The ARA Program
At a Glance...
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Modern science and technologies have sparked profound and irreversible social and cultural changes at astonishing speeds. For the first time in human history, man has become both an actor in and an object of a globalized movement that is affecting all aspects—natural, social, cultural, and intellectual—of human life.

In this context, the human and social sciences have a crucial role to play. Indeed, these are the only sciences that provide keys for understanding our complex modern world and the people who live in it from a comparative and critical perspective. They can also help us design models and scenarios that pull on the vast cultural, artistic, and intellectual richness of diverse human civilizations in order to build intelligent and imaginative long-term development policies. Indeed, these sciences stand in staunch opposition to the “clash of civilizations” hypothesis reminiscent of the old “man is man’s worst enemy” myth.

The primary objective of the Audiovisual Research Program of the ESCoM Laboratory (Cognitive Semiotics and New Medias Team) at the Fondation Maison des Sciences de l’Homme (FMSH, literally House of the Sciences of Man Foundation) in Paris is to collect and diffuse the living and global heritage produced by the social and human sciences throughout the entire world.

Providing permanent access to this exceptional heritage and promoting its “good use” is a great way to promote and facilitate responsible and quality education in schools and universities. It also ensures that professional milieus have access to reliable information.
Making this heritage available can also be a driving force for designing policies (social, economic, cultural, or scientific) that see traditions and cultures as unique resources man needs for “living in this world”, and for being able to use intelligence and heart to address the major challenges of today and tomorrow.

In the pages that follow, we invite you to discover ESCoM’s ARA Program at the Fondation Maison des Sciences de l’Homme (FMSH) in Paris. You will learn how ARA’s missions, activities, organization, and various services and tools are working to preserve, promote, and make concrete use of the global scientific and cultural heritage being produced by the human and social sciences.

Enjoy the read!

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1. ARA: Origin and Objectives

The Audiovisual Research Archives Program (ARA) was designed as a research and development project focusing on the cognitive semiotics of knowledge. It was created in 2001 by the Cognitive Semiotics and New Medias Team (ESCoM) at the Fondation Maison des Sciences de l’Homme (FMSH) in Paris.

The ARA Program is a collective group working to produce, diffuse, and preserve the world’s vast and diverse cultural and scientific heritage by using information and communication technologies (ICT), and digital audiovisual production techniques.

ARA supports and promotes:

1. **Public and private research** (an observatory showing how research is conducted in today’s world; an environment for producing and diffusing knowledge among researchers, teachers, and students from all over the world);

2. **Formal** (university, secondary, primary) and **informal** (life-long learning, secondary literacy, adult education, intercultural education, continued learning, professional training, etc.) education;

1. AAR official web site: http://www.archivesaudiovisuelles.fr
2. ESCoM official web site: http://www.semionet.com
3. **Dialogue between science/culture and society** (raise awareness about scientific, cultural, and social issues; enhance and promote scientific, literary, or artistic activities and projects);

4. **The fight against discrimination and social/economic exclusion** due to lack of access to knowledge and know-how (fighting the “intellectual and cognitive fracture”).

## II. ARA’s Three Services

ARA offers three broad services:

1. **ARA Video Library** – an online library containing some 5,500 hours of digital video in over a dozen languages produced by ESCoM and its partners alongside an international community of about 2,000 authors (researchers, teachers, artists, intellectuals, political figures, “eye-witnesses”, etc.) from 85 different countries;

2. **ARA Portal** – A vast web Portal in eight languages for a global community of visitors and users (around 27,000 visitors monthly from 150 different countries) offering a wide array of specialized services: thematic audiovisual dossiers, bilingual videos, educational resources, etc.;

3. And **Semiioscape** - a complete virtual work environment that enables not only ESCoM but ANY ESCoM partner to set up their own digital archives, as well as to produce, edit, diffuse, and stock audiovisual resources using a set of software and methodological guides available in **ESCoM Suite 2009**.
III. ESCoM and ARA

ESCoM’s R&D unit works to ensure that these three broad services are maintained, regularly improved, and diversified:

1. **The Production and Publication Service** for cultural and scientific heritage covers all the steps needed to ensure the high-quality diffusion of filmed and documented works (prep, filming, building and editing the corpus to publish with the video, publishing and archiving the corpus).

2. The **IT Service** plays two roles within ESCOM: it carries out strictly development and engineering activities, but it also manages and maintains the physical and technological infrastructure (servers, work stations, specialized software, filming and recording equipment, etc.).

3. **The Processing, Semiotics, and Republication/Adaptation of Audiovisual Corpuses Service** whose goal is to make the content of audiovisual resources produced by ESCoM or its institutional/individual partners as clear and understandable as possible and to adapt it to other, more varied types of use.

4. **The Communications and Fundraising Service** is responsible for sending out the ARA Newsletter every Monday to our 12,000 subscribers, for promoting ARA and its services in France and abroad, and for acquiring more in-depth knowledge about the profiles and expectations of ARA’s user community.
5. The Management and Archives Service stores on ESCoM’s servers all contractual documents governing how audiovisual resources can be diffused.

The ARA Program is structured around a network of French and international partners specialized in audiovisual semiotics, knowledge processing and management, as well as ICT and digital audiovisual media.

It also enjoys substantial support from the European Commission and France’s National Research Agency, which offer funding for multi-year R&D projects in the fields of technology and the social and human sciences.

IV. A Few Facts and Figures about ARA

1/ Exceptional cultural and scientific heritage in the form of 5,500 hours of online video

ARA’s Online Video Library is available to everyone and is completely free of charge. Its 5,500 hours of video include:

- recordings of scientific events (interviews, seminars, conferences, round-tables) in all the main disciplines of the human and social sciences,

- recordings of literary or cultural events (exhibitions, plays, concerts),

- recordings of educational activities (classes, workshops, games),

- documentaries and special reports showing the diversity of traditions and cultures in today’s world,

- audiovisual corpuses with dozens of hours of video on one specific knowledge topic,

- recordings of professional practices and activities related to specific material cultures,

- recordings and montages of scenes from daily life from all over the world,

- projects with a cultural and scientific dimension organized by ARA’s institutional or individual partners.
ARA’s Online Video Library has videos in 15 different languages. Most videos were produced by ESCoM, but some were done by ESCoM’s individual (researchers, artists, documentary-makers, etc.) and institutional (research laboratories, universities, etc.) partners. Roughly 60 new hours are added to the library every month.

2/ Cultural and scientific heritage produced by an international community of authors for a global community of visitors

The “author” of ARA’s audiovisual collection is an international community composed of more than 2,000 people from 85 different countries, including researchers, teachers, artists, writers, intellectuals, journalists, political figures, or eye witnesses.

ARA’s audiovisual collection is visited by around 27,000 people per month from 150 to 165 different countries (including France with 45% of visitors, followed by the United States, Canada, Italy, Germany, Spain, Poland, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Morocco, Algeria, Russia, Japan, and China).
3/ Specialized collections of audiovisual and multimedia publications

The ARA Publishing House adapts audiovisual collections from its library to other specific uses (scientific, educational, professional, etc.).

Current collections available are:

- hypermedia folders devoted to the work of one author (a researcher, artist, teacher, etc.);

- bilingual video dossiers suitable for diffusing knowledge in an intrinsically multilingual digital;

- short audiovisual encyclopedias and video-glossaries containing mini-corpora of short audiovisual segments organized around one topic, term, or a key-word;

- “trailers” and “advertisements” a few minutes long that provide great over-views of the most important points from original material.

4/ Audiovisual resources for formal and informal learning

ARA and University (will later be expanded into other sectors of the “educational market”) is a service geared towards university teachers and students.

It is available on the ARA Portal and offers:

- courses and concrete methodologies that explain how videos can be used for undergraduate and graduate education,

- projects done by undergraduate and graduate students in France and abroad who used ARA’s audiovisual resources to earn their diplomas.
5/ A virtual work environment “available to everyone” for producing, publishing, and managing personal and institutional audiovisual collections

Semioscape is a complete virtual work environment that enables not only ESCoM but ANY ESCoM partner to set up their own digital archives, as well as to produce, edit, diffuse, and stock audiovisual resources using a set of software and methodological guides available in ESCoM Suite 2009.

1. GAAV software for the remote management of online video libraries;

2. Interview software (co-developed with the National Institute of Research, INA) for sequencing, analyzing, indexing, adapting, and publishing audiovisual corpuses;

3. OntoEditor software for creating and managing terminotics and schemas used for describing/indexing audiovisual resources;

4. FFCoder tool for managing and compressing digital audiovisual files, particularly important for remote work;

5. PlaylistMaker tool needed for being able to work with commercial editing software like Adobe’s Premiere Pro and Interview that are part of ESCoM Suite 2009;

6. ESCoM Explorer web browser serves as an interface when working remotely;
6/ A knowledge network composed of specialized online libraries and portals

In addition to its main video library, ARA and ESCoM have also built ten specialized portals that are part of the ARA Knowledge Network. All are open to the public and are available online free of charge:

- People & Cultures of the World (PCW),
- Linguistic & Cultural Diversity (LCD),
- Globalization & Sustainable Development (GSD),
- History and Civilizations of South America (AmSud),
- Semiotics, Communications, and Culture (SCC),
- AVERROES – The France – Maghreb Media Library,
- AZERI devoted to the Azeri history, culture, and language,
- Archeo-Explorers Workshop (AEW),
- Cultural Encounters Workshop (CEW),
- Literature from Here and Beyond Workshop (LHBW).

7/ A major website providing free and open access to all its heritage and services

ARA’s website is available in eight languages: French, English, German, Spanish, Italian, Russian, Arabic, and Chinese. The site provides centralized access to all products and services developed by ESCoM and its partners for the ARA Program: general video library, specialized video libraries, specialized publications, help services for teachers and students, tools and methodologies for designing and building knowledge archives.

The ARA Portal is also the “official” interface between ESCoM and all communities interested in the ARA Program.

ESCoM uses the interface to:

- analyze the profiles and expectations of user communities by compiling daily statistics about user activity on the portal and online surveys;
- encourage communities to take an active role in ARA’s future by making concrete contributions, coming up with new ideas, or even providing financial and/or material support.
Organization of the ARA Team

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