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Paula Amad, *Counter-Archive: Film, the Everyday, and Albert Kahn's Archives de la Planète*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010. xiii + 408 pp. Figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$99.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-231-13500-9; \$34.40 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-0-231-13501-6.

Review by Barbara Creed, University of Melbourne.

Paula Amad's ground-breaking *Counter-Archive: Film, the Everyday, and Albert Kahn's Archives de la Planète* is the first book-length study of one of the most remarkable private archives of the twentieth century. Her book essentially creates a new theoretical field in the history of film studies and in the history of the archive. Amad not only brings this fascinating archive of early non-fiction films to life for the reader, she also explores the history of the archive and its founder Albert Kahn, as well as those who influenced its formation and features such as the philosopher Henri Bergson, the geographer Jean Brunhes, and the biologist Jean Comandon. At the same time, Amad offers an original and challenging argument about the nature and role of the newly formed film archive as a counter-archive, and the crucial role played by early cinema in the formation of debates about the everyday that took place mainly in France in the twenties. In a sense there are three main "characters" in this book: Albert Kahn, the Archives de la Planète and Henri Bergson. Drawing on philosophy, geography, history and film theory, Amad interweaves her impressively erudite discussion around the pivotal roles played by each member of this unusual trio in her re-assessment of the history of early non-fiction film and its neglected, but absolutely critical role in the history of the cinema.

In the opening chapter, Amad documents Kahn's life with an astute focus on the influences that shaped his interest in film and photography. Born in the small town of Marmoutier in Alsace, Albert Kahn (1860-1940) was an Alsatian Jew who decided to settle in Paris in 1876 rather than remain in his birthplace, which was to become part of Germany as a result of the Franco-Prussian war. In Paris he found employment with the Banque Goudchaux. At the same time he commenced studying for his *baccalauréat* with a Henri Bergson, a then unknown teacher; this was to become in Amad's words "the defining friendship of his life" (p. 28) Kahn revealed a talent for banking and made a fortune from investments in diamond and gold mining ventures in South Africa. By 1892, he had become a joint owner of the bank and was thus in a position to dedicate his considerable energies (he was a confirmed bachelor) and vast fortune to philanthropic concerns. An idealist and humanitarian, Kahn established his archive in order to promote peace and understanding amongst the peoples of the world. Amad quotes Émile Borel who described Kahn's mission as advancing "the *oeuvre* of mutual comprehension of peoples and international rapprochement" (p. 31).

In 1895, Kahn acquired a large property in Boulogne, situated on the outskirts of Paris, where he built a world-themed garden (now open to the public) and his Archives de la Planète, which houses 4,000 stereotopic plates, 72,000 colour autochrome photographs, 183,000 meters of mainly unedited 35 mm black and white silent film and a small amount of colour film. Kahn's monumental archive was designed to preserve a vast picture of the everyday life of all the peoples of the world as the changes of modern life irrevocably eroded and altered that world. Kahn stated his goal was to "fix once and for all, the look,

practices, and modes of human activity whose fatal disappearance is just a question of time" (p. 49). Amad describes this as "one of the twentieth century's most utopian experiments in world memory and modern media" (p. 5).

Although Kahn's first visual materials were produced in 1908, his project only acquired the name of Archives de la Planète when Jean Brunhes, the pioneer of human geography, accepted Kahn's invitation to become its director. In operation from 1908-1931, the Archives employed photographers and cameramen who traveled to forty-eight countries, including Japan, China, Lebanon, Palestine, Indochina, India, Europe and North Africa. Amad focuses her discussion on the rushes or unedited footage, which she describes as one of the world's most unique collections of unedited non-fiction film footage. Amad notes that in his instructions to Kahn's cameramen, Brunhes encouraged them to avoid tourist sights and to shoot what they thought was important. Apart from filling out detailed index cards that recorded the date, place and subject, they were to keep their eyes open and follow whatever aroused their curiosity. Amad uncovers a wealth of new information about the period. *Counter-Archive* is a superbly documented study that draws on a range of original and diverse materials.

Strangely, the Archive was not open to the public. Although Kahn's project was to film different peoples from around the globe, particularly the ordinary person living in the everyday, he only screened his remarkable collection to groups of invited guests--intellectuals, artists, political figures and people of importance. It was both a democratic and elitist project. He created a special group for intellectuals, the *Société Autour du Monde* (1906-1949), dedicated to the pursuit of intercultural cooperation. The *Société* met every Sunday for lunch. Members and guests included Henri Bergson, Thomas Mann, Albert Einstein, H. G. Wells, Marie Curie, Louis Lumière, Paul Valéry and Colette. It also organized private film screenings and projection of Kahn's autochromes. Amad carefully documents the history of the Archives, its global influence and its many projects and publications. Although Kahn was responsible for the filming of a vast number of people around the world, he himself was notoriously camera-shy and apparently only posed for one photograph--the one necessary for his passport.

Amad's original concept of a "counter-archive" is central to her investigation of both Albert Kahn's humanitarian project and to the meaning of the archive in the modern world. She argues that "the archive has become a touchstone in contemporary debates and practices across history, philosophy, art, and especially new media" (p. 4). Her book returns us to the early twentieth century when these debates first arose. The invention of the movie camera and the emergence of the first films--short, fragmentary, non-fiction documents--challenged the traditional concept of the archive as text-based and its positivist notions of coherence, synthesis and order. She identifies two directions in the way in which the archive conceptualized film: "as an at once superior archive and a counter-archive" (p. 137). "Promising the historicist dream of total recall while also threatening the nightmare of infinite memory, film presented what I [Amad] call a 'counter-archival' challenge to the positivist archive's sacred myths of order, exhaustiveness, and objective neutrality At the core of film's counter-archival record of reality was its attraction to the everyday fragment as the history of the present, in direct contrast to the nineteenth-century archives' dedication to the political document as the history of the past" (p. 4).

In defining counter-archive, she focuses on the anarchic properties of film, the way in which film has the power to capture the arbitrary, unexpected details of everyday life and to arouse the spectator's curiosity--sometimes even improper or unseemly curiosity. She refers to the following properties of film as central to its counter-archive status: "its propensity for capturing excessive detail, inciting unmanageable curiosity, suspending habitual modes of memory and perception, and most importantly, automatically collecting that which was usually overlooked or suppressed in the official archive, such as the minor events of social life that Boleslas Matuszewski described as the "anecdotal side of History" (p. 165).

She is not, however, uncritical and notes that “the Archives thwarted as much as it courted historicist archival ideals” (p. 165). One of the fascinating aspects of the book is those sections where Amad discusses the power of early unedited non-fiction film to capture the seemingly inconsequential nature of the everyday. This power, she reminds us, was central to early debates about the nature of this new medium among theorists such as Jean Epstein, Louis Delluc and Siegfried Kracauer. There is also an intriguing discussion of Colette and her early career as a film critic and her writings on non-fiction film.

Amad's analyses of specific films and the intimate relationship between early non-fiction film and the everyday are endlessly fascinating. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the notion of the everyday had become somewhat clichéd, having been explored in literature, painting and theatre. Film however had the power to record and store with renewed immediacy and accuracy the overlooked and seemingly unimportant or irrelevant aspects of daily life—to make the seemingly invisible visible. This power was of particular significance because, at the moment of film's invention, everyday life was undergoing rapid change brought about by modernization and industrialisation both in European nations and across their colonial empires. Amad discusses films shot in the colonies and the often complex and ambivalent relationship between the camera-eye and the look of the colonial subject. She is particularly interested in those films in which the people being filmed acknowledge the presence of the camera in some way. In chapter eight, she discusses a series of rushes from the Archive in which Kahn's cameramen filmed colonial prostitutes and their customers outside brothels. Interestingly the women almost always address the camera—they look back, wave at the camera, or give mock salutes. While Amad draws our attention to the exploitation of these women, she is also alert to the different ways in which they empower themselves before the camera-eye (pp. 278-282).

Amad argues that Kahn's films belong on a spectrum between pre-documentary and the documentary film. Only a very small number of films were edited, and some were given inter-titles—apparently by Brunhes for use in his lectures. In silent film, inter-titles were pieces of printed text inserted between sequences of filmed action in order to convey important information to the audience. The vast majority of these films were screened as rushes varying in length from several minutes to over sixty. Amad argues that the unedited nature of the Kahn footage is also central to its representation of the everyday—creating views of the quotidian which appeared even more casual or aimless than they might have if they had been edited. “Kahn's films may look undone, even suggesting the documentary form in decay. The comparison, however, is ultimately limited. Kahn's films did not fall into fragments; they were supposed to look and remain undone” (p. 90). Kahn's raw footage was deliberately bereft of any grand narrative or controlling logic. His films were certainly not intended to fit into the later model of the “problem-solving expository documentary mode” (p. 91). It is ironic that a recent BBC4 ten-part documentary, *The Wonderful World of Albert Kahn*, presents a history of Kahn's archive, accompanied by a wonderful selection of his still and moving images, yet also imposes a controlling voice-over narration that is completely antithetical to the original goals of the Archive itself.

One of the most intriguing aspects of Albert Kahn's life was his close personal relationship with Henri Bergson who was indirectly involved in the establishment of the Archive. Amad establishes that Kahn continued to engage in long discussions about philosophy with Bergson as late as 1930. To what extent did Bergson's ideas influence Kahn and his approach to film-making? Amad acknowledges that it is tempting to interpret Kahn's films as attempts to explore Bergsonian ideas of time and the everyday (pp. 103-104). Instead she argues that “Bergson's philosophy permits a progressive encounter with (rather than, as has usually been argued, an outright opposition to) the mechanistic and habitual tendencies of everyday life and cinematographic methods to which the Albert Kahn Archive is a monument” (p. 14). I found her argument subtle, complex and convincing. She unravels an important relationship between Bergsonian ideas and early cinema, which was also exploring ideas about time, memory, the mechanistic

and the everyday. She uses the phrase “to return Bergson to early cinema” at various points throughout her discussion, which encapsulates perfectly the thrust of her argument.

Counter-Archive not only offers a new theory of the film archive, but is filled with important information about the forces and people who shaped the early history of the cinema. Its analysis of the 1920s, which Amad sees as a watershed moment in the theorization of the everyday in relation to French film criticism, is superb. Discussion of the role of avant-garde artists and theorists to these debates is informative and fascinating. Her analysis of the contribution of Bergsonian philosophy to the formation of the Archives de la Planète and the nature of non-fiction film is equally impressive. As if this were not enough, Amad also brings her discussion of early film and the everyday into the present and explores its implications for contemporary forms of the archive from Google Earth to Facebook and the Internet. *Counter-Archive* is a groundbreaking, original and scholarly book, which is indispensable to a full understanding of the early and present history of the cinema and its relationship to the archive and the everyday.

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