

**Mohammed A. Gawad**  
**Time Helix**

Armed with a thread, a labyrinth dweller is able to hold onto a timeline amidst the timelessness of the labyrinth. Offering one entrance but many ways in, the labyrinth acts as a prism through which the flow of time enters as one, and with every turn, splits. At each bifurcation, and with every choice, a rupture is introduced in the fabric of the real. The thread allows the dweller to dive in/ free fall/ fast forward/ go forth/ forge a way through the narratives past, towards the eye of the temporal storm. A place where new time could be formulated/ new relations could be forged.

Proceeding through a labyrinth, the traces of previous dwellers, each a leftover from a certain past, hang like memory scratches on the abstract walls. They become at once evidences of history and dissolvents of time. The wider the rupture of time and space, the harder it becomes to separate the marks/arrange them into a narrative that would lead back from a point B to point A. Giving rise to paranoia? A closer look at the marks on the walls opens up portals of imagery/coiled miles of condensed narrative. Each mark awaits to be uncoiled and to tell of its story/past lives... the mark expands to reveal a reel.

A reel unwinds into a stream of celluloid consciousness, another thread that was extended through another labyrinth in another time, in an attempt to create reason from point A to point B – and rewind. Pulled through lives, places, mediums, histories and politics, the celluloid thread is paradoxically finite, bookended in a round canister//video box//compact disks//HDD, narrativizing chaos, projecting linearity/sanity.

Each projection of a reel maps out a route within a labyrinth, the viewer sees the route but has to imagine the rest of the labyrinth, and maybe construct new routes connecting the projected with the real.

Standing in a film archive that attempts to be “living”, relocated between a former crematorium and a neighbouring graveyard, Jose Saramago’s ALL THE NAMES springs to mind, particularly a climactic scene where the protagonist reaches a labyrinthine graveyard; the end station of a long, obsessive, unorthodox search for a mysterious woman. Fueled by what could only be unexplained love towards the woman he never met, Saramago’s protagonist’s journey was not hindered by the discovery of her recent death. He arrives at her grave, only to learn that it does not necessarily mean finding her. A mystical shepherd has been going around swapping the plates of the tombstones, in an attempt to give the dead an equal chance of being visited/forever lost, and because “One can show no greater respect than to weep for a stranger”... The protagonist arrives at a dead/open end.

Film canisters have a certain silence to them. In an archive space, they look almost identical in their solid shape and color to the point where the rows of reels resemble a wall/a passageway.

I try to use my precarious position as a guest, lodged in the archive, to rethink my presumed positions. I start to wonder if our natural/physiological/philosophical criteria of life and death could be stretched to include film... If so, wouldn’t a film be alive only throughout the process

of its making, where it can grow, change, develop... Wouldn't the final change of the fabric of a film on the editing table/in the color grading suite/sound mixing studio be the last moment of a film's active life - as we know it? Is it possible that a film dies between that moment and the moment of its premiere? Where a new stage awaits it; loops of resurrections, as it enters the realm of the undead.

Approaching the translucent celluloid strip with the naked eye implies seeing it and seeing through it at the same time. A film both points to itself and refers to a larger image. The individual frames reveal images, and between the frames, a context can be retrieved. Much like approaching a strand of DNA. It promises that once uncoiled, and with some imagination/investigation, one can access layers of information, stories and histories that a specific print of film witnessed throughout its life/afterlife. A history of resurrections... Can it also tell us something from/about the future? About how we created film to project/mimic something of us?

In the timelessness of the archive mindset, we have the space to speak of the films that watched us. Images can recall their past lives as parts of a continuum... before they were extracted, isolated, appropriated/imprisoned. Does a black and white film remember its original colored existence?

Perhaps in our times, the archive is haunted by a contemporary version of a labyrinth; one that dissolved its center, and spread its Minotaur thin over its entire space. Yet still requires regular inflow of material. The challenge of an archive dweller is no longer to survive a subjective journey where he meets/overcomes a version of himself. Maybe what is left is to exercise a balance between contemplating the very nature of the archive as a whole, while allowing enough encounter space for the individual building blocks to assume their dual nature; dead and alive, subjective and universal, reflective and transparent, unified and diverse, a self-contained entity and a part of a bigger code that awaits the moment to be deciphered/reprogramed.

Mohammad A Gawad was the first Living Archive scholarship holder at silent green.