the present.

4. Fetishistic Collector

Digital artefacts were and are an integral part of audiovisual culture. The archive is still a collection of film materials, cameras, photographs, posters, scripts, and other supplementary material. Mostly these are cultural records of a non-digital constitution whose materiality is defined, visible, and archivable. As discussed in Chapter 2, digital artefacts, even though they are referred to as artefacts, do not have fixed and stable materiality as analogue items. Therefore, the digital star wipe is a complicated object to grasp, even though it has clear star outlines in the final image. The star wipe is an editable, interactive, and modifiable artefact that provokes archival imagination.

4.1 The One Who Remembers

Nonetheless, the contemporary archival impulses, including bad film histories, attempt to rearticulate the idea of what an archivable audiovisual artefact could look like, challenging us to consider potentialities beyond the established patterns of archival imagination. Even a fragment can have archival value; therefore, twist the archival perspective – that tries to fill in incomplete images, to find all the parts – to accept a fragment as an object in itself. The aim is to present the star wipe as a distinctive object with an archival value of its own as a configuration of a specific material-technological interface dynamic. A new theoretical framework that considers the digital item's specificity is required. Consequently, a new concept of collecting for the digital age is to be found that postulates archiving practices which go beyond the possibilities of contemporary archival.

Our focus on the marginal digital audiovisual artefact seeks to propose a practice that would lean towards what Aleida Assmann (2011: 127) calls “functional memory”, suggesting a living memory that is still circulating, present, understandable, and adaptable. Approaches based on functional memory differ from those linked to the “storage memory”, which would entail only literal

preservation of the star wipe, for example, on Linear Tape-Open (LTO), a magnetic tape data storage in an archive. Assmann (2011: 123-132) uses this dichotomy to describe the construction of cultural memory and how images and cultural artefacts reinforce it; however, the notion of functional and storage memories could be adaptable to the archive in the digital age. The storage memory (Assmann, 2011: 127–128) is described as a dead memory: something may be stored, but that does not prevent it from being forgotten. Fixed storage reduces some digital artefacts to mere visual information. In this case, the star wipe would be archived just as a visual imprint that cannot be separated from the audiovisual work. The editing effect would become unchangeable, unusable, and non-functional even though it would exist on a visual surface, but only as a fixed result. Simply put, it would be a different audiovisual artefact.

Returning to the star wipe as an editing technique that we do not just have to watch as spectators but that we could also use it. Which means prioritising functional memory over storage memory. Thus, the fetishistic collector asks not how to store the star wipe in the archive (in what format, through what works, in what form) but how to capture the star wipe without destroying it and make it functional again.

The fourth chapter aims to discuss the figure of the fetishistic collector. First, the theoretical tradition from which this figure emerges is to be presented. The second part focuses on how this perspective allows us to constitute marginal digital artefacts as archivable, thus granting them archival value even if they are fragments. The third part suggests how the digital medium determines the figure of the collector. The “fetishistic collector” is a complement to the current archive network. As Lian (2015: 10) claimed, “autonomous archives do not just supplement what is missing in state archives; they also render what is present, unstable,” as they may not be subject to the exact definition of value, temporality, or authenticity as audiovisual archives.

4.2 The Ur-Text

In “Unpacking my Library”, published in 1931, Walter Benjamin (1969) postulated the act of collecting as a fetishistic fascination with a particular artefact. It was a

rather personal essay through which he reflected upon his position as a collector in relation to the objects he collected. Through fetishistic collecting, an object becomes an artefact that is not only part of the collector, but the collector becomes part of the genealogy of the artefact as well. The object is deprived of anonymity (Benjamin, 1969: 61–62). Therefore, the collector is shown as the performative act of establishing the artefact in its disposition. The act of collecting is imprinted both on the object, which suddenly appears as an archivable artefact, and on the collector.

Benjamin (1969: 63) described the act of collecting as a magical process to “accomplish the renewal of existence [through] the whole range of childlike modes of acquisition, from touching things to giving them names”. Thus, the collector does not have to follow the established hierarchy of archival values. According to Benjamin (1969: 60), the collector has “a relationship to objects that does not emphasise their functional, utilitarian value – that is their usefulness.” It is an oppositional strategy in which the artefact is the primary point of fascination. It can be a detail, a fragment, or a colour that stimulates the collector’s attention.

In Benjamin’s original description of the collector, there are allusions to fetishism. A “fetish” is a human-made object believed to be the source of supernatural abilities or strong spirits, making it a part of a holy configuration. It is probably an object created by the mechanisms of production, by the hand of an artist, or craftsman, even if the object seems to transcend this sphere of production. It has become something more in the eyes of the collector; even though, for others, it may only be a commodity that has a certain commercial value (Benjamin, 1969). Fetishism can be understood as an attachment to an object that takes on a meaning beyond its material essence. Thus, such an object represents itself and, at the same time, becomes a sign of fascination, value, and belief that transcends material limitations.

Fetishism is not an asymptomatic fascination. Benjamin was criticised for this obsession by Hannah Arendt (1969: 30), for whom it was a sign of admission of Benjamin’s class determination – the bourgeoisie. From the view of Marxist theory, it can be understood as the absorption of humans into the site of things, putting human subjects into a network of commodities. According to Fredric Jameson (2011: 22–29), Marx understood the term “fetish” to describe the relationship

between people and commodities akin to religion and magic. It is a strategy to obscure the artificiality of the system, which is thus presented as already existing. For Benjamin (1999), the only world we know is the world of displayed images – there is only the dimension of visual information, phantasmagoria. The relationship between an object and a viewer, a customer, and a collector is the only one that is possible.

“For Benjamin, there is no escaping the phantasmagoria; there is no truth to uncover beneath the fetish, no being ‘free’ from its influence once and for all. For this reason [...] we are all fetishists to some extent or other,” as Martel (2012) concludes. In this situation, it is possible to be a fetishist who only passively consumes or, on the contrary, to be a fetishistic collector who reflects on his/her position. As Laura Mulvey (1996: 2) describes, “fetishism in an attempt to explain a refusal, or blockage, of the mind, or a phobic inability of the psyche, to understand a symbolic system of value, one within the social and the other within the psychoanalytic sphere.” Fetishism can be perceived as the materialisation of fascination without being able to see at first glance why a particular object is fascinating, what makes it distinguishable, and what makes it different (Buse, 2019). This fascination can be towards commodities as well as images or digital artefacts. While the consuming collector would be satisfied with merely getting closer to the object of interest, the reflective collector strives to consider the whole dynamic between the artefact and the collector. Thus, as part of (our) strategy, we should try to answer the following questions: why did the artefact come to the collector’s attention, or what symptom of the contemporary digital era does the audiovisual artefact represent?

4.3 Medium

The constitution of memory of the past or the creation of memory for the present and the future is not an asymptomatic activity. Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney (2009, 4) claim that “just as there is no cultural memory prior to mediation, there is no mediation without remediation: all representations of the past draw on available media technologies, on existent media products, on patterns of representation and media aesthetics.” Memory, collective or individual, is influenced and co-created by the medium. This limitation also determines the position of the collector, who,

on the one hand, uses the potentiality of the medium to collect and archive objects but is also subject to the medium.

The figure of the fetishistic collector, however, is not yet part of the archive. The act of collecting is not subject to the medium of the archive but is affected by the medium the collector chooses as a means of storing his artefacts: an atlas, a film, a boxed collection. The chosen medium structures the possibilities of the performativity of memory: what is remembered, how it is remembered, and how it is presented. An example of the connection between medium and collecting is the work of Aby Warburg. His atlases were black cloth panels on which photographic images of artistic paintings were given. These included photographs of the whole but also photographic details from individual images or various visual montages. Philippe-Alain Michaud (2004) describes the Atlas's panels as a "conductive medium." Within the panel, the fragments exist as details and, at the same time, as parts of the whole. This dynamic set by the medium allows for new relationships, connections, and a different memory inscription to emerge. The "conductive medium" became the literal frame of what could be considered an archivable (or preservable) media object from Warburg's perspective, as a fetishistic collector.

Warburg used photographs as material that was spatially organised on a panel. A different structuring principle would be based on temporality, meaning the photographic material would be arranged in sequence. In the very principle of recording moving images lies the essence of collecting various moments, gestures, details, scenery. The moving image became an index of the object, and, at the same time, it was the object itself. With the advent of digital media, the figure of the fetishistic collector has become increasingly detached from the commodity itself to its virtual imprint, which, however, assumes the character of a commodity. Whereas earlier collectors depended on commodities – atlases, filmstrips, photographs, video tapes – nowadays the digital medium has become the main framework in which and through which the collector can emerge.

4.3.1 Unlimited Possibilities

In addition to being the driving force behind the creation of the artefacts we aim to archive, digital technology has emerged as a tool for their possible preservation. While certain digital artefacts can be converted across formats – from analogue to digital and vice versa – this is not always the case. Each transfer has the ability to produce a unique artefact with a unique material configuration concurrently.

Compared to the black plate or the filmstrip as a medium through which the collector can work, if one refers to the Internet environment, collecting is conditioned by the architecture of the digital sphere. Thus, it is subject to its speed, ephemerality, and elusiveness. On the other hand, it offers access to a wide range of materials, relative openness, and accessibility. In its early days, digital architecture symbolised a utopian hint of openness and non-hierarchy. However, this pathos has faded. As Wolfgang Ernst (2006: 119) describes the current traps of working in the digital sphere, “memory in cyberspace is subject to an economy of memory not generous to gaps and absences. The archival phantasms in cyberspace are an ideological deflection of the sudden erasure of archives (both hard- and software) in the digital world.”

The fetishistic collecting may be viewed as an archiving technique that draws from the digital era on the level of epistemology as well as practice: what constitutes an achievable artefact and how it should be preserved, displayed, and stored. The collector has digital resources that allow him to find, retrieve, and archive various commodities, from images to videos to other possible versions of digital objects. The already mentioned theorist Laura Mulvey reflects on the fetishistic relation not only as a possibility of explaining fascination but also as a specific relation to digital images or objects. She (2006) outlines two modes of spectatorship based on the possibility of digital technology to capture the ephemeral: “the possessive spectator” and “the pensive spectator”. Through these two modes, we can actualise Benjamin’s figure, what potentiality it has given to collecting, and how to think about the editable.

The possessive spectator resembles a fetishistic collector who does not reflect on his position, his relationship to the audiovisual phantasmagoria. Freezing the image, rewinding the image, constantly returning to partial fragments, does indeed return

the desired digital image or artefact. Yet, according to Mulvey's terminology (2006: 161–180), the possessive spectator controls the subject of their observation sadistically. This desire can materialise in a short video, which allows the viewer to capture the image of an actor and put him / her / they into the form of a GIF in which the actor repeats a gesture over and over again. Therefore, this position allows nothing more than to remain locked in a loop between the want and the object in question.

New technological tools allow the spectator and the collector a control over the image, the narrative, the representation, and thus create delays. Mulvey (2006: 186) elaborates on how “a moment of stillness within the moving image and its narrative creates a ‘pensive spectator’ who can reflect on the cinema.” The pensive spectator notices a subtle detail in relation to the whole due to the gesture of slowing down. If we repeat this theoretical gesture of slowing down, but not from the position of a “mere” observer, but also from the position of a collector, the moment of slowing down allows us to reflect and ask what processes shape a digital artefact (2006: 181-196). What would happen if we tried to export the object to another format or open it in another program? Which transformations would take place, what would change and what would remain the same? What would the object look like in another interface? Finally, would that artefact be visible without theoretical intervention, or would it be unidentifiable among audiovisual artefacts? What is our position, as fetishistic collectors, in the process of establishing the artefact?

There are endless moving images available for reuse and remixing right now. For audiovisual work, everything seems within reach. Although some moving images remain inaccessible, the quantum of accessible material makes it seem like a small percentage. The recovery and reassembling of audiovisual fragments have evolved into a common creative process in contemporary media and is no longer primarily a privilege of experimental artists. “The death of ‘film’ and the rise of digital media, have effectively enabled and produced a new critical language that we are only really learning to speak” this is how Catherine Russell (2018: 28) describes the current status for which she has coined the term “archiveology,” describing the collection, reconfiguration, and resignification of pre-existing material. Thus, this notion postulates an understanding of images as individual objects. To put it simply,

partial audiovisual images become complete artefacts. They become cultural artefacts, allegories of their own creation. This approach removes images from their position of being part of the whole and thus “‘resurrected’ [images] to speak on their own terms” (Russell, 2018: 143).

Digital tools have accentuated the possibility of establishing partial frames from moving images as artefacts that can be cut out and exist on their own without having to be part of the whole. The collector does not have to be focused on the whole. Would it be possible to take a step even further, though? If Russell proposes to focus on partial sequences of the whole, on individual frames, so that these fragments gain their independent archival value, would it be possible to repeat this gesture, and draw attention to the tiniest units of the image? As Hannah Frank (2019: 1) proposed: “Imagine studying a building not by walking its hallways or perusing its blueprints, but by examining each of its bricks [...] Imagine evaluating a mosaic not for the bigger picture but for the glint of individual tesserae. Or imagine not watching a film but looking at it frame by frame.” Even if the star wipe is a detail, it is the result of a specific material and technological media configuration, thus it is a contemporary document and can be perceived as an artefact of archival value. The fetishistic collector presents a perspective from which previously unseen digital artefacts can be seen as archivable.

On the other hand, the fetishistic collector is an epistemological fracture with the advent of the digital archive. There has been a transformation not only of the archivable objects themselves but also of the strategies of how to archive specific objects that exist not only as objects but also as techniques, practices, something that exists in the moment of becoming. Audiovisual archives have always worked with objects that had their own temporality as moving images could have been stopped and stored in their fixed position. How to capture something that cannot be frozen and caught?

4.3.2 The First Attempt to Catch the Star Wipe: Database Prism

Digital technologies have made it possible to work with larger amounts of data: to fragment and simplify the rearrangement of audiovisual units. For example, the

audiovisual material is sorted and rearranged in one minute to go from a scene with the highest percentage of red in the image to a scene with the lowest percentage of that colour. This database prism could be summarised through the video-art project *Every Shot, Every Episode* (2001) by Jennifer and Kevin McCoy. Each entry from the 1970s cop show *Starsky & Hutch* was rearranged typologically by technique (every zoom-in, every special effect, every camera angle, every special effect), character (waiter, comic criminal, boyfriend), action (interrogating, eating, laughing), object (wallpaper, lamp, plant), or other categories (colours, textures, typography). Every element has the same value, there is no hierarchisation of the scenes. The whole work is disassembled on the basis of a preconceived logic. The material has been subjected and recreated according to the non-linear, non-narrative logic of the computer database.

The database prism is perceived in contrast to the archive prism: on the axis of the amount of archivable data, the structure of the archive, the ephemerality of the system architecture. Although the database prism was present before the advent of digitalisation – as a catalogue, as a dictionary, as an atlas – digital databases have fulfilled the potential of large-scale collection of disparate data. It has become the archival modality of the digital age. Database is viewed as the logic of the twenty-first century (Tohline, 2021). As Marlene Manoff (2012: 386) postulates, “database is the most recent in a progression of forms that support or give voice to the instinct to create, collect, and transmit culture.” The database prism can be seen as a response to the epistemological rupture with the advent of digital technologies. On one hand, many digital artefacts have been and are being created that are not archived and are looking for storage. And from the other side, the archival prism is shown to be too slow, fixed, and non-reactive.

The database prism allows us to see digital audiovisual artefacts as archivable data. At the same time, however, it suggests that they are not unique objects, but are on the same plane as all other digital data. On a general level, the database offers an inclusion of any audiovisual artefact, detail, or symbol as long as it exists in a digital form. A database can be visualised in many forms: a dictionary, a list, a web page, or even a work of art.

The current audiovisual forms of the database include supercut. It is a practice that emerged from the database episteme: finding each example of a given trope (it can be scenes in which the same characters appear, for example, a compilation of policemen, but it can also be a search for similar gestures, actions, scenery, technique, fragments); accessibility of information; audiovisual artefacts are understood as data. In this form, they do not have specific material aura as they exist as modifiable, reproducible, transferable items. A single piece is thus separated from its source or sources into a new piece. All these star wipes from audiovisual works and formats would be extracted. The digital form of star wipe is editable, open, and reprogrammable, and therefore accessible and modifiable by a program. The digital character of the editing effect enables it to be extracted from an original work and incorporated into a new work.

“Information access has become a key activity of the computer age. Therefore, we need something that can be called ‘info-aesthetic’ – a theoretical analysis of the aesthetics of information access as well as the creation of new media objects that aestheticize information processing,” this is how Manovich (2002: 193) postulated the task for the digital age in 2001. In doing so, the creators of supercuts replicate computer searches of content that cannot yet be accessed by computers. The supercut phenomena exemplify the ideological infiltration of the database episteme. The supercut is more than simply an editing technique; it is a way of connecting fragments into argument structure or narrative (thinking) that is presented via editing.

Could we archive editing effects in this manner? One such archaeology of cinematic transitions is visible in Aaron Valdez’s film *Dissolve* (2003). Which is a supercut in which editing techniques are cut from the original films (from old US educational films) and combined into a new audiovisual form which has become a repository for editing transitions. By focusing on previously almost invisible audiovisual data, namely editing, which serves as a link between shot A and shot B, the unseen has been transformed into the visible. Crucially, the film adopts the dissolve as its primary unit of enunciation and meaning, shifting its function as a transitional device to that of a transformational device.

Katherine Hayles (2007) claims that more and more data we create, hence more narratives we need to make sense of it and find useful applications for it. The figure of the collector might be understood as a narrative tool. The fetishistic collector's gesture consists precisely of bringing these objects out of anonymity. Supercut supports remediation of objects, including those that do not have a stable form: it restores (or can restore) the star wipe back into circulation. By creating a supercut in which all the instances of the star wipe from audiovisual culture and history would be seen as specific versions of audiovisual data, it would be possible to create a whole that could be seen as an archive of this editing technique.

If the fetishistic collector is postulated as the archival modality, a possible extension of contemporary archival imagination, would it not be more appropriate to connect this figure to the architecture of the database? Nonetheless, we still would not get an answer on what object we are working with. It should be reflected that this strategy can only work with instances of the star wipe that already have a digital form or imprint. Instances of the analogue star do not have the necessary material requirements to be incorporated into a supercut. In other words, while a supercut makes it possible to compile information into a coherent story, it no longer displays information that does not fit inside the narrative.

4.3.3 The Second Attempt to Catch the Star Wipe: Technique

In the second try, we attempt to capture the star wipe as a digital artefact that is modifiable, editable, tied to a particular technological interface. At this point, we ask how to return to the star wipe when our interface no longer contains it by default. How can the fetishistic collector grasp something of the past if there are only the tools of the present digital interface?

How do you go back to something that, as a cutting technique, could not have existed at a moment of freeze? Because freezing means automatic transformation into an image. The star wipe exists only at the moment of becoming – it cannot exist outside of the scenes it connects, because it uses visual information from one scene into which it inserts the other scene through the shape of the star. If we tried to touch it, we would end up with just a silhouette of it.

The star wipe is an editing technique that has survived the transformation of television production and found its way into the digital editing software(s) that could be part of a computer owned by a professional and an amateur editor. Viewing tables, film splicers, film footage, lamps, and glue have been replaced by a digital version – editing applications. The shift from the physical into the virtual has enabled the alteration of existing footage or fragments faster.

Digital editing uses instantaneous random access rather than linear access (e.g., from beginning to finish). Editing programs became part of the computer with the advent of the graphic user interface, which is based on the visual presentation of information, the use of metaphors to initiate the reaction of a user – which is different from previous versions of user interfaces (Dourish, 2001: 1–23). Metaphors prospect in interfaces and computer architecture (Chun, 2011: 55).

The potential of an engaged user, accessibility of action, and a comprehensible rectangular computer screen where editing software is located are achieved by a graphical user interface. (Turquety, 2014b: 32). Editing programs have been built onto remediation of previous editing styles, techniques, metaphors into the digital realm (Bolter and Grusin, 2000). The modern GUI (graphical-user-interface) screen offers simplicity of use, intuitive orientation, and the ability to have anything on the desktop. As Ben Shneiderman (2003: 486) has demonstrated, these interfaces succeed when they move their users from grudging acceptance to feelings of mastery and eagerness.

Nevertheless, the possibilities of user interaction end when the software is updated or a subprogram is changed: the programs cannot be interfered with or modified. Of course, another update can be considered, but in that case, there is a risk that the programs stop working after a certain period because the software is no longer compatible. Hence, the star wipe could be used as a redefinition of GUI within a dispositif that has its limits; we are no longer in a dark cinema; we are in front of bright computer screens that could, with one actualisation, rewrite itself.

Until 2014, the star wipe had been part of editing software as one of the options in the prepared portfolio of transitions or irises. However, one day it disappeared from the options menu; the star wipe was nowhere to be found, it stopped being part of the software. The presence of this effect was being mentioned on multiple forums, followed by an articulation of a sudden loss of it as one user named Paul Boone (2014) indicated on the Creative Cows forum: “I do not know how this was overlooked, but I can’t find any Star Wipe transition. Clearly, people have failed to appreciate the subtle beauty in the star wipe, and for that, I forgive you.”

The star wipe is specific in that it does not have an identity of its own, only as of the connection of two frames through the shape of a star. Many editing programs enable creating shapes and modifying existing effects, but creating a star wipe without a visible outline, such as a star with a yellow edge or an edge of a different colour, would mean going back to the editing software and animating the star wipe frame by frame. To demonstrate the complexity of the task, there is a step-by-step tutorial: firstly, to open film in an editing application, in which to put two frames (= two sequences) that should be connected together, put onto the first sequence option of “the free iris shot,” draw the iris to resemble the shape of a star, and then animate the star frame-by-frame (24 frames in one second), until the shift from one frame to the second one is reached. Creating the star wipe in this way would be time-consuming and challenging to transpose. Moreover, it would already be an animation of partial frames, rather than working with one digital artefact – the star wipe. This option mimics the star wipe effect in the exported version of moving images, but it does not create the star wipe outside the image itself, as the effect that is ready to be used.

Yet, the disappearance of wipes/irises/transitions from editing software(s) has been alleviated by the emergence of an unofficial plug-in compatible with Adobe Premiere Pro. By creating a new version for the current editing program settings, a unique editing effect has been successfully simulated. In this form, it is a digital artefact connected to the present. If our goal, the goal of the fetishistic collector, was to capture the star wipe from the early digital era, this result is not the fulfilment of the original plan. Our investigation may seem even more doomed to fail because we are dealing with an obsolete, fleeting artefact that is deemed not worthy of being

an object, let alone an object worth preserving. As a result, by emphasising the act of touching and trying to collect the star wipe, we, as fetishistic collectors, are forced to re-evaluate our assumptions about archive items as being solid, quantifiable, and graspable things that can be removed from their context. And at the same time, it turns out that it is impossible to touch the star wipe. If it is not possible to touch the star literally, can we do so in another way? Does the fetishistic collector offer a different gesture?

4.3.4 The Third Attempt to Catch the Star Wipe: Gimmick

How to work with a digital artefact that we just missed? At the same time, it is impossible to return to the archive because the star wipe is not there. If it were there, it would just be a coincidence that the audiovisual work containing the star wipe was captured by luck. Because that work would not have been captured for the star wipe as it exists (or rather does not exist) in the current archival imagination. There are no categories, tools, or places for the star wipe.

As suggested in the introduction to the chapter, the fetishistic collector is a product of both the objects collected and the medium through which the collection is performed. It is a figure that is determined by the possibilities of the medium through which collecting is done. While the digital medium has enabled the establishment of the fragments as distinct objects, it has also determined the ephemerality of the star wipe. What if the collector accepted the impossibility of fully approaching the star wipe, and instead accentuated this gap between collector and object in the digital age?

There is a recent video essay that applies this approach within a specific archival impulse that somehow resonates with ours: Barbara Zecchi's *Filling (Feeling) the Archival Void: the case of Helena Cortesina's Flor de España* (2022). A first Spanish film directed by a woman that did not survive in any material form and it has been wiped out of history is a case in point of an absent, impossible archival object. Yet Zecchi takes a speculative exercise in whether this archival void can be filled with other contemporary artefacts – fragments of kindred films, photographs, newspapers, quotes. The collector can follow a similar path of hypothesising. In

this section, we attempt to capture the star wipe through imagination, what this effect might look like if it were a full-fledged part of our audiovisual culture.

For this purpose, a scene from the TV series *Better Call Saul*³¹ can be employed. In the episode “Off Brand” (2017), a fictional character James “Saul Goodman” McGill made a commercial that includes up to nine star wipes within only a 46-second-long time span to secure getting enough attention. This is the scene in which the main character brings the star wipe back into circulation. However, for us as fetishistic collectors, it is only the possibility of watching the star wipe as an object that is in front of us on the screen, but at the same time it is ungraspable.

There is no such thing as too many stars; the more, the better, at least for James, the director. The star wipe is a trick, a wonder, and a gimmick. Sianne Ngai describes the gimmick as an ambiguous form that both seduces and repels (2020: 3–6). The gimmick utilises the technological possibilities of the medium; it is not merely a tool that performs a given task – in this case, the connection of two film images – it elevates editing into a spectacle. Through aestheticization, it challenges our learned patterns of perception; on the other hand, it could be viewed as degradation of a particular technique because of the vulgar visibility that could be viewed as mocking (Ngai, 2020: 5). This duality is reflected in the quote by James “Saul Goodman” McGill: “The guy at the station said he has never seen so many star wipes in a row. It has never been done” (*Better Call Saul*, “Off Brand”, 2017).

From James’s perspective, the star wipe is a fascinating editing technique. However, for others – the guy at the station – the star wipe is repulsive in its unprofessionalism, “gimmick-ness”. The gimmick object evokes dissatisfaction mixed with fascination (Ngai, 2020: 3). In a brief overview, the Oxford English Dictionary describes the purpose of gimmick as “*attracting attention or publicity*” (Ngai, 2020: 60).

³¹ The *Better Call Saul* series is a contemporary television production, but the fictional world is set in the noughties. The main character James (or later Saul) is a lawyer who is not taken seriously by the legal world, lacks social or cultural capital, and graduated from an unknown university. Thus his position is always to be on the periphery. It is this position that motivates him to seek unexpected solutions, not to be afraid of gimmickry, not to be afraid of the magic of television, in order to succeed in the American legal system.

The gimmick is determined by material possibilities given both by the technological background and the conventions of the period. Therefore, referring to something as a gimmick could be inspired by the structural design of the object (Ngai, 2020: 3). The star shape outline of transition looks like a “futuristic” option. Still, it simultaneously seems like evidence of an outdated editing method, which instead of silent adoration, provokes laughter due to clumsy performance compared to the invisible editing style. The star wipe would always be excessive, exceeding the set historical norm of editing. Therefore, it could be described as a gimmick object *par excellence*: it is a technically advanced detail that is always outside the rules, always out of place, constantly exposing the technological base, and always noticeable.

The performative presence of the gimmick – in our case, the star wipe – elaborates on the technological basis of *dispositif*; the gimmick is part of what the *dispositif* offers. Thus, the gimmick itself does not take the position of a fetishised object that can be cut out of film or digital material and the sequence exhibited or stored in a collector’s private library. This is the moment when the gimmick becomes an object. A gimmick needs its collector to become an object, to be seen and recognised, to gain its mediality.

The “gimmick” emerges in an age of simultaneous bewitchment and “disenchantment” with cutting-edge technology, as Ngai (2020) described. The digital star wipe presents itself as a wonder of editing programs that offer a wide range of previously (almost) uncreatable tricks and effects for editors outside the industry. It is a symptom of a technological configuration where the click has become the key movement to achieve what is desired, on the other hand, the limit of technological possibilities. The gimmick of the star wipe would be sufficient to describe the technological and material determination of the *dispositif* through which the gimmick effect has been animated.

The advent of audiovisual archives marked a transformation in the sense that archivable objects in the form of moving images were carriers of a double temporality: the temporality of the captured and the temporality of the artefact. Gimmick returns us to the question of temporality at the visual representation level and adds the temporality between the techno-material-interface components. It is

an artefact that contains its own temporality of becoming. As Eivind Røssaak (2010: 68) notes, "storage space is no longer the main problem, the problem is rather time." In the sense of the temporality of digital artefacts, which is always in flux and ephemeral.

4.3.4.1 Labour

The constant actualisation required by the dispositif to properly function could erase small and unsuitable elements like a star wipe. Ngai (2020) sketches out the gimmick's contradictory, capitalistic nature: the gimmick simultaneously saves labour and does not save labour; works too hard and too little; is outdated and yet modern, and transparent but obscure about capitalist production, which includes a computer dispositif as well. Because in capitalism, the device that is not a gimmick, that performs its function in an unremarkable way, is no longer an aesthetic object. It is just a device (Ngai, 2020: 96).

The gimmick, whose worth we sometimes dismiss, has enormous importance. Especially when audiovisual production is dependent on digital programs, the computer interface has become an integral and almost the only possibility of creation. Thus, a large part of the techniques depends on a given material and technical configuration. That is why it was possible to articulate through the gimmick the question of what happens if a given technique is connected to a given constellation to such an extent that it can be lost once it is actualized because the dispositif does not allow for the same degree of active participation for all.

The gimmick carries the promise of an improvement, a trick to save time. Much like the digital star wipe was meant to save time, all it took was one click and the effect was in the right place. In contrast, the analogue star wipe had to be manually produced. However, the gimmick quickly becomes obsolete as it does, no longer a time-saving spell, but rather an object that takes time to be recreated, to be found, to be unearthed from the rubbish of the digital.

To work as a fetishistic collector is to immerse oneself in the void of the forgotten. Like the pickers in Agnes Varda's film *The Gleaners and I* (2000), who revisit the

fields, the streets, the bins, to make sure that nothing is left, that everything has already been collected.

In our case we could not have found the original version, respectively the star wipe once used in audiovisual production. However, we did manage to find a new version of the star wipe, which was created by a fan who could not have accepted that this editing effect was out of the question. This is the star wipe, but it is only linked to the current digital discourse; it is a new version. The gimmick-ness of digital artefacts is presented as a trick that makes work easier, as something that can be created with one click, but on the contrary, the digital artefacts are labour-intensive objects to produce and archive.

4.3.4.2 Gimmick Will Not Wait

The wipe as an editing method postulates a challenge: how to archive the non-archivable. Understanding the technological basis of the dispositif means to archive the material and techniques and methods connected to its interface and possibilities – the gimmick functions as a non-functionally functional detail. Although the modern digital computer interface has incorporated some features of film language, not everything remains preserved in the software. Once the nitrate base of film footage could not wait because of its chemical instability that is prone to degradation, there has been a shift in understanding and archiving early cinema (Slide, 1992; Usai, 2000a, 2000b, 2001). The gimmick technique does not have a material basis that would be destroyed by oxygen but is connected to media configuration that might include the star wipe. Even a marginal transformation, which situates the possibilities of the active participant, can lead to the loss of procedures and techniques that are no longer supported. The fetishistic collector is essential for capturing the imperceptible updates and partial modifications of digital dispositifs. The figure remains situated, intertwined with the medium and, above all, allows a more detailed view than the archival imagination.

4.4 Summary: Fleeting Star Wipe and Fetishistic Collector

The fourth chapter attempted to articulate the place of the fetishistic collector in the digital age. It is a figure that Benjamin (1999) worked with to reflect on collecting in modernity, where the circulation of commodities has accelerated, making the object take on a viral quality of being displayed in a shop window. The collector is connected to the medium through which collecting and gathering are done (catalogues, libraries, in our case, the digital apparatus and dispositif) and the object of interest. This triangle indicates potentialities and obstacles. The fetishistic collector is postulated as a modality that makes it possible to see digital artefacts – the star wipe – as archivable objects. However, seeing and capturing are two different problems. The chapter's final part addresses several difficulties arising from both the digital dispositif and the artefact itself. The first question is whether the fetishistic collector is not rather a part of the database prism, but this connection would not make it possible to grasp the star wipe in its materiality. The second question concerns how to capture the star wipe, which takes on the contours of the editing technique and is always connected to the changing digital dispositif. The last part focused on the star wipe as a gimmick, as an artefact acquiring its own mediality and temporality.

5. Conclusion

The aim of the thesis was to expand the archival imagination, which has been based on analogue media, to acknowledge digital artefacts as archivable objects.

The advent of digitalisation in the audiovisual culture has led to the formation of new digital artefacts in addition to the acceleration of production, the expansion of distribution channels, and even the incorporation of new tools for archiving practices. However, the archival imagination is still linked to categories based on the analogue audiovisual medium. Thus, an archivable object can be a work of art, various types of apparatuses, documents, and promotional materials. It has to be an artefact that has distinctive contours. Digital artefacts do not quite fulfil the meaning of the word object; they are modular, modifiable, interactive, and can assume various forms at once. Moreover, as suggested in Chapter 2, the term “digital artefact” in the context of this thesis means details and fragments. In other words, these were artefacts that did not fit into the existing categories such as film or television shows, cameras, and projectors.

The star wipe was used as a case study to outline the problem of archiving fragmentary digital objects through the current archival imagination (Chapter 3). In this way, we have followed the path of contemporary tendencies to reframe archival theory, as suggested by Katherine Groo and Catherine Russell. Groo (2019) has shown how even fragments of early ethnographic films can exist as objects in their own right, in the form of scraps. Taking another step closer, Russell (2018) reflected on contemporary remix culture and postulated the premise that images or sequences can exist without the original whole as archivable objects. For the star wipe to exist as an archivable object, there had to be a perspective that would establish it as such.

In the last part of the thesis, the fetishistic collector has been established as a prism through which digital artefacts such as the star wipe can be seen as having archival value. The figure is based on a text by Walter Benjamin (1969) in which he reflects on the act of collecting, how commodities determine the collector and the collector, in turn, determines the commodities. However, the fetishistic collector is defined

by the medium through which collectable objects are found and acquired. The modern collector and the star wipe have emerged thanks to digital media.

As mentioned in the introduction, the fetishistic collector can expand the archival imagination, but cannot overcome the epistemological limitations of the digital medium without the archive itself. However, for the archive, this relationship implies turning away from analogue materiality and attempting to preserve digital materiality in its functioning state, that is, without slowing it down or destroying it.

The star wipe was established as a digital artefact with its own contours, mediality, and temporality. It is a fragment connected to the period-specific configuration of the audiovisual medium. The fetishistic collector allows for such an object to be seen. Thus, it is a perspective applied to other digital artefacts with an ambiguous character and materiality. However, the collector always remains in the triangle along with the artefact and the medium.

This work presents the fetishistic collector as an opportunity to see fragmentary digital artefacts, which, however, have no identity in themselves for the archival imagination. This figure has been presented as a locally, temporally, and medium-given position. It is an archival modality that is in motion, exploring, searching, trying to capture. There are two paths for further theoretical research. The first would be to extend the fetishistic collector to a broader set of digital artefacts, to try to capture the uncapturable. Although, as written in the introductory part of the thesis, the fetishistic collector does not try to create categories but rather works with the object. The second way would attempt not only to see but also capture artefacts through the fetishistic collector. A possible strategy has been suggested in this thesis. However, this problem is still open for research. Because a hint is not the same as establishing a definite procedure. Thus, this direction would go one step further to investigate the material-technological dynamics of digital artefacts.

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7. Filmography

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8. Figures

Figure 1.: *Better Call Saul* (2017) © AMC