In the past several decades, “the archive” as both a concept and an object has been undergoing a transformation. Although official photography, film, and television archives still promote their holdings as the most valuable and “authentic,” online databases and private collections threaten to unseat official archives as the primary purveyors of evidentiary audiovisual documents. Indeed, the increased availability of still and video cameras, analog and then digital, has led to a proliferation of indexical documents outside of official archives and prompted questions about the nature of what constitutes an “archive,” and, hence, what constitute “archival documents.” At the same time, filmmakers are appropriating sounds and images from all of these various sources and, in the process, are breaking down the previously useful distinction between “found” and “archival” documents. Indeed, this situation calls for a reformulation of the notion of the archival document - not as an object but as a spectatorial experience or, more precisely, a relationship between viewer and text. Indeed, certain audiovisual documents produce for the viewer the “archive effect” as they are appropriated into new texts and that this encounter endows these documents with a particular kind of authority as “evidence.” By reconceiving of the archival document not as an object but as an experience, we may begin to rethink how knowledge (particularly knowledge about the past) is constituted in the contemporary world.

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