GRAZIA INGRAVALLE

ARCHIVAL FILM CURATORSHIP

Early and Silent Cinema from Analog to Digital

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This book was a long way in the making, linking different autobiographical moments, geographies, and disciplinary paths in philosophical hermeneutics, film theory, film history, archival research, and film curatorship. As such, it benefitted from the input, curiosity, and support of many. But I'm told to keep it concise, so I'll do my best to do so, while knowing I will not be able to thank everyone.

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Tout film projeté est l'index d'un morceau de la durée du monde. Et la part de vérité énoncée relève de la rencontre de deux interprétations : celle des signes émanant du réel que le cinéaste construit et transmet et celle que le spectateur interprète. La vérité cinématographique réside dans cet affrontement.

Dominique Païni

Theorizing Archival Film Curatorship

ABSTRACT

The book's introduction places the phenomenon of film's museumification within the context of the digital turn and the debates about its impact on the medium's specificity, its historicization, the circulation of archival footage, and archival workflows. Building on previous readings of Jean-Louis Baudry's notion of dispositif, the chapter examines the curatorial discourses and historical narratives that shape our understanding of early and silent cinema today, positioning film museums at the intersection of film archiving and film historiography. Against the limits of poststructuralist conceptualizations of the archive, this introduction theorizes archival film curatorship as a space of temporal and historical mediation within the framework of Hayden White's metahistory and Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics.

KEYWORDS
film archives; film museums; early cinema; silent cinema; metahistory; hermeneutics

In 2015, the British Film Institute (BFI) National Archive uploaded a partially faded and scratched 1913 newsreel excerpt from *The Derby* to its YouTube channel as part of a program dedicated to suffragettes in silent cinema.[1] The clip's posthumous title *Emily Davison Trampled by King's Horse*, added by the BFI, presents it as a rare historical record of the incident leading to the suffragette's death. We see crowds of enthusiasts arriving in Epsom by car, on carriages, in overcrowded buses, and on foot. Horses and jockeys get ready. Then the race begins. Despite its ominous retitling and the suddenly gloomy tone of its previously cheerful score, to the untrained eye the clip may appear to defy its new title as one struggles to identify the dreadful event. The video ends with a medium shot of the winning horse, leaving one wondering whether they have watched the wrong clip or just failed to fathom what happened. YouTube's recommendation of similar attractional catastrophes and a forensic video examination of Davison's invasion of the tracks and collision with the King's horse, however, encourages one to reexamine the clip for its apparent tragedy. Only upon closer inspection, in the background of a faint long-distance shot, does the fatal clash between Davison and the horse become visible. In a fraction of a second, the horse suddenly falls, an Edwardian hat rolls away, and crowds rush on the tracks. The newsreel, however, abruptly cuts to a closer view of the horse race (which despite the incident continued) as if to call audiences' attention to what newsreel producer Topical Budget must have considered the event worthy of attention at the time—"The Race from Start to Finish and Incidents of the Day," as one of the film's original title cards announces. By recirculating what was initially intended as a film chronicle of the 1913 Epsom Derby on YouTube and presenting it as a visual testimony of suffragettes' struggles, the BFI situated *The Derby* within a new narrative of events. Despite the BFI's efforts to recontextualize the footage, these images retain a tragically surreal character. They are caught in a double historical tension: between their casually recorded deadly event and the evenementiality it acquired later, and between the present and this media past.

This book examines archival films such as *The Derby* as traces of a history mediated by: 1. specific cinematic conventions (in this case, serving Topical Budget's informative purpose and editorial strategies); 2. a particular mode of viewing embedded within media of display, namely, early cinema's apparatus as well as YouTube's video sharing platform; 3. a film's cultural significance

among audiences, present and past; and 4. the way film archives have actualized and framed its present viewing. *Archival Film Curatorship* is about the work of film museums and archives, which preserve century-old analog films and provide access to their interpretation often through digital media and technologies, mediating between different temporalities of cinema's history.

In comparison to other media, cinema enjoys a privileged relationship with time. As photographer and filmmaker Bolesław Matuszewski argues as early as 1898, moving images provide "a new source of history" to historians and students.[2] According to what D. W. Griffith declares months after the infamous release of *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), film not only enjoys equal scientific footing with traditional historical records but, most importantly, allows for what he bafflingly sees as unbiased and direct recordings of historical events.[3] As Mary Ann Doane writes, cinema is a medium that records, represents, and stores time, intersecting multiple temporalities: the linear time of the mechanical apparatus's workings, the diegetic time represented in the film, and the temporality of reception.[4] Every time moving images meet new viewers, new interpretations rearrange and recombine these multiple temporalities. Such readings produce new dimensions of sense and engage in practices of what Patricia White calls "retrospectatorship," "through which texts of the past, reordered and contextualized, are experienced anew in a different filmgoing culture."[5] In this respect, one can extend Gilles Deleuze's definition of "time-image," in which "sheets of past coexist in a non-chronological order," to all moving images, the viewing of which cuts across and combines different historical temporalities.[6]

Different moving-image temporalities meet in the present media landscape, in our urban spaces, libraries, schools, and home environments, where vintage media, imageries, and "retrocultures" often coexist with new media practices.[7] Within this intermedia context, audiovisual archives and museums offer unique standpoints for encounters with different moving-image temporalities, framed by the institution's historical, political, and aesthetic discourses and choice of media of exhibition. The following chapters concentrate on the preservation and curation of early and silent films, whose cultural significance has shifted from neglect (for instance, in the years following the advent of sound) to rediscovery, preservation, and wide display in the present day.[8] Through different technologies of display and media of access, through restorations and curatorial interventions, film museums contextualize spectators' encounters with this previous age in film and media history. This book asks: how do film archives and museums perform moving-image history as they negotiate cinema's different temporalities? To address this question, this study focuses on how archivists and curators are preserving and representing analog film as it becomes an object of the past—the time before the digital

turn—and how they are envisioning new forms of audience engagement with that past in the digital future.

In this introduction, I place the phenomenon of film's museumification within the context of the digital turn and the debates about its impact on the medium's specificity, its historicization, the circulation of archival footage, and archival workflows. Building on previous adaptations of Jean-Louis Baudry's analysis, I introduce the concept of *dispositif* to account for the multifaceted complexity of film archives' and museums' work of curation. Focusing on "the arrangement of the different elements" that make up the film archive's physical and virtual dispositif (including exhibition technologies and settings, film collections, and audiences), I examine the curatorial discourses and historical narratives that shape our understanding of early and silent cinema today, positioning film museums at the intersection of film archiving and film historiography.[9] Against the limits of poststructuralist conceptualizations of the archive, I theorize archival film curatorship as a space of temporal and historical mediation—a "hermeneutic dispositif"—within the framework of Hayden White's metahistory and Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics.

FILM ARCHIVES FROM ANALOG TO DIGITAL

The digital turn has been a major preoccupation for film and media theorists and historians. Many have interrogated its epistemological, historical, and technological implications, expanding André Bazin's ontological question. They no longer ask just "what *is* cinema?" but also what cinema *was* and what digital cinema *will become*.[10] Film historians such as André Gaudreault and Philippe Marion and curator Paolo Cherchi Usai interpret the break from analog film technologies as a profound historical change, going so far as to postulate cinema's "crisis of identity" or, even worse, its death.[11] According to proponents of medium specificity, such changes have affected all aspects of the medium: its claims to realism, ontology, materiality, aesthetic qualities, understanding, and viewing.[12] On the other end of the spectrum, scholars like Thomas Elsaesser question the strict opposition between old and new media, understanding the contemporary media landscape as an intermedia and transhistorical entanglement of old and new media, rather than as the result of a linear evolution or a definitive break from previous cultural practices.[13] Beyond the conundrum of cinema's ontology, a broader metahistorical problem is at stake—how to conceptualize and periodize the medium's changes across history. These discussions have led many among film and media scholars to rethink the changing social, cultural, and technological experience with

moving images throughout time, and to seek new ways of conceptualizing phenomena of visual culture and cinema's different temporalities.[14]

Cinephilic practices and communal viewing at film festivals, multiplexes, and art-house cinemas today coexist with home cinema, laptop streaming, and other new media practices. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, theatrical box office returns had kept increasing globally as has the number of cinema screens (98 percent of which are digital) even after the pandemic, led by the market's expansion in the Asia-Pacific region.[15] In the aftermath of the pandemic's peaks, film theaters have kept rebranding theatrical film screenings as unique, immersive events, by investing in gigantic screens, 270-degree auditoriums, and 4D cinema experiences.[16] However, despite such refurbishments, as a viewing experience, cinema has paradoxically witnessed broad continuities throughout its history amidst its relocation across multiple devices and platforms. On the one hand, as John Belton claims, much of what we experience in a cinema, that is, "the projection on a screen of life-size— or bigger than life-size—images before an audience," has stayed the same, even after movie theaters' digital conversion.[17] On the other, cinema has kept expanding its horizon into the digital age while retaining its ability to elicit a particular kind of experience—in Francesco Casetti's words, the way "it activates our senses, our reflexivity, our practices."[18] As he notes, "we continue to call 'cinema' what we watch at home, in our home theater, or while traveling, on our tablet ...."[19]

Lockdown restrictions due to COVID-19 have accelerated the migration of increasingly large spheres of our lives to digital and virtual environments: work-related tasks, communications, politics, social networking, healthcare, education, and shopping. Yet, while we have acquired new literacies and habits, and despite the long history of computer technologies and the Internet, the quick popularization of digital technologies in the late 1990s and early 2000s still evokes retrospectively the impression of a momentous and sudden change, a revolution.[20] Even for those who were "born digital"—Generation Z—new media have retained the aura of the new. In Lisa Gitelman's words, they are still "widely perceived as technologically advanced and advancing, globally connected amid intense competition, unstinting hype, and increasingly open and extensive markets."[21] To this by now familiar narrative of a digital revolution, this book offers an alternative kind of history by addressing the phasing out of analog cinema and the spread of new technologies and media as experienced in the field of film archiving over the last two decades.

The transition to digital has had a complementary retroactive effect, turning analog technologies and media (such as analog radio and television, Walkmans, audiotape, and VCR, to mention only a few) into *old* media and endowing cinema with a new sense of historicity.[22] Before digital media, the

popularization of video in the 1980s already seemed to mark in French film historian Joseph Ishaghpour's words, "a final moment in the history of cinema, a sort of closure."[23] Nearly three decades after the 1995 centenary of its birth—when apprehensions about its progressive digitization and supposedly inevitable death accrued around the momentous turn of the millennium—the undiminished sense of novelty surrounding digital media has pushed cinema further into the realm of history.[24] In response to the perceived threat and epochal change brought by the digital turn, in 2005, UNESCO established the World Day for Audiovisual Heritage on October 27. In the launching statement, we read:

> Audiovisual documents, such as films, radio and television programmes, are our common heritage and contain the primary records of the history of the 20th and 21st centuries. Unfortunately, that heritage is *now* endangered, because sound recordings and moving images can be deliberately destroyed or irretrievably lost as a result of neglect, decay and technological obsolescence.[25]

The immediacy, urgency, and inexorability associated with the digital turn—as exemplified by the popular metaphor of the digital revolution—project an equally urgent sense of impermanence and vulnerability onto analog media, now in need of upscaled stewardship and protection.

The heritagization of moving images has transformed the formerly little-known work of film archivists preserving and protecting these records into a collective responsibility towards the generations to come. Initiatives such as Martin Scorsese's Film Foundation, Shivendra Singh Dungarpur's Film Heritage Foundation, and Inés Toharia Terán's 2021 documentary *Film, The Living Record of Our Memory* have raised awareness about film preservation on a global level.[26] Film archives and museums feature complex workflows and a wide range of remits, which extend from acquisition, identification, and cataloging to dissemination and outreach, acting as major stakeholders within the cultural and tourism industries.[27] Unlike other kinds of archives, audiovisual archives not only preserve and provide access to their assets but, similar to history, art, and science museums, they also exhibit their artifacts and restorations to the widest possible audience through different events, spaces, and platforms. While the terms film archive, film museum, and cinematheque place emphasis on distinct aspects of film preservation—respectively film conservation, public exhibition, and programming—most film heritage institutions today have exhibition outlets, both physical and virtual.[28] For many years the term preservation has been synonymous with duplication of older archival elements onto new film stock. However, in the last two decades it

has come to indicate "the full continuum of activities necessary to protect the film and share its content with the public," from film identification to public exhibition and access.[29] For the purposes of this book, this broad spectrum of activities also defines the realm of archival film curatorship, which comprises all the work of care (as the Latin etymon *cūrāre* suggests) and stewardship around film collections' preservation, interpretation, and display.[30] As I examine institutions that both manage film and film-related collections and also carry out exhibition, dissemination, and educational activities, I use the terms film archive and film museum interchangeably in the following pages.

With their historical specificity and aesthetics unfamiliar to most viewers, early and silent cinema offer an ideal entry point into examining the work of archival film curatorship. As curator Eric de Kuyper highlights, early and silent cinema

> speak a different 'language' from that of the cinema that the audience knows and loves …. Doubtless the distinctive sentimental character, the Manichaeism in the behavior of the personae, the pronounced theatricality lie far beyond our aesthetic criteria. In a word, this cinema has not arrived into the modern era.[31]

The arrival of synchronized sound phased out silent cinema's acting, scripting, editing, and shooting conventions, which today seem so alien to us. The obsolescence of early and silent cinema's original media carriers, apparatuses, and techniques (such as the application of color dyes) has further complicated our historical understanding. However, all these hindrances considered, silent cinema, notes Giovanna Fossati, "has never been so visible, so exposed and accessible as it is nowadays."[32] Popular costume television series such as *Boardwalk Empire* (HBO, 2010–14) and *Cable Girls* (Netflix, 2017–20) have popularized 1910s and 1920s visual culture, while vintage photography and cinema from those same years inspired the imagery of films like *The Artist* (Michel Hazanavicius, 2011), *Snow White* (*Blancanieves*, Pablo Berger, 2012), and *The Great Gatsby* (Baz Luhrmann, 2013).[33] Compared to only twenty years ago, silent films—even obscure titles—are much more widely accessible today, thanks to the multiplication of online repositories, including public archival platforms (such as the Danish Film Institute's Stumfilm.dk, dedicated to the golden era of Danish silent cinema and the Library of Congress's National Screening Room), commercial streaming platforms (including YouTube, Vimeo, Mubi, and Netflix), and torrent trackers like Karagarga.[34]

In the wake of these changes in archival practices, many within the field have expressed a preoccupation with the risk of shifting public attention from the often-invisible work of archival preservation as a whole (inextricably

encompassing finding, identification, indexing, conservation, restoration, and exhibition) to access alone.[35] As the Eye Filmmuseum's (Eye) silent film curator Rongen Kaynakçi illustrates, most national and European film preservation schemes, for instance, focus on digital access to archival collections:

> Compared to the past ten years, the number of restoration projects has dramatically decreased due to budget cuts. … Most of the available funding, whether from the Dutch government or the EU, is meant to support access policies, and as curators, we must prioritize online digital access. For instance, we prioritize the restoration of films for which we anticipate concrete opportunities for wide circulation either as part of Eye's large access projects or a festival program.[36]

With time, prioritizing the necessity to satisfy an increasing demand for access over other facets of archival work could lead to scarce financial support for passive and active preservation—a potentially dangerous situation due to the quick corruptibility of digital files.[37]

Many archivists worry that the new modes of audience engagement with digitized archival film collections may encourage more superficial and consumeristic viewing habits. For instance, as Austrian film curator Alexander Horwath argues, "the way access has been used in the neo-liberal rhetoric … mainly means consumption." In Horwath's view, rather than "creating and curating various forms of engagement with the artefact," digital access policies have turned "the collections into image-banks for intermediary dealers and end-consumers."[38] An example of such a process of commodification is British Pathé's YouTube release of 85,000 clips from its collection (3,500 hours of content) in 2011. On their YouTube channel, users can freely browse through tens of thousands of clips of news items ranging from *Queen Victoria's Funeral* (1901) to *Arnold Schwarzenegger wins Mr Universe* (1969).[39] British Pathé excerpted each clip from the original newsreel to which it belonged, retitled it, and included a short description with links to British Pathé's licensing and subscription platform to watch the complete clips. The amount and variety of freely displayed material here may at first seem to empower users to skim through this digitized archive, which would have otherwise remained unknown to most casual viewers. However, British Pathé's two-tier access model enables users to consult only a very limited set of archival information for free on YouTube, while redirecting us to its subscription service for a better-informed understanding of this footage.

The Prelinger Archives, of which around 6,000 advertising, educational, industrial, and amateur films can be freely consulted on the Internet Archive, provides a counterexample of mass archival digitization and online access. In

1983, Rick Prelinger began collecting "ephemeral" films of historical interest that no other archive was preserving, including "films produced by and for many hundreds of important US corporations, nonprofit organizations, trade associations, community and interest groups, and educational institutions." In 2002, the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division of the Library of Congress (LoC) acquired the collection amassing more than 60,000 items, making around 10 percent of it accessible, researchable, and freely reusable under Creative Commons license on the Internet Archive. Over the past two decades, the National Film Preservation Foundation, LoC, the Internet Archive, and Prelinger himself have digitally curated this vast collection of non-fiction titles by providing newer and higher-quality versions of the files, archival metadata, and publishing *The Field Guide to Sponsored Films* in 2007.[40] While Getty Images represents the collection for stock footage sale, this project came about under a very different banner from the commercial purposes animating British Pathé or streaming platforms like YouTube. Inspired by Prelinger's recuperative and revisionist film historical research, the digitization of his archives reflects the Internet Archive's utopian and universalist non-profit mission to "provide Universal Access to All Knowledge."[41]

Digitization has complicated film archives' work of historical mediation. If digital software has provided new tools for image correction, significant problems remain unresolved, such as the sustainability of long-term digital storage and preservation vis-à-vis the global "data tsunami."[42] The digitization of most commercial movie theaters has made analog film projection a near-exclusive prerogative of cinematheques and film museums. At the same time, unprecedented possibilities of online access and dissemination have imposed upon film museums new models of outreach, exhibition, and communication.[43] The institutional and amatorial digitization and online circulation of unprecedentedly vast amounts of archival footage have made the act of appropriating, recycling, and recontextualizing preexisting images a staple of new media practices. Such footage becomes all the more valuable and visible on the occasion of historical commemorations and anniversaries, when historians, documentarists, and broadcasters mine archives in search for precious material. This was the case for Peter Jackson, who reused, colorized, and sonorized WWI footage from the Imperial War Museum in his spectacular (if ethically and politically questionable) digital makeover documentary *They Shall Not Grow Old* (2018).[44] Beyond such notable examples, repurposing archival footage has turned into a ubiquitous—at times, nearly undetected— gesture in the digital age, in memes, mashups, GIFs, remixes of all sorts, essay films, and video essays.

Archival material and aesthetics have gained increased visibility also through archival film screenings, which have become top cultural attractions,

as exemplified by the 2013 premiere of the latest restoration of Abel Gance's *Napoleon* (1927) at the Royal Festival Hall in London.[45] Film museums' spectacular modern architectures attract thousands of visitors, as in the case of the Australian Centre for the Moving Image in Melbourne and the newly opened Academy Museum of Motion Pictures designed by architect Renzo Piano in Los Angeles. Film archives promote inter-archival research projects, international exhibitions, archival film programs, and in-house displays of artifacts and apparatuses. International film festivals, such as the Pordenone Silent Film Festival, Il Cinema Ritrovato in Bologna (both in Italy), and the San Francisco Silent Film Festival, to mention just a few famous examples, showcase the discovery and restoration of archival films. Such a wealth of practices, events, and institutions is testament to the vitality of the cultural work of archival film curatorship.

In what follows, I examine three key institutions at the forefront of experimentation with early and silent film exhibition and curatorship: Eye in Amsterdam, the Netherlands; the George Eastman Museum of Photography and Film (GEM) in Rochester, NY; and the National Fairground and Circus Archive (NFCA) in Sheffield, UK. Inspired by new media practices, in the past twenty years, Eye has digitized, repurposed, and recirculated early and silent film fragments from its collections through various iterations of digital remix. On the opposite end of the spectrum, GEM has built on a long history of silent film curation, specializing in the exhibition of analog film, most notably nitrate film, the projection of which is generally interdict elsewhere on the grounds of the stock's high flammability. Lastly, the NFCA has run itinerant film programs mixing early films with modern performances (including extravaganzas, contortionists' acts, and burlesque), reenacting early fairground cinema's performative, multimedia milieu. In all three cases, archival film curatorship has intersected with historiographic work and metahistorical narratives—namely, non-linear remix at Eye, a tragic narrative around analog cinema's obsolescence at GEM, and historical pastiche at the NFCA. As film preservation and curation take place within specific institutional frameworks, this book places what these film museums and archives are doing right now within their longer curatorial histories. *Archival Film Curatorship* looks retrospectively at how the understanding of film has shifted over the years, foregrounding how the archival and museological value of early and silent cinema has changed throughout these institutions' decades-long curatorial history up to the digital present. Each of these archival histories exposes the processes through which historians, cinephiles, and archivists have selected the objects of their attention, according to or despite established cultural hierarchies, dominant historiographies, and personal taste.

None of the institutions I examine here are exclusively film archives. Eye,

for instance, emerged from the merger of four different institutions with other remits than just strictly film preservation: the Dutch film archive (the Netherlands Film Museum, NFM), Holland Film, the Filmbank, and the Netherlands Institute for Film Education.[46] Whereas GEM is a museum of both photography and film, initially, at the time of its charter in 1948, devoted chiefly to their scientific and technological history.[47] Finally, the NFCA, the youngest institution of the three, is part of the Special Collections of the University of Sheffield Library.[48] It holds various records (photographs, printed material, manuscripts, films, and audiovisual recordings) of the history of itinerant fairground entertainments, including the traveling cinematograph, or bioscope. The diversity of these archives—their missions, histories, and holdings— attests not only to film museums' institutional hybridity but also to the wide-ranging scope of audiovisual curatorship, a task certainly not confined to film archives and museums. What counts here is that each of these institutions has advanced new modes of mediating between early and silent cinema's past   and the digital media present, at the intersection of film historiographic and curatorial work.

My case studies build upon fieldwork carried out in these institutions through self-observation, interviews with curators, and research into internal documents, correspondence, public talks, policy documents, preservation strategies, and program notes. In-depth interviews and observation of professional practices helped me bring to light unwritten institutional histories and collect information about unstated rules, principles, and practices—what Karen F. Gracy defines as a "tacit knowledge" shared by members of the archival community. However, unlike Gracy's "archival ethnography," in which the researcher is "out among the subjects of [their] research, becoming immersed in their milieu, and seeing events and activities as they see them," this book maintains a critical distance from its subject, engaging instead in a historical and critical analysis of archival practices, in dialog with different generations of professionals in the field.[49]

Shifting from textual analysis to a study of the context of moving image circulation, in the last twenty years a growing number of scholars have investigated the history of institutions like film archives and museums. This work includes Haidee Wasson's history of the Film Library at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, Caroline Frick's history of film preservation in the US, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and Christophe Dupin's investigation of the BFI between the 1930s and the 2000s, and Bregt Lameris' research into Eye's institutional forefather, the NFM.[50] Film historians have increasingly grounded their work in archival research, embarking on revisionist histories that bring previously marginalized individuals and groups to the fore.[51] In areas less strictly informed by historical methodologies, audiovisual archives have

become sites for investigating the dynamics of memory politics and metaphors of new forms of knowledge organization.[52] Collaborations between archivists, curators, and scholars inform conferences such as that of Domitor, the International Society for the Study of Early Cinema and the Orphan Film Symposium, to mention two established examples.[53] Several film archivists and archival scholars, including Dominique Païni, Gracy, Cherchi Usai, David Francis, Alexander Horwath, Michael Loebenstein, Fossati, and Jurij Meden, have published book-length studies of film preservation and archival curation.[54] Media and art scholars have also examined the curation of film, video, and digital media in a different kind of institution, the art museum.[55] To date, however, the nexus between archives' institutional histories, archival film curatorship, and film historiography has received insufficient attention.

The last twenty years have seen the birth of several international film preservation programs.[56] The two leading professional organizations in the field, the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) and the Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA), deliver regular summer schools and training workshops.[57] *Archival Film Curatorship* speaks to this new generation of training moving image archivists, librarians, preservationists, curators, and archival scholars equipped with an enhanced understanding of film as both documentary record and technological artifact, aware of the ephemerality and preservation requirements of moving-image media, and conscious of the politics of film archiving and preservation. At the same time, this book actualizes questions around the place of cinema and the moving image within broader cultural and institutional histories, media histories, and film and media theories, by focusing on the material history and the changing cultural value of individual films and film collections throughout their archival life and in the wake of the digital turn.[58]

FILM ARCHIVES AS HISTORIOGRAPHIC DISPOSITIFS

It has become common practice to remind students in film history classes that viewing a silent film on YouTube on a laptop is very different from watching a 35mm silent film projected in a museum with live music accompaniment. Viewers may experience early and silent films in radically different ways in film archives and museums, depending on their mode of presentation. A 1955 film program titled The Development of the Narrative at George Eastman House (GEH), for instance, characterized early films like James Williamson's *Fire* (1901) and Edwin Porter's *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) as primitive antecedents of narrative cinema, according to a dominant historiographic approach that at the time emphasized the development of narrative continuity.[59] Com-

pared with this example, the NFCA's screenings of early local films, such as the 1901 *Workers Leaving the Carr's Biscuit Works* in Carlisle, UK, framed a very different encounter with early cinema for local audiences, who could participate in the history of their town and ancestors projected on screen.[60] Early and silent cinema's historicity does not speak for itself but instead acquires meaning within particular cultural and historical contexts of exhibition and reception. Different factors—ranging from the technology of exhibition to the way of addressing audiences, and from the historical discourses around particular films to their exhibition settings—frame how early and silent film history speaks to present audiences. By bringing together such a multitude of factors—which include, for example, museum architecture, the choice of music accompaniment, program notes, and particular audiences—archival film curatorship shapes our perceptions of early and silent cinema.

Take, for instance, the case of *Man with a Movie Camera* (*Chelovek s kinoapparatom*, 1929), for which GEM and the Dovzhenko Center in Ukraine played out two opposing historical legacies. In 2015, GEM chose to screen an archival 35mm print of Dziga Vertov's film with live accompaniment by the Alloy Orchestra, presenting the screening as a rare and unique event for the museum's audiences.[61] As the Alloy Orchestra based its score on Vertov's notes for the musical accompaniment to the 1929 Moscow premiere, GEM characterized the screening as an authentic reenactment of the original event, faithful to the intentions of the Soviet master. By contrast, on the other side of the Atlantic, the Dovzhenko Center reinterpreted *Man with a Movie Camera* as the work of a Ukrainian dissident filmmaker, made possible by Ukraine's short-lived independence from Soviet censorship. Back in 2011, the Center released a new digital restoration of the film on DVD with Ukrainian intertitles to familiarize audiences, both domestic and international, with Ukraine's cinematic modernism.[62] Its new score, composed by Ukrainian electronic musician DJ Derbastler, refashions the synthetic artificiality of Vertov's "kino-eye," situating it within the context of Ukraine's post-soviet cultural renaissance. In these examples, technology—35mm projection with symphonic accompaniment versus DVD with electronic music score—plays a significant role in mediating between *Man with a Movie Camera* and its present audiences. In attaching values of authenticity to analog media (in the case of GEM) and a revisionist agenda to the choice of digital technologies (in the case of the Dovzhenko Center) both institutions claim to be true to Vertov's authorship, situating *Man with a Movie Camera* within two distinct cultural, historical, and geo-political contexts.

The above examples foreground the power of institutional and curatorial contexts of display to frame the historical significance of a given film. In recent years, reception, audience, and experimental film scholars have highlighted

how various film exhibition settings—including cinemas, art galleries, and film archives—may shape the meanings attributed to particular films. In an attempt to conceptualize this phenomenon, Frank Kessler recuperates Roger Odin's semio-pragmatic analysis of the role played by different contexts of film viewing in the production of meaning and affect.[63] By revisiting Baudry's concept of dispositif, Kessler argues that past and present viewing situations comprise an array of settings including "institutional framings, the modes of address they imply, as well as the technological basis on which they rest."[64] Drawing on his work, Fossati deploys the concept of dispositif as "a functional instrument to theorize archival practice."[65] In her view, the film archive is a dispositif in which "film identity becomes a variable that realizes itself only within … a situation where the film meets its user."[66]

Through different exhibition dispositifs, film museums emphasize certain facets of film textuality and aesthetics, and the affordances of the chosen media of display, leaving other aspects in the background. For example, the titles of GEM's annual nitrate film festival, the Nitrate Picture Show (discussed at length in chapter 2), remain secret until its opening.[67] What counts here, more than the film titles, directors, and stars, is nitrate film's aesthetic specificity and the exclusivity of the event, given that the Dryden Theatre is one of the handfuls of venues around the world that can still publicly project nitrate.[68] For former GEM curator Cherchi Usai, these nitrate films' textuality is of secondary importance to the distinctive look of their material base and the now rare opportunity to see them projected at all. Similarly, analog film projection is particularly significant within a project like the Crazy Cinématographe, a historical reenactment of early fairground cinema exhibition, which has occasionally taken place since 2007 as part of the annual Luxembourg City fair.[69] Unlike the Nitrate Picture Show, however, the Crazy Cinématographe does not use analog projection to call attention to the aesthetic features of the archival film prints, but rather as part of a composite reenactment performance. Spectators leave the show remembering "the Kiriki family's human pyramid and the way Alfred Machin's leopard raced through the streets of Brussels." However, as Dick Tomasovic explains, they are even more fascinated by "the shape of the tent, the size of the screen, the way the lecturer struck the screen with his cane and the sound of the projector: in short, a whole series of elements relating more to the show than to the films' content."[70]

Multiple elements make up dispositifs of film exhibition. Focusing on modern art institutions and their incorporation of artists' moving images, Erika Balsom analyzes the material and discursive practices shaping the museum space through Michel Foucault's definition of dispositif:

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a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions—in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the *dispositif*. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements.[71]

In a similar vein, in examining the exhibition strategies of Eye, GEM, and the NFCA, the following chapters address both their discursive practices and the arrangement—in Baudry's words, *la disposition*—of material elements (such as exhibition technologies, settings, and collections), as well as the way these have changed over time.[72]

Longer institutional histories, changing collection policies, archival workflows, preservation programs, and international film preservation standards (such as FIAF's Code of Ethics) inform the workings of these institutional dispositifs.[73] In these spaces, old and new media assume cultural functions and aesthetic values, film texts acquire meaning and historicity, embedded in particular exhibition and viewing practices. The functions and functioning of media such as cinema, radio, and television may vary so much over time, that, as Kessler notes, "it would be more accurate to describe the different *dispositifs* in which [they] take shape," rather than to seek their identity or specificity.[74] While the curatorial choice of particular technologies of display certainly entails different types of viewing experiences and historical understanding—hence this book's title's emphasis on the transition from analog to digital—such encounters take place within a complex dispositif that comprises and combines, beyond technology, also discourses, architectures, and geographies. The concept of exhibition dispositif allows one to counter rigid media ontologies and medium-specific arguments with an interrogation of the multifaceted character of archival exhibition settings.[75]

Curatorial discourses tie together the various components of the film museum-dispositif, embedding them within historical narratives and performing a mediation across over a century of moving-image history. By creating new contexts of circulation, intelligibility, and significance for archival films, film museums also act as historiographic dispositifs, consolidating particular historical canons or openly questioning established historiographies. The famed 1978 FIAF Conference in Brighton was one of the most notable moments in which the archival film community helped shape historiographic agendas, an event which, as Katherine Groo and Philippe Gauthier notice, has since acquired the status of founding myth for what came to be known as the "new film history."[76] On this occasion, film archivists and historians examined a large body of early films from 1900 to 1906, preserved in affiliated archives

around the world.[77] Before the conference, a series of early film screenings curated by Eileen Bowser at MoMA allowed a new generation of film historians—including Charles Musser, Tom Gunning, Gaudreault, Elsaesser, William Uricchio, and Roberta E. Pearson—to study a corpus of films until then virtually unknown and identify it as "early cinema."[78] By bringing into focus a cinema that had until then been considered primitive and "pre-historical," the Brighton project helped extend film history's periodization.[79] As Groo and Gauthier argue, debates interrogating film history's methodologies and professionalization certainly predate Brighton, going as far back as the 1974 FIAF Conference in Montreal and Ottawa and the publication of Douglas Gomery's 1976 article "Writing the History of the American Film Industry" in *Screen*.[80] Taken together such debates encouraged scholars to search and interrogate archival records—to look at production sheets and distribution papers, and compare early film prints—inaugurating the discipline's historical turn.

In those same years, avant-garde practitioners and theorists such as Noël Burch, Jay Leyda, Ken Jacobs, Hollis Frampton, and Michael Snow incorporated early film footage in their work, crucially influencing film historians and New York's film culture at large.[81] Within the context of broader methodological and epistemological discussions amongst film historians, the recirculation of early cinema led Gunning and Gaudreault to conceptualize the "cinema of attractions" in 1985, a term that has since entered film historians' jargon.[82] The cinema of attractions emphasizes early cinema's mode of addressing spectators—a spectatorial effect that historians imagine in direct opposition to the diegetic immersion typical of narrative cinema, and which they theorize based on their own experience of watching these early films.[83] At the time of its formulation, the cinema of attractions expressed a growing discomfort with the psychoanalytic framework dominating film analysis, which, modeled on Hollywood cinema, was deemed unsuitable for the study of early films' visual regimes. By shifting attention from early films' lack of narrative structure to their attractional qualities, the cinema of attractions challenged one of the historiographic principles that had until then organized most accounts of cinema's evolution—the development of the narrative form.[84] Research into cinema's dispersed origins and various proto-cinematic ancestors pointed to its multiple genealogies as a medium with different and interrelated functions that ranged from information to spectacle, and from surveillance to imaging.

The appreciation of film's multiple historical trajectories has given rise to a widespread skepticism about the "competing teleological narratives" of cinema's development toward technical maturity, narrative continuity, and mimetic realism.[85] Elsaesser summarizes the metahistorical revisions the new film history has instigated, arguing "such rethinking of early cinema and proto-cinematic practices runs counter to any linear conception of cause and

effect." Therefore, he concludes, "no inevitable logic about the development of the cinema" can be drawn.[86] Such critiques of film history's master-narratives have inspired also a general distrust of narrative itself as a formal principle organizing historical discourse.[87] Narrative has become synonymous with fictitious continuity and closure, and with a progression constructed retrospectively according to historians' chosen standpoints—traditionally, a specific film genre, an auteur, or the medium's technological development.[88]

Just as the popularization of digital media would have done later, the rediscovery of early cinema produced an "epistemological vertigo," leading to the emergence of historiographic and discursive strategies alternative to historical narratives.[89] Gaudreault and Gunning, for instance, look to Russian Formalists' approaches to literary history, which question evolutionist principles of development. In Juri Tynjanov's words:

> If we agree that evolution is the change in interrelationships between the elements of a system—between functions and formal elements—then evolution may be seen as the "mutations" of systems. These changes ... do not entail the sudden and complete renovation or the replacement of formal elements, but rather the *new function of these formal elements*.[90]

The historical and discursive trope that Gunning and Gaudreault consider to better reflect film's shift from a hegemonic "system of monstrative attractions" to one of "narrative integration" after 1908 is that of "series," inspired by Hans Robert Jauss' idea of "literary series."[91] This new concept, they argue, allows historians to account for "the succession, the diachrony, of various systems that have been engendered over the course of film history."[92] Along with a diachronic approach, according to Jauss, series should include also "synchronic cross-sections" of moments of historical variation that would account for "the heterogeneous multiplicity of contemporaneous works in equivalent, opposing, and hierarchical structures, and ... overarching system[s] of relationships."[93] In Gaudreault and Gunning's view, the concept of series allows historians to question teleological notions of progression, increment, and development, challenging previous historical hierarchies that had sanctioned the superiority of institutionalized narrative codes over attractional forms. Moreover, as they claim, the convergence of the two moments—the diachronic historical series and the synchronic analysis of specific moments in film history—also encourages a reconciliation of history and theory.

However, behind such a rethinking of historical causality there is not just a desire to theorize a plurality of historical systems but also a more epistemologically ambiguous need to explain early cinema in what historians often deem to be its own empirical terms. In examining "kine-attractography"

(*cinématographie-attraction*) as a "cultural series," for instance, Gaudreault emphasizes the importance of the synchronic dimension over the diachronic one, which he sees as inevitably leading to teleological narratives. This enables him to address the phenomenon both in its "horizontal" intermedia overlaps with other cultural practices and "vertically," that is, in his words, "as it itself was."[94] Musser invokes a similarly dualistic method, at once "materialist and historical," interrogating early cinema's history while embracing "a sympathetic, humble openness to the material and a readiness to accept a body of work on its own terms."[95] As these examples suggest, the new film historians often embrace object-centered approaches and empirical methodologies—what Jane Gaines identifies as the field's "empirical turn"—in the hope of doing justice to the historical specificity of their objects. This leads her to provocatively ask where the historical phenomenon defined as cinema of attractions was before its conceptual formulation in 1985, drawing attention to the often-disavowed discursive nature of historical work.[96] Overall, as Gaines, Nicholas Baer, and Groo point out, "the 'new film history' adheres to the traditional discipline," implicitly embracing empiricist stances close to philosopher Leopold von Ranke's historicism.[97]

Such a tacit alliance between evidence-based methodologies and empiricist epistemologies "presupposes an objective or neutral point of historical reception" and interpretation. As Groo concludes, the new film history's "empirical view simply reconsolidates spectatorial power where it has been for centuries: in the eyes of the most privileged (white, male) beholder."[98] Politically revisionist film historiography and curatorship—exemplified by the Nasty Women programs at the Pordenone Silent Film Festival (2017 and 2021) and the 2022–23 exhibition *Regeneration: Black Cinema 1898–1971* at the Academy Museum, to mention a few recent examples—have brought to the fore the lives, practices, and work (often scarcely documented and previously unwritten) of individuals and communities hitherto marginalized within the industry and dominant historiography.[99] Such work points to the urgent need to not just shake unquestioned beliefs in the correspondence between archival evidence and historical accounts, but also re-examine the epistemologies framing historians' archival research and questions.

Media archaeology—which inspired a more recent strand of work Elsaesser calls "new film history as media archaeology"—shares a similar penchant for synchronic investigations and anti-teleological accounts with the new film history.[100] "Instead of looking for obligatory trends, master media, or imperative vanishing points," Siegfried Zielinski argues, "one should be able to discover individual variations."[101] Through synchronic analyses of dynamic historical moments and transversal "cuts" across different historical periods, in his words, media archaeology illuminates

past situations where things and situations were still in a state of flux, where the options for development in various directions were still wide open, where the future was conceivable as holding multifarious possibilities of technical and cultural solutions for constructing media worlds.[102]

Zielinski's words reveal his desire to rescue what he sees as an archetypical anarchy of things past from the ideological ordering pretensions of traditional history.[103] His history is consciously anti-systematic: it addresses differences—rather than continuities—without hierarchizing them and rejoices in curiosities and "fortuitous finds."[104]

A similar dissatisfaction with linear narrative, determinist causality, and a general distrust in historical storytelling animates media archaeology and new film historians.[105] This explains media archaeology's predilection for alternative discursive strategies and weaker historical links than straightforward causation, such as conjuncture, correlation, and an emphasis on accident and chance.[106] "Since telling a story imposes a logic retrospectively onto events," Gitelman notes, "these critics seek to avoid and thereby critique storytelling." This, she adds, "just as—and at the same time that—… no one in cultural studies seems to want to be historicist according to any but a 'new' historicist paradigm."[107] In its different variants (anarchaeology, variantology, archiveology, and counter-history), media archaeology embraces a form of what, adapting a definition by Roman Jakobson, White calls "agrammatic" historical discourse—one that lacks "the ties of grammatical coordination and subordination" as much as it lacks relationships of causation.[108] White refers to this kind of discourse—one that, according to Zielinski, supposedly does justice to the state of fecund disorder and dynamism of media history—as a form of historical *flaneurisme*, which rejects discursive ordering principles and central perspectives.[109] Despite these new or counter-histories' revisionist spirit, which has raised critical awareness about the constructedness of traditional film and media histories, what remains ambiguous here is the epistemological, ontological, and discursive relationship between the things past (*res gestae*) and their historical narration (*historiae rerum gestarum*).[110]

Taking up Gaines' invitation to rethink moving-image history metahistorically and philosophically, I examine the creative and performative work involved in film archiving and historiography through White's theory of "historical imagination" and Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. Through a form of "poetic" discourse—from the ancient Greek word *poiesis* for production and creation—the historian, in White's words, "prefigures the historical field and constitutes it as a domain upon which to bring to bear the specific theories he [*sic*] will use to explain 'what was *really* happening' in it."[111] Historical interpretation here belongs to the sphere of *poiesis*, that is, the production

and expression of meaning, rather than that of *noesis*, i.e., the exact knowledge of events.[112] Paul Ricoeur's concept of "emplotment" provides the blueprint for conceiving this poetic process of narrativization as "the configurational arrangement [that] transforms the succession of events into one meaningful whole which is the correlate of the act of assembling the events together and which makes the story followable."[113] By reading a historical discourse "as an *apparatus* for the production of meaning, rather than merely as a vehicle for the transmission of information about an extrinsic referent," White's "performance model" challenges the epistemological correspondence between historical facts and their narration.[114]

White's theory of historical imagination enables me to theoretically position this study in two important respects. Firstly, his emphasis on the creative, productive, and performative work of historical meaning-making allows me to read the film museum as an apparatus for the production and performance of historical meaning, or what I call a "historiographic dispositif." At the intersection of film preservation, exhibition, and historiography, I read Eye, GEM, and the NFCA in this light, as dispositifs exhibiting early and silent cinema within a variety of settings, all the while situating these films within specific narratives revolving around cultural continuities, technological ruptures, and, ultimately, the digital turn. As I show in chapters 1, 2, and 3, while displaying early and silent films respectively as film fragments, works of art, and popular attractions, these institutions emplot them in non-linear media histories (Eye), a tragic narrative around analog cinema's obsolescence (GEM), and historical pastiche (the NFCA).

Secondly, while rejecting historicism's positivist and teleological inflections, White's theory of emplotment enables me to recuperate narrative as a viable metahistorical mode of historical explanation. While I focus on silent film and new media cultures as privileged moments to examine media change, this book's approach differs from methodologies known as "parallel historiographies," which concentrate on early cinema and new media in isolation, highlighting historical parallels between their epistemes.[115] Similarly, this book distances itself from the kind of Benjaminian "ragpicker" attitude inspiring media archaeologies, which treasures obsolete and forgotten media objects—the "refuse" or "detritus" of history—in search of unexpected "historical indexes" of present and future media configurations.[116] Instead, I organize the institutional histories I recount here according to narrative principles of causality, advancing just one of many possible alternative archival histories of film. To be clear, this does not mean ignoring the irregular, "dynamically unstable" objects of history or the archival gaps Groo urgently calls attention to.[117] Some of the archival histories I investigate here—which have often remained film history's invisible "archival a-priori," to adapt Fou-

cault's expression—are sprinkled with missing documentation and at times exist only in the form of oral histories.[118] While acknowledging such absences, this book emphasizes the consequences these histories have borne, determining, for instance, which films we can digitally access today or have conversely become irremediably lost.

In accounting for such legacies, *Archival Film Curatorship* mobilizes Gadamer's concept of "historically effected consciousness" (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*), according to which specific interpretative traditions and contingent epistemological frameworks shape historical awareness, determining "both what seems to us worth inquiring about and what will appear as an object of investigation …."[119] By highlighting the intersections between historical discourses and archival practices, the following chapters tell a history where past conceptions of film have affected which titles have been preserved and have therefore survived, thus becoming available to critical considerations, historical revisions, and new media appropriations in the present day.[120] This book looks at a history of curatorial practices in which earlier curatorial choices have influenced later archival practices through cultural continuities, variations, diversions, along with significant breaks.

FILM ARCHIVES AS HERMENEUTIC DISPOSITIFS

Photography and moving images have forever altered our relationship with the past, providing records that bear unprecedented faithfulness and visible evidence, even while selectively framing what they capture. Since their appearance, as Walter Benjamin argues, history is "no longer masked."[121] So intimate is the relationship between cinema, the twentieth century, and its history, that, as Ishaghpour hyperbolically claims, cinema not only was "the main expressive form of the 20th century," but, citing Jean-Luc Godard, in some way it "created the 20th century."[122] Like "antediluvian fossils," images are tied to a specific moment and time—they possess a "historical index." Such indices, however, not only disclose the past to which the images belong but, as Benjamin argues, also reveal how those same images "attain to legibility only at a particular time."[123] What this means is that images are historical not only because they carry the timestamp of the events they record, but also because what we see in those images is situated in the time and space in which we interpret them.

Over thirty years ago, Gaudreault and Gunning invoked the need for a hermeneutic approach that would "take into account the historicity of the gaze which he [the historian, *sic*] directs at works of the past, while taking into consideration the temporal distance that divides him from them."[124] While

framing the problem of film historical interpretation in philosophical hermeneutic terms for the first time through the Gadamerian concept of "temporal distance," Gaudreault's and Gunning's later work largely eludes the question. Unlike the German historicist school, which encouraged historians to transpose themselves in the past, in Gadamer's hermeneutics, "time is no longer primarily a gulf to be bridged because it separates."[125] Conceived as an irreducible, "positive and productive condition enabling understanding," Gadamer makes temporal distance a central preoccupation in his philosophy of historical interpretation. More recently, Gaudreault has returned to the problem of temporal distance, warning fellow historians that "to write history is to take up at the same time past and present: the past in question and the questioning present."[126] However, his hermeneutic interrogation somewhat disappointingly results in the formulation of the concept of "cultural series," which as useful as it is in capturing early cinema's intermedia constellations, does little to shed light on the "questioning present," to use his words. To this date, a systematic attempt to theorize in philosophical hermeneutic terms the double, intertwining historicity of moving images and the archival record, on the one hand, and of the interpreting frameworks and conditions from which we read them, on the other, is still missing.[127]

"According to Gadamer and Ricoeur," White explains, "the 'method' of the historico-genetic sciences is hermeneutics, conceived less as decipherment than as 'inter-pretation,' literally 'translation,' a 'carrying over' of meanings from one discursive community to another."[128] In short, for Gadamer (as for Ricoeur), historical interpretation happens through the process of mediating the temporal distance between subject and object. Along with Gaudreault and Gunning, French film scholar Michèle Lagny understands film history in similar terms to those of a hermeneutic process of mediation. As such, film history "provides the elements necessary to evaluate the potential relations between the representations and conceptions suggested by the films, those which were hegemonic at the time, and our own (the ideas which may lead us to interpret a film in a totally different manner ... certainly not an 'absolute' one) ...."[129] However, here too, the specific hermeneutic phenomenon of historical mediation between the present and the past ultimately shifts to the background of Lagny's work.

This book takes up the problem of the irreducible temporal distance and difference between media present and past, focusing on the hermeneutic question of film historical mediation. Just as in the late 1980s and 1990s analog video provided new self-reflexive perspectives on the history of cinema by circulating a video archive of cinematic images, digital media now similarly offer new hermeneutic opportunities to re-examine the history of moving images through a digital archive amassed over the past thirty years.[130] The following

case studies thus examine the film museum as a hermeneutic *dispositif*, that is, as a privileged site for interrogating the work of historiographic and curatorial mediation between early and silent cinema and the digital age. Given the limited familiarity most readers will have with Gadamer's thought, I begin with a brief excursus into the history of philosophical hermeneutics, before highlighting the ways in which the hermeneutic archive differs from the post-structuralist one that Foucault and Jacques Derrida theorized between the late 1960s and the mid-1990s.

One of the main concepts in Gadamer's philosophy is that of "hermeneutic circle," which describes the endlessly perfectible, recursive work of interpretation, marking both the foundation and the result of our own temporally situated existence as interpreters.[131] According to Gadamer, understanding moves in a circle, from the historical text, artifact, or event (the part) to the broader historical context (the whole) and, after hypothesizing this broader context, returns to the part.[132] Interpreters are themselves wholly part of the hermeneutic circle, setting it in motion with their quest for meaning, unavoidably partial and historically situated. This circular hermeneutic work and process of hypothesis formation, which goes from the specifics to the broader framework, is a discursive act, which we may compare to the process of narrativization that White and Ricoeur understand in terms of emplotment. Through particular historical narratives, as White explains, we structure "relationships by which the events contained in the account[s] are endowed with a meaning by being identified as parts of an integrated whole."[133]

In his main work, *Truth and Method* (published in German in 1960 and in English in 1975), Gadamer traces the evolution of the notion of hermeneutic circle from the Protestant Reformation to his time. With its anti-dogmatic stance against the Catholic Church's claim to be the sole legitimate interpreter of Sacred Scripture, the Protestant Reformation for the first time systematically applied the rule of part and whole to the interpretation of the Bible as a historical text. Against appeals to ground Biblical interpretation onto the intermediary authority of the ministers of the Roman Church, Martin Luther affirmed Scripture to be its own interpreter (*sui ipsius interpres*).[134] "The whole of Scripture," Gadamer explains, "guides the understanding of individual passages: and again this whole can be reached only through the cumulative understanding of individual passages."[135] According to the Reformation, the interpretation of a historical text (what Luther called "the letter") and its sacred dimension ("the spirit") is always bound to the varying interpretation of its parts, therefore subject to historical change.

The Reformation's philological application of the hermeneutic rule profoundly influenced Romantic theories of literary interpretation. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the German theologian and philosopher

Friedrich Schleiermacher describes the psychological interpretation of a historical text as a constantly expanding circle from the interpreter's psyche to the author's mind and inner life.[136] Romantic hermeneutics then had a significant influence on the development of the German historical school's methodology. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, historian and philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey set to provide scientific grounding to historical research by "consciously [taking] up romantic hermeneutics and expand[ing] it into a historical method—indeed into an epistemology of the human sciences."[137] Dilthey bases the possibility of historical knowledge on the individual existential experience of temporal progression, that is, on the historian's existential awareness of being part of history as a whole. Dilthey's critique of historical reason (an adaptation of the Kantian *Critiques* to the field of historical inquiry) represents a watershed within the history of human sciences, revealing for the first time the ontological correspondence between their subjects and objects, both of which are, in a sense, products of history.[138] While influential on Gadamer's thought, Dilthey's emphasis on the correspondence between the subjective experience of temporal progression and the objective passage of time in history, in the former's view, foreshadows a suspicious subjective projection of coherence onto historical temporality. Such is, according to Gadamer, the archetypical mistake of Ranke's historicism in which "the elements of historical coherence, in fact, are determined by an unconscious teleology that connects them and excludes the insignificant from this coherence."[139]

Despite his criticism, Gadamer takes up Dilthey's existential reading of the part-whole hermeneutic circle, reinterpreting it in light of Heidegger's phenomenology of *Dasein* (commonly translated in English as "being there").[140] In Gadamer's reading, the circular interpretative movement ceases being a methodological rule and becomes a hermeneutic philosophy or a phenomenology of interpretation. The hermeneutic circle "is neither subjective nor objective," Gadamer explains, "but describes understanding as the interplay of the movement of tradition and the movement of the interpreter."[141] It is worth noting here that, having attracted sustained criticism since the first edition of *Truth and Method*, the Gadamerian concept of "tradition" is possibly partly responsible for Gadamer's overall reputation as a conservative philosopher and his disregard in the field of film studies. Jürgen Habermas, chiefly, sounds a cautious note against Gadamer's notion of tradition, which, according to him, implicitly presupposes a transcendental historical continuity hardly leaving any room for theorizing discontinuities and radical change.[142] In keeping with Habermas's just caution, I re-read Gadamer's concept of tradition as suggestive of a historical past that while weighing on the present and making it intelligible, invests its temporally situated interpreters with the responsibility to critically interrogate its sustained legacies.

By examining the historical object (the part) vis-a-vis its anticipated context (historical whole), through "an anticipatory movement of fore-understanding," hermeneutics performatively also produces a new whole, a new context of circulation and intelligibility for the part. Such is the iterative nature of the hermeneutic circle. The historian "trying to understand a text is always projecting ... a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges" according to their expectations.[143] Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics encourages us to rethink historical interpretation as an open-ended heuristic task in which "every revision of the fore-projection is capable of projecting before itself a new projection of meaning." It advances a plural, amendable version of historical interpretation, in which "rival projects can emerge side by side until it becomes clearer what the unity of meaning is"—where "unity" stands for a provisional mediation between an object of interpretation and the interpreter, rather than as definitive consensus.[144] Here I envisage Gadamer's hermeneutics as a virtually endless activity and an inherently pluralistic, pragmatic, and politically inflected work of interpretive negotiation and mediation. Rather than dismissing it altogether as a transcendental and inherently conservative philosophy of historical interpretation, my analysis of the archival work of mediation envisions it as a dialogical interpretative practice and political work. In this respect, my pragmatic reading of Gadamer corresponds with that of Habermas, who also understands philosophical hermeneutics as "structurally oriented toward eliciting from tradition a possible action-orienting self-understanding of social groups."[145]

Within this framework, the hermeneutic archive appears as a culturally and discursively constructed site of historical interpretation, a perspective that overlaps with poststructuralist theorizations of the archive. Foucault understands the archive as an authoritative apparatus that establishes what can be thought, expressed, and remembered at a given time in history, thereby producing historical objects and events. In the *Archaeology of Knowledge*, he famously defines the archive as comprising various systems of statements, including "the density of discursive practices, systems that establish statements as events (with their own conditions and domain of appearance) and things (with their own possibility and field of use)."[146] To this density, Derrida adds further material and technological layers of constructedness, clarifying that "archival technology no longer determines, will never have determined, merely the moment of the conservational recording, but rather the very institution of the archivable event."[147] By foregrounding the archive as the elusive locus of cultural, nomological, and material inscription and the a-priori of knowledge, as Groo summarizes, "post-structuralist critique was a rethinking of the ontology of origins, artefacts, and historical objects."[148]

Like poststructuralist critique, Gadamer's understanding of interpreta-

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tion as a linguistically determined event dispenses with the structural binarism of subject and object of knowledge. By conceiving of interpretation as an encounter and event that happens within and through the historically contingent medium of language, Gadamer underscores the "radical finitude" of the hermeneutic experience. Language, he argues, is "the realization of meaning, as the event of speech, of mediation, of coming to an understanding."[149] He describes the hermeneutic experience as an imaginary dialog of question and answer, "an event that is at once appropriation and interpretation," a negative dialectic of fore-projection and self-correction.[150] Throughout the contingent event of historical or artistic interpretation, in his words, "we go beyond the idea of the object and objectivity of understanding toward the idea that subject and object belong together."[151]

In their interrogation of the conditions of interpretation, Gadamer and poststructuralist philosophers share an obvious rejection of essentializing epistemologies; however, crucial tensions between the two projects remain apparent. For instance, while Gadamer's thought does not exclude the possibility of misunderstanding, misinterpretation, and conflict, his ideal of interpretation comes close to that of a harmonious dialog within the human community.[152] He is simply not preoccupied with the power relations at work in the politics of history and its revisions, which in turn are a major concern in Foucault's archeology and Derrida's grammatology.[153] Similarly, there remains a certain ideality to Gadamer's conception of meaning and truth that is at utter odds with Foucault's discursive formations and Derrida's concepts of *différance* (difference and deferral) and *mal d'archive* (archive fever), where a drive to destroy the archive and efface its traces besiege the impulse to inscribe and preserve.[154] A passage from *Of Grammatology*, in which Derrida distances himself from Heidegger's phenomenology of *Dasein*, sheds light on Gadamer's (Heideggerian-inspired) hermeneutics of truth and its untranslatability in deconstructive terms. As Derrida argues:

> Heideggerian thought would reinstate rather than destroy the instance of the logos and of the *truth* of being ... implied by all categories or all determined significations, by all lexicons and all syntax, and therefore by all linguistic signifiers, though not to be identified simply with anyone of those signifiers, allowing itself to be precomprehended through each of them, remaining irreducible to all the epochal determinations that it nonetheless makes possible, thus opening the history of the logos, yet itself being only through the logos ....[155]

There could not be a wider gap between Gadamer, for whom our play of interpretations always ideally implies a horizon of truth and understanding,

and the Derridean text, which always already comprises presence as well as absence, meaning and its reversal, the sign and its erasure. The (partially) failed dialog between Gadamer and Derrida, which took place in April 1981 at the Goethe Institute in Paris on the occasion of the symposium "Text and Interpretation," epitomizes such an irreducible distance.[156]

However, rather than necessarily elect one approach over the other, I argue that thinking with the unredeemable contradictions between the poststructuralist and the hermeneutic projects opens up a possibility to theorize the space of historical and curatorial interpretation within the film archive. Over the years, film and media scholars have expressed uneasiness with applying poststructuralist concepts to the analysis of film and media archives. Frick, for instance, argues that while poststructuralist approaches have popularized cultural critiques of the archive, they have often relied "upon basic, conventional understandings of archival identity and practice," defining film archival practices, rationales, and purposes only intuitively.[157] Elsaesser and Paula Amad provide a medium-specific critique of the limits of poststructuralist deconstructions of the archive, highlighting that "for the most part their work neglected the material example responsible for unwittingly reinventing that concept in the early twentieth century, the *film archive*."[158] Drawing on Siegfried Kracauer's *Theory of Film*, Amad claims that despite its promise of automatic, anonymous, and exhaustive recording of reality, film displays a "level of 'endlessness' and 'indeterminacy' that unsettled the finite needs of historicist evidence."[159] In keeping with such critique, the following case studies foreground film archives' institutional specificity, rather than modeling them after state archives (which, in Marc Ferro's view, historians often place at the apex of an imaginary hierarchy of historical resources at the bottom of which sit moving images).[160] In the next pages, I flesh out the film archive as a site-specific place with its own history, self-reflexive policies, deontological practices, and curatorial work.

Archives are rarely inert repositories where, in Carolyn Steedman's words, stuff "sits there until it is read, and used, and narrativized."[161] As Librarian of Congress Carla Hayden argues against the backdrop of social upheaval following the police killing of African American citizen George Floyd, "cultural institutions like libraries and museums are offering historical context but also reexamining and continuing to look at how we present information and history to our publics ...."[162] Moreover, as custodians of a visual medium like moving images, film archives inevitably engage more directly with questions of reproduction, display, and "remediation" than archives of written records.[163] Film archives' task of putting on display (theatrically or otherwise) audiovisual media actualizes pragmatic questions of historical, technological, aesthetic, and political interpretation, contextualization, and mediation with particular urgency. It is precisely these questions, accruing within and around the

encounter and mediation (themselves historically situated) with the archival record and museum object, that Foucault's and Derrida's accounts of the archive leave unanswered, marking the limits of their inquiries.

In a short passage, Foucault describes the archival experience as one akin to entering a region "at once close to us, and different from our present existence," adding "it is the border of time that surrounds our presence, which overhangs it, and which indicates it in its *otherness*; it is that which, outside ourselves, delimits us." In his view, interpretative archival work exposes us to an "exteriority," enacting, in his words, an experience of "otherness" and "temporal discontinuity."[164] While these words seem to draw Foucault close to Gadamer's terminology, questions around the encounter vis-à-vis the historical record—around, for instance, the alienness of the historical record and its temporal removal from the interpreter—however, remain tangential in Foucault's work. It does not come as a surprise then that, as Groo argues via Steedman, media archive scholars' response to poststructuralist critiques has been, in her words, a "phenomenological" one reaffirming the specifics of engaging and working with media archival objects.[165]

Gadamer's concept of "play" sheds light on such dynamics of historical mediation at work within the film museum. He understands all works of cultural production as intrinsically open to historical interpretation, their meaning a variable of interpreters' readings. Cultural works realize their meaning within the interpretative *play*, which Gadamer conceives as the moment, the space, and, one may add, the dispositif in which we meet the creative work. In enacting a *play* of self-presentation and representation of reality, cultural works perform also a meaningful inter-*play* with their audience of interpreters.[166] As he notes, this interpretative *play* "takes place 'in-between'." Taking theatrical plays as the epitome of such inter-*play*, Gadamer explains, performers here "are wholly absorbed in the presentational *play* and find in it their heightened self-representation, but also … represent a meaningful whole for an audience." Cultural works' openness to the interpreter is what defines the self-enclosed interpretive dynamic that he calls *play*.[167] In this light, no historical work therefore exists in isolation from the time-bound *play* of its appearance and interpretation. From a similar standpoint, Benjamin, too, defines the reception of works of art and their afterlives as instances that not just externally *affect* artworks but rather *constitute* them.[168]

From a philosophical hermeneutic perspective, a creative work becomes then inextricably entangled with the inter-*play* of conditions enabling its appearance (specific media and technologies of display, for instance, in the case of film museums) and the interpretative practices and discourses (such as those of archivists and curators) actualizing its meanings. Museum objects and archival records, such as, for instance, a film print, come always already

enveloped within a set of practices enabling their conservation, consultation, and intelligibility—protocols that in turn have their own institutional history. Understanding the film museum in terms of hermeneutic play—as a hermeneutic dispositif—emphasizes the ongoing work of historical interpretation and mediation, which generations of archivists, collection managers, and curators perform daily, enabling archival films' dissemination. This play of interpretation takes place in the physical and virtual spaces of the film museum, shaped by a plurality of conditions that include the practices of film preservation, restoration, and exhibition (e.g., retrospectives, DVD releases, and archival streaming platforms), the film artifacts and texts on screen, the curatorial narratives around their cultural and historical significance (as they appear, for instance, in exhibition catalogs, press releases, and museum blogs), and the viewer, along with the institution's history, architecture, and site-specificity. *Archival Film Curatorship* examines the ways in which Eye, GEM, and the NFCA function as historiographic and hermeneutic dispositifs at the juncture of institutional histories, early and silent film historiography, and archival curatorship.

Chapter 1 delves into the particularities of these dispositifs by examining Eye's digital remix of early film samples—the pinnacle of a strategy that curators refer to as "crowd curatorship." This chapter, like chapters 2 and 3, is divided in two parts, the first of which traces the archive's history, highlighting particular junctures that illuminate more recent curatorial practices, which I analyze in the second part. I read the experiments with digital archival remix at Eye within the longer history of its institutional predecessor, the Netherlands Film Museum (NFM). Between the 1980s and the early 2010s, the museum's focus gradually shifted, not without resistance and conflicts, from films commonly identified as canonical masterpieces (often acquired from other archives) to some of its own unique assets, including the now famed Desmet collection, comprising films from the transitional period (1907 to 1916), and unidentified early film fragments. Inspired by the practice of found-footage filmmaking, curators began splicing various unidentified early film fragments together, creating what came to be known as the Bits & Pieces compilations. These innovations paved the way for Eye's later experiments with digital remix and non-linear historiography. The museum's recently discontinued AI-powered remix experiment, Jan Bot, falls under this same set of curatorial strategies, with the difference being that in this case it was the algorithm, rather than the user, that performed the acts of selecting and remixing archival film clips.[169] Through Gadamer's hermeneutic concepts of part and whole, I analyze digital remixes of early film samples and the forms of historical mediation they enact, pointing to the shortcomings of digital remix as an alternative form of non-linear historical discourse.

Chapter 2 then turns to an institution, GEM—until recently known as the George Eastman House (GEH)—whose curatorial practices radically differ from those of Eye. Here, I focus on GEM's Nitrate Picture Show, a festival that exclusively screens nitrate archival films, emphasizing their unique aesthetic qualities and the rarity of their public projection. This chapter examines what I call GEM's "fine art discourse" against key moments in the museum's history. One such moment dates back to the early years of the museum, established in 1948 as a memorial to Kodak founder George Eastman and dedicated to the technology, rather than the artistic medium, of photography and film. In the 1950s, under competition from MoMA's more firmly established Film Library, GEH began acquiring lesser-known films—notably silent titles that MoMA at the time considered trivia—theorizing an aesthetics of film as popular art against the film canon. In contrast with this rhetoric, the museum's current "fine art" curatorial strategy treats film prints as unique art objects with authentic aesthetic and material qualities, the preservation of which, GEM's curators argue, cinema's progressive digitization has tragically endangered. Against Gadamer's critique of the "aesthetics of separation," in this chapter I argue that GEM's logic fosters an abstracting aesthetics, reinforcing established historiographies and hierarchies of taste.

In chapter 3, I move to discuss the NFCA, born in 1994 under the name National Fairground Archive (NFA) out of the combined efforts of the University of Sheffield Library, the Showmen's Guild, and the Fairground Association of Great Britain. The archive gained national and international prominence in 2005 when it began collaborating with the BFI and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) on the study and exhibition of the then newly discovered Mitchell & Kenyon collection of eight hundred early British films. The NFA's expertise in the fields of fairground, circus, sideshows, magic, boxing, variety, and amusement parks helped unlock the historical significance of the Mitchell & Kenyon films by placing their circulation within the context of early fairground cinema, working class entertainment, and local exhibition circuits. Drawing on the variety format of bioscope shows and the tradition of showmanship, the NFCA's more recent exhibition projects combined film screenings with off-screen performances, including film lecturing, contemporary circus acts, and burlesque. Within the framework of Gadamer's concept of *volksfest* (in English, folk festival, fair, or fête), I read the archive's interpretative and curatorial work as "historical pastiche"—less preoccupied with historical authenticity than with recursively translating and adapting early cinema's culture to current sensibilities. Rather than giving pride of place to particular media of display (analog or digital), the NFCA's work brings to the fore questions of cultural politics at play with the interpretation and exhibition of archival films.

While this book focuses on the present and past contexts of early and silent film exhibition, its scope falls outside the field of reception studies, nor does it provide a film museum audience study. It centers instead on how Eye, GEM, and the NFCA have fostered exemplary strategies for their audiences to engage with archival films and the media past. While the museum-dispositif incorporates spectators and their viewing positions, I do not conceive the relationship between curatorial rhetoric, archival practices, and technologies of exhibition, on the one hand, and viewers' understanding, on the other, as one of determination. Nor do the following chapters flesh out the film museum as a space bringing viewers together in appreciation of the highest examples of film art—the masterpieces of film history—according to an ideal of film connoisseurship, or what philosopher Friedrich Schiller calls "aesthetic cultivation" (*Bildung*).[170] Rather, I evaluate Eye, GEM, and the NFCA against an ideal of the film museum as a space of historical research, critical engagement, and emancipation. This book proposes a plural hermeneutics, encouraging idiosyncratic interpretations, questioning established historiographies and archival absences, and producing a new sense of media history and community.

Archival Film Curatorship proposes a shift of focus from archival films to the discourses and practices that have historicized them—in Vivian Sobchack's words, a shift from history "itself" to history's discursive tropes, or "tropology."[171] What the curatorial histories in my examples illustrate is the emergence of specific rhetorical tropes—including that of the film fragment, the film artifact, and film showmanship—that, throughout the history of Eye, GEM, and the NFCA, have helped identify film and film practices as objects of preservation for posterity. Similar to what Dana Polan notes about the history of film studies as an academic discipline, which offers "not only an archival history but also an *intellectual history*," this study of film curatorship advances a history of film culture as harvested by film museums and archives.[172] *Archival Film Curatorship* narrates the story of film's metamorphosis from a disposable commodity into an artifact with enduring cultural value, explaining what it means for film to become a museum object in the twenty-first century.

NOTES

1 The BFI Collection Database lists the original title as *The Derby 1913 Topical Budget 93-1*. "The Derby (1913)—Emily Davison trampled by King's horse," BFI YouTube Channel, May 30, 2013, https://youtu.be/um9GV6_AILM. *The Derby* (1913) is also part of a BFI program titled Make More Noise: Suffragettes in Silent Film, screened in the autumn of 2015 in UK theaters on the occasion of the release of Sarah Gavron's *Suffragette* (2015), which also features the scene of Davison's death. I henceforth refer to the British Film Institute National Archive simply as BFI. Throughout the book, I refer to the names of film archives, film museums, and cinematheques (in English, when a translation is available) as they appear in the International Federation of Film Archives' (FIAF) directory of affiliates. See "FIAF Members," FIAF, accessed October 3, 2023, https://www.fiafnet.org/pages/Community/Members.html.

2 Bolesław Matuszewski, "A New Source of History," in *A New Source of History*; *Animated Photography: What It Is, What It Should Be*, trans. Ryszard Drzewiecki (Warsaw: Filmoteka Narodowa, 1999), 25–30.

3 Richard Berry, "Five Dollar Movies Prophesied," *The New York Times*, March 28, 1915. Reprinted in *D. W. Griffith: Interviews*, ed. Anthony Slide (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi, 2012), 26.

4 Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 30.

5 Patricia White, *Uninvited: Classical Hollywood Cinema and Lesbian Representability* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1999), 197.

6 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: The Athlone Press, 2000), xii.

7 Jussi Parikka, *What Is Media Archaeology?* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2012), 3.

8 Compilation documentaries like *The Golden Age of Comedy* (Robert Youngson, 1957), for instance, brought silent cinema to the small television screen, contributing to audiences' rediscovery of the silent film period.

9 Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," trans. Alan Williams, in *Movies and Methods. Volume II*, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 539.

10 See André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," "The Myth of Total Cinema," and "De Sica: Metteur-en-Scène," in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 166–82; D. N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 84; and Dudley Andrew, *What Cinema Is! Bazin's Quest and Its Charge* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

11 See André Gaudreault and Philippe Marion, *The End of Cinema? A Medium in Crisis in the Digital Age*, trans. Timothy Barnard (New York: Columbia University Press,

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2015); and Paolo Cherchi Usai, *The Death of Cinema: History, Cultural Memory, and the Digital Dark Age* (London: BFI, 2001).

12   Literature about cinema's medium specificity is vast. Rodowick defines "cinematic specificity" as "the location of a variable constant, the instantiation of a certain form of desire that is at once semiological, psychological, technological, and cultural." Rodowick, *Virtual Life*, 22. See also Paolo Cherchi Usai, *Silent Cinema: An Introduction* (London: BFI, 2000), where he discusses film specificity in relation to its material and aesthetic qualities.

13   Thomas Elsaesser, *Film History as Media Archaeology: Tracking Digital Cinema* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016). On the concept of "post-cinematic" configuration, see Malte Hagener, Vinzenz Hediger, and Alena Strohmaier, *The State of Post-cinema: Tracing the Moving Image in the Age of Digital Dissemination* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

14   See for instance Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*; and Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

15   See "2017 THEME Report," Motion Picture Association of America, 5, accessed February 7, 2019, https://www.mpaa.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/MPAA-THEME-Report-2017_Final.pdf; and "2021 THEME Report," Motion Picture Association of America, 42, accessed February 7, 2023, https://www.motionpictures.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/MPA-2021-THEME-Report-FINAL.pdf.

16   See Daniel Loria, "How Premium Large Format Auditoriums Are Helping Welcome Audiences Back to the Movies," *Boxoffice Pro*, July 29, 2021, https://www.boxofficepro.com/giants-premium-format-2021/.

17   John Belton, "If Film Is Dead, What Is Cinema?," *Screen* 55.4 (Winter 2014), 470.

18   Francesco Casetti, *The Lumière Galaxy: Seven Key Words for the Cinema to Come* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 5.

19   Ibid., 3.

20   See Elsaesser, *Film History*, 39. On the concept of "digital revolution" see Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 5–6.

21   Lisa Gitelman, *Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 17.

22   On the rhetoric of an "analog renaissance" see Grazia Ingravalle, "Allegories of the Past: Nitrate Film's Aura in Post-industrial Rochester, NY" *Screen* 60.3 (Autumn 2019): 371–87.

23   Jean-Luc Godard and Youssef Ishaghpour, *Archéologie du cinéma et mémoire du siècle: dialogue* (Tours: Farrago, 2000), 24, my translation.

24   See for instance Anne Friedberg, "The End of Cinema: Multi-media and Technological Change," in *Reinventing Film Studies*, eds. Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (London: Arnold, 2000), 438–52.

25   UNESCO has since removed this statement from its publicly available pages. The quote is available on Thammasat University Library's website. "27 October United Nations World Day for Audiovisual Heritage," Thammasat University Library, October 23, 2020, http://203.131.219.167/km2559/2020/10/23/27-october-united-nations-world-day-for-audiovisual-heritage/, emphasis added. See "World Day for Audiovisual Heritage 27 October," UN, accessed February 7, 2019, https://www.unesco.org/en/days/audiovisual-heritage-day.

26   "The Film Foundation," accessed December 4, 2022, https://www.film-foundation.org/; "Film Heritage Foundation," accessed December 4, 2022, https://filmheritagefoundation.co.in.

27   There are substantial differences between the European and North American contexts. As Thomas Elsaesser notes: "While in Europe the audiovisual heritage was elevated to an instrument of national identity-formation, serving tourism and local pride, and across film festivals, becoming a priority in cultural politics, in the United States it was the commercial potential of film libraries that began to be recognized and exploited, before collectors, academics, and artists rallied around the scraps and 'orphans' of film history." See Thomas Elsaesser, "Is Nothing New? Turn-of-the-Century Epistemes in Film History," in *A Companion to Early Cinema*, eds. André Gaudreault, Nicolas Dulac, and Santiago Hidalgo (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 593.

28   The remit of film archives and museums is generally different from that of both galleries that exhibit media art and artists' moving images, and television and broadcast archives. However, overlaps exist, as in the case of the BFI, which preserves both film and TV, or in the case of GEM, which acquired the work of media artist William Kentridge. See "William Kentridge Donates His Complete Works on Time-Based Media to the George Eastman Museum," Eastman Museum, accessed February 8, 2019, https://eastman.org/william-kentridge-donates-his-complete-works-time-based-media-george-eastman-museum. For a discussion of the differences between film archives, film museums, and cinematheques see Fossati, *From Grain to Pixel*, 23–24.

29   National Film Preservation Foundation, *The Film Preservation Guide: The Basics for Archives, Libraries, and Museums* (San Francisco: National Film Preservation Foundation, 2004), 3–4.

30   "Curate," Oxford English Dictionary Online, accessed September 28, 2023, https://www.oed.com/dictionary/curate_n?tab=etymology&tl=true#7531320.

31   Eric de Kuyper, "Silent Films in Their First Decades: Objects for Research or for Exhibition?," in *Early Cinema Today: The Art of Programming and Live Performance*, ed. Martin Loiperdinger (New Barnet: John Libbey Publishing Ltd, 2011), 57.

32   Giovanna Fossati (Professor of Film Heritage and Digital Film Culture at the University of Amsterdam and Chief Curator at the Eye Filmmuseum), interview by the author, January 20, 2014.

33 I refer to films whose title is in a language other than English with their North American distribution title. I add the original title in parenthesis, where I deem it useful to identify the specific film I am discussing.

34 See Danish Silent Film, accessed May 29, 2020, https://www.stumfilm.dk/en/ stumfilm; and "National Screening Room," Library of Congress, accessed February 8, 2019, https://www.loc.gov/collections/national-screening-room/.

35 See for instance Paolo Cherchi Usai, David Francis, Alexander Horwath, and Michael Loebenstein in *Film Curatorship: Archives, Museums, and the Digital Marketplace* (Vienna and Pordenone: Österreichisches Filmmuseum and Le Giornate del Cinema Muto, 2008).

36 Elif Rongen Kaynakçi (Curator of Silent Film at the Eye Filmmuseum), interview by the author, January 15, 2014.

37 See Science and Technology Council of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, *The Digital Dilemma: Strategic Issues in Archiving and Accessing Digital Motion Picture Materials* (Los Angeles: Academy Imprints, 2007); and Science and Technology Council of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, *The Digital Dilemma 2: Perspectives from Independent Filmmakers, Documentarians, and Nonprofit Audiovisual Archives* (Hollywood: Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, 2012). By keeping film elements in temperature and humidity-controlled film vaults, "so-called *passive* form of preservation assures stability for film material and prevents or slows down material deterioration, mechanical damage, color fading, and biological threats such as mold infestation." Active preservation instead also includes digitization, restoration, and analog duplication. See "Film Preservation," Austrian Film Museum, accessed June 10, 2022, https://www. filmmuseum.at/en/collections/film_collection/film_preservation.

38 Cherchi Usai et al., *Film Curatorship*, 80.

39 I have not included these clips' titles in the filmography because they were extracted from the original newsreel item of which they were part. "Arnold Schwarzenegger wins Mr Universe (1969)," British Pathé YouTube Channel, August 3, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c7Iaz_r2t-g; and "Queen Victoria's Funeral (1901)," British Pathé YouTube Channel, August 2, 2011, https://www.youtube. com/watch?v=UzzAhdS-xI0.

40 "Prelinger Archives," The Internet Archive, June 4, 2005, https://archive.org/ details/prelinger?tab=about. See Rick Prelinger, *The Field Guide to Sponsored Films* (San Francisco: National Film Preservation Foundation, 2007).

41 "About the Internet Archive," The Internet Archive, accessed June 20, 2022, https:// archive.org/about/.

42 On the management and impact of the "data tsunami" see for instance Linda Tadic, "Data Storage Media and Digital Preservation: Today and The Future," Digital Preservation Forum, accessed October 2, 2023, https:// academydigitalpreservationforum.org/2021/10/05/linda-tadic-data-storage-media/.

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On the impact of digital restoration software, such as Correct DRS, Revival by Da Vinci and Diamant, see Giovanna Fossati, *From Grain to Pixel: The Archival Life of Film in Transition* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 81–91. See also *Digital Dilemma 1* and *Digital Dilemma 2.* After its *Digital Dilemma* reports, the Science and Technology Council of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences launched the Digital Preservation Forum in 2021 to corral debates around digital preservation. See "Digital Preservation Forum," accessed February 8, 2022, https://academydigitalpreservationforum.org/.

43 On participative modes of audience engagement see Johan Oomen and Lora Aroyo, "Crowdsourcing in the Cultural Heritage Domain: Opportunities and Challenges," in *Proceedings of the 5th International Conference on Communities and Technologies* (New York: ACM, 2011), 138–49.

44 The release of *They Shall Not Grow Old* sparked significant debate amongst film historians. See Robert Burgoyne, "Remediation, Trauma, and 'Preposterous History' in *They Shall Not Grow Old*," in *The Routledge Companion to History in Moving Images*, eds. Marnie Hughes-Warrington, Kim Nelson, and Mia E. M. Treacey (London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2023, forthcoming). The EU-funded portal European Film Gateway (EFG) featured footage of WWI from sixteen European archives. See "European Film Gateway 1914," EFG Beta, accessed February 8, 2019, http://www.europeanfilmgateway.eu/content/efg1914-project.

45 The event resulted from the collaboration between film historians and preservationist Kevin Brownlow, the BFI, composer and conductor Carl Davis, and the London Philharmonia Orchestra. See Pamela Hutchinson, "How We Made – Napoleon," *The Guardian*, November 29, 2013, https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2013/nov/29/how-we-made-napoleon.

46 See "Nederlands Filmmuseum (NFM)," Filmarchives Online, accessed February 8, 2019, http://www.filmarchives-online.eu/partneriai/nederlands-filmmuseum.

47 See "History of the George Eastman Museum," Eastman Museum, accessed February 8, 2019, https://eastman.org/history-george-eastman-museum.

48 See "About the NFCA," National Fairground and Circus Archive / The University of Sheffield, accessed February 8, 2019, https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/nfca/about.

49 G.E. Gorman and Peter Clayton, *Qualitative Research for the Information Professional: A Practical Handbook* (London: Library Association Publishing, 1997), 23. Cited in Karen F. Gracy, *Film Preservation: Competing Definitions of Value, Use, and Practice* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2007), 9.

50 Haidee Wasson, *Museum Movies: The Museum of Modern Art and the Birth of Art Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Caroline Frick, *Saving Cinema: The Politics of Preservation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and Christophe Dupin, *The British Film Institute, the Government and Film Culture, 1933–2000* (Manchester: Manchester University Press: 2012); and Bregt Lameris, *Film Museum Practice and Film Historiography: The Case of the Neder-*

lands Filmmuseum (1946–2000) (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017). One of the earliest books to trace a transnational history of film preservation is Raymond Borde, *Les cinémathèques* (Paris: Edition l'Age d'Homme, 1983). Other book-length studies in the field of archival film history include Penelope Houston, *Keepers of the Frame: The Film Archives* (London: BFI, 1994); Alison Griffiths, *Wondrous Difference: Cinema, Anthropology, and Turn-of-the-Century Visual Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Paula Amad, *Counter Archive: Film, the Everyday, and Albert Kahn's Archives de la Planete* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); Alison Trope, *Stardust Monuments: The Saving and Selling of Hollywood* (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2011); and Janna Jones, *The Past Is a Moving Picture: Preserving the Twentieth Century on Film* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012).

51   Literature in this field is vast. Recent examples of revisionist early and silent film histories include Allyson Nadia Field, *Uplift Cinema: The Emergence of African American Film & The Possibility of Black Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015); Maggie Hennefeld, *Specters of Slapstick and Silent Film Comediennes* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018); Jane M. Gaines, *Pink-Slipped: What Happened to Women in the Silent Film Industries?* (Urbana, IL: Illinois University Press, 2018); and focusing on India's transition to sound Debashree Mukherjee, *Bombay Hustle: Making Movies in a Colonial City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020).

52   See Leshu Torchin, "Since We Forgot: Remembrance and Recognition of the Armenian Genocide in Virtual Archives," in *The Image and the Witness: Trauma, Memory and Visual Culture*, eds. Frances Guerin and Roger Hallas (New York: Wallflower Press, 2007), 82–97; and Wolfgang Ernst, *Digital Memory and the Archive*, ed. Jussi Parikka (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

53   Domitor, https://domitor.org, accessed June 20, 2022; and Orphan Film Symposium, NYU, accessed June 20, 2022, http://wp.nyu.edu/orphanfilm/. Orphan films typically "lack either clear copyright holders or commercial potential to pay for their continued preservation." Annette Melville and Scott Simmon, *Film Preservation: A Study of the Current State of American Film Preservation: Report of the Librarian of Congress* (Culpeper, VA: National Film Preservation Board, Library of Congress, 1993), accessed April 20, 2022, https://www.loc.gov/programs/national-film-preservation-board/preservation-research/film-preservation-study/current-state-of-american-film-preservation-study/. See also Dan Streible, "The Role of Orphan Films in the 21st Century Archive" *Cinema Journal* 46. 3 (Spring 2007): 124–28.

54   Dominique Païni, *Le Temps exposé: Le cinéma de la salle au musée* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 2002); Karen F. Gracy, *Film Preservation: Competing Definitions of Value, Use, and Practice* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2007); Cherchi Usai et al., *Film Curatorship*; Fossati, *From Grain to Pixel*; and Jurij Meden, *Scratches and*

Glitches: Observations on Preserving and Exhibiting Cinema in the Early 21st Century (Vienna: Synema Gesellschaft für Film und Medien, 2021). See also Sonia Campanini, "Film Sound in Preservation and Presentation" (PhD diss., University of Udine and University of Amsterdam, 2014); and Rossella Catanese, *Lacune binarie: Il restauro dei film e le technologie digitali* (Roma: Bulzoni, 2013). Popular film preservation manuals for training archivists include Paul Read and Mark-Paul Meyer, *Restoration of Motion Picture Film* (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2000); and the National Film Preservation Foundation, *The Film Preservation Guide: The Basics for Archives, Libraries, and Museums* (San Francisco: National Film Preservation Foundation, 2004).

55 See Erika Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art* (Amsterdam: University Press, Amsterdam, 2013); Erika Balsom, *After Uniqueness: A History of Film and Video Art in Circulation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017); and Andrew Uroskie, *Between the Black Box and the White Cube: Expanded Cinema and Postwar Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014). See also Angela Dalle Vacche, ed., *Film, Art, New Media: Museum Without Walls?* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Julia Noordegraaf, *Strategies of Display: Museum Presentation in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Visual Culture* (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, 2012); Julia Noordegraaf, Cosetta G. Saba, Barbara Le Maître, and Vinzenz Hediger, eds., *Preserving and Exhibiting Media Art: Challenges and Perspectives* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013); and Mark Nash, *Curating the Moving Image* (London: Normal Films, 2023).

56 They include the L. Jeffrey Selznick School of Film Preservation in Rochester, NY; the Moving Image Preservation and Presentation MA in Amsterdam; the Moving Image Archive Studies MA at UCLA; the Moving Image Archiving and Preservation MA at NYU; and the Film Culture: Archiving, Programming, Presentation MA in Frankfurt.

57 An example is the Film Preservation & Restoration Workshop in India, organized yearly by the Film Heritage Foundation and FIAF.

58 Examples of work that combines these different strands of research include Andreas Busche, "Just Another Form of Ideology? Ethical and Methodological Principles in Film Restoration," *The Moving Image* 6.2 (2006): 1–29; Katherine Groo, "Cut, Paste, Glitch, and Stutter: Remixing Film History," *Frames Cinema Journal* 1 (2012), accessed February 8, 2019, http://framescinemajournal.com/article/cut-paste-glitch-and-stutter/#a6; Paul Flaig and Katherine Groo, eds., *New Silent Cinemas* (New York: Routledge, 2016); and Joshua Yumibe and Alicia Fletcher, "From Nitrate to Digital Archive: The Davide Turconi Project," *The Moving Image* 13.1 (April 2013): 1–32.

59 This is the title of the early film program that opened the first Dryden Theatre Motion Picture Lecture Series at the George Eastman Museum in March 1951, Stills, Posters, and Paper Collection (SPPC), GEM.

60 In collaboration with the BFI, in 2005 the NFA curated Mitchell & Kenyon film programs touring in small northern British towns, including Blackburn, Chorey, Derby, Morecambe, Carlisle, and Stoke. Vanessa Toulmin, "'This Is a Local Film': The Cultural and Social Impact of the Mitchell & Kenyon Film Collection," in *The Public Value of the Humanities*, ed. Jonathan Bate (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011), 95–96.

61 See Aaron Schaffer, "Silent Film Still Makes Itself Hear," *Campus Times*, November 19, 2015, http://www.campustimes.org/2015/11/19/silent-film-still-makes-itself-heard/.

62 Oleksandr Dovzhenko National Center, "Ukrainian Re-Vision: Ukrainian Film Classics" DVD box (2011). See also Larysa Briukhovetska, Lubomir Hosejko, Vyacheslav Kasim, Ivan Kozlenko, Stanislav Menzelevsky, Oleksii Radysnsky, and Serhii Trymbach, *Ukrainian Re-Vision: Ukrainian Film Classics* (Kiev: The State Film Agency of Ukraine, 2011).

63 Roger Odin, "A Semio-Pragmatic Approach to the Documentary Film," *The Film Spectator: From Sign to Mind*, ed. Warren Buckland (Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 1995), 213.

64 Frank Kessler, "The Cinema of Attractions as *Dispositif*," in *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 61–62. Baudry, "Ideological Effects," 531–42; and Jean-Louis Baudry, "The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in the Cinema," trans. Jean Andrews and Bertrand Augst, in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 299–318.

65 Fossati, *From Grain to Pixel*, 73.

66 Ibid., 127.

67 Cherchi Usai to the Nitrate Picture Show mailing list, December 13, 2014, "Introducing the Nitrate Picture Show."

68 Ibid.

69 See Claude Bertemes and Nicole Dahlen, "Back to the Future: Early Cinema and the Late Economy of Attention. An Interim Report About *Crazy Cinématographe*," in *Early Cinema Today: The Art of Programming and Live Performance,* ed. Martin Loiperdinger (New Barnet: John Libbey Publishing Ltd, 2011), 79–106.

70 Dick Tomasovic, "The Crazy Cinématographe or the Art of the Impromptu Spectator," in *Early Cinema Today*, 110.

71 Michel Foucault, *Power-Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980), 194. Cited in Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art*, 16, emphasis added.

72 Baudry, "Ideological Effects," 539.

73 "Code of Ethics," FIAF, accessed February 10, 2019, http://www.fiafnet.org/pages/Community/Code-Of-Ethics.html.

74 Kessler, "The Cinema of Attractions as *Dispositif*," 62. Vinzenz Hediger similarly criticizes the notion of traditional cinematic dispositif, advancing the idea of a

multitude of post-cinematic configurations. See Miriam De Rosa and Vinzenz Hediger, "Post-what? Post-when? A Conversation on the 'Posts' of Post-media and Post-cinema," *Cinéma&Cie* 16.26/27: 14.

75　Similarly, philosopher Giorgio Agamben looks back at the Foucauldian genealogy of the concept of dispositif and points to its deconstructive potential to substitute ontologies and universals with systems or networks of relations. Giorgio Agamben, *What Is an Apparatus? And Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

76　Katherine, Groo, *Bad Film Histories: Ethnography and the Early Archive* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 12; and Philippe Gauthier, "The Brighton Congress and Traditional Film History as Founding Myths of the New Film History," (paper, 53rd Society for Cinema and Media Studies Conference, Boston, March 24, 2012).

77　See Bowser, "Brighton Project."

78　See William Uricchio, "Historicizing Media in Transition," in *Rethinking Media Change: The Aesthetics of Transition*, ed. David Thorburn and Henry Jenkins (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 37. Gunning notes that the term "early cinema" started circulating in those very same years. See Gunning, "Attractions: How They Came into the World," 31; and Charles Musser, "The Early Cinema of Edwin S. Porter," *Cinema Journal* 19:1 (fall 1979): 1–38.

79　See for instance Paul Rotha, *The Film till Now: A Survey of the Cinema* (New York: Jonathan Cape & Harrison Smith, 1930), 24; and Arthur Knight, *The Liveliest Art: A Panoramic History of the Motion Picture* (New York: New American Library, 1957), 29.

80　Gauthier, "The Brighton Congress"; and J. Douglas Gomery, "Writing the History of the American Film Industry: Warner Bros and Sound," *Screen* 17.1 (1976): 40–53. Cited in Groo, *Bad Film Histories*, 12.

81　Thomas Elsaesser, "Is Nothing New?," 593; and Gunning, "Attractions: How They Came into the World," 34.

82　Wanda Strauven reconstructs the genealogy of the concept and its different interpretations. See Wanda Strauven, "Introduction to an Attractive Concept," in *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 11–27.

83　Charles Musser, "Rethinking Early Cinema: Cinema of Attractions and Narrativity," in *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 405.

84　Gaudreault and Gunning highlight that Terry Ramsaye was probably the historian responsible for the creation of the myth of Griffith as the filmmaker who "began to work out a syntax of screen narration." According to Gaudreault and Gunning, new film historians are indebted to George Sadoul for his distinction between the two regimes of "theatricality" and "narrativity" at work in the cinema from 1903 to 1911. They conclude, however, that Sadoul's and Jean Mitry's histories were

inspired by an ideal of teleological progress. André Gaudreault and Tom Gunning, "Early Cinema as a Challenge to Film History," in *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 371–72. Terry Ramsaye, *A Million and One Nights* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1926), 508; Georges Sadoul, *Histoire générale du cinéma, volumes 1–6* (Paris: Denoël, 1948–75); and Jean Mitry, *Histoire du cinéma* (Paris: Editions universitaires, 1967). All cited in Gaudreault and Gunning, "Early Cinema as a Challenge," 371–72.

85 Elsaesser, "Is Nothing New?,"594.

86 Ibid., 596.

87 Jean-François Lyotard introduces the expression "master-narrative" in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984). David Bordwell criticizes what he terms the "postmodernist suspicion of 'Grand Narratives'" and argues that "overarching logics" organize all historical accounts, including "micro-histories" and anti-teleological narratives. See David Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 6.

88 Elsaesser, *Film History*, 60.

89 Uricchio, "Historicizing Media in Transition," 23.

90 Jurij Tynjanov, "On Literary Evolution," in *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, eds. Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska, trans. C. A. Lupow (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), 76–77, emphasis in the original. Cited in Gaudreault and Gunning, "Early Cinema as a Challenge," 372.

91 Hans-Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Brighton: Harvester, 1982), 17. Cited in ibid. The historiographic concept of "series" was central also to Foucault's "archaeology of knowledge," which elaborated on the *nouvelle histoire*'s rejection of historical narrative. Foucault's archaeology looks at "different series, which are juxtaposed to one another, follow one another, overlap and intersect, without one being able to reduce them to a linear schema." Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 9.

92 Gaudreault and Gunning, "Early Cinema as a Challenge," 372.

93 Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, 36. Cited in ibid., 373.

94 André Gaudreault, *Film and Attraction: From Kinematography to Cinema*, trans. Timothy Barnard (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 2.

95 Charles Musser, "Historiographic Method and the Study of Early Cinema," *Cinema Journal* 44: 1 (Fall 2004), 102.

96 Gaines, "What Happened to the Philosophy of Film History?" *Film History* 25.1–2 (2013), 76.

97 Ibid., 72. On the influence of the German historicist school on the new film history see Nicholas Baer, "Historical Turns: On CALIGARI, Kracauer and New Film History," *Research in Film and History*, November 23, 2018, https://film-history.org/issues/text/historical-turns; and Groo, *Bad Film Histories*, 15–16.

98   Ibid., 22–23.

99   Following the Nasty Women programs, curated by Hennefeld and Laura Horak, Hennefeld, Horak, and Elif Rongen-Kaynakçi curated Kino Lorber's 2022 four-disc DVD/Blu-ray set "Cinema's First Nasty Women" in partnership with the Pordenone Silent Film Festival, the Women Film Pioneers Project, Carleton University, and the Festival Internacional de Cine Silente México. See "Nasty Women – 3," Pordenone Silent Film Festival, accessed December 4, 2022, http://www.giornatedelcinemamuto.it/en/nasty-women-3/. The appointment of Jacqueline Najuma Stuart as Director and President of the Academy Museum has provided a clear steer, firmly bringing revisionist, research-informed approaches into the film museum. See "Regeneration: Black Cinema 1898–1971," Academy Museum, accessed December 4, 2022, https://www.academymuseum.org/en/press-release/academy-museum-announces-details-of-regeneration-black-cinema. Scholarship about race cinema in the US includes Jane M. Gaines, *Fire & Desire: Mixed-Race Movies in the Silent Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Pearl Bowser, Jane Gaines, and Charles Musser, eds. *Oscar Micheaux & His Circle: African-American Filmmaking and Race Cinema of the Silent Era* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001); and Jacqueline Najuma Stewart, *Migrating to the Movies: Cinema and Black Urban Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

100 See Elsaesser, *Film History*. Recent examples of media archaeology-inflected film historical work include James Leo Cahill, "A YouTube Bestiary: Twenty-Six Theses on a Post-cinema of Animal Attractions," in *New Silent Cinemas*, ed. Paul Flaig and Katherine Groo (New York: Routledge, 2016), 263–93.

101 Siegfried Zielinski, *Deep Time of the Media: Toward an Archaeology of Hearing and Seeing by Technical Means*, trans. Gloria Custance (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 7. Lisa Gitelman criticizes media archaeology's penchant for addressing synchronic events from the past, isolated from historical continuum, highlighting that in these accounts "the past serves only as 'an index or placeholder (rather than cause or antecedent) of the future.'" See Gitelman, *Always Already New*, 11.

102 Zielinski, *Deep Time of the Media*, 10.

103 Zielinski invokes an "anarchaeological" approach rather than a historical one. Ibid., 27.

104 Ibid., 32. Zielinski borrows the idea of historical difference and discontinuity from Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

105 Elsaesser, *Film History*, 58–59.

106 Ibid., 40–42.

107 Gitelman, *Always Already New*, 11. Erkki Huhtamo's work on media archaeological *topoi* represents an exception to media archaeology's general skepticism of discursive analysis. See Erkki Huhtamo, "Dismantling the Fairy Engine: Media Archaeology as Topos Study," in *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and*

Implications, ed. Jussi Parikka and Erkki Huhtamo (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 27–47.

108 Roman Jakobson and Moris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language* (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1956). Cited in Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 15.

109 Ibid., 164.

110 Ibid., 12.

111 Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), xxx, emphasis in the original.

112 Ibid., 42.

113 Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Volume I, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 67.

114 White, *Metahistory*, 42, emphasis added.

115 See for instance Elsaesser, *Film History*, 48–49.

116 Jussi Parikka, "Archival Media Theory: An Introduction to Wolfgang Ernst's Media Archaeology," in *Digital Memory and the Archive*, 13. See Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); and Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, 253–67.

117 Groo, *Bad Film Histories*, 17.

118 Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 142.

119 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 311.

120 William Uricchio addresses similar concerns over the implications of curatorial choices on present and future historical research. See William Uricchio, "Archives and Absences," *Film History* 7.3 (Autumn, 1995): 256–63.

121 Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 461.

122 Godard and Ishaghpour, *Archéologie du cinéma*, 8, my translation.

123 Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 461 and 462.

124 Gaudreault and Gunning, "Early Cinema as a Challenge," 377.

125 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 308.

126 Gaudreault, *Film and Attraction*, 100.

127 Dudley Andrew offers a systematic account of film theory in the tradition of hermeneutics. Unlike this book, however, his account, concentrates on the interpretation of modes of expression in the filmic text, and does not engage with Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. See Dudley Andrew, *Concepts in Film Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 172–90.

128 White, *Content of the Form*, 49.

129 Michèle Lagny, "Film History: Or History Expropriated," *Film History* 6. 1 (1994), 31.

130 See Ishaghpour and Godard, *Archéologie du cinema*.

131 See Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 278.

132 Ibid., 280.

133 White, *Content of the Form*, 9.

134 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 182. See Martin Luther, *Luther's Ninety-Five Theses*, ed. Kurt Aland (St Louis: Concordia, 2004).

135 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 182.

136 Ibid., 196. See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Sämmtliche Werke*, III (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1834–64).

137 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 203.

138 Wilhelm Dilthey left *Entwürfe zur Kritik der historischen Vernunft* ("Drafts for a Critique of Historical Reason") incomplete. It was published posthumous as *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*, ed. Rudolf A. Makkreel, and Frithjof Rodi (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

139 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 208. See Leopold von Ranke, *Weltgeschichte, IX* (Leipzig: Verlag von Duncker & Humblot, 1910).

140 See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein und Zeit*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).

141 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 305.

142 See Jürgen Habermas, "A Review of *Truth and Method*," trans. Fred R. Dallmayr and Thomas McCarthy, in *The Hermeneutic Tradition: From Ast to Ricoeur*, ed. Gayle L Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), 234–44.

143 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 304.

144 Ibid., 279–80.

145 Ibid., 232. The idea of a plurality of historical narratives draws Gadamer's hermeneutics close to Hannah Arendt's idea of pluralism. See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959).

146 Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 145.

147 Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 18.

148 Groo, "Cut, Paste, Glitch, and Stutter."

149 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 488.

150 Ibid., 479.

151 Ibid., 477.

152 See ibid., 410.

153 See ibid., 448.

154 Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 10. For a discussion of Derrida's concept of *différance* see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's preface to the 1997 edition of *Of Grammatology* referenced here, xxix.

155 Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 20, emphasis added.

156 The symposium's proceedings appeared in English along with additional con-

tributions. See Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer, eds., *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 2.

157 Frick, *Saving Cinema*, 12.

158 Thomas Elsaesser, "Early Film History and Multi-Media: An Archaeology of Possible Futures?," in *New Media, Old Media: A History and Theory Reader*, ed. Wendy Hui Kyong Chun and Thomas W. Keenan (New York: Routledge, 2006), 24n17; and Amad, *Counter Archive*, 21.

159 Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960). Cited in Amad, *Counter Archive*, 21.

160 Marc Ferro, *Cinema and History* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), 25–26.

161 Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 68.

162 Carla Hayden, "Carla Hayden & Lonnie Bunch, Cultural Institutions at Times of Social Unrest," Library of Congress YouTube Channel, June 5, 2020, https://youtu.be/1RU7eG63-pE.

163 See Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, eds., *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 45. Bolter and Grusin identify remediation as "the representation of one medium in another …, a defining characteristic of new digital media." By analogy, one can interpret digital restorations, archival DVD releases, and online streaming platforms as "remediations" of analog films. For an application of the concept of remediation to the archival field see Fossati, *From Grain to Pixel*, 137–45.

164 Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 147, emphasis added.

165 Katherine Groo, "Alice in the Archives," in *New Silent Cinemas*, ed. Paul Flaig and Katherine Groo (New York: Routledge, 2016), 23.

166 The idea of the artwork's intrinsic "openness" to the public is central also to institutional aesthetic theory. See George Dickie, "The Institutional Theory of Art," in *Theories of Art Today*, ed. Noël Carrol (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), 93–108.

167 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 113, emphasis added.

168 See Walter Benjamin, "Eduard Fuchs, Collector and Historian," in *Selected Writings: Volume 3: 1935–1938*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991–99), 260–61.

169 Amsterdam Fund for the Arts (AFK), the Eye Filmmuseum, and Stimuleringsfonds Creative Industries funded the project with a budget of 130,000 euros. Along with its outputs, Jan Bot remained property of its creators Bram Loogman and Pablo Núñez Palma. See "Jan Bot," Docubase, accessed June 20, 2022, https://docubase.mit.edu/project/jan-bot/; Giovanna Fossati, (Professor of Film Heritage and Digital Film Culture at the University of Amsterdam and Chief Curator at the Eye Film-

museum), e-mail exchange with the author, February 15, 2023.

170 Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, trans. Reginald Snell (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2004).

171 Sobchack, "What Is Film History? Or the Riddle of the Sphinxes," in *Reinventing Film Studies*, eds. Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (London: Oxford University Press, 2000), 312.

172 Dana Polan, *Scenes of Instruction: The Beginnings of the U.S. Study of Film* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 22, emphasis in the original.

The Eye Filmmuseum: Beyond the Canon, the Fragment and Remix

ABSTRACT

Chapter 1 examines the experiments with digital archival remix at Amsterdam's Eye Film Museum (Eye) within the longer history of its institutional predecessor, the Netherlands Film Museum (NFM). Staring in the 1980s, the NFM's focus shifted from canonical avant-garde films to lesser-known titles from the transitional period (1907 to 1916) and unidentified early film fragments. Inspired by found-footage filmmaking, curators began splicing unidentified early film fragments together, creating what came to be known as the Bits & Pieces compilations. These innovations paved the way for Eye's later remix experiments, including Celluloid Remix and Jan Bot, which I analyze through Gadamer's concepts of part and whole, pointing to their limits as alternative forms of non-linear historical discourse.

KEYWORDS
Netherlands Film Museum; found-footage; sample; participatory; algorithm; non-linear historiography

On April 4, 2012, Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands inaugurated Eye Filmmuseum's (Eye) new hypermodern building.[1] With its aerodynamic structure and imponderable shape, the Eye building sits on the banks of the river IJ in the northern neighborhood of Overhoeks, the regeneration of which the new museum helped accelerate. Since then, Eye has held yearly parties—Eye Galas—to celebrate the anniversary of the Dutch film archive's new venue.[2] At Eye, visitors encounter various temporalities, formats, technologies, and experiences of and with moving images. As Chief Curator Giovanna Fossati illustrates:

> When you are in here, ideally you could link every single *dispositif* that is available to the whole experience of being in the building by looking at the city from what recalls a Cinerama window, diving into the collection in the *Panorama* exhibition, walking around the museum with the virtual Eye Walk, and then finally watching the 4K restoration of *Lawrence of Arabia* in one of our cinemas as the main feature of your whole experience.[3]

The museum's move from its former home in Vondelpark to the larger spaces of the Eye building has encouraged curators to experiment with alternatives to theatrical film programming by mixing exhibition apparatuses, technologies, media, and archival material from different historical periods. Such experimentation—less preoccupied with conveying film-historical linearity than giving new visibility to formerly neglected archival material—has a history dating back to the late 1980s.

In 1987, the appointment of Hoos Blotkamp as director of what at the time was called the Netherlands Film Museum (Nederlands Filmmuseum, NFM) and of Eric de Kuyper as her deputy in 1988 inaugurated a period of intense experimentation, particularly with color film restoration and the preservation and exhibition of film fragments found in the archive's vaults.[4] Due to the incomplete nature of film fragments, often only a few minutes long, archivists generally struggled not just to identify their titles but also to determine their genre or whether they were fictional or non-fictional material. For these reasons, in many film archives, film fragments remain unpreserved, laying on a shelf or ending up in the trash. In the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, however, the NFM began to save, preserve, and display these early film fragments, which often sparked a sense of "surprise, astonishment, [and] magic."[5]

It resorted to collating these snippets into Bits & Pieces compilations, as archivists called them, provisionally numbering and splicing together each excerpt, duplicating the resulting compilation onto safety film stock, and making them available to curators, programmers, and filmmakers to recombine and exhibit in different settings.[6] In those years, the NFM displayed early and silent film fragments through dedicated film programs at the museum, film festivals, on TV, and on DVD.[7]

At the time, the preservation and display of unidentified film fragments and the color restoration of relatively unknown titles, such as the Italian diva film *Flower of Evil* (*Fior di male*, 1915), seemed unorthodox choices compared with international archival practices.[8] Between the mid-1980s and the mid-1990s, in close collaboration with the Dutch film laboratory Hagefilm, the museum began building technical expertise in silent film color restorations, which it showcased internationally at film festivals, archives, and cinematheques. By bringing attention towards under-investigated areas of historical research, such as early film color application and early non-fiction film genres (including early scientific, animated, and colonial films), the NFM pioneered revisionist epistemologies, historiographies, and archival and curatorial practices. Such work exposed the limits of traditional film histories, which, according to de Kuyper, had for too long conceived their field of inquiry as "a homogeneous one, a smooth and perfectly closed object, linear and logical, with its beautiful dramatic moments ([such as] the emergence of sound!), and of course, lesser-known or less valued domains."[9] Since then, the museum's preservation of silent film color and early film fragments, encapsulated in the Bits & Pieces project, has inspired the work of several filmmakers, including Peter Delpeut (who worked at the NFM as assistant to and then as deputy director), Gustav Deutsch, Peter Forgacs, Bill Morrison, Fiona Tan, and Sandra Beerends, all of whom have reused this unusual material in their found-footage work.[10]

Twenty years later, a thirty million euro grant from the Dutch government enabled the digitization of approximately 20 percent of the museum's collections, including the Bits & Pieces, thereby transforming these early film fragments into digital samples. Thanks to this mass-digitization program, known as Images for the Future, the museum brought the curatorial and historical experiments it began in the 1980s and 1990s into the realm of digital media and technologies.[11] Throughout the 2000s and 2010s, the museum launched several digital projects whose common goal was to encourage users to explore, interact, and play with its digitized collections of early and silent films, exploiting the aura of novelty surrounding digital media. These web-based initiatives included the mash-up platform Scene Machine and the remix contest Celluloid Remix, which invited users to remix samples from the Bits & Pieces digitized collection, inspired by the practice of found-footage filmmaking.

Its latest experiment with digital remix was Jan Bot (discontinued in March 2023), an AI-powered platform that automatically generated short remixes of Bits & Pieces samples based on daily news trends.[12]

Eye is certainly not the only film museum to have invested in digitizing archival collections, digital dissemination, and innovative audience engagement strategies. However, what makes the Dutch case unique is that, in doing so, the museum has also helped theorize revisionist archival practices and historiographies revolving around early and silent cinema and introduced new modes of audience interaction with the material on display. By bringing film heritage to the digital and algorithmic age, curatorial initiatives like Jan Bot, and Celluloid Remix have produced hybrid analog and digital media practices and aesthetics. Through a set of practices the museum refers to as "crowd curatorship" and the automation of curatorial work, the museum has rethought the interaction between users (including historians, cinephiles, and filmmakers) and the archive.[13]

The first part of this chapter situates Eye's recent digital initiatives within the museum's longer history, highlighting shifting correlations between archival practices and the historical understanding of early and silent cinema.[14] Starting from the museum's origins in the work of the Dutch film society Filmliga, committed to a rigid modernist agenda and artistic film canon, I concentrate on the NFM's progressive shift of focus from the Uitkeijk collection of canonical avant-garde films to the Desmet collection of films from the transitional period (between 1907 and 1916). Greater circulation of films from the Desmet collection in international festivals and in-house programs in the 1980s and 1990s led to revisionist historiographies, rediscovering the specificity of transitional cinema, non-fiction film, the use of applied color techniques in silent cinema, and the work of firms such as Vitagraph, Selig, Ambrosia, and Nordisk, which historians had until then considered minor. This work set the stage for the more daring archival experiments inspired by found-footage filmmaking starting in the late 1980s and epitomized by the Bits & Pieces compilations.

Against the background of the NFM's institutional and curatorial history, the second half of this chapter foregrounds the cultural, technological, historiographic, and epistemological stakes within Eye's digital remix strategies, which have become a pillar of its curatorial interventions. I compare Deutsch's found-footage film *Film Ist. (1–12)* (1996–2002), user-generated remixes, and Jan Bot's automated archival remixes, all of which recycle digitized fragments from the Bits & Pieces collection. I examine the kinds of historical understanding and discourses these works of archival recombination produce by mobilizing Rosalind Krauss's distinction between "reflexiveness" and "auto-reflection" and the semiotic concepts of syntagm and paradigm within the

framework of philosophical hermeneutics. As I argue, the shift to evermore automatic modes of appropriation and recombination has made the discursive, interpretative, and historical links that articulate archival remix increasingly tenuous, leading one to question the overall curatorial efficacy of some of these projects.

FROM THE CANON TO THE DESMET COLLECTION

It is tempting to seek parallels and continuities between Eye's recent curatorial experiments with Bits & Pieces and digital remix and the museum's earlier history. For instance, the programming strategies of NFM's institutional progenitor, the Dutch Film League (Nederlandsche Filmliga), in the late 1920s appear to anticipate a certain sensibility for early cinema and a penchant for juxtaposing historically heterogeneous materials. Founded in 1927, Filmliga was a key actor within the film cultural network that shaped the formation of the Dutch film archive. The prints of avant-garde films that Filmliga's partner cinema de Uitkijk ("the Outlook") purchased for distribution ended up constituting one of the museum's most precious collections.[15] NFM founders Piet Meerburg, Paul Kijzer, and Jan de Vaal formed their sense of film appreciation through the film club's avant-garde film programs, lectures, and film magazine.[16] One of Filmliga's earliest programs on October 20, 1927 included two early films, the 1907 Pathé drama *Will Grandfather Forgive?* and Segundo de Chomón's féerie *L'Obsession de l'or*, alongside René Clair's *Entr'acte* (1924) and Alberto Cavalcanti's avant-garde documentary *Nothing but Time* (*Rien que les heures*, 1926).[17] Such exhibition practices followed in the footsteps of the French cine-clubs' eclectic programs, mixing avant-garde, early, and scientific films. However, as film historian Hans Schoots notes, rather than being "an ode to the infinite possibilities of the medium of film or a tribute to early cinema," the Filmliga program was inspired by rigid modernist principles about what types of films were to be appreciated as art.[18]

From the pages of the club's magazine, also called *Filmliga*, leading theorist and critic Menno ter Braak claimed that such a varied program aimed to illustrate the "uncountable detours" that film had encountered in its struggle to emancipate from mass entertainment and its obsession with drama and photographic realism. An elitist educational agenda that strictly distinguished good films from bad ones and art films from cinema's presumed commercial aberrations shaped Filmliga's programs. As ter Braak argues, in featuring "no close-ups, no independent expressions, [but] only cliché's [*sic*] of reality reproduced in ridiculously enhanced melodramatic style," early cinema lacked the medium's self-reflexive "consciousness of the power of cinematography." In

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"avant-guerre cinema"—as early cinema was referred to in the Netherlands—he concludes, "Film is not born yet from the cinema." Against this radical modernist teleology, early cinema was nothing but a "prehistoric mistake."[19]

Filmliga's educational program and strictly defined artistic film canon profoundly influenced the NFM's genesis. Discussions about the creation of a national film archive in the Netherlands had begun as early as 1919, leading to the creation of the Dutch Central Film Archive (Nederlandsch Centraal Filmarchief, NCF), whose mission was to collect films of cultural, historical, and social value as records of life in the Netherlands.[20] Conversations between de Vaal (at the time a film collector), Meerburg, Kijzer (respectively founder and programmer at the Kriterion arthouse cinema in Amsterdam), and David van Staveren (who was the director of the Board of Film Censors and had previously been involved in the NCF) resumed after WWII. In 1946, they founded the Dutch Historical Film Archive (Nederlandsch Historisch Filmarchief, NHFA).[21] It was only when the archive acquired the Uitkijk collection of avant-garde films in 1952 that the NHFA dropped the term "archive" from its name in favor of "museum," morphing into the NFM and moving its premises to the Stedelijk Museum of modern arts.[22] The collection included films such as Alberto Cavalcanti's *News in Brief* (*Faits-divers*, 1923), Germaine Dulac's *The Seashell and the Clergyman* (*La coquille et le clergyman*, 1928), and Man Ray's *The Starfish* (*L'Étoile de mer*, 1928).[23] De Vaal became the museum's first director, a position he held until 1984.

The Stedelijk Museum's incorporation of film among the officially sanctioned high modern arts followed in the footsteps of Alfred Barr's establishment of the Film Library at the Museum of Modern Arts (MoMA) in New York.[24] The NFM's "designation as a museum, and its presence among historically legitimised art forms in the Stedelijk Museum," film historian Bregt Lameris highlights, "were clear indications of film's trajectory towards its consecration as an art."[25] In its newfound home, the NFM was equipped with its own offices and a dedicated auditorium, where it started its season of weekly screenings, film lectures, courses, and public events with international guest filmmakers. Echoes of Filmliga's prescriptive educational programs kept resonating in much of the film museum's work in the following years, including its mandate to inculcate a "correct understanding of quality film."[26]

The Uitkijk collection of avant-garde films was pivotal in establishing the NFM's reputation nationally and internationally, helping de Vaal build networks with other members of the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) and expand the museum collections. FIAF had established a system of archival distribution, enabling relatively small archives (such as the NFM) to trade obscure titles for more acclaimed ones in other archival film collections elsewhere. As the sixty-six avant-garde films in the Uitkijk collection were representative of the

art film canon, they became a popular currency within this exchange network.[27] Therefore, as salvaging the art film canon remained an international preservation priority, it should not be surprising that the NFM's Uitkijk collection held such an enduring prestige even while many of its titles could be found also in other archives.[28] For a long time, its unchallenged status overshadowed other material in the museum's vaults, such as the Desmet collection, which consists of more than 900 unique nitrate film prints, promotional material, and business records from the transitional period between 1907 and 1916.

The NFM acquired this vast collection comprising films, promotional material (such as posters, flyers, and programs), and a business archive (including invoices, rental books, sales lists, telegrams, and insurance policy documents) in 1957.[29] It had belonged to Jean Desmet, who, from humble origins in the fairground business, had built a career as a cinema owner and independent international distributor in the 1910s.[30] As purchasing film prints (rather than renting them) was common practice among film distributors at the time, Desmet amassed a vast repository of dramas, comedies, and travelogues of various lengths, mainly from France, the United States, Italy, Germany, and Denmark.[31]

Throughout the 1960s, the NFM screened nitrate film prints from the Desmet collection at the auditorium of the Stedelijk Museum. Between 1961 and 1966, it held retrospectives titled Images Fantastique at the International Film Week in Arnhem (the precursor of the Rotterdam International Film Festival), reenacting early traveling cinema with titles such as the 1911 Pathè comic short *Rosalie et son phonographe* (Rosalie and her phonographe), the 1912 Italian short drama *The Ship of Lions* (*La Nave dei leoni*), and Maurice Tourneur's two-reeler *La Bergère d'Ivry* (The shepherdess of Ivry, 1913).[32] However, despite such occasional programs, the museum never considered the preservation of the Desmet collection its top priority in the thirty years following its acquisition, also due to insufficient state funding. In line with FIAF's standards, for instance, the museum often traded unique nitrate prints of foreign titles from the Desmet collection with other archives—eager to preserve the widest possible portion of their national film heritage—in exchange for films deemed more valuable. According to film historian Ivo Blom, in the mid-1970s, de Vaal shipped thirty-two unique Danish nitrate films to the archive in Copenhagen, which preserved them but returned only two 16mm duplicates to the NFM.[33] By 1986, when a substantial grant became available for preservation, only fifty-nine Desmet films had been preserved and often by archives abroad.[34]

Under the interim management of Frans Maks, who succeeded de Vaal in 1984, and Hoos Blotkamp starting in 1987, the NFM began to devote considerable efforts to exhibiting the Desmet collection more widely. In 1985, the museum appointed Frank van der Maden as collection curator and held its first Desmet-focused exhibition at the Vondelpark Pavilion, where the muse-

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um had moved in the early 1970s.[35] The following year, a color restoration of the largely unknown 1915 Italian drama *Flower of Evil*, produced by Cines and directed by Carmine Gallone, premiered at the Pordenone Silent Film Festival. Many in the audience marveled at Italian diva Lyda Borelli in a beautifully photographed green-toned scene, where she sneaks in and out of Count van Deller's villa before walking to the beach and repenting of her sins against the dramatic silvery backdrop of a dawning sun. For many critics and historians, it was like rediscovering a neglected portion of a film history in need of revision. In a letter to Blom, film curator Paolo Cherchi Usai recalls the event as follows:

> It was a declaration of war against the assumption that Italian cinema of the silent period was a known entity. It was the proof that much, much more could be seen and told about it. It was an indictment of the false representation and false consciousness of film history as a crystallized set of periodizations.[36]

This kind of sentiment demonstrated the potential impact of revisionist approaches bringing films previously deemed to have little historical value into the public view. In the following years, the Desmet collection enjoyed unprecedented visibility in Pordenone. A 1987 retrospective of Vitagraph films in collaboration with the British Film Institute (BFI) National Archive was followed by a program of 1910s Messter films titled Before Caligari in 1990 and a series of Éclair films in 1992. These retrospectives showcased the quality of the NFM's color restorations, which became a trademark of the Desmet collection.[37] They shed light on the richness and variety of color technologies and processes used in early and silent films, 80 percent of which had been colored with dyes, stencils, color baths, and tints.[38]

While the Desmet collection's wider circulation in the mid- and late 1980s led to greater awareness of its historical value and specificity, the NFM continued to hold surprisingly tight to aesthetic hierarchies it had inherited from previous administrations. As the museum's 1989 report illustrates, based on qualitative grounds, the museum deemed sufficient preserving only a limited selection of Desmet films for the purpose of historical research and film analysis. Compared to the Uitkijk collection, which, according to the report, reflected a "conscious qualitative choice, … intended to counterbalance what was usually on offer in the regular cinemas," the Desmet collection appeared as a heterogeneous archive, lacking coherent rationale and aesthetic interest.[39] Based on these premises, the practice of trading unique Desmet films in exchange for duplicates of the same or other titles considered more prestigious continued until at least the late 1980s, further jeopardizing the collection. In 1989, several film historians sitting on the museum's board, including

Karel Dibbets, resigned in protest of the draining of the Desmet collection abroad—a polemic that Dutch newspapers referred to as the "Desmet affair."[40]

Extensive research into the so-called transitional period (in which Jean Desmet had been most active) offered crucial coordinates to better understand the collection's significance in the following years. The collection documented Desmet's business expansion—from his early traveling cinematograph to the opening of the 1909 Cinema Parisien in Rotterdam and the 1912 luxury Cinema Palace in Amsterdam—offering a time capsule from this hitherto scarcely known period in cinema history.[41] Within the Dutch context, characterized by the absence of a strong production sector, Desmet was able to build an empire, operating as an independent international film dealer, distributor, and exhibitor. However, the introduction of increasingly longer, more elaborate, and prestigious cinema programs, which in the early 1910s popularized international silent film stars such as Asta Nielsen and Henny Porten, marked Desmet's gradual demise. Fueled by higher production values and the emerging star system, the soaring popularity of feature films led to the introduction of exclusive exhibition licenses and progressively more vertically integrated networks of distribution, driving exhibitors like Desmet out of competition.

According to former MoMA curator Eileen Bowser, the Desmet collection holds "special value because it is from a period when so few films survived." As she argues, archivists at MoMA's Film Library "certainly began to have a new idea of the importance of the Vitagraph production," for instance, only "after the Desmet Collection began to become accessible."[42] The study of the collection and the international circulation of until then forgotten films by such companies as Vitagraph, Selig, Ambrosio, and Nordisk cast new light onto early and transitional cinema, making their formal characteristics legible to a larger group of archivists, curators, historians, and spectators.

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, various NFM initiatives reflected this newly acquired awareness. In 1991, Delpeut's archival collage film *Lyrical Nitrate* (*Lyrisch Nitraat*), entirely made up of fragments of early travelogues, ghost rides, and dramas from the Desmet collection, premiered at the Berlin International Film Festival.[43] In the same year, the archive issued a series of 16mm film compilations dedicated to early Italian, French, and US cinema, titled Amore e Lotta, À la Campagne, and A Changing Society.[44] In the mid-1990s, the NFM held several international workshops about non-fiction films in the 1910s and color in silent cinema.[45] In 2003, Blom published the first English-language book-length study of the collection, *Jean Desmet and the Early Dutch Film Trade*, based on a decade-long study of countless archival records and films. In 2007, MoMA featured an entire program titled Jean Desmet's Cinema of Sensation and Sentiment, followed by a second one dedicated to early film comedies from the collection a few years later.[46] The arc of the col-

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lection's changing fortunes concluded with its inscription in the UNESCO Memory of the World Register in 2011.[47]

The recovery and rediscovery of the Desmet collection happened in the context of a radical paradigm change that had begun at the end of the 1970s. Contrary to the earlier art historical approach, focused on films as autonomous works exemplary of cinema's formal development, the new film history, as I mention in this book's introduction, regards early cinema as embedded in an intermedia matrix of theatrical entertainment, illustration, optical and photographic apparatuses, and science. Up to that point, historians and archivists had concentrated chiefly on the masterpieces of the silent era, neglecting the vast variety of material sitting (and progressively deteriorating) in archival vaults, including early, ethnographic, transitional, orphan, and unidentified films, as well as film fragments. By uncovering early cinema's historical specificity—its remediation of tropes circulating in other media, modes of addressing spectators (encoded in its formal characteristics), and exhibition contexts—the new film historians redefine early films as essentially different from the kind of cinema that came afterwards.[48]

The new film history advances an epistemological revision of the terms that have previously defined historical investigations into early and silent cinema and the interpretative work of archivists and curators. In philosophical hermeneutic terms, such an epistemological shift alters the correlation between the phenomenon under investigation, what Gadamer calls the *part*, and the unity of discourse establishing a coherent historical context (a *whole*) to read the *part*. The new film history abandons an explanatory model previously centered on cinema's incremental process of institutionalization and formal and artistic development, repositioning early films (the *part*) within a new historical discourse (a revised historical *whole*) describing a much less linear time frame, in which cinema existed as an optical, scientific, and imperial attraction, rather than exclusively as a medium of "narrative integration."[49] Within a reiterative movement that Gadamer defines as a hermeneutic circle from *part* to *whole* and back to the *part*, a revised understanding of early cinema's contextual history has enabled historians to appreciate the merits of individual early film titles, the diversity of their expressions, their technical innovations, and artistic experimentation with, for instance, the use of color.

Inspired by these revisions, the reevaluation of the Desmet collection led to a better understanding of what a film collection was, at the intersection of film's material histories and archival practices. Historians and archivists began understanding a film collection like Desmet's as "a corpus, with its own history, life and patterns of making, unmaking, exploitation, survival, rediscovery, and new archival and scholarly use." In Cherchi Usai's words, the films of the Desmet collection are "a healthy reminder that films do not exist

in a void, but are 'made' constantly, after they are shot, printed and shown."[50] According to Blom, "it is only when we recognise a repository of objects as comprising a self-contained *whole* with an individual history and a specific context, that it becomes a collection."[51] The value of the Desmet collection lies in the completeness of the records that accompany its many unique film prints—publicity material, correspondence, invoices, programs, lists of acquisitions, sales, and rentals—which make it "unparalleled in the world, in terms of both size and content." It tells a micro-history that in UNESCO's words, "exceeds the boundaries of film history and has great value for the socio-historical description and appreciation of one of the most important decades in modern history."[52]

In a sort of hermeneutic circularity, these epistemological shifts and historiographic revisions in turn fueled a progressive redefinition of the museum's archival policies and exhibition practices, prompting new curatorial challenges. In an interview with Blom, Blotkamp illustrates some of the questions these changing paradigms raised, explaining:

> the big audience doesn't care whether a film comes from a collection. They come for the films, for the filmmakers. ... When you have two equal films, and one is from the Desmet Collection and the other is not, and you only have money [to preserve] one, you are posed a moral dilemma.[53]

Thanks to Blotkamp's fundraising, the museum secured adequate financial resources to address such a predicament. In 1990, a major four-year grant enabled the NFM to inventory its holdings, preserve them on a larger scale, and experiment with new exhibition approaches.[54] The museum uncovered a wealth of films that had previously been deemed lost, forgotten, or remained unidentified, such as Frank Borzage's *The Good Provider* (1922) and Fritz Lang's *Harakiri* (1919). However, "for one 'great title', for one film by a great master," the NFM's deputy director de Kuyper notes, "there were dozens of less important films from less important directors, and hundreds of forgotten films from forgotten filmmakers," along with material impossible to identify.[55]

BITS & PIECES OF FILM HISTORY

Building on this revisionist work, at the end of the 1980s, archivists Delpeut and Mark-Paul Meyer started experimenting with a new and, relative to the era, peculiar way of preserving and exhibiting early and silent films. Inspired by the variety, colors, and randomness of the unidentified early film snippets they found in the NFM's vaults, they sought ways to preserve this material, which the museum

would have customarily neglected or discarded. Due to the practical problem of duplicating such short segments of film strip, Delpeut and Meyer resorted to editing them one after the other. As preserving "a fragment of 20 meters is impossible for a lab," the way round at the time, explains Meyer, was "to collect 10–20 of them and then put them on one reel, to make rolls only with colour fragments or black-and-white fragments, so that they can copy them in one go."[56] These resulted in the Bits & Pieces compilations of early film fragments.

The first Bits & Pieces compilation, for instance, contains ten different film fragments numbered from one to eleven (number three is missing).[57] Interpolated between two predominantly sepia-toned snippets, sits fragment number three, a two-minute-long segment featuring a fictional noble Japanese poet, whose name, we learn, is Li Kiang. The segment opens with a vivid blue close-up of the poet in meditation, followed by a close-up of his hands as he pulls out of his gown a potion that he hopes will bring an end to his terrible nightmares. Three beautifully hued shots succeed one another: an ochre-cultured iris shot of his eyes, a sepia-toned sequence of an award ceremony in Li Kiang's honor, and a wisteria-colored panning shot of his home, surrounded by a garden and creek. The fragment concludes with a montage alternating again between a blue-themed close-up of the poet with eyes closed, a shot of his healer's blessing in sepia, and a final close-up of Li Kiang in blue. A title card reads, "Three drops … no more! Ten drops would forever destroy Your eyes." Just as it appears to be approaching its narrative climax, the fragment interrupts, leaving us wondering about the effects of Li Kiang's potion—a denouement we will most likely never know.

As fragment number three illustrates, the Bits & Pieces present random cross-sections of longer narratives, lacking a coherent arc unfolding from beginning to middle and end. Despite the preponderance of unidentified film fragments in archival collections worldwide, in the absence of international preservation standards for them, archivists struggle to index these scraps of film, typically disposing of them.[58] As unidentified fragments, "these pieces of film are not only bereft of legal status," Delpeut notes laconically, "they are not even orphans, as they are written off before they were written in."[59] They are simply "non-existent in the eyes of [a] film history … based on 'identities' procured by 'works' and 'authors'," as de Kuyper provocatively highlights.[60] In many film archives, as Delpeut explains:

> fragments are disappearing in the trash. … "But they are often so beautiful …," we regretfully sighed again and again in our weekly meetings. Eventually, the solution turned out to be to make a small collection of the most beautiful fragments. … Now these are preserved, each with its own number, and more importantly, they are used, that is: shown.[61]

FIGURE 1.
Fragment no. 5, *Bits & Pieces Nrs. 1 t/m 11*. Courtesy of Eye Filmmuseum.

Devoid of definite historical context, authorship, production credits, and title, many of these fragments display what André Habib calls the "aesthetic autonomy of the ruin," appealing to archivists' sense of surprise and marvel.[62] By recuperating these ruinous traces, the NFM invoked, in de Kuyper's words, a revisionist "aesthetic of film history."[63]

The Bits & Pieces compilations feature what Habib defines as a "poetics of ruins," in which the fragment has the power "through its debris, of bringing to the present a past life that time has dismantled."[64] With its oddly truncated brevity, fragment number five from the same compilation, for instance, stands out as a present trace of cinema's past, picturing the pathos of its silent female performer, paradoxically cut off from its unknown narrative coherence. Though only a minute long, this bright, red-toned segment beautifully captures the emotional climax of a family drama as we see the extended duration of its protagonist's grief (see figure 1). She clings to what looks like her desperate mother, breathes heavily, stands up with her eyes closed, holds her head in pain, then opens her eyes, and as her sigh is emphatically about to turn into a cry, the film suddenly interrupts. While this mutilated sequence is testimony of a loss, "this residue of the combined forces of coincidence and willful indifference," Delpeut argues, "often has a fascinating attraction." What once was "*part* of a larger *whole*," as he poetically sums up, "time, in its strange ways, made into an indefinite image fragment valuable in and of itself."[65]

These eccentrically truncated excerpts disturb our habitual narrative and historical reading modes, poking at the viewer in the guise of what Roland Barthes defines as *punctum*, an accident, a punctuation mark, a fracture.[66]

Like a photograph's *punctum*, a film fragment is in his words "a 'detail,' *i.e.*, a partial object."[67] According to Mary Ann Doane, the *punctum*'s singularity is "an effect of the indexicality of the image," understood as "an absolute particularity … opposed to the culturally generated meaning of the photograph (which Barthes labels the *studium*)."[68] With their excised dramatic details, or *puncta*, the Bits & Pieces fragments arouse an intense affective reaction, a "sympathy" and a "tenderness," to use Barthes' expressions, which transcend the culturally coded work of historical interpretation. As Habib observes for Delpeut's *Lyrical Nitrate*, fragments here function as allegories of the memory and history of early and silent cinema, objects of longing and melancholic contemplation. With their singularity, the Bits & Pieces allegorically project us towards a partially lost past. As film historian Nanna Verhoeff observes, they act as details that hermeneutically "strive towards *whole*ness."[69]

As Delpeut argues, preserving and exhibiting film fragments invites a reconsideration of "the archive as a *whole*" by questioning "its function, its purpose, its rationale, its endurance, its influence, and aura."[70] Based on incomplete archival evidence, film history is an inevitably partial, unexhaustive, and heuristic endeavor that needs constant revision and expansion. As Verhoeff notes, "every object found in a film archive is a fragment of an irretrievable, ever-widening *whole*: the 'complete' film, the 'genre,' the program, the cultural habits of watching films, the culture."[71] In her analysis of fragments of early Western films in the Bits & Pieces compilations, Verhoeff advocates a "post-archaeological attitude" to archival research and film history, one that "endorses fragmentation rather than attempting to overcome it."[72] In place of traditional archival and curatorial approaches inspired by ideals of historical reconstruction, coherence, and integrity, the Bits & Pieces embrace the singular beauty of film fragments as allegories of a history that has foregone completeness and linearity. As de Kuyper claims, such a history "would have a very different developmental line" from that of established historiographies by rewarding disruptions and discontinuities and accepting that we often "work with 'fragments of a history of film' where the holes and losses are even as significant as what is still there."[73]

The NFM translated its curatorial practice, inspired by the aesthetics and politics of found-footage filmmaking, into a revisionist and non-linear historical discourse. In the book accompanying Eye's inaugural exhibition, *Found Footage: Cinema Exposed* (2012), Fossati argues that found-footage filmmaking performs some of the same processes at the basis of film archival practice, such as "selection, decontextualisation, re-contextualisation, and presentation of (parts of) films."[74] We can see this principle at work in one of the most recent Bits & Pieces compilations, *Nrs. 610 t/m 623*.[75] It gathers a series of exoticized views, including actualities (such as the disturbing footage of a Ku Klux Klan

parade in Washington, DC), travelogues, Osio Koffler's animations of silent film celebrities Lya de Putti and Emil Jannings, and excerpts of feature films. Fragment no. 610 places the camera on a sleigh in Alaska. The no. 614 takes us amidst the passengers on the North Sea Canal ferry, and we end up flying over the snowy peaks of the Mont Blanc in no. 617. As with the images recycled and assembled in found-footage works, one may read the fragments in the Bits & Pieces as severed from their original historical and textual contexts. As Catherine Russell notes, they yield "incomplete information in which the referent is rendered as a singularity, an eruption of the real within a system of ethnographic representation."[76] Even so, by juxtaposing the singularity of these images (as hermeneutic *part*s) one next to the other, the Bits & Pieces compile them into a signifying unit (an interpretative *whole*), enabling us to read them as traces of perceptive attitudes and modes of representation emerging at the turn of the nineteenth century. The Bits & Pieces compilation *Nrs. 610 t/m 623* highlights a continuity of contexts across its different imageries, underscoring film's early fascination with simultaneous movement, mass gatherings and entertainments, and a new mobile perspective captured for the first time by cinema's unfastened camera. More than a century after it was originally shot, this footage circulates as an ethnographic record and allegory of a distant and partially alien past—"the time of the Other."[77] Reassembled, these images mediate what we may call, paraphrasing Russell's words, a "temporal discontinuity," or in Gadamer's terms, the temporal distance between us and this past visual culture.[78]

Throughout the 1990s, Delpeut and Meyer enjoyed remarkable curatorial freedom and modeled their archival and curatorial work on found-footage filmmaking. Delpeut's filmmaking work, exemplified by archival compilations such as *Lyrical Nitrate*, *The Forbidden Quest* (1992), and *Diva Dolorosa* (1999), often overlaps with his archival ethos. As he writes in the Dutch magazine *Skrien* in 1990, besides being a keeper and a guardian, "perhaps the archivist should consider himself [*sic*] ... a filmmaker, too, an editor of a beautiful, perpetual film."[79] With Bits & Pieces, found-footage filmmaking became a catalyst of experimentation in the field of film exhibition and a model of audience engagement. From the very start, Delpeut and Meyer conceived these compilations less as a finished product than as an inventory of raw archival material that enabled further historical research and recombination. The principle behind Bits & Pieces, retrospectively explains Meyer, "was that reels could be divided in separate fragments (respecting the integrity of the single snippet) and that new combinations could be made."[80] The loan history of the 35mm print of compilation *no. 12 t/m 20*, for instance, shows many examples of creative reuse, despite the laborious process of extracting and reediting analog fragments. They range from a screening of fragments in the 1991 program

Lost & Found at the Rotterdam Film Festival to their repurposing in Deutsch's 2002 archival essay film *Film Ist. (1–12).*[81] In 1995, Meyer and Delpeut included various Bits & Pieces fragments in two compilations broadcast on the Dutch TV channel VPRO as part of a series called *Cinema Perdu*, showcasing the museum's collections.[82]

Since the late 1980s, dozens of curators, filmmakers, musicians, and scholars have repurposed early and silent film material from the NFM's vaults. In her 1992 compilation film *Mode in beweging* (Fashion in motion), for instance, fashion historian José Teunissen investigates the interplay between the body, motion, and fashion between the 1910s and the 1930s, reusing newsreels and fashion films by Pathé and Gaumont from the NFM's archive.[83] In 2000, DJ Spooky incorporated several Bits & Pieces into a 16mm film screened at the Louvre as part of his DJ set Les Vestiges: de la techno au Louvre?[84] Inspired by the Bits & Pieces, these experiments anticipate the ease of access, duplication, and recombination digital media and technologies would have begun making possible in the 2000s. Looking back, Delpeut notes, "we were dreaming of the possibilities the digital would have brought."[85] When funding enabled the digitization of the NFM's collections, the Bits & Pieces provided not just curated material for the museum's growing digital repository but also a successful curatorial and historiographic precedent for Eye's later experiments with digital remix.

INTO THE DIGITAL AGE

In the late 1990s, the NFM began carrying its innovations in early and silent film preservation, restoration, and exhibition into the digital age. It did so with "the ambition to bridge analog and digital," to use Fossati's words, by testing boundaries and meshing analog film aesthetics and techniques with digital tools and the aura of novelty surrounding new media practices.[86] The museum took its first steps into the digital domain in 1996, when it embarked on a project to digitize about one thousand films in its collections, transferring them to Digital Betacam tapes and MPEG1 files at Standard Definition.[87] Since then, the NFM has established itself at the forefront of digital archival experimentation. Three axes define its current curatorial approach: digital access to its collections, participatory dissemination practices, and the digital remix of archival material of different provenance.

Between 2000 and 2003, the NFM joined the 2.29 million euros project Digital Film Manipulation System (Diamant), co-funded by the European Union to develop software for the digital restoration of archival films.[88] Based on the collaboration between the NFM, Laboratoires Neyrac Paris (special-

ists in film restoration), three IT research centers, and private software and hardware developers, the new Diamant software allowed archivists to correct scratches and dust on the film emulsion, stabilize the image, and eliminate flickering effects.[89] The acquisition of new digital skills and tools led the museum not just to explore the potential for digital image manipulation in restoration projects, but also experiment with new modalities of archival film release and exhibition.

In 2002, the NFM conducted its first digital restoration experiment on the 1931 silent film *Zeemansvrouwen* (Sailor's wives). Somewhat ironically, it was the last silent film to be produced in the Netherlands, despite initial plans to release it as the first-ever Dutch sound film with studio-recorded dialog. Taking inspiration from that initial ambition, restorers transformed the film into a talkie with a music score composed by musician Henny Vrienten and dialog reconstructed from the homonymous theatrical play by Herman Bouber and lip-reading.[90] One of the most delicate and innovative aspects of the restoration, carried out at Digital Film Lab in Copenhagen, involved stretching the film from 22 frames per second (fps), in the original silent version, to the 24fps speed of sound film.[91] The result, showcased at the NFM's 2003 Filmmuseum Biennale, is in Fossati's words, "a new version, not a restoration," which challenged "not only the limits of the technology … but also those of film restoration ethics."[92] This was the first of the museum's projects where the manipulative potential of digital technologies was put in the service of creative, unorthodox interpretations of historical material. In drawing together historically disparate source elements, including the nitrate print of *Zeemansvrouwen*, Boubler's play, and Vrienten's score, this restoration features the same recombining logic that had animated Bits & Pieces.

The restoration of *Zeemansvrouwen* inaugurated a series of daring restoration projects that reinterpreted silent films in a revisionist spirit, digitally remediating them to appeal to contemporary audiences' curiosity. In 2004, the NFM performed an even more ambitious digital restoration of Sam Wood's long-lost film *Beyond the Rocks* (1922), which had recently resurfaced in the museum's vaults. The museum produced seven restored versions of the film: two silent film prints (with Dutch and English title cards), two sound film prints with Vrienten's composed score, one DCP, and two DVD versions with two different soundtracks.[93] After digitally scanning the film's battered nitrate print, restorers at the Hagefilm laboratory and NFM archivists used the newly available Diamant software to thoroughly clean, stabilize, and eliminate excessive flickering from the images. Digital interventions included grading, doubling every third frame to stretch the film from 18 to 24fps of sound speed, and adapting it to the Academy ratio.[94] Such an ambitious use of digital techniques allowed the NFM to tailor different restored versions (analog and digi-

tal, silent and sound, Dutch and English) and exhibition experiences to various audiences. The restoration of *Beyond the Rocks* has since screened widely: in the Classics section at Cannes, on Turner Classic Movies, on the Dutch public television, and in archival film festivals such as Il Cinema Ritrovato in Bologna and the Pordenone Silent Film Festival.[95] Beyond maximizing the film's audience outreach and circulation, its seven incarnations display varying degrees of digital manipulation, demonstrating the unprecedented power of adaptability, malleability, and reproducibility of digital technologies.

The restoration of *Beyond the Rocks* hinges upon the logic of digital remediation, that is, the new medium's "promise to reform its [technological] predecessors by offering a more immediate or authentic experience."[96] Eye's Silent Film Curator Elif Rongen Kaynakçi highlights the reiterative nature of such work of reinterpretation, refashioning, and remediation, illustrating the case of the 2013 restoration of Alfred Machin's 1914 *War is Hell* (*Maudite soit la guerre*), carried out in collaboration with the Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique / Koninklijk Belgisch Filmarchief. As she explains:

> We can *re-make* a film, that is, we can improve the appearance of the archival material that we already have. This improvement can be achieved on two grounds today. The first one is on the level of content and narrative as there can be a more complete version of the same film because new material has been found. The second one is from a technical perspective as we might now be able to achieve a restoration that looks better than the existing one. *Maudite soit la guerre* is an example. Although I had already worked on restoring this title in the early 1990s, and it has since been extensively shown around, its importance is renewed today within the context of the WWI centennial.[97]

In this way, the NFM reached out to an audience accustomed to ever sharper, brighter, and higher resolution moving images by tapping into the undying aura of newness, efficiency, and realism surrounding digital technologies and digitally restyling silent cinema. The success of its digital experiments, liberally blending different archival source elements, techniques, and technologies, paved the way for the museum's metamorphosis into Eye.[98]

In 2007, the Dutch government injected around thirty million euros into the mass digitization of the NFM's collections, a seven-year-long project known as Images for the Future. It enabled the assessment, preservation, restoration, digitization, and dissemination of approximately ten thousand titles (equivalent to 5,000 hours of film), kickstarting a series of initiatives hinging on the digital accessibility of increasingly large portions of the museum's archive.[99] The NFM acquired hardware, software, and skills to digitally scan, restore, and

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manage digital assets, progressively incorporating these operations within its daily workflow. The digitization of around 20 percent of the museum's collections in 2K (2048×1080 pixels) resolution multiplied their opportunities for circulation and new modalities of exhibition, not just on digital screens but also in theatrical projections, installations, and temporary exhibitions such as *Jean Desmet's Dream Factory* in 2015.[100] The NFM began redefining its institutional image by embracing a digital access policy conceived, as in much media discourse and scholarship at the time, as a harbinger of novelty, democratic values, transparency, participatory practices, critical reading, and creative reuse.[101] As Sandra den Hamer, who became museum director in 2007, said, "Images for the Future is the pillar under our metamorphosis into a new museum. Digital access to audio-visual heritage is as important as our actual re-housing."[102]

On December 31, 2009, the NFM merged with Holland Film, the Filmbank, and the Netherlands Institute for Film Education—three organizations that specialized respectively in the promotion of Dutch film abroad, experimental film, and national film education—to form Eye.[103] By incorporating their resources, collections, and mandates, the new organization assumed the role of "Dutch national film institute and the only museum for film heritage and the art of film in the Netherlands."[104] In the spring of 2012, the newly established museum moved to its much anticipated new venue on the river IJ in the redeveloped neighborhood of Overhoeks in Amsterdam North. Located on the formerly industrial lot of the dismantled Shell laboratory, the new building's name, Eye, is a double reference to both the Dutch pronunciation of the river IJ ("eye") as well as the visual and cinematic experience.[105] The optical motif further resonates with the building's elongated shape, which smoothly accommodates the river's bend, and the museum's new logo, a blinking eye.

Eye's site developer ING Real Estate followed the urban regeneration formula popularized by the 1997 opening of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao by commissioning the construction of a sculptural, eye-catching museum, which functioned as an anchor attraction within the district's redevelopment plans.[106] Designed by the Vienna-based architecture firm Delugan Meissl, the sleek aluminum clad building sits on the waterfront as a landmark of Amsterdam North's postindustrial requalification. Stretching out southwards, towards Amsterdam's historic town center, and northwards, pointing to the city's formerly industrial quarters, the museum's cusped design bridges heritage and renovation. Eye's futuristic building stands as a visual, symbolic, and architectural incarnation of the promise of seamless modernization and total transformation of the digital age.

Fossati highlights the significance of "the move from the Vondelpark, where the historical location of the film museum was based until 2012, to

this new building" by identifying it as "one of the most radical changes in the history of this institution."[107] By providing increased room for screenings and exhibitions and attracting new audiences, including tourists arriving at Amsterdam's central railway station, the Eye building has worked as a catalyst for the archive's new curatorial practices.[108] Through the digitization program Images for the Future, the establishment of Eye, and the relocation to its hypermodern venue, the museum cast itself as an institution at the frontier of digital archival preservation, accessibility, and display. Capitalizing on the aura of newness surrounding digital media and technologies and their pledge to democratize access to film heritage and save it from impending oblivion, Eye presents itself as the ultimate mediator between film history and the digital age.

In those years, Eye began reimagining the relationship between the archive, film history, and access by modeling it on the modes of consulting information, consuming moving images, and interacting with databases in the digital age.[109] The widespread availability of a vast range of digitized information online has made universal access to content a default condition of cultural production and distribution. This new media ecology has led film archives to update their practices and rationale, integrating access among their priorities or else running the risk of becoming culturally irrelevant under the competition of commercial video-sharing and streaming platforms such as YouTube, Vimeo, and Netflix. Building on Images for the Future, with which the museum streamlined the digitization of its holdings, Eye identified providing access as essential to its mission, making its collections increasingly available online.[110]

As Fossati argues, "the technological transition to digital makes possible a more participatory form of curatorship" that encourages a revision of the traditional role of the film curator.[111] As computers and new media have enabled not just the reproduction but also unprecedented levels of manipulation and interaction with content, we have witnessed a shift from a "Read/Only" ("RO") to a "Read/Write" ("RW") culture, according to Creative Commons founder Lawrence Lessig. Inspired by the logic of computer file permissions, he describes RO cultures as epitomized by television broadcasting and centered around the exclusive and unidirectional transmission of (media) texts from professional producers to a public of recipients. As such, these cultural forms are, in his words, "less practiced in performance, or amateur creativity, and more comfortable … with simple consumption." By contrast, RW practices allow audiences to "add to the culture they read by creating and re-creating the culture around them, … using the same tools the professional uses."[112] RW culture is characterized by ingrained habits of appropriation, recombination, and recirculation of material often accessed without the mediation of state, cultural, and educational institutions.

Within the field of curatorship, according to Fossati, free access to vast portions of the archive's digitized collections opens the possibility to shift power from the curator-gatekeeper—central to what she defines as the old "chaperone model" of the archive—to the user, who is now free to consult, explore, and potentially reuse the material.[113] Inspired by Henry Jenkins' notion of "participatory culture," she coins the term "crowd archiving," or "crowd curatorship," which challenges traditional top-down models of the archive by entrusting the task of selecting, appropriating, and circulating digitized archival material to audiences.[114] However, by examining several crowd-curated projects, I show that the transferal of sets of operations, such as the selection, reorganization, and repurposing of archival material in the hands of digital users does not necessarily yield critical forms of engagement with the historicity of the sources made available. As I argue in the next section, some of these examples display unreflective forms of sampling and remixing that assimilate the archival footage being repurposed to a metonymic placeholder for a generic past, jeopardizing the historical specificity of this digitized material.

DIGITAL REMIX

One of Eye's first digital projects to put the idea of crowd curatorship into practice was the Scene Machine, conceived by designer Dima Stefanova and filmmaker David Lammers and launched in 2012.[115] This web platform, now offline, allowed viewers to become architects and curators of their own experience by exploring, ordering, and editing historical film clips. By selecting up to four keywords, such as "chase," "special effects," "fire," and "mischief," users obtained a randomly generated thematic remix of clips from titles including Theo Frenkel Sr.'s 1916 crime film *Genius against Violence* (*Genie tegen geweld*), Alfred Machin's 1913 drama *Loyalty* (*Het meisje uit de bloemenvelden*), or the 1934 comedy *Het meisje met de blauwe hoed* (The girl in the blue hat).[116] The clips flowed side by side, from right to left, to form a virtual film strip made of digital samples. Hyperlinks redirected visitors to the database Film in the Netherlands (Film in Nederland), offline now, providing a comprehensive set of facts related to each movie, including synopses, film stills, the entire cast, crew, and technical data.

Another example of crowd curatorship is the *Panorama* exhibition, an immersive 360-degree projection of rows of film strips from Eye's collections. Located in the basement of the new building, this exhibition dispositif puts visitors in charge of physically navigating the space and exploring archival samples at their own pace and on consoles placed around the room. The goal of the *Panorama* installation, Fossati explains, is "to give the visitor a sense of the

variety and diversity of films in the collection's vaults by creating a 360-degrees space for projection where you feel immersed."[117] However, if the *Panorama* arguably exhibits samples from the early and silent period as part of a specific institutional collection (rather than of an abstract film history), it nevertheless features only bite-sized excerpts that hardly account for the archive's historical complexity. The museum resolved this tension by installing small booths called Pods next to the *Panorama* exhibition, where visitors can sit down and watch selected films from beginning to end.[118] Through these dispositifs, Eye appeals to users' desires to interact freely with large bodies of digitized data and toy with the affordances of new digital tools, reaching out to audiences of non-specialists.

Scene Machine offered a brief and condensed viewing experience with archival moving images. Based on users' choice of keywords evoking different kinds of filmic attractions (such as "fire" and "mischief"), the application algorithmically generated a short remix of archival film clips which rapidly paraded on the screen before disappearing. Before one managed to read the samples' titles, they would swish away, throwing the viewer into a fast-paced encounter with images that appeared replaceable and incidental. As with the *Panorama* exhibition, the Scene Machine invited users to participate in a process of interaction where they could "choose which elements to display or which paths to follow, thus generating a new work." One wonders, however, whether a reductive conception of interactivity inspired these exhibition dispositifs, conversely encouraging, in Lev Manovich's words, a merely "physical interaction between a user and a media object (pressing a button, choosing a link, moving the body)."[119] As such, the Scene Machine inhibited users' intellectual and psychological investment into media texts and their historicity, embracing instead what media theorist Eduardo Navas calls "an assimilated form of interactivity."[120]

Unlike the Scene Machine, Eye's experiments with user-generated remix— namely the Celluloid Remix contests—conceived in analogy with the practice of found-footage filmmaking, encouraged a more substantial kind of engagement with the museum's collections. In a bid to reach and include the widest possible audience, the museum situated digital remix at the core of what it has recently defined as its "open" presentation strategies (in contrast to its "curated" ones), granting users the freedom "to decide what to see and how they want to (re)use the material."[121] In 2009, the museum launched Celluloid Remix, a competition inviting users to creatively remix digitized fragments from the archive, a project Eye expanded with the second edition, Celluloid Remix 2: Found Footage, inspired by the theme of found-footage. The museum supplied around forty-five Bits & Pieces samples online, asking participants to create remixes of up to three minutes using their own software or Eye's online

editing tool. Unlike the *Panorama* exhibition and the Scene Machine, Celluloid Remix entrusted users with the creative task of sampling, recombining, juxtaposing, editing, and compositing an original work of remix. A jury of curators, filmmakers, and journalists, including Delpeut, Rongen Kaynakçi, and artist Aernout Mik assessed each competition entry and awarded the first, second, and third prize.[122]

The first prize winner, Dániel Szöllosi's untitled short, is a meditation on the voyeuristic regime of the moving image and the technology of early cinema and digital media. In this single shot film, three iPhones appear one next to the other facing the camera. After a hand unlocks the devices, mirroring archival images of an early filmmaker appear on the screen in the middle. The arrangement of the three phones gives the impression that the split cameraman in the middle is filming another man smiling at the camera on the left screen and a woman laughing hysterically on the right iPhone (see figure 2). Then, what looks like an electromagnetic interference causes the smartphone tryptic to crash and the archival footage previously displayed on the screens to deteriorate. This process is set to a soundtrack of whizzes, buzzes, and the overlapping noise of a jammed projector. When the phones resume, the initial archival footage reappears, with the early filmmaker sticking his head out of his camera. A hand then switches the middle screen to video mode, showing us a mirror image of Szöllosi behind his camera tripod filming himself peering at us.[123] While the central display reveals Szöllosi's act of filming the screen performance, credits appear on the two side screens.

Szöllosi's remix invites us to examine the act of filming in cinema's early days on three iPhone screens, which taken together function like a time-traveling viewing device. When activated, the sleek smartphones reveal sepia-toned and black-and-white footage from the Bits & Pieces fragments no. 83 and 364, framed within QuickTime's streamlined graphic interface. In the original footage, we see an experienced camera operator (the same reappearing in Szöllosi's remix) maneuvering a hand-cranked camera and filming people in their Sunday best, stirring self-conscious demeanors, timid smiles, and uncontrollable laughter. As it features in Szöllosi's remix, the contrast between those early images of clunky and bulky apparatuses and these hand-sized, quiet, and smoothly operating digital filming devices could not be starker. Szöllosi emphasizes this difference and the temporal distance between early cinema and digital technologies by superimposing a soundtrack of clattering projectors on the repurposed footage, as if to signify an obsolete mechanical soundscape from far away times.

Untitled oscillates between two conflicting attitudes that, in her analysis of the aesthetics of video art, Krauss identifies as "reflexiveness" and "auto-reflection." According to Krauss, "reflexiveness" is a modernist "*dédoublement*
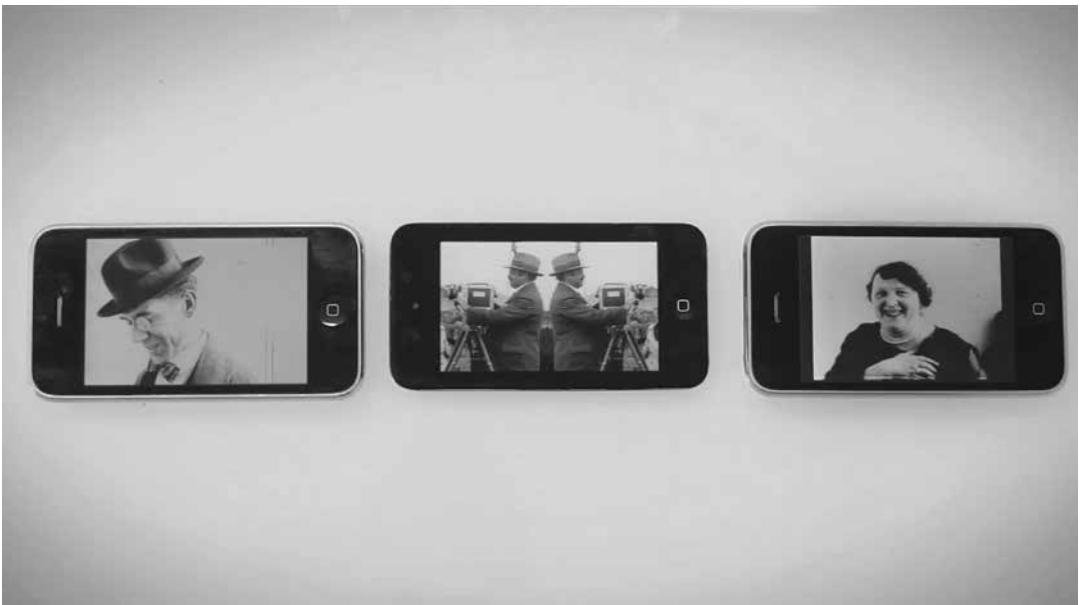
FIGURE 2.
Bits & Pieces fragments no. 83 (side screens)
and no. 364 (middle screen), remixed in Dániel
Szöllosi's *Untitled.*

or doubling back" that foregrounds the work of art against the backdrop of a particular medium.[124] By doing so, a maker reflexively establishes a relationship between their medium of choice and the work they created, that is, in her words, between specific "forms of art and their contents, between the procedures of thought and their objects."[125] Shifting from a reflexive to a reflective attitude, "auto-reflection," on the other hand, is, according to her, a narcissistic expression of "self-encapsulation" characteristic of much video art. As Krauss points out in the work of video artists such as Vito Acconci, Richard Serra, and Lynda Banglis, the monitor here literally turns into a mirror reflecting the videomaker's actions as they happen.[126] Similarly, Szöllosi's short enacts a narcissistic, self-reflective exercise in digital remix while also reflexively interrogating the medium's history.

Untitled doubles the voyeuristic act of filming depicted in the early film fragments by reshooting this archival footage while it plays on the iPhone screens. He reflexively places his act of filming within a more extended genealogy of moving-image technologies, scopic pleasures, and media of visual inscription. However, when an interference disrupts Szöllosi's digital screen tryptic and the time-traveling broadcast short-circuits, the middle screen discloses the filmmaker's own act of filming and illusionistic device. As the monitor becomes a mirror reflecting Szöllosi's image gazing at us, it unveils

the film's feedback loop mechanism, displaying the filmmaker recording his act of remixing early archival samples. *Untitled* reveals the centrality of auto-reflection in moving image media, from early cinema (as, in the early archival footage, the cinematographer is himself being filmed in the act of filming) to new media practices such as smartphone recording and photography, encapsulated in today's ubiquitous gesture of taking selfies.

In other Celluloid Remix entries, the remix of early Bits & Pieces samples with newly shot material and other found images leads to exercises in recombination where the logic of auto-reflection prevails. In *Dance Battle* (2009), for instance, Leonie Annevelink films the reaction of gallery visitors as they peer through the door of a smoke-filled white cube installation whose centerpiece is her early film remix. Shot in the style of early stage performances like *Annabelle Serpentine Dance* (1894) and *Carmencita* (1894), the footage Annevelink repurposes pictures a female dancer in folk attire twirling her skirt, pirouetting, and swinging her hips.[127] These images of a hula-inspired dance number remain somewhat mysterious as the filmmaker does not identify their source, nor do they appear in the Bits & Pieces samples available on the Celluloid Remix platform. Annevelink superimposes a grainy black-and-white video of a dancing woman (possibly herself?) over the archival footage, using La-Rita Gaskin and Wish's song *Nice and Soft* as the soundtrack to her remix (see figure 3). A caption accompanies Annevelink's remix on the Celluloid Remix website: "is it the ultimate dance battle, or not?" *Dance Battle* resolves in a superficial comparison of old and new filmic depictions of dancing, premised on an uncritical othering of these century-old ethnographic images. As David J. Gunkel notes about many mash-up works, here "the creative process became more important than the product."[128] While the remix's caption possibly evokes a sense of futurity by hinting at ever-new filmed dance performances to come, *Dance Battle* fails to engage with the historical significance of the footage it recombines. It results in a self-serving, exhibitionist performance and exercise in digital remix virtuosity.

In another remix titled *Wiebelkont* (Wobbling bottom, 2009), Caitlin Sas recycles early monochrome Bits & Pieces footage (fragment 351) of a young woman in a revealing bodysuit exercising in tabletop position on a beach. As the woman sensuously swings her hips forwards and back, this footage briskly alternates with modern color images of a naked man lying on his front, set to a pressing drum and bass score. The remix ironically interrogates the sexist representational logic in the archival footage by comparing old and new erotic imageries. By zooming in on the woman's and the man's buttocks, through reverse effects, and a rhythmic montage switching back and forth between the historical footage and the digital images, this forty-three-second-long remix pairs an *old* female object of the gaze with a *new* male sexual object. The remix

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FIGURE 3.
Leonie Annevelink's *Dance Battle.*

appropriates, repurposes, and literally reverses the sexist iconography that Sas detected in the early footage, concluding with a looped montage of female and male erotic attractions and ostensibly setting right the wrongs of the past.

Each of the remixes discussed above attempt historical comparisons where the old and the new feature next to each other, outlining similarities and parallels between the archived past and the digital present, as well as stark contrasts, competitions, and reversals. However, the terms of these films' discourses appear uncertain as the historical and cultural referents of the archival images they repurpose remain elusive. Adding to the Bits & Pieces fragments' lack of textual and archival context, these remixes rework bite-sized fragments of fragments, often only a few seconds long. As reused here, these archival images mostly function as placeholders for a nondescript past, deployed merely because of their iconic and metonymic value. In the Celluloid Remixes, early film samples acquire what, referencing Siegfried Kracauer's concept of the "mass ornament," film scholar Jaimie Baron defines as an "ornamental" function. These archival samples' ontology appears now situated within a "tension between the seemingly infinite variety of objects in the digital archive and the redundancy and superficiality of these same objects."[129] Their historical specificity gives way to a signification resting exclusively upon their ornamental value in the juxtaposition of "sameness and differences in order to reveal patterns and deviations" in human behavior.[130] The early dance

film we see projected in the cubical installation in *Dance Battle*, for instance, stands for *any* old folkloric dance, regardless of its cultural specificity, setting, time, and the conditions of its performance and shooting. This early filmic record of a hula dancer serves only as an ornamental backdrop on which Annevelink superimposes her own dance moves.

These user-generated remixes foreground a different logic from the aesthetics of citation of recognizable cultural references, which according to Lessig, animates remix culture. Instead, they mobilize a generic "archive effect," which in Baron's terms relies on the user's perception of the archival document as "coming from another time or from another context of use or intended use."[131] By circulating within new media ecologies, the historical bonds between archival documents and their referents loosen as these records enter a new regime of anonymity and interchangeability.[132] Downloadable as .mp4, .ogv, or .mov files of variable sizes, ready to be reassembled and shared, the archival samples on the Celluloid Remix platform acquire the characteristics associated with new media variability. As Manovich explains, due to their encoding and modular structure, new media objects are "not something fixed once and for all, but something that can exist in different, potentially infinite versions."[133] Within the digital archive, these early film excerpts turn into just another unit of digital data ready to be customized.

These crowd-curated remixes' ultimate referent is their makers' act of remixing, a narcissistic exercise that "represents to the user her actions and their results."[134] Paraphrasing Krauss' analysis of video art, these remixes "withdraw attention from an external object—an Other—and invest it in the Self," failing to engage dialectically with the irreducible otherness of the past and the historical meaning of the records they manipulate.[135] Inspired by philosopher G. W. F. Hegel's definition of historical understanding as dialectical experience (*Erfahrung*), Gadamer sees the ability to recognize the specificity of a historical event, text, or artifact as pivotal to the process of historical interpretation. According to Hegel, historical interpretation enacts a dialectical movement outwards, leading the interpreter to encounter the Other, acknowledge differences and mistakes intrinsic to the process of understanding, and move beyond the reader's own situatedness. Recognizing the alterity of the past also entails a movement inwards as the historian finds in the past Other something familiar and relatable that alters the interpreter's own consciousness.[136] Against the backdrop of this Hegelian dialectics of recognition, remixes such as *Dance Battle* fail to interrogate the historical specificity and the politics of the gaze at work in the ethnographic footage they appropriate. Annevelink's labor of recognition halts early on in her comparative remix as her attention shifts to exhibiting her own dance and remix performance. An analogous self-reflective preoccupation characterizes Eye's recently discon-

tinued AI-powered remix initiative, Jan Bot, described as "the first filmmaking bot hired by EYE Filmmuseum to make short videos from a 100-year-old film archive, taking inspiration from today's trending topics."[137]

ALGORITHMIC CURATORSHIP

Building on its experiments with crowd-curated remix and AI developments in the fields of image recognition and natural language processing, in 2017, the museum launched its first "algorithmic curator."[138] In the past six years, Jan Bot generated daily remix loops based on the day's trending topics in the Netherlands, Great Britain, the United States, Belgium, France, Germany, and Denmark, repurposing material from the Bits & Pieces collection. On January 21, 2022, for instance, Jan Bot produced a remix titled *2022-01-21.008-wwe_2k22.mp4*, inspired by news of the then imminent launch of the Wrestling Videogame *WWE 2K22*.[139] As we begin watching it, a puzzling title card in block letters reading "it bragging an adventure [*sic*]" appears on the screen. Flashing black-and-white images of a backward-facing naked woman walking sideways on a stage follow, alternating with the briefest excerpts of a different woman walking out of a department store. "Yet plenty has some plenty! [*sic*]" announc-

FIGURE 4.
Bits & Pieces fragment no. 83, remixed in Jan Bot's *2022-01-21.008-wwe_2k22.mp4*. Courtesy of Bram Loogman and Pablo Núñez Palma.
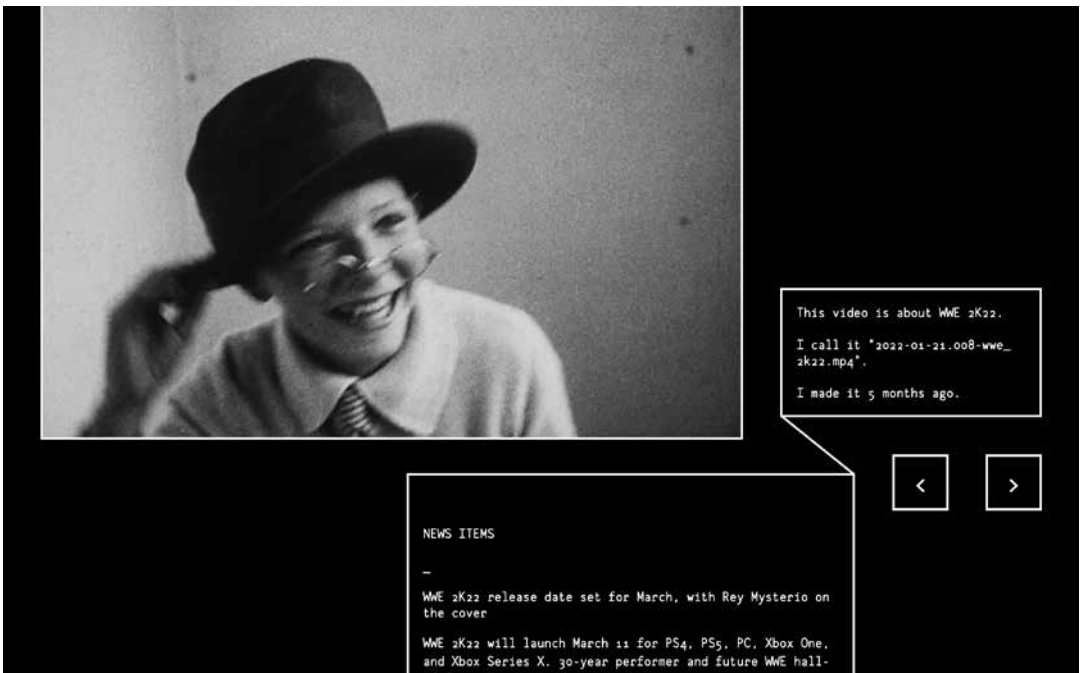
es another title card. Then the remix intersperses a yellow-toned close-up of Asta Nielsen sensuously sipping liquor with other close-ups, including footage of two young boys making faces in front of the camera (see figure 4). After another cryptic title card reading "Rey Mysterio bragging some movie [*sic*]," a hyper-accelerated loop of Nielsen inclining her head concludes the remix, ready to start again.

As with *2022-01-21.008-wwe_2k22.mp4*, it is hard to make sense of what is going on while watching most of Jan Bot's remixes, unless one knows the bot's inner workings. As one of its creators, Pablo Núñez Palma, elucidates, Jan Bot's algorithms perform three distinct sets of operations. The first one consists in generating metadata for the Bits & Pieces fragments using image recognition software to annotate the 7,000 shots identified in the digitized collection. The tags associated with the early film samples repurposed in *2022-01-21.008-wwe_2k22.mp4*, for instance, include "mask," "movie," "dancing," and "adventure." Secondly, taking inspiration from the most frequent Google search queries on Google Trends, Jan Bot links news text to the archival clips' tags through natural language processing software, selecting the best matching shots. Lastly, through an editing algorithm still being developed at the time of its online release, the bot edits the archival samples in rhythmic montages and bewilderingly fast loops.[140]

Jan Bot's website includes a list of the tags that guided the production of each remix, allowing one to speculate about, if not deconstruct, the algorithm's associative logic. In a recent remix inspired by the news of pop band Duran Duran's performance at Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee, for instance, the word "drummer" features as the highest-scoring tag. The bot's selection and sampling of archival material for this remix relies on the questionable semantic correlation between the word "drummer" (extracted from news articles citing an interview with Duran Duran's drummer, Roger Taylor) and the early footage of a large metallic drum, which appears in the remixed clip.[141] As archival scholar Christian Gosvig Olesen notes, the semantic word-image relations on which Jan Bot builds its remixes and "the indexical relations they suggest are in a traditional sense broken if not nonsensical."[142] The limited vocabulary on which the Eye bot's image recognition software rests does not transfer well from today's infosphere to early cinema's visual culture, highlighting the ingrained need for historical context in natural language applications. As Olesen argues, in the future, these misidentifications may inspire experimental approaches to data-driven film analysis beyond current evidentiary epistemologies governing metadata creation and mainstream use of archival footage. At present, however, they mark the liquidation of any dimension of critical engagement with the archival material in use within this algorithmic exercise.

As with some of the Celluloid Remixes, Jan Bot's logic is more self-reflective than reflexive. The bot's remixes reflect the algorithm's complex architecture rather than meditating on the ubiquitous circulation of archival footage within online news feeds, news programs, and our information consumption patterns. In short, its looped archival montages mirror Jan Bot's own workings, linking Google Trend's and Bits & Pieces' datasets according to a shared semantics, instead of investigating the media structures that make them possible. Proof of the bot's self-referentiality is the elusive meaning of its AI-generated remixes, which become intelligible only upon grasping the specifics of its algorithmic machinations. (Of course, the same may be true of much algorithmic art).[143]

As film scholar Katherine Groo observes, archival remix "raises crucial questions for film historians," asking, what do remix's "revisions do to and for the archival object?"[144] In keeping with her concerns, one wonders what functions and meanings archival films acquire within Eye's crowd-curated remixes intended as exercises in historical interpretation. Performing a hermeneutic circle, according to Gadamer, historical interpretation enacts a double (re)contextualization of the object under examination (the *part*). On the one hand, the interpreter reads it against a historical *whole* situated in the past. On the other, they place the historical object within a new *whole*, a novel interpretative context of circulation in the present.[145] Similarly, one may read Eye's digital remixes as a hermeneutic exercise ripping historical *parts*—the archival samples they recycle—and recombining them within new compositions and discursive configurations. One can trace a genealogy of such hermeneutic exercises in recombination by tracking the reuse of Bits & Pieces fragments such as the no. 83 in the work of found-footage filmmaker Gustav Deutsch, Szöllosi, and Jan Bot over the past twenty years. As we have seen in earlier discussions of *Untitled*, fragment no. 83 features a series of sepia-toned portraits of anonymous people in medium close-up: a smart-looking man lighting up a cigarette in a display of composure; a woman giggling uncontrollably; a young woman smiling coyly; and several boys putting up all sorts of improvised performances, including impressions, box fighting simulations, and military salutes. In the humble setting of an unadorned photo booth, each captured participant displays heartwarming delight and joy at the simple fact of being filmed.

Within Deutsch's found-footage work *Film Ist. (1–12)*, fragment 83 appears in the last section titled "Memory and Document" amidst other images of personal, collective, and historical memories.[146] He edits together footage of various subjects—including recognizable figures such as Pope Leo XIII (1878–1903) and unspecified parties of friends—all acknowledging the camera with nods, salutes, benediction signs, and cheers, which over a century later seem

to be directed at the viewer. Using the editing technique of shot-reverse shot, Deutsch playfully alternates each portrait in fragment 83 with excerpts from Bits & Pieces no. 364 (the same used in *Untitled*), showing an early cameraman hiding and peeking out of his camera apparatus. With their direct address to the camera, these archival films instigate a mnemonic process that uncannily brings the past back to life before us. As we have seen, Szöllosi similarly edits fragments 83 and 364 together, alluding to the voyeuristic act of filming, which he references and magnifies by recording his own act of filming these images. Lastly, we encounter brief looped excerpts of the same early film fragment (showing kids making poses and imitations for the camera) in the remix that Jan Bot created based on news of the launch of *WWE 2K22*. The sample's fugacious appearance in the bot's remix leaves us perplexed due to its lack of logical coordination with the preceding fictional footage of Nielsen and the title cards referencing WWE wrestler Rey Mysterio following it.

The same archival fragment appears in Deutsch's and Szöllosi's works as *parts* of discourses about film as a mnemonic device and cinema's voyeuristic drive. In Jan Bot's remix, instead, the semantic, historical, and hermeneutic links that tie together the archival film samples have loosened beyond comprehension. According to Núñez Palma, Jan Bot shares with new media forms such as Instagram Stories and photo albums a "vertical storytelling" rationale, collating "an endless non sequitur of media fragments that altogether don't seem to make much sense." In his words, vertical timelines and storytelling feature "no character development, not even a theme that gets properly explored." Unlike newspapers, which we could also understand as a form of vertical narrative in Núñez Palma's analysis, algorithm-powered vertical storytelling can lack editorial intervention and meaningful continuity. Yet, by sourcing its "content from an even wider arrange [*sic*] of sources and adapt(ing) it to the likes and dislikes of individual users," he argues, vertical storytelling captivates our imagination as a radically new form of narrativization.[147]

In his reading of *Film Ist. (1–12)*, Gunning evokes a vertical aesthetic somewhat analogous to Núñez Palma's vertical storytelling. According to Gunning, each of the film's twelve chapters—including the chapter 6 "Mirror," 8 "Magic," and 9 "Conquest"—works as a "guiding thread" addressing the question "What is Cinema?" The archival fragments appearing under each thread succeed as if "listed vertically, each one offering a new example or synonym" of the titular themes. "This discontinuous list," he explains, "rubs against the linear way we usually watch film, searching for a succession of unfolding events, each one connecting with the next."[148] In describing *Film Ist. (1–12)*'s aesthetic, Gunning refers to Christian Metz's semiotic concepts of paradigm and syntagm, whereby paradigms represent categorical groupings of elements sharing the same characteristics (or syntactic functions in the case of linguistics) and syntagms are lin-

guistic units organizing those elements in a linear, sequential order. Metz sees the gathering of paradigmatic elements of the same kind as preparatory to the syntagmatic moment, as in Sergei Eisenstein's filming of individual shots that he later arranged in montage sequences.[149] According to Gunning, however, *Film Ist. (1–12)* subverts this logic, by presenting a succession of chapters that in his view function like paradigmatic "lexicon entries." Here, "we are watching paradigms, not constructing syntagms," he concludes.[150]

Similarly, according to Manovich, new media practices build on vast databases that reverse the hierarchy of paradigm and syntagm. By theorizing an opposition between traditional narrative and the database, conceived as new media's most distinctive cultural form, he programmatically announces: now "the database (the paradigm) is given material existence, while narrative (the syntagm) is dematerialised. Paradigm is privileged, syntagm is downplayed. Paradigm is real; syntagm virtual."[151] Jan Bot's rationale, revolving around keywords and metadata such as "dancing," "adventure," and "dinner jacket," confirms the centrality of this paradigmatic organizing logic governing much of new media practices and expressions. In projects like Jan Bot, the database transforms the ways we interrogate the archive and, in Manovich's terms, "becomes a new metaphor which we use to conceptualize individual and collective cultural memory, a collection of documents or objects, and other phenomena and experiences."[152]

Computer software, web design, the shared taxonomies of linked data, and AI applications revolve around the evermore efficient management of databases, actualizing the underlying logic of the paradigm organizing knowledge and information. Such rationale, however, keeps coexisting with syntagmatic structures, not just in the form of the linear Boolean logic at the base of computer programming, but also through the narratives we employ in our online interactions. Here, as elsewhere in new media's vernacular practices, the taxonomic ordering of data, epitomized by the metaphor of the paradigm, coalesces with discursive interpretative strategies. As Katherine Hayles argues, "no longer singular, narratives remain the necessary others to database's ontology, the perspectives that invest the formal logic of database operations with human meanings."[153] Narratives help us navigate the different temporalities in our virtual and physical lives through causal and deductive reasoning, operating as an essential "technology for human beings."[154] As Metz explains, with words that resonate with Gadamer's, Paul Ricoeur's, and Hayden White's, narrative mediates between "the time of the thing told and the time of the telling," acting as the medium through which we understand the past.[155] Like narratives, arranging a past "time scheme" within a present temporality, (meta)historical discourses act as what, adapting Hayles' expression, we may call a "hermeneutic technology."[156]

Film Ist. (1–12) and *Untitled* reject traditional film narrative in favor of a thematically organized chapter structure (the former) and a loosely chronological set of iPhone operations (the latter). Even so, both films repurpose archival fragments within a metahistorical discourse about film. Such a metahistorical work, in Hollis Frampton's words, is "occupied with inventing a tradition, that is, a coherent, wieldy set of discrete monuments, meant to inseminate resonant consistency into the growing body" of the filmmaker's art.[157] Similarly, as a metahistorical discourse, found-footage and remix works such as *Film Ist. (1–12)* and *Untitled* situate the Bits & Pieces fragments (intended here as hermeneutic *parts*) within a new temporal scheme and sphere of intelligibility—an interpretative *whole* that Gadamer, like Frampton, understood in terms of historical tradition.[158] By doing so, Deutsch's and Szöllosi's films advance a historical mediation between early cinema and new media temporalities.

By contrast, from a hermeneutic and curatorial perspective, Jan Bot fails to fulfill its promise to bring film heritage into the algorithmic age. By employing semantics that escape discursive reasoning and coherence, its remixes stop short of performing the task of historical mediation at the core of historiographic and curatorial work. Eye initially conceived of its experiments in crowd curatorship and digital remix as a gateway to a more participatory form of digital historiography and curatorship. However, these initiatives have hardly subverted institutional hierarchies through the democratization of curatorial decisions to do with which films to restore, digitize, and screen. As Baron notes, the main challenge here remains finding ways to open archival footage "to a variety of possible meaning and orders, while also stirring the user's desire in such a way that she will keep wanting to engage and learn from the text."[159] For all of Jan Bot's shortcomings, by toying with the paradigmatic logic of new media, its remixes help us test the limits of digital remix as a hermeneutic process, historiographic method, and curatorial practice. Arguably, Jan Bot's greatest merit is to have complemented the taxonomic logic animating its remixes with critical discourses about film historiography, algorithmic art, the digital humanities, and curatorship (some of which are quoted in this chapter), archived in the bot's blog "The Meta.Log."[160] It is perhaps in this kind of generative interplay of paradigm and syntagm, database and critical discourse, that lays the future of digital archival remix.

The museum's century-long history has taken us from the Filmliga film society to the NFM to Eye, from the art film canon to revisionist curatorship and historiography, from the Stedelijk Museum of modern arts to the Pavilion in the Vondelpark to the Eye building in Amsterdam North. As we have seen, Eye's origins were steeped in modernist aesthetics as the Filmliga canonized the filmic avant-garde, an approach that influenced the formation of the NFM's collections and preservation priorities in the following decades. How-

ever, from the late 1970s, a revisionist impulse made its way within the museum, first giving progressively greater visibility to the Desmet collection, and then introducing curatorial innovations such as the found-footage-inspired project of Bits & Pieces in the 1980s and 1990s. In the last fifteen years, experiments with digital crowd curatorship and remix, culminating in Jan Bot, have sought to establish participatory curatorial strategies and non-linear and anti-teleological discursive practices in curatorship and historiography.

The narrative I have advanced in this chapter (one of the many possible narrativizations of this curatorial history) has not taken the shape of a teleology of exponentially greater innovation and digital participation. Not only Eye's history was marked by debates that at times took the museum in opposing directions, think of the so called "Desmet affair," but its latest instances expose the very limits of crowdsourcing curatorial tasks, fragmentation, remix, and non-linear discourse. If there is one thread that may be said to have characterized this institutional history throughout, that is the recurrence of a sort of hermeneutic circularity that from the introduction of novel film exhibition practices (as with the international circulation of the NFM's color- and Desmet film restorations in the late 1980s) has led to revisionist film historiographies and then in turn to shifts again in archival and curatorial approaches. As such, the history and critical analyses that I advanced in this chapter represent just one recent occurrence in this self-reflexive, narrativizing, hermeneutic movement.

NOTES

1   "Putting Dutch Film Culture Firmly on the Map," European Commission, accessed January 26, 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/projects/netherlands/putting-dutch-film-culture-firmly-on-the-map. This chapter is based on fieldwork conducted at Eye between 2014 and 2018.

2   No party was held in 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

3   Giovanna Fossati (Professor of Film Heritage and Digital Film Culture at the University of Amsterdam and Chief Curator at the Eye Filmmuseum), interview by the author, January 20, 2014. Launched in October 2013, the Eye Walk is a virtual reality tour of the Eye building, designed for children to discover cinema history as they walk around the museum. Irene Haan (Head of Digital Presentations at the Eye Filmmuseum), interview by the author, January 23, 2014.

4   Hans Schoots, "Een Kleine Geschiedenis van EYE Filmmuseum," accessed December 10, 2021, http://www.hansschoots.nl/nieuws/nieuws20.html; and Peter Delpeut, "Questions of Colour," in *The Colour Fantastic: Chromatic Worlds of Silent Cinema*, ed. Giovanna Fossati, Victoria Jackson, Bregt G. Lameris, Sarah Street, and Joshua Yumibe (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 19–29.

5   Peter Delpeut, "Bits & Pieces. The Limits of the Film Archive," *Jan Bot* (blog), *Medium*, 11 September 2018, https://medium.com/janbot/the-limits-of-film-archive-76ae5d338eae. The article originally appeared in Dutch in Peter Delpeut, "Bits & pieces. De grenzen van het filmarchief," *Versus* 2 (1990): 74–84.

6   Mark-Paul Meyer (Senior Curator at the Eye Filmmuseum), e-mail exchange with the author, September 8, 2016.

7   Ibid.

8   Eric de Kuyper, "Anyone for an Aesthetic of Film History?," *Film History* 6.1 (1994), 102; and Ivo Blom, "The Impact of the Desmet Collection: Pordenone and Beyond," *Journal of Film Preservation* 87 (October 2012), 38–39.

9   de Kuyper, "Aesthetic of Film History?,"106.

10 Peter Delpeut (former Deputy Director at the Eye Filmmuseum), interview by the author, December 4, 2021; and Elif Rongen-Kaynakçi (Curator of Silent Film at the Eye Filmmuseum), e-mail exchange with the author, February 14, 2022.

11 Elif Rongen-Kaynakçi, e-mail exchange with the author, February 8, 2022.

12 Creators Bram Loogman and Pablo Núñez Palma discontinued Jan Bot on March 31, 2023. Of the thousands of remixes Jan Bot generated since 2017, they saved only 151, which they minted and auctioned as Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs). See "Long Live Jan Bot," Objkt.com, accessed June 8, 2023, https://objkt.com/collection/KT1JYrSZTEC67zHqwQ8k6ScS7wHarwUos2qZ. Loogman and Núñez Palma erased all other Jan Bot films from their server. Giovanna Fossati, e-mail exchange with the author, February 15, 2023; and Pablo Núñez Palma to the "A Jan Bot Update" mailing list, May 8, 2023. While limited room here prevents me from

discussing the makers' choices exhaustively, commercial and proprietary considerations seem to have overridden Eye's access and preservation priorities in this case.

13 See Giovanna Fossati, "Found Footage: Filmmaking, Film Archiving and New Participatory Platforms," in *Found Footage: Cinema Exposed*, ed. Jaap Guldemond, Marente Bloemheuvel, Giovanna Fossati (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 180.

14 For a comprehensive history of the NFM see Annemieke Hendriks, *Huis van Illusie. De Geschiedenis van het Paviljoen Vondelpark en het Filmmuseum* (Amsterdam: Bas Lubberhuizen, 1996); and Bregt Lameris, *Film Museum Practice and Film Historiography: The Case of the Nederlands Filmmuseum (1946–2000)* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017).

15 "De Uitkijk – The Little Cinema with a Big Name," Eye, accessed April 7, 2022, https://filmdatabase.eyefilm.nl/en/collection/film-history/article/de-uitkijk---the-little-cinema-with-a-big-name. See also Nico de Klerk and Ruud Visschedijk, eds. *Het gaat om de film! Een nieuwe geschiedenis van de Nederlandshe Filmliga 1927– 1933* (Amsterdam: Bas Lubberhuizen/Filmmuseum, 1999).

16 Lameris, *Film Museum Practice*, 18; and Miriam van Kempen, "The Diligent Dutchman: Jan de Vaal and FIAF (1946–1952)," *Journal of Film Preservation* 89 (November 2013), 66.

17 Hans Schoots, "The Filmliga Laboratory," *Cinegrafie* 12 (1999), 256.

18 Ibid., 262.

19 Menno Ter Braak, "Onze tweede matinée," *Filmliga* 1.3 (November 1927), 3. Cited and translated in Ansje van Beusekom, "'Avant-Guerre' and the International Avant-Garde: Circulation and Programming of Early Films in the European Avant-Garde Programs in the 1920s and 1930s," in *Networks of Entertainment: Early Film Distribution 1895–1915*, ed. Frank Kessler and Nanna Verhoeff (Eastleigh: John Libbey Publishing Ltd, 2007), 286–87.

20 When the NCF terminated its activities in 1933, its collection of around 1,100 reels of film, including many municipal films, was transferred to the Public Records Office (Algemeen Rijksarchief) and are now part of Eye's collections. "The Dutch Central Film Archive," Eye, accessed April 7, 2022, https://filmdatabase.eyefilm.nl/en/collection/film-history/article/the-dutch-central-film-archive; and van Kempen, 65.

21 van Kempen, "The Diligent Dutchman," 65; Hans Schoots, "Een Kleine Geschiedenis"; and Lameris, *Film Museum Practice*, 22.

22 Lameris, *Film Museum Practice*, 22.

23 Ibid., 49 and 154.

24 van Kempen, "The Diligent Dutchman," 68; and Lameris, *Film Museum Practice*, 131–35.

25 Lameris, *Film Museum Practice*, 23.

26　Filmmuseum Annual Report no. 11 and 12 (1951), 3. Cited and translated in Lameris, *Film Museum Practice*, 138.

27　During the 1952 FIAF Conference, held in Amsterdam, members discussed the creation of an archival distribution collection (an international "film pool") of 16mm film prints of canonical titles, which de Vaal offered to help coordinate. In 1960, he revamped the project by launching FIAF's Members Film Service, a distribution library housed in the NFM's vaults in Castricum. Despite de Vaal's efforts, the film pool was operative for only around ten years and gathered no more than a few titles. See van Kempen, "The Diligent Dutchman," 68–69; and "Jan de Vaal Fund," FIAF, accessed April 7, 2022, https://www.fiafnet.org/pages/Community/Supporters-Jan-de-Vaal-Fund.html; and Lameris, *Film Museum Practice*, 48.

28　"Conserveringsplan 1989–1992" (Conservation Plan 1989–1922), Nederlands Filmmuseum: Jaarverslag 1989 (Nederlands Filmmuseum: Annual Report, 1989), 39, Filmgerelateerde Collecties (Film-related Collections).

29　Ivo Blom, *Jean Desmet and the Early Dutch Film Trade* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2003), 12.

30　Ibid., 37–76.

31　Ibid., 22.

32　For lesser-known films that, like *Rosalie et son phonographe*, did not have an English distribution title, I have included a non-italicized English translation in parentheses. Ivo Blom, "The Impact of the Desmet Collection," 38–39.

33　Ibid., 37.

34　"Conserveringsplan 1989–1992," 38.

35　Marenthe Bloemheuvel, Jaap Guldemond, and Mark-Paul Meyer, eds., *Jean Desmet's Dream Factory: The Adventurous Years of Film (1907–1916)* (Amsterdam: Eye Filmmuseum, 2014), 20; and Lameris, *Film Museum Practice*, 24.

36　Blom, "Impact of the Desmet Collection," 38.

37　According to Blom, such exhibitions showed that "a silent film did not have to be a greying black-and-white copy, riddled with tramlines, 'rain', and scratches, and printed on sound film stock. It could be a composition of luminous and stable images: an artefact alive with colour, whether tinted, dye-toned, or hand- or stencil-coloured." Blom, "Impact of the Desmet Collection," 40.

38　See Giovanna Fossati, Victoria Jackson, Bregt G. Lameris, Sarah Street, and Joshua Yumibe, eds., *The Colour Fantastic: Chromatic Worlds of Silent Cinema* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018); and Blom, "Impact of the Desmet Collection," 20.

39　"Conserveringsplan 1989–1992," 38–39, my translation.

40　Blom, "Impact of the Desmet Collection," 36.

41　Blom, *Jean Desmet*, 34 and 89.

42　Blom, "Impact of the Desmet Collection," 40.

43　Bloemheuvel et al., *Dream Factory*, 20.

44   Innovative programming strategies continued in November 1994 with the annual museum's Theme Days (Themadagen) where curators recreated six Desmet film programs with the aid of program notes from the collection. Blom, "Impact of the Desmet Collection," 46.

45   See Nederlands Filmmuseum, *Nonfiction from the Teens: The 1994 Amsterdam Workshop* (Amsterdam: Stichting Nederlands Filmmuseum, 1994); Nederlands Filmmuseum, *"Disorderly Order": Colours in Silent Film. The 1995 Amsterdam Workshop* (Amsterdam: Stichting Nederlands Filmmuseum, 1996); and Nederlands Filmmuseum, *Uncharted Territory: Essays on Early Nonfiction Film* (Amsterdam: Stichting Nederlands Filmmuseum, 1997). In 2015, twenty years after the "Disorderly Order" workshop, Eye organized an international symposium on color in the 1920s titled "Colour Fantastic: Chromatic Worlds of Silent Cinema." See Giovanna Fossati, Tom Gunning, Joshua Yumibe, Jonathon Rosen, eds., *Fantasia of Color in Early Cinema* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015).

46   Bloemheuvel et al., *Dream Factory*, 20.

47   "Desmet Collection," UNESCO, accessed April 7, 2022, https://en.unesco.org/memoryoftheworld/registry/401.

48   Bloemheuvel et al., *Dream Factory*, 33.

49   See André Gaudreault and Tom Gunning, "Early Cinema as a Challenge to Film History," in *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 365–80.

50   Blom, "Impact of the Desmet Collection," 41–42.

51   Blom, *Jean Desmet*, 21, emphasis added.

52   "Memory of the World Register: Desmet Collection" (nomination form), UNESCO, 1, accessed January 14, 2022, https://zh.unesco.org/sites/default/files/netherlands_desmet.pdf.

53   Blom, "Impact of the Desmet Collection," 48.

54   Blom, "Impact of the Desmet Collection," 37; and de Kuyper, "Aesthetic of Film History?," 100–105.

55   de Kuyper, "Aesthetic of Film History?," 101.

56   Christian Gosvig Olesen, "Found Footage Photogénie: An Interview with Elif Rongen-Kaynakçi and Mark-Paul Mayer, November 8, 2013, http://www.necsus-ejms.org/found-footage-photogenie-an-interview-with-elif-rongen-kaynakci-and-mark-paul-meyer/#_edn1.

57   "Bits & Pieces, Nrs. 1 t/m 11," Eye YouTube Channel, November 6, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQ4_gygMI0A.

58   de Kuyper, "Aesthetic of Film History?," 104.

59   Delpeut, "The Limits of the Film Archive."

60   de Kuyper, "Aesthetic of Film History?," 104.

61   Peter Delpeut, *Cinema Perdu. De Eerste Dertig Jaar Van De Film 1895–1925* (Epe: Bas Lubberhuizen, 1997), 82. Quoted and translated in English in Nanna Verhoeff,

The West in Early Cinema: After the Beginning (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 25.

62 André Habib, "Ruin, Archive and the Time of Cinema: Peter Delpeut's Lyrical Nitrate," *Substance* 110 35.2, (2006), 135.

63 de Kuyper, "Aesthetic of Film History?," 106.

64 Habib, "Ruin, Archive," 136 and 131. See also Paolo Cherchi Usai, *Silent Cinema: An Introduction* (London: BFI, 2000), 64.

65 Delpeut, "The Limits of the Archive," emphasis added. After the publication of fragment no. 5, *Bits & Pieces Nrs. 1 t/m 11* on Eye's YouTube channel, users helped identify the actress as Fern Andra. Elif Rongen-Kaynakçi, e-mail exchange with the author, November 10, 2023.

66 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 25–27.

67 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 43, emphasis in the original.

68 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 26–27. Cited in Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 216. Here Doane defines cinephilia in the context of the archive as "love attached to the detail, the moment, the trace, the gesture."

69 Verhoeff, *West in Early Cinema*, 29, emphasis added.

70 Delpeut, "The Limits of the Archive," emphasis added.

71 Verhoeff, *West in Early Cinema*, 27, emphasis added.

72 Ibid., 33.

73 de Kuyper, "Aesthetic of Film History?," 106.

74 Fossati, "Found Footage," 178.

75 "Bits & Pieces, Nrs. 610 t/m 623," Eye YouTube Channel, November 6, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9n5eyNqbAwA.

76 Catherine Russell, *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 251.

77 Ibid., 252.

78 Ibid.; and Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 307–9.

79 Delpeut, "The Limits of the Archive."

80 Meyer, exchange with the author, December 4, 2017.

81 "Print: KOP59562 DK 540-0: Bits & Pieces 12 t/m 20," loan history, courtesy of Meyer.

82 Delpeut, interview.

83 *Mode in beweging* (1992), Eye Player, accessed April 7, 2022, https://player.eyefilm.nl/nl/films/mode-in-beweging.

84 Olesen, "Found Footage Photogénie."

85 Delpeut, interview.

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87 Giovanna Fossati, *From Grain to Pixel: The Archival Life of Film in Transition* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 277n172; and "Meet the Archive #2," Eye YouTube Channel.

88 Fossati, *From Grain to Pixel*, 203.

89 Ibid., 82 and 203.

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129 Jaimie Baron, *The Archive Effect: Found Footage and the Audiovisual Experience of History* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 152 and 153.

130 Ibid., 154.

131 Ibid., 9.

132 See Jos de Mul, "The Work of Art in the Age of Digital Recombination," in *Digital Material: Tracing New Media in Everyday Life and Technology*, ed. Marianne van den Boomen, Sybille Lammes, Ann-Sophie Lehmann, Joost Raessens and Mirko Tobias Schäfer (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 95.

133 Manovich, *Language of New Media*, 36.

134 Manovich, *Language of New Media*, 235n29. Remix's narcissistic exercise also recalls Marshall McLuhan's "subliminal state of the Narcissus trance" in which the medium is the message. Marshall McLuhan, "Understanding Media," in *Essential McLuhan*, ed. Eric McLuhan and Frank Zingrone (London: Routledge, 1997), 154.

135 Krauss, "Video," 57.

136 G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Arnold Vincent Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979). The dialectics of archival interpretation I describe here is very similar to the ethics of archival appropriation Jamie Baron discusses via Emmanuel Levinas and Sarah Cooper. As Baron explains, an ethics of archival appropriation should invite the viewer "to see those onscreen neither as entirely others—thereby reducing them to their image, to objects rather than subjects akin

to ourselves—nor as mimetic reflections of ourselves—thereby disregarding the specificity of their experiences and identities." Jaimie Baron, *Reuse, Misuse, Abuse: The Ethics of Audiovisual Appropriation in the Digital Era* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2021), 13.

137 Link unavailable since Loogman and Núñez Palma have taken the platform off-line.

138 Eye Filmmuseum, *Collection Policy (2017–2021)*, 33.

139 I had to purchase the NFT of the remix I analyze here to avoid it from sharing the fate of thousands other remixes that Jan Bot created in the past six years, which have been permanently deleted from the server. It is now available on Objkt.com under its new title *Rey Mysterio #1003*. "Rey Mysterio #1003," Objkt, accessed, April 3, 2023, https://objkt.com/asset/ KT1JYrSZTEC67zHqwQ8k6ScS7wHarwUos2qZ/127.

140 Pablo Núñez Palma, "Jan Bot's Step by Step. The Filmmaking Algorithm Explained," *Jan Bot* (blog), *Medium*, November 28, 2018, https://medium.com/janbot/jan-bots-step-by-step-822b831d0402.

141 Link unavailable since Loogman and Núñez Palma have taken the platform off-line.

142 Christian Gosvig Olesen, "Jan Bot: a Surrationalist Historiographer," *Jan Bot* (blog), *Medium*, February 8, 2018, https://medium.com/janbot/surrationalist-2b49b60db941.

143 See Clint Enns, "A Brief History of Algorithmic Editing," *Jan Bot* (blog), *Medium*, November 22, 2018, https://medium.com/janbot/a-brief-history-of-algorithmic-editing-732c3e19884b.

144 Katherine Groo, "Cut, Paste, Glitch, and Stutter: Remixing Film History," *Frames Cinema Journal* 1 (2012), accessed February 8, 2019, http://framescinemajournal. com/article/cut-paste-glitch-and-stutter/#a6.

145 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 280.

146 I refer here to Gustav Deutsch *Film ist. (1-12)* Index DVD Edition.

147 Pablo Núñez Palma, "On Vertical Storytelling. Speculating About Social Media for the Avant-Garde Preservation of Film Archives," *Jan Bot* (blog), *Medium*, November 28, 2018, https://medium.com/janbot/on-vertical-storytelling-5fc50a6d39b0.

148 Tom Gunning, "*Film Ist.*: A Primer for a Visual World," Gustav Deutsch *Film ist. (1-12)* Index DVD Edition (booklet), 8.

149 Christian Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, trans. Michael Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 36.

150 Gunning, "A Primer for a Visual World," 8. Gunning's analysis here neglects the many instances in which Deutsch reflexively uses narrative editing techniques, such as the 180-degree rule, alternate montage, and shot-reverse shot (as we have seen earlier), to compose archival fragments within a metahistorical narrative about film's changing ontology.

151 Manovich, *Language of New Media*, 231.

152 Ibid., 191.

153 Katherine Hayles, "Narrative and Database: Natural Symbionts," *PMLA* 122.5 (2008): 1603.

154 Hayles, "Narrative and Database," 1606.

155 Metz, *Film Language*, 18. For an in-depth discussion of the intersections between Gadamer, White, and Ricoeur's see this book's introduction.

156 Ibid.; and Hayles, "Narrative and Database," 1606.

157 Hollis Frampton, "For a Metahistory of Film: Commonplace Notes and Hypotheses," *On the Camera Arts and Consecutive Matters: The Writings of Hollis Frampton* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 136.

158 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 167.

159 Baron, *Archive Effect*, 169.

160 *Jan Bot* (blog), *Medium*, accessed April 7, 2022, https://medium.com/janbot.

The George Eastman Museum: From Trivia to Popular and Fine Art

| 103

ABSTRACT

Chapter 2 investigates the work of the George Eastman Museum (GEM) from the 1950s, when it was known as the George Eastman House (GEH), to the present. Under competition from the longer established Film Library at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, GEH theorized film as popular art, acquiring silent films that MoMA at the time considered "trivia." By contrast, with recent initiatives such as the Nitrate Picture Show, GEM identifies films as fine art objects with unique aesthetic and material characteristics, emphasizing their aura in the age of analog film's near obsolescence. Through Gadamer's critique of the "aesthetics of separation," I argue that GEM's "fine art" curatorial discourse reinforces established historiographies and hierarchies of taste.

KEYWORDS
Nitrate Picture Show; nitrate film; analog film; digital turn; obsolescence; aura

The primary showcase for the film collection of the George Eastman Museum (GEM) is the Dryden Theatre, opened on March 14, 1951.[1] Compared to the Eye Filmmuseum's (Eye) futuristic building, the neoclassical architecture of the Dryden Theatre—which recalls the traditional motifs of classic Greek theaters—evokes a sanctified encounter with the moving-image past (figure 5). If at Eye, "users access the building over a gentle slope and in constant deceleration … reaching the building's interior in an almost imperceptible manner," a colonnade marks the entrance to the Dryden Theatre.[2] A porch—what ancient Greeks called *pronaos*, literally "before the temple"—symbolically prepares spectators to enter the Dryden, signaling its institutional authority. This architectural transition anticipates a radical change of context when we leave the Dutch film archive for GEM—a change of the signifying dispositif in which spectators encounter silent cinema and understand its historicity.

Two distinct views of the cultural function of the film museum inspire these institutions. On one end of the spectrum, Eye has embraced the newness and potential for access of digital technologies and relocated part of the museum's exhibition spaces to online platforms. On the opposite end, GEM has espoused a more traditional approach, modeled on the fine art museum, with the Dryden Theatre as its main gallery, prioritizing the screening of films in the format in which they were originally shot.[3] Technology has played a pivotal role in shaping Eye's and GEM's curatorial strategies. Eye has disseminated hundreds of digitized silent film clips on its YouTube channel and through online projects such as the Scene Machine, Celluloid Remix, and Jan Bot. By contrast, in 2015, GEM launched the first international festival to screen exclusively archival nitrate films, the Nitrate Picture Show, to which the second part of this chapter is dedicated. "Cinephiles from all over the globe will be flying to Rochester next spring and have the unique privilege of seeing [nitrate films] in the magnificence of their original format," former senior curator Paolo Cherchi Usai anticipated on the eve of the festival's first edition.[4]

Through the initiatives examined in this book, Eye and GEM have displayed early and silent films respectively as film fragments (or as digital samples) and as works of art, incorporating them within specific curatorial discourses and historical narratives. By preserving and displaying unidentified film fragments (with the Bits & Pieces compilations, for instance) and encouraging users to remix samples of early films in onsite installations and

editing platforms, Eye has challenged traditionally linear historical narratives, experimenting with alternative models of historical discourse. GEM, by contrast, has identified silent films (and films more broadly) as works of art—or film "artifacts," to use curators' own terminology—with unique material and visual features, under threat by the feared discontinuation of analog stock production in the 2010s and its scarce availability.[5] The museum's mission to preserve and display the aura and authenticity of these artworks has fed into a tragic historical narrative of what Cherchi Usai defines the "death of cinema," which I read in the latter part of this chapter within Hayden White's metahistorical framework.[6] By theorizing films as archival and museum objects and addressing the changing function of the film museum in the digital age, curators at Eye and GEM have crafted two distinct, if not opposing, strategies of film curatorship. Their choice of exhibition technologies, analog or digital, is embedded within a more complex museological dispositif, shaped by particular curatorial discourses envisioning specific viewing positions and audience

practices and enacting a distinct historical mediation between the moving-image past and the digital present.

The first part of this chapter situates GEM's art discourse—which identifies films as distinct art objects—within a longer history of the museum's curatorial practices. Debates around the artistic nature of photography and film, and the opportunity to display them publicly within the spaces of the newly opened George Eastman House (GEH), dominated the early years of its institutional life. Its first film curator, James Card, strategically identified cinema as a form of art to legitimate the acquisition of films for what was at the time called the museum's Study Collection. In doing so, he challenged the artistic canon that the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York had established in the 1930s through Iris Barry's selective acquisitions of silent films and the incorporation of archival film series in university courses on motion pictures.[7] Against what Card identified as MoMA's attempts to elevate cinema to the rank of the high arts, he began theorizing film as a popular art by blending a variety of sources, ranging from American poet and early film theorist Vachel Lindsay's identification of film as a popular art for the masses to his own fandom and admiration for silent film stars.

After Card's resignation in 1977, several curators succeeded him, securing the sustainability of the museum's collections (John Kuiper) and expanding its film collections and international prestige (Jan-Christopher Horak).[8] The progressive redefinition of the museum's film curatorial strategies culminated with the 1997 opening of the L. Jeffrey Selznick School of film preservation, founded by Cherchi Usai. This moment marks the beginning of what I identify as GEM's present curatorial strategies (that the second part of this chapter examines in detail), which the museum's recently appointed new Senior Curator of Moving Images Peter Bagrov has committed to continue expanding.[9] While Card's and Cherchi Usai's curatorial approaches might share similarities, and fervent and tragic tones characterize both their rhetoric, the aesthetic premises and historical grounds on which they identified film as an art form differ entirely. As I show in the following pages, in his own idiosyncratic way and according to his male gaze, Card dismantled the silent film canon MoMA had established, proclaiming cinema's autonomy as a popular art. By contrast, GEM's latest initiatives mobilize an abstracting aesthetics, which I read critically through Hans-Georg Gadamer's concept of "aesthetics of separation," that equates archival film artifacts to fine art objects and deliberately sidesteps revisionist historiographical pursuits.

AN "ARCHIVE OF TRIVIA"

In the present day, moving image archives stand as some kind of institutional hybrid, sitting in-between the model of the archive and that of the museum. The Society of American Archivists (SAA) defines archives as:

> materials created or received by a person, family, or organization, public or private, in the conduct of their affairs and *preserved* because of the enduring value contained in the information they contain or as evidence of the functions and responsibilities of their creator, especially those materials maintained using the principles of *provenance*, *original order*, and collective control; permanent *records*.[10]

According to this and other definitions adopted by the SAA, *records* are the main class of materials around which the archive's mission revolves. Archives *preserve* these records produced and collected during the "administrative or organizational activity of the originating body" (corporate body, governmental agency, organization, group, or family) according to the principle of *provenance*.[11] By contrast, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) describes the museum as "a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and *exhibits* tangible and intangible *heritage*."[12] An earlier definition, proposed by ICOM's Executive Board in 2019, identifies common museum objects as "*artefacts* and *specimens* in trust for society ...."[13] Where archives emphasize the *preservation* of *records* according to principles of *provenance*, museum professionals stress instead their mission to conserve as well as *exhibit* their collections of *artifacts* and *specimens*, conceived as *heritage* for future generations.

Film archivists and curators have inherited such distinctions from nineteenth-century European states' bureaucracies. Former director of the Austrian Film Museum, Alexander Horwath, for instance, explains:

> the *museum* usually relates itself to presentation, and very often to an *art form*, or to the "muses." ... The *archive* is a place where historical *documents* are being collected, *documents* related to the person, the company, or nation which has established the archive in question. And so for film institutions today, calling themselves "film archive" or "film museum" would seem to tell us that they either understand themselves as collectors of *documents* of history, or as standing in the tradition of collecting and preserving *artefacts*.[14]

While these definitions help identify different strands of work within film archives' missions and workflows, when examining the remit of most film heritage institutions today, there is significant overlap between the scope of activities traditionally linked to the archive and those commonly associated with the motion museum. Some institutions, however, rehearse this distinction in order to stake out their priorities and institutional profile from those of competing actors in the field, as exemplified by Cherchi Usai's statement that "GEM is not an archive but a film museum, which means that we tend to be more selective."[15] Here selection implies artistic imprimatur.

The archive/museum opposition helps navigate the galaxy of different US institutions (film archives, libraries, and museums) that embarked on film preservation enterprises at different moments in history, under different auspices, and with very diverse goals.[16] Due to the lack of coordination at the federal level—at least until the 1967 creation of the American Film Institute (AFI)—various institutions, including the Library of Congress (LoC), the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), MoMA, and GEH, began collecting films, variously understood as records, historical specimens, or yet differently as artifacts.[17] Their policies and collections reflect shifting power dynamics between the principal stakeholders within the American archival movement—the Hollywood studios, federal agencies (such as the National Endowments for the Arts), film societies, film artists (notably directors and stars), and the film archives themselves—at different points in time.[18]

The first two national collections of motion pictures in the US were born under the logic of the archive of records. In accordance with the 1870 Copyright Act, in 1894 motion picture producers began depositing their films at LoC in the form of printed photograms—what later came to be known as the "Paper Print Collection."[19] Forty years later, President Franklin D. Roosevelt established NARA, which began collecting motion pictures including official US Government records of permanent value and donated materials obtained from various sources.[20] In 1945, Librarian Archibald MacLeish started expanding LoC's newly born Motion Pictures Division beyond the *preservation* of *records* to include also *exhibition* and *education*. It was according to this broader mandate that MacLeish envisioned the creation of a national film collection, which the LoC would have developed in collaboration with MoMA's Film Library—a project the US Congress eventually abandoned in 1947.[21] Rather than prioritizing artistically significant films, according to MacLeish's idea, the Motion Pictures Division should have acquired films that functioned as *specimens* exemplary of particular periods in film history—films that in his words reflect "the most truthful and revealing information as to the life of the period, the interests of the period, the taste of the period, and the picture of themselves which the people of the period accepted."[22]

As Caroline Frick highlights, unlike LoC's Motion Pictures Division, in the mid-1930s, MoMA's Film Library was conceived according to a rationale that introduced the art discourse within the field of film archives for the first time. "I seriously question the Museum's acting as a general *archives* or repository for all films good and bad," argued MoMA's first director Alfred Barr, adding, "the Museum is an art museum concerned with *art*—and this means quality, discrimination—not wholesale collecting and storing in bulk."[23] Several film archives followed the precedent set by MoMA, including GEH, where, in his capacity as assistant to curator Beaumont Newhall, Card began acquiring films in 1948.[24] The identification of film as art relied on particular interpretations of what the two terms—film and art—meant both separately and when paired together. Different definitions of film art, auteurs, and film artists have since informed various museums' acquisitions and policies, often still providing criteria for programming and exhibition.

The Anthology Film Archives, for instance, founded in 1970 by filmmakers Jonas Mekas, Jerome Hill, P. Adams Sitney, Peter Kubelka, and Stan Brakhage, claimed the status of the "first film museum exclusively devoted to the *film as an art*." In its manifesto, it programmatically asks, "what are the essentials of the film experience?"[25] The Pacific Film Archive (PFA), somewhat differently, emerged within the context of the cinephilic circuits in the San Francisco Bay Area in 1967. It was modeled after the Cinémathèque Française in Paris and specialized in screening avant-garde, international, and classic films, inviting auteurs such as Jean-Luc Godard and Fritz Lang (who were among PFA's first guests) to discuss their work.[26] The youngest institution in this field, the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures opened in Los Angeles in September 2021. Drawing on the archives of the Academy Collection, Academy Film Archive, and the Margaret Herrick Library, the museum's seven floors offer a space to exhibit "a vast range of works on paper and still and moving images covering the history of motion picture in the United States and throughout the world."[27]

Debates over the artistic value of both photography and film played a critical role in the history of GEH as an international museum devoted to both media. The very first idea for the creation of GEH originated from the ranks of Kodak. In June 1945, Kodak manager Howard Sauer submitted a plan to establish the George Eastman Foundation to the company's executives and researcher Walter "Nobby" Clark, who helped acquire the first nucleus of the museum collection.[28] In the hands of Kodak's public relations executive to later become GEH's first director Oscar Solbert, the project started taking shape. He conceived it as a "historical photographic institute [and] ... as a living, teaching memorial to [the late Kodak founder] George Eastman by establishing his home as a cultural center for public display of the *science* and *art* of Photography that his genius so greatly advanced."[29]

The first meeting of the Board of Trustees took place on June 3, 1948. Shortly after, the museum hired Newhall (formerly employed at MoMA) as its first curator. Despite the museum's stated focus on both the scientific and artistic advancements in the field of photography, the new exhibition space Newhall found in Eastman's former residence was more suited to the display of photographic apparatuses than artistic photographs.[30] The bright space in the conservatory on the ground floor, for instance, hosted glass cases showing apparatuses and techniques from the early days of photography. Similarly, the mansion—whose layout had initially been left nearly untouched—housed an exhibition dedicated to the technological history of photography, articulated in three parts: historical, or pre-Eastman; the Eastman period, 1879–1932; and modern.[31] Eastman's garage (the only wing in the mansion to have undergone more radical redesign) hosted a slide exhibition titled *Cavalcade of Color* on the theme of "human progress through photography," repurposing a trade show Kodak presented at the 1939 World's Fair.[32]

The museum's early corporate imprint clashed with the aesthetic sensibility and scholarly background of its first curator, who had left MoMA over disagreements with photographer Edward Steichen about the artistic potential of photography.[33] Writing to photographer Edward Weston in 1949, Newhall's wife, artist Nancy Wynne Parker Newhall, points out that Kodak's plans for the museum did not include the exhibition of photographs, but instead revolved around the underlying assumptions that:

> (a) George Eastman is the most important man in the history of photography. (b) The whole aim and end of photography is the snapshot. (c) The technological development that has made the snapshot possible is the only interesting thing in the history of photography. (d) Nobody wants to look at photographs—a few with interesting subject matter, maybe, but not Art Photographs. They [Kodak] don't want a museum, they want 'a shrine to George Eastman.' Quote from Nobby Clark.[34]

Nevertheless, in the following years, Newhall gradually managed to introduce his approach. GEH began expanding its exhibition spaces from the limited eight-square-foot room for the display of photographs in 1949 to the opening of the permanent exhibition *The Art of Photography* in 1960.[35] It was during this first decade that, under Solbert's directorship, GEH converted from a peripheral gallery of photographic paraphernalia, a direct emanation of Kodak, into an international museum of photography and film. This change during the early years of the institution's history coincided with a shift of focus from science and technology to art, which bestowed renewed visibility to the photographs in the collection away from techniques and apparatuses.

No less controversial, the genesis of GEH's Moving Image Department recast questions about film's artistic legitimacy and historical value, challenging the canon established by MoMA's Film Library. GEH's Motion Picture Study Collection (as it was initially referred to) developed from Card's loan of his collection of allegedly more than eight hundred film titles to the museum in 1948, at a time when he was Kodak's International Film Division director and cameraman.[36] Once he became GEH's first film curator, one of Card's most challenging tasks was to envision an autonomous profile for the museum's film collection, one that would justify its existence vis-à-vis MoMA's authoritative precedent. The Board of Trustees' reluctance to fund the acquisition of new titles posed the first obstacle to the formation of a film collection. "If a film was worthy," they wondered, "why wasn't it at the prestigious MoMA?"[37] Such skepticism prompted Card to publicly question the canon that Barry had established during her first fifteen years at MoMA, which, according to him, overlooked films that were crucial to understanding cinema's history.

In the early 1930s, when talks of creating a film library at MoMA began to circulate in the high-cultural circles of New York, there was very little awareness of the need to collect and preserve films. Talkies had been around for only a few years, and silent films and orchestras' accompaniments were slowly entering filmgoers' memory, forming cinema's first fading past. When Barry started taking her first steps to acquire silent films for MoMA, she was walking in the darkness as no one knew where they had ended up after their original release, nor in what material conditions they were. As she recalled later, "it is difficult indeed to believe that in 1935 the vacuum which existed could have been so great or that it could ever have been filled."[38] Twenty years on, when GEH started assembling its own collection, the situation was very different. The operations of the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) had resumed after WWII, MoMA's in-house and circulating film programs had bolstered a more extensive understanding of film history, and film archivists, collectors, and buffs had many more opportunities to watch old films circulating in non-commercial circuits.[39]

At the start, a principle of exclusion inspired Card's new acquisitions as GEH began acquiring any title that was not already in MoMA's collection. This strategy earned the museum the derogatory epithet of "archive of trivia," as MoMA curator Richard Griffith dismissively put it.[40] However, as an experienced film collector, Card knew that despite Barry and her husband John Abbott's extensive international search, MoMA had missed titles as notable as Cecil B. DeMille's *The Cheat* (1915), Fred Niblo's *Ben-Hur* (1925), King Vidor's *The Crowd* (1928), and Josef von Sternberg's *The Docks of New York* (1928), all of which later became classics of film history.[41] In an undated internal document titled "Purpose and Function of a Proposed Motion Picture Collection," Card notes:

Logically, one institution could not be expected to cope with a task so large. There are entire areas vital to the history of motion pictures, untouched by existing collections. A student working with the Museum of Modern Art's Collection may now learn a great deal about the films of Edison's Edwin Porter and the work of D.W. Griffith. But there is insufficient material to enable him [*sic*] to decide whether or not the work of Thomas H. Ince was as important to the development of the medium as that of D.W. Griffith.[42]

He points to entire areas MoMA had overlooked: the work of the Vitagraph Company; transitional 1910s films like the westerns of "Broncho Billy," Tom Mix, and William S. Hart; the Thanhouser dramas directed by Carl Gregory and George Nicholls (like the 1912 *The Cry of the Children*); and the archetypical gangster film *The Gangsters and the Girl* (1914). All these titles and directors can be found today in GEM's film catalog.[43]

Inspired by film historians Robert Brasillach, Maurice Bardèche, Paul Rotha, and Lewis Jacobs, MoMA's film canon had crystallized what David Bordwell identifies as the "Basic Story" of the evolution of cinematic language, from Georges Méliès through Edwin Porter and Griffith up to film's artistic maturity in the 1920s.[44] In her 1926 book *Let's Go to the Pictures*, Barry acknowledges the merits of American films, namely "their acceptance of a mechanical civilization, their pride and delight in motor-cars, type-writers, lifts, skyscrapers, traffic and above all, Speed."[45] As Haidee Wasson, Peter Decherney, and Allison Trope highlight, by championing American film, now as vernacular modernist art, now as a sociological and historical document, through the work of the Film Library, MoMA aimed to make the museum appear more "American," in line with the nationalist and populist spirit that had animated the creation of many museums in the 1930s.[46] Despite this, Card shared the opinion of Barry's detractors, who accused her of having scornful attitudes towards American silent films. In a statement whose polemical tone replicates some of the chauvinistic and sexist attitudes circulating in the film collecting, cinephile, and archival world, Los Angeles-based journalist Herb Sterne argues:

Entangled as is Miss Barry in the foreign films, she finds little time to understand or salvage many important aspects of the American motion picture. The serial, a salient and vastly popular attraction in this country from 1913 to 1920, is represented not at all. In a published statement, Miss Barry admits she recovered certain episodes of the Pathe-Pearl White week-to-weeker, *The Exploits of Elaine*, but she carefully adds that the Library will not circulate the exciters because she personally finds them "dull."[47]

Like Sterne, Card considered MoMA's collection not only to reflect Barry's personal taste but also to expose a "cultural dependence" of American cinema on European acknowledgements and established aesthetic models.[48]

According to him, the popularity of Rotha's *The Film till Now*—which, in Card's words, in the 1930s had become the "gospel for every ardent film fan/critic" in the US—helped cement the perception of European and Russian cinemas' artistic superiority over American films.[49] In the preface to the first edition, Rotha sets up a preliminary distinction between a "film," like *Old and New* (*Staroye i novoye*, Sergei Eisenstein and Grigori Aleksandrov, 1929) and a "movie," such as *The Love Parade* (Ernst Lubitsch, 1929). Rotha's pioneering history tracks the progress of film as a "valuable medium of dramatic expression rather than as a superficial entertainment; as a mental stimulant rather than as an amusement."[50] The first and foremost example of this kind of film, according to Card, could not but be *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (*Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*, 1920), whose acquisition and projection became a sort of "rite of initiation" for the emerging film societies and Little Theatres in the United States.[51] Although Weimar cinema remained one of Card's primary interests as a film collector—and evidence of this is its significant presence within GEM's collections—the museum decided to explicitly challenge the hierarchy established by Rotha (and arguably reinforced by MoMA) by concentrating on the acquisition of American silents.[52]

The goal was not an easy one given the cautious and ambiguous attitude of many Hollywood producers toward film preservation. As Card explains, producers are less "impressed that we call their product a unique new form of art" than they are struck "with the fact that [we] are asking them for a piece of merchandise which they produced at great cost, and which was produced for the purpose of making a profit over that cost. Moreover, [we] are asking them to give it to [us] for nothing."[53] A great aid to the expansion of the museum's collections nevertheless came from the Head of Kodak's Motion Picture Division Ted Curtis, the company's chief liaison in Hollywood. With Curtis' help, GEH gained a direct channel to the Studios, from which it borrowed original negatives of films such as *The Crowd* and *Ben-Hur* and struck viewing prints at Kodak village in Rochester.[54]

Card's curatorial approach was inspired not only by the ambition to question the aesthetic canon that Barry's selections had established, but by a more radical refutation of any historical canon at all. As Card states in a 1957 speech at the Canadian Federation of Film in Toronto, "no one knows today which films are the classics of motion picture history." He then polemically adds: "we have come to see, in the course of the past nine years, some of this 'trivia' assume great importance in the eyes of other archives, including MoMA, as the realization takes form that the bulk of film history is still undiscovered."[55]

His agnostic attitude, which he shared with many other private collectors and enthusiasts of old films, was skeptical about the very possibility of establishing such a thing as a historical and aesthetic canon. At the same time, such doubtfulness was at the basis of Card's and his assistant George Pratt's historiographic method, grounded in the search of extant film prints and film-related material.[56] Their curatorial and historiographic stance anticipates the cautious attitude prevailing among current preservation professionals. In a study LoC commissioned in 2013, for instance, archivist David Pierce explains, "it is impossible to determine in advance which films will stand the test of time as art, or which will prove significant as a social record. With so many gaps in the historical record, every silent film is of some value and illuminates different elements of our history."[57] Such suspension of judgment is all the more reasonable in the context of the low survival rate of most American silent feature films, of which, according to the same report, only 25 percent (2,749) survive in complete form.[58]

At the time, however, in the eyes of MoMA's curators not only was GEH's collection an archive of trivia in comparison to the Film Library's canonical collection of classics; what is more, Card had carried out the whole enterprise under the banner of his film fandom, an attitude that he fervently defended against criticism. Card's understanding of cinema was rooted in his personal attachment to specific films, in particular silent cinema. In his semi-autobiographical book *Seductive Cinema*, he recounts the origins of his bewitched fandom as follows:

> In those days, being a film fan was a condition completely different from being a film buff today. There was an emotional involvement with the stars to a degree unimaginable now. Perhaps part of it was the hypnotic effect of sitting in a darkened theatre with only music to support the play of light and shadow and the not altogether human apparitions of the mute actors and actresses. Shimmering images reflected from a silver screen.[59]

His relationship with the medium is one of seduction: the erotic seduction of actors' and even more so actresses' grandiose appearance on screen, the aesthetic seduction of close-ups, and the mass seduction of a popular medium. Although he never systematically formulated his ideas on the art of moving images, his speeches, articles, and book provide sufficient elements to trace back a coherent film aesthetics and a historiographic approach that informed the formation of GEH's collection, its exhibition, and curatorship at large.

Card vigorously rejects the idea of film authorship that, according to him, places excessive and exclusive emphasis on directors' artistry, thereby ignoring "the creative authority of producer, studio head, supervisor and superstar."[60] As he argues, Emil Jannings, for instance, was so influential on the production of *The Broken Jug* (1937) that he appears in the film's credits for his "artistic super-direction" (*Künstlerische Oberleitung*).[61] The creative agency of charismatic actresses such as Asta Nielsen and Mary Pickford—the world's first film stars—Gloria Swanson, Lillian Gish, Pola Negri, and Greta Garbo constituted, in Card's view, the historical and artistic novelty of American silent cinema.[62] Garbo's personality was, according to him, "not only so extraordinary[,] but so influential on her production," that she would "cast the film, [make] alterations in the script, [and have] the right of selection or modification of the costuming." Against the straightforward attribution of a film like *Queen Christina* (1933) to producer Clarence Brown or director Rouben Mamoulian, Card pointedly disputes, "you know, it's really a Greta Garbo production."[63]

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Such a conception of film artistry significantly influenced the history of GEH's Moving Image Department—not only the development of its collection but also the kind of events it organized.[64] The museum's most glamorous celebration of film stars was the Festival of Film Artists, the launch of which in 1955 featured editions in both Rochester and Hollywood, the latter directed by producer Jesse Lasky. The first festival paid homage to the greatest artists of the silent era from 1915 to 1925—directors, cinematographers, actors, and actresses, whose work, in Card's words, "was beginning to be really appreciated as creative accomplishments to cherish as part of our cultural heritage, rather than simply exploited as cute curiosities of a naïve past."[65] Film stars were also one of the main focuses of the glossy film programs featuring reproductions of film stills and stars' portraits from the museum's collections. GEH's film series included Garbo Encore in May and June 1965 (figures 6 and 7); The Devil's Envoys. The Femme Fatale in Silent Drama in July 1965 (figures 8 and 9); and the Tribute to Gloria Swanson in May 1966 (figures 10 and 11).[66]

Far from being merely a reflection of Card's nostalgic fondness for actresses' iconic screen presence, the museum's focus on film stars was tied to aesthetic and historical considerations over the medium's specificity. "No performer of theatrical days before the time of the camera lens," Card recalls in a speech at the Festival of Film Artists, "was ever challenged upon to perform the profoundly intimate creative task imposed by the motion picture close-up." As he contends, a distinctive short-lived beauty appeared on screen with silent cinema, one that disappeared with the advent of sound, a kind of bravura "that these silent film artists achieved—something which has not been

TOP: FIGURE 6.
"Garbo Encore," front
(Dryden Theatre, May and
June 1965). Courtesy of the
George Eastman Museum.

BOTTOM: FIGURE 7.
"Garbo Encore," program
(Dryden Theatre, May and
June 1965). Courtesy of the
George Eastman Museum.

THE DEVIL'S ENVOYS
The Femme Fatale in Silent Drama
DRYDEN THEATRE OF THE
GEORGE EASTMAN HOUSE
Evenings at Eight
JULY 9-28, 1965

A FOOL THERE WAS
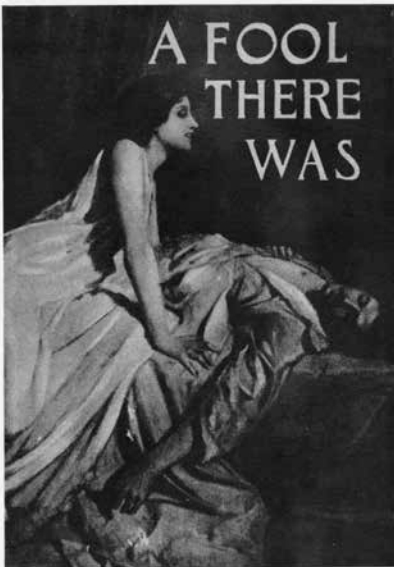
"The Vampire," the celebrated painting by Sir Philip Burne-Jones, 1897, inspired many of the American vampire films via Rudyard Kipling and the dances of Alice Eis and Bert French.

THE DEVIL'S ENVOYS
A SURVEY OF SIRENS

Friday, July 9 — VAMPIRE 1913 • Alice Eis, Alice Hollister
CARMEN I 1915 • Geraldine Farrar, Wallace Reid
Directed by Cecil B. DeMille

Saturday, July 10 — FORBIDDEN PARADISE 1924 • Pola Negri, Adolphe Menjou
Directed by Ernst Lubitsch

Sunday, July 11 — METROPOLIS 1926 • Brigitte Helm, Gustav Froelich
Directed by Fritz Lang

Monday, July 12 — THE BOX OF PANDORA 1928 • Louise Brooks, Fritz Kortner, Franz Lederer,
Gustav Diessl . Directed by G. W. Pabst

Tuesday, July 13 — PASSION 1919 • Pola Negri, Emil Jannings
Directed by Ernst Lubitsch

Wednesday, July 14 — DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE 1920 • Nita Naldi, John Barrymore
Directed by John Robertson

Thursday, July 15 — OUR DANCING DAUGHTERS 1928 • Anita Page, Joan Crawford
Directed by Harry Beaumont

Friday, July 16 — THE CHEAT 1915 • Fannie Ward, Sessue Hayakawa
Directed by Cecil B. DeMille

Saturday, July 17 — DON JUAN 1926 • Estelle Taylor, John Barrymore
Directed by Alan Crosland

Sunday, July 18 — CHRONICLES OF GRIESHUUS 1923 • Gertrud Welcker, Lil Dagover, Paul Hartmann
Directed by Arthur von Gerlach

Monday, July 19 — TYPHOON 1914 • Gladys Brockwell, Sessue Hayakawa
Directed by Reginald Barker

Tuesday, July 20 — CARMEN II 1918 • Pola Negri, Harry Liedtke
Directed by Ernst Lubitsch

Wednesday, July 21 — VARIETY 1925 • Lya De Putti, Emil Jannings
Directed by E. A. Dupont

Thursday, July 22 — NANA 1924 • Catherine Hessling, Werner Kraus
Directed by Jean Renoir

Friday, July 23 — MANTRAP 1926 • Clara Bow, Percy Marmont
Directed by Victor Fleming

Saturday, July 24 — CAMILLE 1921 • Alla Nazimova, Rudolph Valentino
Directed by Ray Smallwood

Sunday, July 25 — SUNRISE 1927 • Margaret Livingston, Janet Gaynor, George O'Brien
Directed by F. W. Murnau

Monday, July 26 — THE HEART OF A SIREN 1925 • Barbara LaMarr, Conway Tearle, Clifton Webb
Directed by Phil Rosen

Tuesday, July 27 — CARMEN III 1926 • Raquel Meller (Titles in French)
Directed by Jacques Feyder

Wednesday, July 28 — A FOOL THERE WAS 1915 • Theda Bara, Edward Jose
Directed by Frank Powell

—All Programs Subject to Change—

TOP: FIGURE 10.
Tribute to Gloria Swanson, front (Dryden Theatre, May 1966). Courtesy of the George Eastman Museum.

BOTTOM: FIGURE 11.
A Tribute to Gloria Swanson, program (Dryden Theatre, May 1966). Courtesy of the George Eastman Museum.

with us since."[67] He shares with film theorist Béla Balász the conviction that there was an intimate relationship between the close-up—the most cinematic of techniques—and silent film performers, citing the work of Danish director Carl Theodor Dreyer as the utmost example of its expressive capabilities.[68] According to him, it was that unique extended duration of silent cinema's close-ups that made actors' and actresses' performances altogether so stunningly lyrical, intense, and erotic.[69]

In *Seductive Cinema*, Card reports the exchange between director Clarence Badger and Clara Bow during the shooting of a particular close-up scene in *It* (1927), in which Betty (Bow) falls in love with her employer Cyrus Waltham (Antonio Moreno). In words that recall Balász's account of the "polyphonic" play of facial features, Card describes the camera lingering over Bow's doll-like face in a prolonged close-up, as her expression shifts from infatuation to "unwholesome passion" and then turns back to romantic.[70] As she explains:

> The first expression was for the love-sick dames in the audience, and … the second expression, that passionate stuff, was for the boys and their papas, and … the third expression—well, Mr Badger, just about the time all the old women in the audience had become shocked and scandalized by that passionate part, they'd suddenly see that third expression, become absorbed in it, and change their minds about me having naughty ideas and go home thinking how pure and innocent I was; and having got me mixed up with the character I'm playing, they'd come again when my next picture showed up.[71]

Unmediated by verbal intermissions, actresses' expressions encoded a whole scale of feelings and desires, to whose nuances close-ups entrusted an intensive temporality and magnetic force.

The unprecedented visibility of women's faces and their commercial exploitation by Hollywood's rising star system coincided with the emergence of the new ideals of the Flapper and the New American Woman.[72] The cinematic incarnations and exploitations of the 1910s and 1920s ideals of female autonomy, social agency, and sexual freedom—ranging from the vamp Theda Bara in *A Fool There Was* (1915) to DeMille's New American Woman, embodied by Swanson, and the energetic Joan Crawford in *Our Dancing Daughters* (1928)—allured Card.[73] Like Lindsay's fascination for Pickford, Card's adoration of film stars sublimates his male gaze, at the same time universalizing and historicizing it.[74] According to Card, thousands, if not millions, of American moviegoers had shared his same devotion to the great actresses of the 1920s, and the mass scale of this collective infatuation made it, in his view, historically relevant. For instance, a film like *Our Dancing Daughters*, in his words,

provided the social historian with "a visually eloquent dramatization, for popular understanding, of the era's basic clash between a puritanical heritage and the postwar, youthful urge toward a new attitude to sexual freedom and the hedonistic enjoyment of all possible privileges of a prosperous segment of society."[75] The Dryden Theatre film series, the sleek graphic of their program leaflets, and events like the Festival of Film Artists all revived the forgotten glory, the glamour, and the sexualized beauty of silent film actresses and actors, at the same time foregrounding silent cinema's relevance as a unique social and historical document. This was the curatorial context in which Louise Brooks (who had moved to Rochester between 1956 and 1985) rewatched classic Hollywood films, including her own, and wrote some of her most powerful feminist criticism of the star system.[76]

One of Card's few references to film theory is Lindsay's theorization of cinema as a popular form of art for the American masses. "Thirty-eight years ago," writes Card in 1953, "art was not considered synonymous with box-office disaster and many enthusiastic pioneers were delighted, as was D. W. Griffith, to have their work recognized as a form of art when poet Vachel Lindsay wrote his book."[77] In *The Art of the Moving Picture*, published in 1915, Lindsay calls attention to the artistic and cultural phenomenon of what he names the "photoplay," which "cuts deeper into some stratifications of society than the newspaper or the book have ever gone."[78] As Stanley Kauffmann observes in the introduction to the book's 2000 edition, Lindsay anticipates Marshall McLuhan in his famous statement: "Edison is the new Gutenberg. He has invented the new printing."[79] Like *Poor Richard's Almanac* in the eighteenth century, the photoplay reached millions of Americans, but, unlike the popular press, it provided mass audiences with a different form of literacy, a visual and aesthetic one. According to Lindsay, cinema taught what had until then been a "word civilization" to think in pictures, like ancient Egyptians with hieroglyphs.[80] "In a democracy," he claims, somehow envisaging the role of film museums and archives, museums "should go as far as the public libraries. Every town has its library. There are not twenty Art museums in the land. Here comes the romance of the photoplay."[81] Lindsay thinks of cinema as a pedagogical institution capable of unifying the nation, bringing images close to every remote corner of the country.

According to Lindsay, the beauty of the motion pictures resided in their portrayal of intimacy on screen. As he explains, the "Intimate-and-friendly Photoplay"—that is, the family drama typically starring Gish or Pickford—invites us to become "members of the household on the screen." As spectators, we enter voyeuristically into the photoplay interior, "we are sitting on the near side of the family board," or "we are gossiping whispering neighbors of the shoemaker, we will say, with our noses pressed against the pane of a

metaphoric window."[82] In a suggestive passage, which perhaps sheds light on Card's sympathy with Lindsay's spirit, the poet writes:

> The Intimate Motion Picture is the world's new medium for studying, not the great passions ... but rather the half relaxed or gently restrained moods of human creatures. It gives also our idiosyncrasies. It is gossip in extremis. It is apt to chronicle our petty little skirmishes, rather than our feuds.[83]

It is this petty intimacy, and the new appealing visibility in close-ups of faces, women, bodies, and objects, that constituted, in Card's and Lindsay's view, the unpretentious allure of the art of moving images, which by way of their very social and popular immanence, made them historically significant.

Card's hermeneutics of the art of moving images—or rather his "erotics," to use a fitting expression by Susan Sontag—was rooted in his appreciation of cinema as a popular medium.[84] As he explains, "real truths about a time, about a people, are to be found beneath the surface of the films that have been designed to please them and have been shown to have won their acceptance and emotional approval."[85] In an interview that is exemplary of how Card plays out the difference in aesthetic and curatorial approaches between GEH and MoMA, he argues:

> This British expert [Iris Barry] was coming over and saying that *Greed* [1924] is a great American film .... The very fact that it was a rejected film commercially would seem to support this point of view, that you had a film so advanced that nobody even appreciated that it was *art*.[86]

In Card's view, Hollywood films belong to the domain of mass production and consumption. They pass the test of time precisely by virtue of their vast popularity that retrospectively offers a mirror image of the audiences that loved them. Unlike Barry at MoMA, he helped establish GEH's legitimacy as a museum of photography and film by celebrating cinema's autonomous aesthetic and commercial sphere, rather than situating it within the genealogies of more prestigious arts.

The situation at MoMA, however, was more complex than Card conceded. As Wasson argues in her study of the Film Library, Barry's curatorial strategy had to thread a careful balance between two opposing pulls. On the one hand, she had to reassure MoMA's trustees by celebrating film as a dignified form of art worthy of sitting at MoMA among the highest forms of artistic expression. On the other, she ought to downplay cinema's artistic claims to ease film producers' fears of losing box office revenue by being associated with elitist

high arts.[87] It is within this context that one should read Barry's enthusiasm about art scholar Erwin Panofsky's endorsement of the Film Library in his 1930s lectures on cinema at Princeton University. "What snob could venture now to doubt that films *were* art?" retrospectively asks Barry in a 1969 issue of *Film Quarterly*.[88] According to Panofsky's own brand of teleology, while early cinema "appealed directly and very intensely to a folk art mentality," cinema could "blossom forth into genuine history, tragedy and romance, crime and adventure, and comedy" by transfiguring its folk archetypes and exploring its distinctive expressive possibilities. However, despite its graduation to the status of "real art," as he claims, cinema still often exploited its "primordial archetypes," such as its "crude sense of humor, graphically described as 'slap-stick,' which feeds upon the sadistic and the pornographic instinct, either singly or in combination."[89]

While Card distanced himself from such calls for cinema's emancipation from folkloric and popular archetypes, GEH nevertheless bought into a similarly teleological view of cinema's artistic evolution into a narrative medium. One of GEH's earliest film programs in March 1951, titled The Silent Films as the Basis of the Art of Motion Pictures, for instance, rehearses this well-established historiography by neatly dividing the program into two distinct chronologies. The program's first section devotes itself to the early film pioneers, from Eadweard Muybridge to Segundo de Chomón and Ferdinand Zecca's *The Invisible Thief* (1909), while the second focuses on the development of film narrative from James Williamson's 1901 *Fire!* to Griffith's 1913 *The Mothering Heart*.[90] Unlike Panofsky, however, Card embraces cinema's vernacular character as constitutive of its artistic specificity and of a production system entirely different from that of the fine arts.[91] To use Lindsay's words, Card's alternative take on the art of film polemically addresses "the haughty, who scorn the moving pictures [but] cannot rid themselves of the feeling of being seduced into going into some sort of Punch-and-Judy show."[92]

In that same March 1951, GEH publicly inaugurated its Moving Image Department at the Dryden Theatre, the construction of which was sponsored by Ellen Andrus Dryden (Eastman's niece) and her husband, the rubber tycoon George B. Dryden. Despite its distinctive attention to American silent cinema, GEH consecrated its first film series with the screening of a French impressionist film, *Nana* (1926). The introductory speech, co-drafted by Newhall and Card, foregrounds the artistic value of cinema, comparing the layered historical representations and mediations in Jean Renoir's film to the interpretative work of curators. Similar to the argument framing the display of still photographs in the museum galleries, the talk sets film exhibition's goal to present the technological and artistic development of the motion pictures "by showing examples of the finished product."[93] Although eventually delivered only by

Newhall, the introduction presents two alternative aesthetic and curatorial stances—one that emphasizes film's continuity with traditional arts, and the other claiming its autonomous aesthetic sphere and break with traditional art history.[94]

In what we might read as Newhall's contribution, the speech places Renoir's film within the legacy of French naturalist literature and impressionist paintings. *Nana* was the cinematographic transposition not only of Émile Zola's homonymous novel but also, as Newhall explains, of French impressionists' visions, carried through from painting to motion pictures. The impressionists were intrigued by photography's unprecedented ability to record "forms and attitudes which exist for only the briefest interval of time," and their fascination lived again in Renoir's film. In Newhall's words: "Renoir turned to his father's paintings for documentation ... [and to] the paintings and the lithographs of Toulouse Lautrec and [Edgar] Degas, both of whom specialized in portraying the theatre, the café and the night life of Paris." Analogously, as the speech highlights, curators' interpretative work entailed interrogating the past, "for just as we are now rediscovering the twenties, so twenty-five years ago the 1880s were being looked back upon with the nostalgia with which we fondly look upon the penultimate past."[95] *Nana*'s exhibition provided the opportunity to show audiences the different levels of historical mediation at work within the film, also illustrating the curator's hermeneutic work.

The same speech, however, also emphasizes another kind of artistic affiliation for *Nana*, a purely cinematic one—a point that reflects Card's curatorial concerns. The art framework is still there, but it departs from the tradition of the fine arts. Renoir was, indeed, the son of Auguste Renoir, the famous impressionist painter, whose footsteps Jean initially followed, but it was only, the speech explains, "when he saw the film *Foolish Wives* ... that he decided to try his hand at film making." Renoir was inspired by one of the most controversial personalities within the silent film world, Erich von Stroheim, "'the man you love to hate,' the infuriating bald Prussian officer." "His last appearance," recalls Newhall with words that seem to come straight from Card's mouth, was as "the butler in *Sunset Boulevard*, starring Gloria Swanson."[96] At the apex of his career, in his masterpiece *The Grand Illusion* (*La Grande Illusion*, 1937), Renoir pays homage to Stroheim, "the man who first brought him into films," who plays his very screen persona in the film, the aristocratic German officer. This lecture deploys cinema's claim to art status on two levels: one that establishes a historical and expressive continuity with the fine arts, and another that draws a distinct genealogy for motion pictures and an autonomous sphere simultaneously artistic and commercial. It prefigures Card's curatorial strategy for years to follow—one that claimed silent cinema's historical value by its own artistic means.

Card had been among the founders of the film preservation movement in the United States. He belonged to what historian Anthony Slide calls the "old generation" of film archivists that had established the field, who had left the task of formalizing film preservation standards and principles to the generations of film curators that would have come after them.[97] In Card's words, after the pioneering work of the first generation of film archivists, it was time "to consolidate what ha[d] been brought together and save it on a very, very careful plan and good, reasonable[,] unemotional basis."[98] Despite Card's merit of having acquired films that would have otherwise likely been lost—including early transitional films, Tourneur's films, and films featuring formerly neglected star Brooks—there had been a conflict of interest between his role as film curator and his practices as a collector.[99] His retirement signaled the beginning of a transition in the museum's history and the archival field at large, from a time when the figures of the film curator and collector overlapped to one marked by the need for standardized preservation practices. This change also entailed a shift in the conception of cinema as art.

In 1977, John Kuiper, former Head of the Motion Pictures Section at LoC, succeeded Card as GEH's Director of Film Collections.[100] Accustomed to LoC's well-established bureaucracy, Kuiper guided the museum through a phase of administrative changes, financial difficulties, and a process of reorganization. In order to overcome GEH's financial insufficiency and place its collections in more suitable premises, in 1984, the museum's Board of Trustees proposed a merger with the National Museum of American History at the Smithsonian Institution—a moment that came to be known internally as the "Smithsonian crisis."[101] The museum overcame its financial predicament with a new managerial profile. It began fundraising more actively, seeking to be more independent from Kodak's backing, and started constructing a new building in 1989 for storing and displaying its collections.[102] The museum's reorganization and greater reliance on external funding (from bodies like the National Endowment for the Arts) exposed the need for a more transparent film preservation rationale and laid the ground for its definition. While this process of restructuring marked Kuiper's time at GEH, a major nitrate fire also occurred in those same years. On May 30, 1978, a fire enveloped the museum's film vaults, destroying several hundred film reels, including many films MGM had previously donated to the museum.[103] The incident alimented Kuiper's fears of nitrate flammability, to the point that he later declined the acquisition of a 1935 print of Georg Wilhelm Pabst's *Don Quixote*.[104]

Jan-Christopher Horak became Assistant Curator in 1984 and then Curator of Film Collections in 1987.[105] Under his tenure, the Film Department

underwent a process of systematization through the introduction of scientific archival practices, new sources of revenue (for instance, from print loan fees), and active fundraising. Like Card, Horak aimed to challenge film historical canons but, unlike the former, he focused on acquiring collections rather than individual titles. Horak expanded the collection's strengths—such as silent fiction films—by focusing on the cinemas of marginalized communities and preserving films such as Oscar Micheaux's *Veiled Aristocrats* (1932).[106] In 1994, he found the until then unidentified Edgar G. Ulmer's instructional film *Let My People Live* (1938) in the museum's vaults, which aimed to educate African American audiences about the benefits of tuberculosis treatment, featuring an all-black cast.[107] Moreover, by offering free storage, GEH acquired the work of East Coast independent filmmakers such as Ken Burns, Frederick Wiseman (whose entire collection of documentaries became part of the museum's holdings), and Martin Scorsese, who in 1991 donated his collection of 16mm films from the 1930s to the 1960s.[108]

During Horak's years at GEH, the Dryden featured a variety of programs—spanning from Northern Exposure, on Canadian experimental films, to whole film series dedicated to new amateur films.[109] Film festivals that are still taking place at the Dryden, such as the Rochester LGBT Film and Video Festival and the Rochester Labor Series, also started in these years. Besides film programming, Horak curated wall exhibitions centered on paper material from GEH's Stills, Posters, and Papers Collection, such as *The Dream Merchants: Making and Selling Films in Hollywood's Golden Age*, which inaugurated the museum's new wing in 1989.[110] In the following years, exhibitions such as *The Elegant Image: Clarence Sinclair Bull*, revolving around portrait photography, similarly built on filmographic work that George Pratt had carried out from 1953 (when Card hired him as his assistant) to 1984, when Horak, who trained under his mentorship, took his place as Associate Curator.[111] As Horak explains, Pratt had brought to GEH several "important film stills, scripts and paper collections, viewing these pieces of film ephemera as important primary documents for a history of cinema."[112]

In 1994, Horak left the museum to take the post of Director at the Filmmuseum in Munich, Germany. Cherchi Usai, who had been assistant curator at GEH from 1989 to 1992 and was working at the Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique / Koninklijk Belgisch Filmarchief at the time, took his place.[113] He had a strong background in film restoration and was one of the founders of the Pordenone Silent Film Festival in Italy. In 1997, GEH opened the first film preservation program in the United States, the L. Jeffrey Selznick School in Rochester, which advanced the professionalization of the entire archival field.[114] The establishment of a training program focusing on all aspects of film archiving—from inspection to identification, and from physical repair to

projection—exposed the need to define the material object of film preservation. Questions around the identification of the original in the process of film restoration and historical interpretation, which had long been familiar to the art restorer, now demanded greater self-reflexivity in the work and formation of the film archivist.

At the same time that films like *Jurassic Park* (1993) and *Toy Story* (1995) proved the increasing photographic realism of computer-generated images, a new awareness of analog film's specificity began circulating within the archival world.[115] In 1996, an article in FIAF's *Journal of Film Preservation* launching Rochester's film preservation school introduced the term "moving image artifact" into the archival field's jargon.[116] A few years later, Paul Read and Mark-Paul Meyer's widely adopted film restoration textbook further cemented the definition of motion picture film as an artifact "that consists of a transparent plastic base on which a photographic emulsion has been coated."[117] The identification of film as an artifact effected a crucial semantic shift in the understanding of film—from a mechanically reproducible art form into an art the making and preservation of which involves human craftsmanship and knowledge. As the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it, an artifact is "an object made or modified by human workmanship, as opposed to one formed by natural processes."[118] In the last thirty years, the fast pace of digitization and the phasing out of analog film technologies have profoundly altered how many curators, filmmakers, and cinephiles perceive not just moving images but celluloid film specifically as a (now endangered) form of artistic expression. Early theorists' fascination with film's unlimited technological reproducibility beyond the boundaries of time and space has left room for an unprecedented awareness of its finitude and need for active preservation.

The notion of film artifact emphasizes archival films' uniqueness and irreproducibility, tied, as in the case of works of fine art, to their individual histories.[119] Paraphrasing Walter Benjamin's "Work of Art" essay, one may understand film artifacts as material archival objects with a unique existence, determined by the histories to which they have been subject throughout time, including "changes to the physical structure of the work over time, together with any changes in ownership."[120] The individual history of an archival film print, for example, may be marked by the frequency of its projection, the way it was edited for distribution purposes (in a foreign market, for instance), or its storage conditions before reaching the archive—a history inscribed in the film's scratches, wear and tear, decomposition, or lack thereof. "When we consider the limited number of prints struck for a film of the early years," Cherchi Usai explains, "and take into account the variety of factors contributing to their loss or decay, the very existence of a nitrate copy one hundred years after the making of the film may be seen as something close to a miracle."[121] The

definition of film artifact has allowed archivists to define the objects of their work while establishing a new historiographic perspective centered around the materiality of film. Against conceptions of films as mere audiovisual content, or abstracted texts devoid of material history, Cherchi Usai objects, "the silent film we are about to watch is not an abstract entity brought to us through a logical pattern designed by history on behalf of posterity."[122]

According to this curatorial logic, silent films hold multiple layers of historicity, the first one of which pertains to their image level, displaying historically specific events, locations, ways of acting, mise-en-scène, and modes of editing the action. Beyond this first layer, a whole array of filmographic information might make an archival film worth preserving. Take the case of Allan Dwan's 1923 film *Zaza* (part of GEH's collections), which is representative of a particular moment in Swanson's life and career, as she had just moved from Hollywood to New York, where she began collaborating with Dwan.[123] Read in its archival context, however, this same archival print possesses also a third historical stratum—it is a material and visual trace of the passage of time, from the moment the print was struck to that when it finally reached the archive. The museum's archival print of *Zaza* is part of Swanson's personal collection, which was entirely relocated to GEH in the 1960s after she discovered that some of her films had been taken from MoMA during John F. Kennedy's electoral campaign.[124] Within the framework of archival film's multi-layered historicity, "it is a precise curatorial choice," declares Cherchi Usai, to use minimal intervention in film restoration and "show images with scratches at GEH, rather than erasing the visual signs of time."[125]

The equation of silent films with artifacts with a meaningful material history invites a certain kind of aesthetic experience akin to that with a unique and rare museum object. Discourses comparing film archives to art museums date back to the early days of the archival film movement. As Ernest Lindgren, first curator of Britain's National Film Library (now British Film Institute National Archive, BFI), argues in 1935, "film archivists will never be accepted unless they use the terminology of an art form that has already been accepted." The art gallery, he suggests, should be the model for film archives.[126] In the present day, when analog film stock is a rare commodity, curators have invoked once again the comparison with fine art museums—this time, not only to legitimize film's artistic prestige but also to account for its changed status as a rare museum object.

Between 2012 and 2013, two of the major producers of motion-picture film stock filed for bankruptcy (Kodak) and discontinued the manufacturing of film (Fuji), putting the survival of film at serious risk—an event eventually averted by Kodak's 2015 and 2020 agreements with Hollywood studios to maintain film stock supply.[127] Since then, Kodak's manufacturing of still

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and motion picture film has witnessed a small-scale revival, with increasingly higher production and retail costs, and Fujifilm has resumed a minimal production of black-and-white stock for archival purposes.[128] Around only 1 percent of films are entirely shot on analog film today. However, the global success of TV series such HBO's *Succession* (2018–23) and films like *The Fablemans* (Steven Spielberg, 2022) and the critical acclaim of titles such as *Aftersun* (Charlotte Wells, 2022), all of which were shot on analog film stock, has marked Kodak's come back.[129]

In the early 2010s, however, analog film was thought to be about to disappear for good under the weight of an inexorable process of obsolescence.[130] "Who would have dreamed film would die so quickly?" asked the late Roger Ebert in 2011, adding, "the victory of video was quick and merciless."[131] Against the backdrop of its shrinking—nearly halted—production, resulting scarcity, and soaring price, analog film turned into a rare and unique commodity, acquiring surplus cultural value. As Cherchi Usai explains in GEH's strategic document for 2014–23, "with the foreseeable demise of film manufacturing,"

> print replacement will eventually become impossible (this is already the case with many items in the museum's collection, due to the distinctive methods used for their creation). As a consequence, photochemical prints will become the equivalent of fine arts paintings and sculptures—unique and irreplaceable objects of great financial value.[132]

Film's feared obsolescence accelerated the process of its "museumification"—a transformation reflected in GEH's name change to George Eastman Museum (GEM) in 2015.[133] While some curators highlight the obvious differences with traditional art museums—in a film museum, "the experience of witnessing the artefact does not include … the artefact itself," which is hidden in the projection booth—film's museumification further cements analog film's comparison with fine artworks.[134]

Such an equation with fine art, however, has dubious implications from both an aesthetic and hermeneutic perspective. According to D. N. Rodowick, film's aesthetics and medium specificity resides in its intrinsic hybridity—not entirely an "autographic" nor an "allographic" art. Building on philosopher Nelson Goodman's distinction, autographic arts, Rodowick explains, are "the arts of signature." From sculpture to hand-drafted manuscript, to painting, "autographic arts are defined by action—the physical contact of the artist's hand—and by a certain *telos*: they are concluded as aesthetic objects once the artist's hand has completed her or his work."[135] However, a clear-cut definition of authorship is hardly applicable to films, which, as Card believes, are the result of several personalities' work and creative efforts.[136]

Even reconceived as the product of multiple authors (including screen-writer, director, and acting cast), film's life, unlike autographic art forms, extends beyond its compositional moment. Like with music and theatrical creations, a film can appear before an audience only when projected or per-formed. Cinema is what Goodman defines as a "two-stage," or allographic art, "in which there is a spatial and temporal separation between composition and performance."[137] Yet, unlike these allographic arts, cinema's compositional stage fails to generate a perfect and fixed notation, a codification compara-ble to a printed music score or a book. Like a lithographic matrix, used as an original master to produce successive prints, a photographic or film negative fails to work as a notation, in that, as Rodowick notes, no photographic or film print is identical to another—an observation that radically questions the idea of film's technical reproducibility. This becomes apparent in the case of *Citizen Kane* (1941), for instance, whose negative is lost and of which different archival prints exist.[138]

Within what I call GEM's "fine art" framework, the interpretation of his-torical film artifacts always presupposes an archetypical creative intention, that is, an artistic agency, no matter how jeopardized it may be. Take the example of a generic colored travelogue from 1912. As Cherchi Usai clarifies, although "the creator might have made a number of aesthetic choices … that are not necessarily resulting from his [*sic*] conscious intention," it is neverthe-less important to establish the reasons for his choice of color techniques.[139] Determining the autographic signature here is pivotal to tracing a herme-neutic separation between the realm of creation—endowed with historical authenticity—and that of subsequent interpretation. Cherchi Usai illustrates the relationship between the creator's intention and authenticity as follows:

> Film history proceeds by an effort to explain the loss of cultural ambience that has evaporated from the moving image in the context of a given time and place. … If all moving images could be experienced as a Model Image (that is, in their *intended state*, in an *intention* visible in every part of them even before their actual consumption), no such a thing as film history would be needed or possible.[140]

While recreating an original work of art—a film artifact in this case—would admittedly be impossible, the process of interpreting, restoring, and preserv-ing film, in this view, should aim to assess the author's intention, thereby approximating the artifacts' original qualities, that is, the ideal "Model Image." In other words, Cherchi Usai heuristically invokes the autographic model for film, inasmuch as the author, or the authors, represent(s) the unreachable locus of authenticity.

Beyond the autographic dimension of film artifacts, Cherchi Usai's curatorial discourse also accounts for the performative moment of film exhibition—what he calls the "cinematic event"—emphasizing the exceptional and unique character of such aesthetic experiences. Tied to contingent variables, such as the specific exhibition technologies available at a given time, "cinematic events," according to him, are historical events in their own right, part of moving-image history. Foregrounding film's allographic character and the communal nature of "cinematic events," he compares them to live concerts, "where an audience hears the melody produced by musicians playing their instruments—parallel to some extent to the work of a projectionist with film's technological apparatus."[141] Alongside the rarity of archival film prints and the limited commercial availability of analog film stock and projection, the communal and historical character of archival film screenings make "cinematic events" unique aesthetic experiences. The direction of such "cinematic events," according to Cherchi Usai, requires knowledge that is at the same time technical and artistic, akin to that of an art museum curator choosing not just the artworks on display but also the color of exhibition walls, the positioning and number of paintings on the walls, the shape of frames, and the angle and intensity of light.[142]

The purpose of this model of curatorship is to guide viewers in the appreciation of moving images, focusing on analog film's material specificity. In Cherchi Usai's view, a film museum should educate audiences to "recognize the texture of analog images and notice that they have a different light from their digital counterparts, helping viewers realize that they [analog images] do not appear continuously on screen, but only intermittently." Accordingly, curators at the Dryden Theatre always specify the format and medium of the movie about to be projected, providing viewers with "a set of tools to appreciate that any message seen in a certain way provokes a different rational and emotional reaction."[143] GEM's curatorial strategy does not necessarily imply a qualitative hierarchy among analog film formats and digital media but instead emphasizes the degree of visual, aesthetic, technological, and cultural difference between the two. In analogy with the arts domain, Cherchi Usai contends, "no one would ever claim that a fresco is better than a painting, or that a string quartet is better than a symphony, or that a violin is better than a trumpet. They are different."[144] Through the fine art model, GEM claims to offer a variety of moving image experiences, ranging from nitrate film to DCP (Digital Cinema Package) screenings, catering to a diverse audience of both digital-born viewers as well more consummate spectators, aware of medium specificity. While claiming to do so, GEM's fine art model all the same privileges the exhibition of analog film and, by reviving traditional ideas of aesthetic cultivation, pursues an ideal of spectatorship geared around the notion of connoisseurship.

THE NITRATE PICTURE SHOW

According to the fine art framework, the film museum experience revolves around the appreciation of the unique visual qualities of an authentic archival film print projected on a screen, a kind of viewing experience that in this view only film heritage institutions can offer. However, one may counter, what film archives and museums screen are not their "archival masters," that is, the closest surviving elements to films' camera negatives, regarded as the originals for restoration and preservation purposes. Excluded from circulation, such masters are instead used to produce duplicates, or "reference prints," which film museums project for their audiences.[145] Within this logic, the existence of at least one print generation between this original archival master and its screening replica would thus undermine the experience of beholding a film artifact, which may be seen as, in fact, inauthentic. Against these objections, the recently launched Nitrate Picture Show ostensibly does away with any residue of ambiguity that might still hinder one from conceiving films as unique museum artifacts.

GEM inaugurated the first edition of the Nitrate Picture Show in May 2015 with a program featuring only uniquely preserved nitrate films. In practical terms, this means that rather than screening prints of later generation duplicated on acetate film stock from archival masters, GEM's nitrate festival projects only authentic nitrate films with original Technicolor dyes and gleaming black and whites. In symbolic terms, it means establishing film's status as a unique museum object, bolstering its aura of authenticity. "The nitrate originals," explains a quote from Card, to whom the 2015 edition was dedicated, "should be used when they're negatives to get the best possible prints; the original positives should be looked at as long as they can be put through projectors. Otherwise you're not talking about films, you're talking about facsimiles."[146] The festival, which epitomizes GEM's fine art model of curatorship, takes its title from The Last Nitrate Picture Show, a program of mostly nitrate films that the BFI and the Imperial War Museum organized on the occasion of FIAF's London conference in 2000.[147] Now in its seventh edition, the Nitrate Picture Show has attracted a growing audience of both international and local film preservation students, film archivists, critics, collectors, historians, and cinephiles of all ages.[148]

Nitrate film stock has been out of production since 1951, and it is widely believed that its visual properties cannot adequately be reproduced either on acetate film stock or digitally, due to their different rendering of color tones and light grading.[149] For many film connoisseurs and enthusiasts, nitrate film displays a "luminosity and a sparkle (supposed to be a result of its silver content) that is unattainable with later film stock."[150] Blacks appear exquisitely
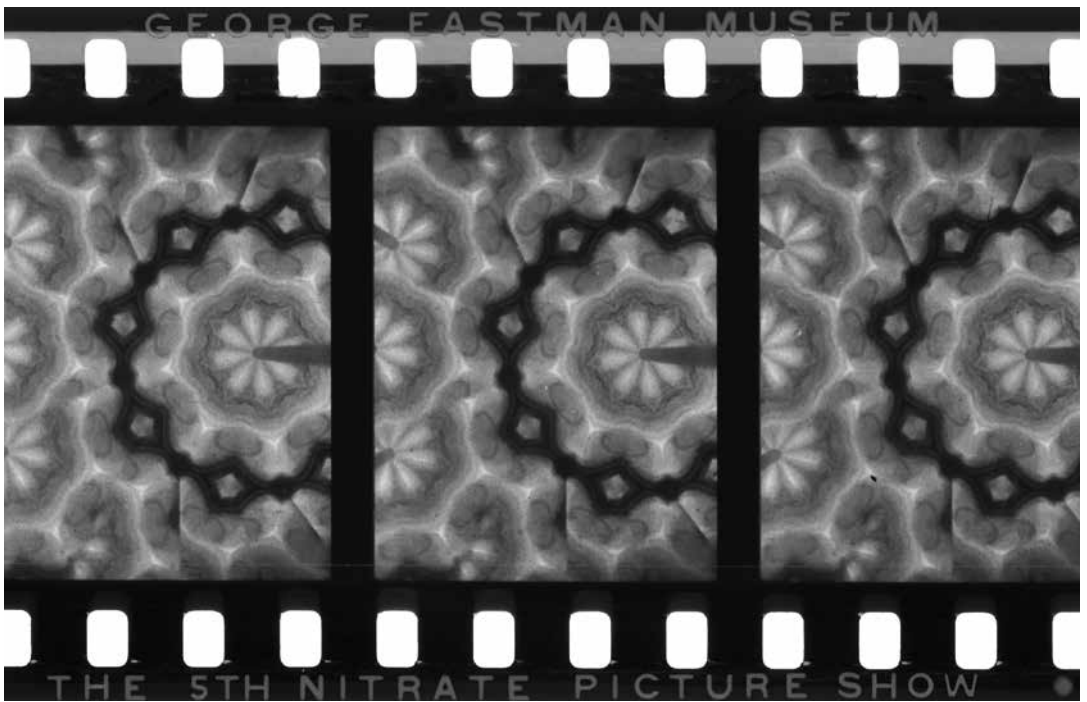
FIGURE 12.
The 5th Edition of the Nitrate Picture Show
(George Eastman Museum, May 3–5, 2019).
Courtesy of the George Eastman Museum.

velvety, and images possess a "pin-sharp definition" resulting from its distinctive tonal palette.[151] Apart from GEM, only a few other institutions in the world (among them Filmoteca de la UNAM in Mexico, the Stanford Theatre, UCLA Film & Television Archive, and the BFI) can still publicly exhibit nitrate, due to strict fire regulations over its high flammability. Moreover, prints that may still be projected today might not be so tomorrow, due to shrinkage and brittleness.[152] These characteristics make the Nitrate Picture Show a unique and exclusive event, at least for those of us not lucky enough to live in Rochester, Mexico City, Palo Alto, Los Angeles, or London year-round.

After its 2015 pilot edition, which mainly screened material from GEM's own vaults, subsequent shows began increasingly to screen nitrate prints from other international archives, ranging from the National Library of Norway to the National Film Archive of Japan, and from Národní filmový archiv in Prague to Mexico's Cineteca Nacional.[153] Thanks to such collaborations, curators have been able to put together programs that survey a great variety of genres, including "a little bit of film noir, comedy, drama, musicals, but also animated shorts, avant-garde films, documentaries, and cartoon sing-alongs."[154] The festival's search for projectable nitrates in various institutional collections

has also encouraged archivists worldwide to start monitoring not only the levels of decomposition but also the shrinkage, splices, and brittleness of their nitrate prints. (Shrinkage, which the festival's program notes specify for each of the titles, needs to be inferior to 1 percent in order to run the films through a projector safely.[155]) This has begun to shift the ways in which preservationists are inspecting nitrate film, no longer only as archival masters, but also with a new "goal of projection in mind."[156] The Nitrate Picture Show is thus indirectly changing how film archivists approach inspection, preservation, and exhibition. "These artifacts," explains the festival's former co-director Jared Case, "have a life, now and in the future, as a source for both preservation and presentation, as opposed to being retained only as master material."[157] In continuity with Card's curatorial approach at the Telluride Film Festival, the Nitrate Picture Show's titles remain secret until its opening—a move criticized by some (particularly those attending from abroad) but one that nevertheless reflects the event's pledge to foreground nitrate film artifacts' unique visual features over the film text.[158]

"There is an inherent beauty—a true 'aura'—in moving images made on nitrate stock," observes Cherchi Usai.[159] One by one, the Nitrate Picture Show restores all the characteristics that Benjamin identifies with traditional art's aura, that is, uniqueness, rarity, and authenticity.[160] Take, for instance, the nitrate print of Edwin Carewe's *Ramona* (1928). This film artifact bears the unique traces, both visible and invisible, of its singular vicissitudes that in 1945 brought it from Nazi Berlin to Russia's Gosfilmofond, among many other confiscated properties.[161] Unlike the rarity and authenticity of many contemporary artists' moving images, often imposed through the practice of the limited edition, the aura of these unique nitrate film artifacts stems from what Nick Pinkerton calls a kind of "aristocracy of scarcity" resulting from decades of obsolescence, fires, decomposition, shrinkage, and neglect.[162] To the uniqueness of the film artifact, we add the rarity of its exhibition. Take the case of the print of *The Damned* (*Les Maudits*, 1947), which the BFI acquired in 1957 and projected only once in 2010 before the Nitrate Picture Show finally screened it again.[163] The unique presence, in a particular time and space, of these original archival films—with original dyes, silver salts, splices, scratches, and end-of-reel cues, dating to the time of their first distribution—thus marks them as authentic film artifacts.[164]

"There will only be 500 people in the world at this first event. Make sure you are one of them," reads the promotional campaign of the first Nitrate Picture Show.[165] Similarly, GEM's Technicolor 100 Years, launched in 2015 to commemorate Technicolor's centennial, reasserted the centrality of the museum as a unique physical site of exclusive aesthetic experiences. It comprised collaborations with several film museums (including MoMA and the

Austrian Film Museum), itinerant talks about Technicolor's early history, a book launch, an exhibition of apparatuses and techniques in GEM's main galleries, and a program featuring original Technicolor prints at the Dryden Theatre. Including titles such as *La Cucaracha* (1934) and *Becky Sharp* (1935), the program, titled In Glorious Technicolor: A 35-Film Celebration, screened a selection of films made with the company's two-color system and its later signature three-color process.[166] Stretching from January to April 2015, In Glorious Technicolor featured both original 35mm Technicolor prints and more recent restorations.[167] While also other film museums around the world held screenings, analog and digital, of Technicolor classics like *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) to commemorate the anniversary, only the Dryden Theatre projected an original nitrate Technicolor print of the film. In Glorious Technicolor foregrounded the centrality of the museum as a unique exhibition dispositif within the fine art curatorial model.

These projects represent only one end of a dual strategy that privileges the display of analog originals in house while using digital technologies and formats for outreach and archival distribution purposes. In October 2014, Kodak donated a fully equipped digital laboratory to GEM, thanks to which the museum began scanning its film elements in house. By considerably cutting the expenses associated with outsourcing scanning, the new lab liberated resources that the museum redirected to other projects the costs of which are seldom covered by national grants, such as inter-archival collaborations and the preservation of foreign titles.[168] Most importantly, thanks to this new equipment, the museum began to create a 2K DCP library for the archival distribution of its most requested titles.[169] As former preservation manager Daniela Currò explains, in the last few years, GEM noticed that films loaned to other archives increasingly "returned to the museum with physical damages such as emulsion and base scratches or tears resulting from poor projection." As she suggests, this happens because "film knowledge is generally diminishing and there are fewer skilled people handling film." The DCP library offered a solution to this problem, enabling the circulation of titles from GEM's collections while protecting its archival film elements.[170] The DCP library and the exhibition of nitrate films thus belong to a two-tier curatorial strategy.

AESTHETICS OF SEPARATION AND TRAGIC NARRATIVES

The Nitrate Picture Show and In Glorious Technicolor shore-up the aura not only around these obsolete film carriers and dyes, but analog film more generally, conferring to its screenings a sense of sheer intensity and authenticity. "At each opening of the curtain," says André Habib about the Nitrate Picture

Show, "we felt, a kind of thrill at the certainty that we were witnessing a kind of re-exposition of time [*réexposition du temps*], somewhere between a tomb opening and the penetration into a prehistoric cave, a crypt or a chapel rarely open to the public."[171] In Habib's auratic impression of nitrate film, the filmic past is re-exposed to light, emerging and revealing itself to the present—an experience of simultaneity where the past appears in the guise of epiphany. Like the rarefied and sanctified space of the art museum—or, by the same token, a secluded prehistoric cave, a crypt, or an ancient chapel—the Dryden Theatre turns into what Gadamer calls a "site for simultaneity," where the historic object and the beholder inhabit the same space and time.[172]

With its exceptionality, intensity, and mystique, the auratic experience of beholding a museum work opens a spatiotemporal breach in the otherwise disciplined pace of our lives. Within the fine art framework, viewing nitrate films becomes an exceptional aesthetic experience, simultaneously merging aesthetic pleasure and historical appraisal. In the words of GEM's collection manager and former Nitrate Picture Show co-director Deborah Stoiber,

> if you are surrounded by those who appreciate not only the movie, but *the nitrate film itself*, it is simply magical. You feel as if you belong, as if you are a part of the movie. You are seeing what the filmmakers wanted you to see and feeling what the audiences of the past felt when they experienced nitrate projection.[173]

Within the auratic experience of nitrate film, the cinematic past reappears in the present, and aesthetic appreciation and historical understanding commingle inextricably, fusing into the film artifact, which eventually attains the status of timeless museum artwork.

Rather than fostering a specific historical interpretative approach, the auratization of nitrate film is predicated upon simultaneity, timelessness, and universality. More generally, "the aura of a historical object or discourse," Michael P. Steinberg observes, tends to posit "all contextual reality into a shadow realm of marginalisation."[174] An aesthetic experience of this kind, according to Gadamer,

> is directed towards what is supposed to be the work proper—what it ignores are the extra-aesthetic elements that cling to it, such as purpose, function, [and] the significance of its content. These elements may be significant enough inasmuch as they situate the work in its world and thus determine the whole meaningfulness that it originally possessed.[175]

Such process of "aesthetic differentiation," to put it in Gadamer's terms, severs artifacts from both the past whence they originated and the present in which they currently circulate, placing them within the suspended temporality of an aesthetic experience beyond time. As the abstracting and reifying process of film's museumification—in Wasson's words, extracting "films from their material conditions of production and usual contexts of exhibition, turning them into objects"—culminates with the Nitrate Picture Show, so too the downsides of conceiving film as a material artifact become finally apparent.[176]

According to Caroline Frick, the notion of the film artifact prioritizes an ideal of tangible heritage molded after the western-centered models of the universal museum and cultural heritage, neglecting the intangible cultural practices surrounding historical objects.[177] While the Nitrate Picture Show admittedly makes an effort to reintroduce some context within its celebration of nitrocellulose film (with tours to Rochester's Kodak factory, visits to the museum's Louis B. Mayer Conservation Center, and demonstrations of nitrate film stock's artisanal making), overall the festival runs the risk of fetishizing the legendary format. Through inspections on a rewind bench, one workshop, for instance, promises to acquaint participants with the "nitrate touch," that is, "the material evidence of original 35mm film artifacts (splices, perforations, and edge codes) as well as their distinctive optical qualities, which are so difficult to reproduce in analog and digital media."[178] As former Cinémathèque Française director Dominique Païni suggests, such focus on nitrate film support's authentic material and chemical features has concealed curators' role (and privilege) "in *choosing*, in *creating a hierarchy*, in advancing taste."[179] Such a fetishizing attitude has ennobled nitrate film, attributing to it an auratic authority that drives out questions about films' content and cultural, historical, and political significance, an attitude exemplified by the festival's decision not to release its titles; in the end, only the auratic encounter with nitrate matters. As filmmaker Hito Steyerl argues, and the Nitrate Picture Show programs largely confirm, the auratization of analog film formats tends to reinforce "high-end economies of film production" still firmly "anchored in systems of national culture, capitalist studio production, the cult of mostly male genius, and the original version."[180]

While susceptible to such criticism, the fine art discourse embraces its own brand of radicalism, challenging what Cherchi Usai calls "the neo-capitalist view of the moving image as a commodity and more specifically as content."[181] In the present day, while digital technologies seem to encourage the separation between the content of moving images and their medium-specific carrier, the fine art curatorial strategy invokes the indivisibility of film's materiality and representational content. In the name of authenticity, however, this model advances a hierarchy that collapses films' content and context into their medium-specific materiality, through a process of aesthetic differ-

entiation and historical abstraction. The fine art discourse metonymically emphasizes the materiality of film artifacts over other defining aspects of the historical network in which such artifacts circulated. These include film's cultural significance, function, and purpose—to use Gadamer's terminology—as a medium of mass entertainment, education, or propaganda. Read through Gadamer's theory of the hermeneutic circle (always shifting from particular objects, the *part*, to their broader contexts of interpretation, the *whole*), GEM's discourse appears to metonymically consecrate the epistemological primacy of the film artifact's material and visual qualities (the *part*), foreclosing its broader understanding as part of a historical *whole*.

The fine art discourse advances a metahistory of moving images marked by the tragic disappearance of analog film, emplotting such narrative and organizing the various elements of GEM's exhibition dispositif around the film artifact metonymy. Within White's metahistorical study of nineteenth-century historical imagination, we find a similar convergence of metonymical tropes and tragic narrative styles. A case in point is that of Alexis De Tocqueville's major works *Democracy in America* (1835–40) and *The Old Regime and the Revolution* (1856).[182] Here, according to White, there is a narratological correspondence between Tocqueville's language, revolving around metonymical oppositions such as "aristocratic" and "democratic societies," and his tragic vision "that the forces of history, which make it an arena of irremissible conflict, are not reconcilable, either in society or at the heart of man himself [*sic*]."[183] More than a century and a half later, the fine art discourse deploys an analogous kind of historical imagery structured around the same narrative tropes, invoking a tragic metahistorical poetics.

In Cherchi Usai's metahistorical narrative, new media always force "their hegemony by killing their predecessors, as in the case of cinema, which advertised itself as better and more realistic than the magic lantern show, and the talkies after silent films."[184] According to the same logic, digital technologies have forced out analog media by marketing their hyper-realistic look and more versatile operability, according to a seemingly inescapable law of technological obsolescence. Incidentally, in a striking continuity across past and present forms of historical thinking, the notion of an ineluctable law of technological obsolescence resonates with what White called the "mechanistic" mode of argument, again, typical of tragic histories such as Tocqueville's, equally concerned with the general laws governing human actions.[185] Against the backdrop of film's feared impending disappearance, the museum has claimed the mission to defend film's medium-specificity against the disruptive commodifying logic of the digital revolution.[186] The tragic tone of this rhetoric—which finds a precedent in Card's passionate defense of silent cinema's artistic and historical specificity, first in the face of the coming of sound and then of the

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spread of television—reflects the "epistemological vertigo" experienced with the technological transition to digital.[187] It also speaks to the preservation field's chronic lack of adequate financial resources and sustainable prospects.

In a further similarity with the correspondence that White traced between nineteenth-century historiography's use of metonymies, the emplotment of tragic histories, and mechanistic modes of argument, Cherchi Usai's tragic moving-image history shares with these kinds of historical narratives also a defining radical and militant tone.[188] According to him, digital culture displays a "profoundly reactionary, dogmatic, and evangelical logic" and "an intriguing tendency to deny history by proclaiming that one of the virtues of the digital image is that it will always be the same, no matter how often one will exhibit it." Against such claims, the curatorial choice to put on display the historicity and visual materiality of film artifacts becomes a "political gesture."[189] Cherchi Usai's tragic narrative has provided an intelligible framework for the mobilization of film artists and directors, including Tacita Dean, Guillermo Del Toro, Quentin Tarantino, Christopher Nolan, Judd Apatow, and J. J. Abrams, who rallied behind the online project Savefilm.org to campaign for the defense of analog film.[190]

Through an online petition, Savefilm.org asked for UNESCO's protection and safeguard of analog film as an endangered form of cultural expression. It metonymically describes film as "a beautiful, physical and robust medium that keeps the light within its fabric and holds in its emulsion the imprint of time. It is our cultural and historical memory: a place of imagination, poetry, art and life." However, the petition warns, "now we are on the point of losing it." With an increasingly tragic tone, it goes on, explaining:

> with the advent of digital, the medium of film is gravely threatened and might, unless action is taken, simply disappear. Its obsolescence will result in untold *tragedy* in all that we will no longer be able to see [,] experience, and … make, because we will have simply lost the technology to do so.[191]

Savefilm.org then calls to action artists, filmmakers, producers, and curators—"we cannot allow this to happen[!]"[192] Alongside this initiative, one may argue that agreements between the studios and Kodak to extend the manufacturing of film stock, as well as the theatrical distribution strategy of movies like Nolan's *Interstellar* (premiered only in analog film theaters across the US and Canada) all act upon the tragic narrative of analog film's imminent disappearance.[193]

While having increased awareness of analog film's specificity and the concrete threat of its phasing out, the urgency of the fine art discourse, virtually equating any archival film artifact to an endangered fine artwork, risks over-

riding paramount aspects of the politics of film curatorship. Take the case of a film like *Beggars of Life* (1928), acquired by Card during his tenure and then featuring as a canonical film over half a century later at the Pordenone Silent Film Festival. As collector and historian Kevin Brownlow highlights in the 2013 festival catalog, the 16mm print previously in circulation was "so badly printed that facial expressions were impossible to see." However, he adds, thanks to its recent 35mm restoration, "the quality of the production is at last apparent." Citing silent film musician Neil Brand, Brownlow concludes, "everytime it plays *Beggars of Life* unfailingly works its rough … but heartfelt magic."[194] In contrast to this evoked sense of aura and prestige, in his autobiography Card admits preserving the film for entirely different reasons—"not because anyone thought it a great film, but simply because of my infatuation with its star, Louise Brooks, an emotional devotion that had begun at the age of fourteen."[195] By ascribing *Beggars of Life* to an "aesthetic sphere," where it belongs as timeless classic and rescued artifact, this model of curatorship naturalizes Card's male gaze, which shaped the museum's collections and GEH's exhibition strategies (certainly a situation that is more structural than specific to GEM). Equally, the film's auratization evades questions about its gender politics and changed reception—think, for instance, about Nancy's (Brooks) crossdressing and the possibility of queering *Beggars of Life*.[196]

Paraphrasing Vivian Sobchack, one might argue that "historical coherence and grand narratives are now riddled not only by holes [and] gaps" caused by the tragic loss and decay of film but also "by the questions and investments of past and present *desire*."[197] "The quality of nitrate is not in the stock, it is in our eyes," claims Païni, arguing that the "nitrate experience" is the result of the convergence of many aspects of the film experience, including the surfaces of the objects on the screen, the film's color and light, its mise-en-scène, editing, and, most importantly, the *desire* we affectively project onto it. As he suggests in the case of *The Spanish Main* (1945):

> It is not only film stock which has changed since Borzage's *The Spanish Main* …. There is a relation between the velvet of the actress's skin and the effect of the light and colors rendered by the projection of this image which indeed resulted from a nitrate copy. What did we see, then? The result of a film stock, or a type of make-up which is no longer used? Is it the film itself which we mourn, or the disappearance of a feminine skin which incarnated the dominant representation of women?"[198]

Past and present curators' *desires* have phenomenologically shaped the film material that gleams on screen, legitimating archival acquisitions, selection criteria, exhibition strategies, historiographic agendas, and revisionist rewrit-

ings. However, the fine art curatorial approach has concealed the cultural, ideological, and erotic investments that have determined the significance of film artifacts behind the urgency of its tragic historical narrative and medium-specific aesthetics.

Besides neglecting the changes in the cultural and historical value of archival films, the fine art curatorial approach eclipses also site-specific elements of GEM's exhibition dispositif. There is no place on earth where the aura of analog photography and film may be more keenly felt than in Rochester, the place still often associated with Eastman Kodak and once known as the "city photographic." Its metamorphosis from a prosperous industrial city to postindustrial center went in parallel with analog photography and film's transformation from industrial commodities to quasi-obsolete media. Since its opening in 1949, the museum's history has been intimately intertwined, more than any other film archive and museum in the world, with the rise and fall of the photographic industry. The museum's film collection, for instance, developed from an initial lot of Kodak industrial films and kept expanding thanks to the company's powerful contacts in Hollywood. Half a century later, the dramatic downsizing of film stock manufacturing—only in Rochester, more than a quarter of its current population has lost their job since 1982—occasioned photochemical film's near extinction, indirectly magnifying its aura and inspiring its museumification.[199] Yet, GEM's fine art curatorial model hardly engages with Rochester's urban history and social demographics, so profoundly affected by this story of industrialization and deindustrialization.

While GEM has often emphasized continuities across Card's art discourse and the museum's latest initiatives, the institutional history I recount in this chapter foregrounds differences between GEH's popular art paradigm—premised on cinema's artistic autonomy as a mass medium—and GEM's assimilation of film to the fine arts. Within a framework that was conservative of his white patriarchal privileges, Card pushed a revisionist preservation, curatorial, and historiographic agenda that disrupted the canon MoMA had established. By contrast, in espousing what after Gadamer I define here as an aesthetics of separation, GEM's initiatives such as the Nitrate Picture Show expunge questions of revisionist historiography, cultural politics, representation, and site-specificity from its auratization of analog film, all the while embracing a seemingly radical rhetoric warning against film's obsolescence. In the strategic document 2014/2023, GEM states its ambition to "present the history of the medium as a living laboratory of ideas and innovation rather than a 'heritage' to be observed with passive deference."[200] It is by reintroducing such cultural political questions within a broader history of analog film's industrialization, crisis, and auratization, that GEM may address some of its curatorial discourse's inherent abstractions and stay true to this ambition.

NOTES

1   This chapter is based on fieldwork I conducted at GEM's Moving Image Department between 2014 and 2018.

2   "EYE—New Dutch Film Institute / Delugan Meissl Associated Architects," *Arch-Daily*, April 10, 2012, http://www.archdaily.com/?p=223973.

3   Paolo Cherchi Usai (former Senior Curator of Moving Images at GEM), interview by the author, July 30, 2014.

4   Cherchi Usai to the Nitrate Picture Show mailing list, December 13, 2014.

5   Motion Picture Department at the George Eastman House, "School of Film and Video Preservation," *The Journal of Film Preservation* 25.53 (1996): 26.

6   See Paolo Cherchi Usai, *The Death of Cinema: History, Cultural Memory, and the Digital Dark Age* (London: BFI, 2001).

7   See Dana Polan, *Scenes of Instruction: The Beginnings of the U.S. Study of Film* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 15–19.

8   George Eastman House, *A Collective Endeavor* (Rochester: George Eastman House, 1999), 89.

9   See Bruce Barnes, "Director's Note: Welcoming a New Curator," *Medium*, August 26, 2019, https://medium.com/george-eastman-museum/directors-note-welcoming-a-new-curator-a72b5da4ce38. In particular, since 2019, when Bagrov was appointed, and throughout the COVID19 pandemic, GEM has embarked on projects including a full inventory of its collections, intense experimentation with restoration software and digital scanning workflows, the reconstruction of American silent films such as Tod Browning's *The Unknown* (1927) and eleven silent westerns with William S. Hart, the preservation of unique nitrate films in the museum's vaults and of foreign silents including *The Red Peacock* (*Arme Violetta*, Paul L. Stein, 1920), *The Overcoat* (*Shinel*, Grigorii Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg, 1928), and *My Son* (*Moi syn*, Yevgenii Cherviakov, 1928). Peter Bagrov (Senior Curator of Moving Images at GEM), interview by the author, August 10, 2023.

10   SAA has recently updated its dictionary, listing twelve different definitions of *archives* (pl. n.) and *archive* (sing. n.). Here I refer to the earlier definition, which while not necessarily exhaustive of debates in the field, is certainly more succinct. Society of American Archivists, "Archives," *Dictionary of Archives Terminology*, accessed 21 March 2023, https://dictionary.archivists.org/entry/archives.html, emphasis added.

11   Steven L. Hensen, *Archives, Personal Papers, and Manuscripts: A Cataloging Manual for Archival Repositories, Historical Societies, and Manuscript Libraries* (Chicago, IL: Society of American Archivists, 1989), 9, emphasis added.

12   The definition importantly specifies: "open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied

experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing." Museum Definition (adopted in Prague, on August 24, 2022), International Council of Museums, accessed June 13, 2023, https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/, emphasis added.

13 "ICOM Announces the Alternative Museum Definition That Will Be Subject to a Vote," International Council of Museums, July 25, 2019, https://icom.museum/en/news/icom-announces-the-alternative-museum-definition-that-will-be-subject-to-a-vote/.

14 Paolo Cherchi Usai, David Francis, Alexander Horwath, and Michael Loebenstein, *Film Curatorship: Archives, Museums, and the Digital Marketplace* (Vienna and Pordenone: Österreichisches Filmmuseum and Le Giornate del Cinema Muto, 2008), 15–16, emphasis added.

15 Cherchi Usai, interview.

16 See Caroline Frick, *Saving Cinema: The Politics of Preservation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 75–77.

17 See Frick, *Saving Cinema*; and Anthony Slide, *Nitrate Won't Wait: A History of Film Preservation in the United States* (Jefferson: McFarland Classics, 2000). As Polan argues, between 1915 and 1935, before the institution of MoMA's Film Library "the study of film … revolved around questions of social reform versus cultural appreciation, as if hesitating between a social science-based and a humanities-based understanding of this new artistic form." Polan, *Scenes of Instruction*, 14.

18 The National Endowment for the Arts was established in 1965 and authorized the foundation of the AFI. Frick, *Saving Cinema*, 55.

19 Ibid.; and "Motion Pictures in the Library of Congress," Moving Image Research Center, accessed September 25, 2019, http://www.loc.gov/rr/mopic/mpcoll.html#top.

20 See "About the National Archives of the United States," National Archives, accessed September 25, 2019, https://www.archives.gov/publications/general-info-leaflets/1-about-archives.html.

21 See Frick, *Saving Cinema*, 40–47 and 55–64.

22 Ibid., 46.

23 Letter from Barr to Abbott, Motion Pictures Division Papers, Library of Congress, MBRS Division, cited in Frick, *Saving Cinema*, 46.

24 George Eastman House, *Collective Endeavor*, 5–7. For a study of the provenance of GEH's film collection see Grazia Ingravalle, "Provenance and Film Historiography: 1910s Films at the George Eastman Museum," in *Provenance and Early Cinema*, eds. Joane Bernardi, Paolo Cherchi Usai, Tami Williams, and Joshua Yumibe (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2020).

25 "About/Manifesto," Anthology Film Archives, http://anthologyfilmarchives.org/about/manifesto, accessed September 25, 2019, emphasis added.

26 "BAMPFA Mission and History," BAMPFA, accessed September 25, 2019, https://bampfa.org/about/history-mission.

27 "Academy Museum Collections," Academy Museum, accessed April 25, 2022, https://www.academymuseum.org/en/collection; "About," Academy Museum, accessed April 25, 2022, https://www.academymuseum.org/en/about.

28 Nobby Clark played a pivotal role in the expansion of what became known as the Eastman Historical Photographic Collection. From its original nucleus, constituted by the collection of Viennese photographic scientist Joseph Maria Eder, he championed the acquisition of the Gabriel Cromer photographic collection of nineteenth-century French photographs, literature, and apparatuses. George Eastman House, *Collective Endeavor*, 5–7.

29 Ibid., 9

30 Ibid., 13

31 Beaumont Newhall, *Focus: Memoirs of a Life in Photography* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1993), 194–99.

32 George Eastman House, *Collective Endeavor*, 13.

33 Newhall, *Focus*, 147–50.

34 Nancy Wynne Parker Newhall to Edward Weston, January 17, 1949; cited in Ibid., 197.

35 George Eastman House, *Collective Endeavor*, 43–45.

36 Oscar Solbert to James Card, November 16, 1948, Stills, Posters, and Paper Collection (SPPC), GEM. See also Herbert Reynolds, "'What Can You Do for Us Barney?' Four Decades of Film Collecting: An Interview with James Card," *Image* 20, no. 2 (1977), 14 and 19. See also George Eastman House, *Collective Endeavor*, 37. Rumor has it that in return for the loan of his collection, Card was offered the position of Assistant Curator.

37 Card noted: "Beaumont Newhall as curator was a little bit bemused by the whole idea, and I'm sure there must have been times when he had the feeling that it [the creation of a film collection at GEH] was assuming importance out of proportion to the plan and the whole direction of the museum." James Card, *Seductive Cinema: The Art of Silent Film* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 120.

38 Iris Barry, "The Film Library and How it Grew," *Film Quarterly 22*.4 (Summer 1969): 19.

39 The 1945 International Cinema Congress in Basel provided an opportunity to renew contacts between the representatives of the first film archives, excluding Nazi Germany's state film archive (Reichsfilmarchiv). See "FIAF Timeline," FIAF, accessed September 25, 2019, https://www.fiafnet.org/pages/History/FIAF-Timeline.html. The New York based "Cinema 16" was one of the most successful film societies in the post-war period. See for instance Scott MacDonald, *Cinema 16: Documents Toward a History of the Film Society* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002).

40 Card, *Seductive Cinema*, 120.

41 Card listed also films such as *The Salvation Hunters* (1925) and *The Last of the Mohicans* (1920). See Card, *Seductive Cinema*, 120; and Reynolds, "Interview with James Card," 20.

42 "Purpose and Function of a Proposed Motion Picture Collection," 1, undated internal document, SPPC, GEM.

43 Decades later, Card criticized the American Film Institute's choice to catalog only the feature-length films from the 1910s, excluding the one-, two-, and three-reelers, which represented the majority of American films produced during those years. According to Card, the AFI catalog's "four-reel" criterion negatively impacted the preservation of shorter films, resulting in gaps in the documentation (particularly relating to the years between 1911 and 1915) and failure to advance a more nuanced understanding of the historical specificity of short film in the 1910s. See Card, *Seductive Cinema*, 72–74; and *The American Film Institute Catalog*: *Feature Films 1911–1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), xv.

44 See Maurice Bardèche and Robert Brasillach, *The History of Motion Pictures*, trans. Iris Barry (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 1938); Paul Rotha, *The Film till Now: A Survey of the Cinema* (New York: Jonathan Cape & Harrison Smith, 1930); Lewis Jacobs, *The Rise of the American Film: A Critical History* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co, 1939); and David Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 12–45.

45 Iris Barry, *Let's Go to the Pictures* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1926), 14, 66–67.

46 See Haidee Wasson, *Museum Movies: The Museum of Modern Art and the Birth of Art Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 110–48; Peter Decherney, *Hollywood and the Culture Elite: How the Movies Became American* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 123–60; and Alison Trope, *Stardust Monuments: The Saving and Selling of Hollywood* (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2011), 15–25.

47 Cited in Slide, *Nitrate Won't Wait*, 22. Card provided an example of Barry's trenchant opinions regarding many American silents: "In a Museum of Modern Art bulletin of 1941, Iris wrote a piece on selection problems: 'Take the case of Will Rogers' 'The Headless Horseman', first feature film on panchromatic stock. ... It would be difficult to view without boredom.'" Card, *Seductive Cinema*, 105. On the sexism in the debates over Barry's curatorship see Frick, *Saving Cinema*, 43.

48 Reynolds, "Interview with James Card," 20.

49 Rotha, *Film till Now*, 21. Cited in Card, *Seductive Cinema*, 10. According to Card, Rotha's book, along with Rudolph Arnheim's *Film as Art* (originally published in 1933), "were perhaps the most influential works read in English that helped create a slowly dawning awareness that there could be serious appreciation of motion pictures as art." Card, *Seductive Cinema*, 107. See Rudolf Arnheim, *Film as Art* (London: Faber, 1958); and Bordwell, *History of Film Style*, 12–45.

50 Rotha, *Film till Now*, 9.

51 In 1935 *Caligari* was the highlight of the first film program at MoMA and, according to Card, the first film Henry Langlois acquired for the Cinemathèque Française. Card traveled to Germany in 1936 (with a scholarship to study at the University of Heidelberg) to purchase a rare 9.5mm reduction of *Caligari* in Dusseldorf. Card, *Seductive Cinema*, 68–71; and Reynolds, "Interview with James Card," 15.

52 "George Eastman House Motion Picture Department: A Profile," 2009, internal document, GEM.

53 James Card, "Archives and Archivists," speech at the Canadian Federation of Film, Toronto, Ontario, August 31, 1957, SPPC, GEM. I am grateful to Nancy Kauffman (Still Archivist at George Eastman Museum), who transcribed this and other speeches and made them available to me. Eric Hoyt offers a different kind of narrative around Hollywood's preservation efforts in his history of studio film libraries. See Eric Hoyt, *Hollywood Vault: Film Libraries Before Home Video* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

54 Reynolds, "Interview with James Card," 19. I am grateful to film historian David Pierce for pointing to me that GEH's duplication policy at the time prioritized producing viewing prints often in 16mm (as in the case of *The Crowd*) likely for purposes of exhibition, rather than preservation. This hypothesis is to be confirmed, as the production of 16mm prints, rather than 35mm, might have also been due to financial constraints.

55 In a lecture titled after historian and MoMA collaborator Arthur Knight's book, *The Liveliest Art: A Panoramic History of the Motion Picture* (1957), and delivered in 1958 at the Dryden Theatre, Card criticized film historians such as Knight, Siegfried Kracauer, Terry Ramsay, Louella Parsons, Jacobs, Peter Noble, and John Bainbridge, whose historical accounts were for Card full of historical fallacies due to their lack of archival research. James Card, "The Liveliest Art," lecture at the Dryden Theatre, 1958, SPPC, GEM.

56 Since GEH hired George Pratt as Card's assistant, he carried out extensive historical research based on film prints and film-related material; however, space limitations do not allow for a more extensive account of Pratt's work here. See Herbert Reynolds, "George C. Pratt: 1914–88," *Cinema Journal* 28.3 (Spring, 1989): 8–12.

57 David Pierce, *The Survival of American Silent Feature Films: 1912–1929* (Council on Library and Information Resources and the Library of Congress: Washington DC, 2013), 3.

58 Ibid., 2.

59 Card, *Seductive Cinema*, 10.

60 Ibid., 128.

61 Reynolds, "Interview with James Card," 25.

62 James Card, "The Art of the Great Faces," undated lecture for the tenth anniversary of the museum's opening, SPPC, GEM.

63 Reynolds, "Interview with James Card," 24–25.

64 Card boldly confessed: "there's no other reason for having so many John Barrymore pictures in the collection, other than I'm just fascinated with him as an actor." Reynolds, "Interview with James Card," 25. The personal friendship between Card and some of the artists he was fond of, along with the museum's tributes to their work, earned it important donations by actresses such as Swanson, Pickford, Colleen Moore and Gish. Reynolds, "Interview with James Card," 22.

65 According to Card, Oscar Solbert suggested to organize the first Festival in January 1955 shortly after Clyde Bruckman—the scriptwriter of many Buster Keaton films—killed himself due to his professional decline. The Festival was therefore a perfect occasion to honor his memory and that of many other silent film artists. Card, *Seductive Cinema*, 280.

66 "Garbo Encore," Dryden Theatre Film Society of the George Eastman House (May and June 1965); "The Devil's Envoys. The Femme Fatale in Silent Drama," Dryden Theatre of the George Eastman House (July 1965); and "A Tribute to Gloria Swanson," Dryden Theatre of the George Eastman House (May 1966), SPPC, GEM.

67 James Card, "Festival in Hollywood," introduction to the first edition of the Festival of Film Artists, Hollywood, 1955, SPPC, GEM.

68 See Béla Balázs, "The Close-up," in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 2009), 273–75.

69 In his speech "Art of the Great Faces," Card cited Theodor Dreyer about the close-up: "A word about actors. Anyone who has seen my films—the good ones—will know how much importance I attach to performance. Nothing in the world can be compared to the human face. It is a land one can never tire of exploring. There is no greater experience in a studio than to witness the expression of a sensitive face under the mysterious power of inspiration. To see it animated from inside, and turning into poetry." As it is often the case, Card provided no reference.

70 Balász, "Close-up," 318–19.

71 Card, *Seductive Cinema*, 131.

72 See Lucy Fischer, ed., *American Cinema of the 1920s: Themes and Variations* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009); and Jennifer M. Bean and Diane Negra, eds. *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

73 Swanson stars in both DeMille's *Don't Change Your Husband* (1919) and *Why Change Your Wife?* (1920). Card, *Seductive Cinema*, 181–83, 144–46, 131–33.

74 Lindsay was fascinated by both Pickford's screen image and its significance as mass cultural phenomenon. He wondered "why do the people love Mary?" Vachel Lindsay, *The Art of the Moving Picture* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1916), 27. The following pages refer to the 1916 edition of Lindsay's book unless otherwise stated.

75 Card, *Seductive Cinema*, 132.

76 See Louise Brooks, *Lulu in Hollywood* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013). On Brooks' incomplete and unpublished *Thirteen Women in Films* and notebooks held at GEM in the SPPC see Maya Cantu, "Double Lives: On Louise Brooks's 'Thirteen Women in Films,'" *Los Angeles Review of Books*, August 15, 2020, https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/double-lives-on-louise-brookss-thirteen-women-in-films/.

77 James Card, "Vachel Lindsay on Film," *Image* 2.4 (1953), 23–24.

78 Lindsay, *Art of the Moving Picture*, 7.

79 Stanley Kauffmann, "Introduction," in Vachel Lindsay, *The Art of the Moving Pictures* (New York: The Modern Library, 2000); Lindsay, *Art of the Moving Picture*, 224.

80 Ibid., 175–188.

81 Ibid., 185.

82 Ibid., 34.

83 Ibid., 35.

84 Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (London: Penguin Classics, 2009), 14.

85 Card, "Archives and Archivists."

86 Reynolds, "Interview with James Card," 20.

87 Wasson, *Museum Movies*, 110–48.

88 Barry, "Film Library and How it Grew," 26.

89 Erwin Panofsky, "Style and Medium in the Motion Picture," in *Film: An Anthology*, ed. Daniel Talbot (Oakland: University of California Press, 1975), 17–18.

90 "The Silent Films as the Basis of the Art of Motion Pictures," Dryden Theatre (March 1951), SPPC, GEM. The program lists *The Invisible Thief* under the wrong title (*The Invisible Ones*, 1905) crediting it to Zecca only.

91 See Miriam Bratu Hansen, "The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism," in *Reinventing Film Studies*, ed. Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 332–50.

92 Lindsay, *Art of the Moving Picture*, 39.

93 Beaumont Newhall, "Introduction to *Nana*," speech for the inauguration of the Dryden Theatre Motion Pictures Series, March 14 and 21, 1951, SPPC, GEM.

94 Card, according to Nancy Kauffman, eventually missed the event due to sickness.

95 Newhall, "Introduction to *Nana*."

96 Ibid.

97 Slide, *Nitrate Won't Wait*, 60.

98 Reynolds, "Interview with James Card," 29.

99 There is widespread awareness among archivists, both within and without GEM, that Card often took advantage of his position as film curator to expand his personal film collection. To this date, however, I have not encountered any evidence in the museum's internal records to incontrovertibly substantiate such claims.

100 George Eastman House, *Collective Endeavor*, 81.

101 Robert Mayer was Director of GEH from 1980 to 1988. George Eastman House, *Collective Endeavor*, 95–102.

102 This was funded through the revenue from the sale of a building Kodak owned in San Francisco, George Eastman House, *Collective Endeavor*, 102.

103 "Fire Loss at Film Museum Less Than Was Feared," *The New York Times*, May 31, 1978.

104 Jan-Christopher Horak (former Director of the UCLA Film & Television Archive), interview by the author, October 30, 2019.

105 George Eastman House, *Collective Endeavor*, 125.

106 Horak, interview by the author.

107 Steve Dollar, "Curator Discovers 'Lost' Black Film at the Eastman House," *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle*, August 6, 1994.

108 George Eastman House, *Collective Endeavor*, 125–26; and Horak, interview by the author.

109 Ibid.

110 "The Dream Merchants: Making and Selling Films in Hollywood's Golden Age," catalog, George Eastman House, 1989.

111 See for instance, George C. Pratt, *Spellbound in Darkness: A History of the Silent Film* (Greenwich, Conn: New York Graphic Society, 1973).

112 Jan-Christopher Horak, "George Pratt at 100," UCLA Film & Television Archive Blog, September 12, 2014, https://www.cinema.ucla.edu/blogs/archival-spaces/george-pratt-100; and Horak, interview by the author.

113 George Eastman House, *Collective Endeavor*, 126.

114 The Selznick School provides training in film preservation and management of audiovisual archives. It offers both a one-year professional certificate and a two-year Master program in partnership with the Department of English at the University of Rochester. See Selznick School of Film Preservation, https://www.eastman.org/l-jeffrey-selznick-school-film-preservation, accessed May 3, 2023.

115 D. N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 8.

116 Motion Picture Department at the George Eastman House, "School of Film and Video Preservation," 26.

117 Paul Read and Mark-Paul Meyer, *Restoration of Motion Picture Film* (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2000), 1, emphasis added.

118 "Artefact," Oxford English Dictionary Online, accessed April 7, 2022, https://www.oed.com/viewdictionaryentry/Entry/11133. See also Paolo Cherchi Usai, *Silent Cinema: An Introduction* (London: British Film Institute, 2000), 52–54; Cherchi Usai et al., *Film Curatorship*, 84–85; and Ray Edmondson, *Audiovisual Archiving: Philosophy and Principles* (Paris: UNESCO, 2016), 4.

119 See Frick, *Saving Cinema*, 151–80.

120 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version," in *Selected Writings: Volume 3: 1935–1938*, ed. Howard Eiland and

Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991–99), 103.

121 Cherchi Usai, *Silent Cinema*, 44–45.

122 Cherchi Usai, *Silent Cinema*, 44.

123 The Toronto Film Society organized a screening of *Zaza* (Allan Dwan, 1923) on August 4, 2014 as part of a retrospective titled "Raiding the Vaults at George East-man House 2014." "Toronto Film Society at GEM in Rochester, NY," *CarensClassic-Cinema* (blog), accessed July 3, 2020, https://carensclassiccinema.wordpress.com/toronto-film-society-at-geh-in-rochester-ny/.

124 Card, *Seductive Cinema*, 159.

125 Cherchi Usai, interview.

126 Cherchi Usai et al., *Film Curatorship*, 15. Reference to the original source is miss-ing.

127 See Carolyne Giardina, "Kodak Inks Deals with Studios to Extend Film's Life," *The Hollywood Reporter*, February 4, 2015, https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-news/kodak-inks-deals-studios-extend-770300/; and Carolyne Giardina, "Studios Re-up Kodak Deals to Keep Celluloid Film Alive," *The Hollywood Report-er*, January 29, 2020, https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-news/studios-up-kodak-deals-keep-celluloid-film-alive-1274709/.

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135 Rodowick, *Virtual Life*, 14. See Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968), 99–123.

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144 Ibid.

145 See National Film Preservation Foundation, *The Film Preservation Guide: The Basics for Archives, Libraries, and Museums* (San Francisco: National Film Preservation Foundation, 2004), 102.

146 The Nitrate Picture Show, catalog, May 1–3, 2015, Dryden Theatre, George Eastman House, 1, accessed June 13, 2023, https://www.eastman.org/sites/default/files/NPS-2015.pdf; henceforth referred to as 2015 Nitrate Picture Show.

147 "The Last Nitrate Picture Show: FIAF 2000," 1–10 June 2000, BFI, London, 28–33, BFI Reuben Library. Possibly taking inspiration from the Nitrate Picture Show, in 2023 the BFI held "Film on Film," screening exclusively acetate and nitrate film prints. See "Film on Film," BFI, accessed June 12, 2023, https://whatson.bfi.org.uk/Online/default.asp?BOparam::WScontent::loadArticle::permalink=foff23&BOparam::WScontent::loadArticle::context_id=.

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150 Martin Scorsese, "Foreword," in *This Film Is Dangerous: A Celebration of Nitrate Film*, ed. Roger B. N. Smither and Catherine A. Surowiec (Bruxelles: Federation Internationale des Archives du Film, 2002), ix.

151 Kevin Brownlow, "Dangerous Stuff," in *This Film Is Dangerous: A Celebration of Nitrate Film*, ed. Roger B. N. Smither and Catherine A. Surowiec (Bruxelles: Federation Internationale des Archives du Film, 2002), 178.

152 Deborah Stoiber and Jared Case, respectively Collection Manager and Curator of Film Exhibition at the George Eastman Museum, interview by the author, July 14, 2016. In past editions, Stoiber and Case acted as co-directors of the Nitrate Picture Show. See also Stephen Herbert, "Projecting Nitrate," in *This Film Is Dangerous: A Celebration of Nitrate Film*, ed. Roger B. N. Smither and Catherine

A. Surowiec (Bruxelles: Federation Internationale des Archives du Film, 2002), 103.

153 Stoiber and Case, interview.

154 Stoiber and Case, interview.

155 Herbert, "Projecting Nitrate," 103.

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159 Paolo Cherchi Usai, "George Eastman House Launches the World's First Festival of Film Conservation to Showcase Vintage 35mm Nitrate Prints at the Historic Dryden Theatre," Eastman Museum, https://eastman.org/george-eastman-house-launches, accessed June 9, 2019.

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CHAPTER 3

The National Fairground and Circus Archive: Early Fairground Cinema and Cine-Variety Pastiche

ABSTRACT

Chapter 3 discusses the National Fairground and Circus Archive (NFCA), established in 1994. In 2005, it collaborated with the British Film Institute (BFI) and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) on the study and exhibition of the newly discovered Mitchell & Kenyon collection of hundreds of early British films. The archive recontextualized them within the milieu of local fairs, working class entertainment, and itinerant film exhibition. Drawing on the variety format of early fairground cinema, the NFCA's later displays combined film screenings with off-screen performances, including film lecturing, contemporary circus, and burlesque. Through Gadamer's concept of volksfest (folk festival), I read the archive's curatorial work as "historical pastiche"—less preoccupied with historical authenticity than with adapting early cinema to current sensibilities.

KEYWORDS
BFI; Mitchell & Kenyon; local film; bioscope; working class; showmanship

As we shift from the Eye Filmmuseum (Eye) and the George Eastman Museum (GEM) to the National Fairground and Circus Archive (NFCA), we abandon the film museum to enter a different kind of institution. The National Fairground Archive (NFA), as it was called until 2016, opened in 1994 thanks to the collaboration between the University of Sheffield Library, the UK's Showmen's Guild, and the Fairground Association of Great Britain.[1] As part of the Library's Special Collections, the NFCA preserves the "history of the travelling fairgrounds and allied entertainments (including circus, travelling theatre, popular entertainment, menageries and waxworks …)."[2] It is within these exhibition settings and social milieus, that the archive has situated early cinema, investigating the work of traveling show people and their mobile film theaters. Through research, archival, and curatorial work, the NFCA has helped advance an alternative historiography to that of the cinema of attractions by focusing on the historical, sociological, and geographical specificities of early fairground cinema within the local context of northern industrial towns in the UK.

Under the leadership of the NFCA founder and Research Director Vanessa Toulmin, the archive devised curatorial strategies that reenacted the format of the cine-variety show and exhibited early films alongside other stage performances inspired by the world of fairgrounds and old freak shows.[3] The transition from the institutional framework of the museum to the world of funfairs and circuses stretches cinema's prehistory back into the immemorial past of traveling fairs, redefining early cinema within this institutional genealogy. Watching early films amidst reenactments of nineteenth-century attractions, such as the Insect Circus Museum (modeled on the flea circus), and sideshows such as Yvette, The Headless Lady reminds us that the fairground's sensational appeal and wonder have long acted as the museum's defining other (see for instance figure 13).[4] As sociologist Tony Bennett remarks, fairgrounds "formed a part of the surrounding cultural environs from which the museum sought constantly to extricate itself."[5]

The NFA began increasingly to focus on fairground cinema and early film exhibition around 2001, when it became involved in a major Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC) project with the British Film Institute (BFI) National Archive and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) to conduct historical research and disseminate the newly discovered Mitchell & Kenyon collection of early local films.[6] Shot by film entrepreneurs Sagar Mitchell and

FIGURE 13.
Sideshows at Showzam 2012, Blackpool.
Courtesy of the University of Sheffield and
Shaun Bloodworth.

James Kenyon, the collection captures community life in industrial towns in the Midlands, Northern England, Scotland, and Ireland at the turn of the nineteenth century. Subjects include school exits, religious processions, calendar customs, sporting events, new modes of transport, phantom rides, public entertainment, leisure, and celebrities' and royals' visits. The most recurring genre in the collection is that of the factory gate film, displaying workers leaving their workplace in the same guise as the better known 1895 title *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory* (*La Sortie de l'Usine Lumière à Lyon*). The extraordinary popularity of the Mitchell & Kenyon restorations and their recirculation in theaters around the UK, on TV, and online called attention to the cultural and intellectual stakes in film curation and contributed to expanding the BFI's focus on archival exhibition.[7] At the same time, the project inaugurated the NFA's own experiments with early film exhibition, incorporating elements of live performance inspired by cine-variety and fairground shows.

In the first part of this chapter, I examine the NFCA's institutional history, the Mitchell & Kenyon project, and the historiographic work around early fairground cinema that the archive helped ignite.[8] The NFCA's collections

tell a story that places the cinematograph's novelty within a long tradition of popular entertainments always "embracing new forms of technological innovations and innovations in exhibition practices."[9] The archive's manuscripts, memorabilia, and photographs document the lives of traveling showmen such as President Kemp and Randall Williams and show-woman Annie Holland (all active at the turn of the century), along with their crowd-managing techniques, oratorical skills, and gilded bioscopes, as mobile cinemas were called in Britain at the time. It was within these exhibition dispositifs that the cinematograph found its first home and audiences, made up of industrial town workers.[10] The Mitchell & Kenyon films and the traveling bioscope existed within a temporality anterior to the Fordist organization of labor and amidst local, partially rural, working-class communities. Encouraged by the NFA's work, a new brand of early film historiography defined modernity in terms that differed radically from those of urban fragmentation, anomie, and experiential discontinuities, central to the cinema of attractions.

Over the years, the Mitchell & Kenyon restorations have circulated across several exhibition dispositifs and within different kinds of historical narratives. On January 14, 2005, the BBC broadcast the first episode of its three-part series, *The Lost World of Mitchell and Kenyon*, featuring footage from the collection and interviews with descendants of the people in the films.[11] It garnered 4.5 million viewers, sparking momentum around the theatrical tour of the Mitchel & Kenyon film program that the NFA and the BFI co-curated.[12] On the same day, the newly restored films premiered at King George's Hall in the town of Blackburn (where the collection had been found a decade earlier), kickstarting the nationwide theatrical tour. Shortly after, the BFI made available a selection of the Mitchell & Kenyon films in the DVD edition "Electric Edwardians: The Films of Mitchell & Kenyon," including features such as Toulmin's voiceover commentary and an introduction by Tom Gunning voiced by the actor Paul McGann. Lastly, the BFI distributed the films also on its YouTube channel and the BFI's on-demand player (BFI Player), respectively, in 2008 and 2013.[13] By mobilizing Stuart Hall's concept of "space of recognition," I compare these different dispositifs, focusing on the opportunities they have enabled to interact, identify, and empathize with the working-class history the Mitchell & Kenyon films document. In the second part of this chapter, I argue that in comparison to the films' public screenings, especially those that the NFA curated in the local towns that Mitchell & Kenyon had captured in their films, these other exhibition dispositifs have progressively expunged class politics, the politics of place, and community participation from their discourses and modes of access.

The historical specificity of the fairground bioscope as a performative and itinerant dispositif, prior to film's transformation into a self-enclosed commodity, inspired the NFA's film exhibition practices. In the archive's curated

shows, just as in early fairground cinema, as Miriam Bratu Hansen notes, "the conception of film exhibition as a live performance (the incompleteness of the film as circulated commodity) created a margin of improvisation, interpretation and unpredictability which made it a public event."[14] In the final part of the chapter, I analyze the NFA's exhibition strategies, focusing on a timeline that stretches from 2005, when the exhibition of the Mitchell & Kenyon film restorations began, to the more recent experiments in 2012.[15] These include, for instance, Professor Vanessa's Twenty Performing Wonders (Toulmin's inaugural lecture), which alternated the screening of films such as *Kobelkoff* (1900), in which an armless and legless man shows off his abilities, with contemporary live performances such as circus and burlesque acts. Here, the specificity of what Jean-Louis Baudry calls the cinematographic technological apparatus (*appareil de base*) shifted to the background, leaving room for an intermedia live performance conducted by a modern-day *bonimenteuse* (woman film lecturer), that is, Toulmin herself.[16]

Like the fairground cinematograph, the NFCA lacks a dedicated exhibition site, and its early film shows toured the most diverse venues, from St George's Hall in Liverpool to the Oldham Rugby League Club.[17] From the Mitchell & Kenyon project up to more recent shows, the NFA has screened early films within a dispositif that, adapting Richard Dyer's concept, I define as modern "cine-variety pastiche." Less preoccupied with historical authenticity than with reenacting the eclectic spirit of fairground cinema, the NFA's cine-variety pastiche integrated live performance acts, local audiences' participation, the cultural specificity of exhibition sites, and filmic texts. If the choice of medium is central to Eye's and GEM's screen-centered exhibition dispositifs, furthering a specific kind of historical mediation between silent cinema and the digital age, here medium specificity is tangential. Professor Vanessa's (Toulmin's art name) cine-variety shows crossed the two-dimensional threshold of the screen, filling the stage with early film commentary, audience interaction, and performance. In comparison with events like the Pordenone Silent Film Festival, which emphasizes the authenticity of silent films by displaying them in the rarefied setting of the Verdi opera theater, the NFA's exhibitions instead situated early films' textual and historical interpretation in the variable space between the screen, audience communities, and the lecturer's mediation.[18] Through Hans-Georg Gadamer's concept of *volksfest* (local festival), I show that like the fair's cyclical returns, an iterative temporality marks film curatorship's hermeneutics too, recursively translating and adapting cinema's culture to new contexts of circulation. By investigating the NFA's historiographic work and exhibition practices, I foreground the cultural politics of historical interpretation, temporal mediation, and film curatorship at play in the archive's cine-variety pastiche.

A LIVING ARCHIVE

The NFCA's engagement with communities of both traveling show people and local audiences in northern Britain has defined the archive's historical and curatorial work since its inception and throughout its thirty-year-long history. Toulmin, the Fairground Association of Great Britain (the UK's leading club of funfair enthusiasts), and the Library of the University of Sheffield began discussing the possibility of establishing a fairground archive in June 1994. On November 20 of the same year, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Sheffield officially inaugurated the NFA before a crowd of show people, enthusiasts, librarians, and historians.[19] The opening of the NFA marked "the possibility of such an archive, rather than celebrating its reality—which [at the time] was a one-box family collection, a set of trade newspapers, one photographic collection of 11,000 images and fewer than 50 books."[20] In the months that followed, Toulmin and the Fairground Association's Chairman, Graham Downie, toured the UK, inspecting show people's moving trucks, living wagons, cellars, and chests, in search of records of show people's and performers' lives, careers, and business.[21]

As Toulmin explains, the NFA was "an idea born out of my personal desire to find a safe home for all the material I was collecting for my research and as part of a family collection."[22] As the fifth of six children of a century-old show family from the northern British town of Morecambe, her familial ties to the close-knit fairground world helped her win the trust of her community. It was the death of her uncle, traveling showman and boxer Arthur William Albert Francis in 1991 that prompted Toulmin to start her research on the social and oral history of traveling show people from the 1890s to the present. "My sense of loss," she recounts, "propelled me into realising … that there was no record or repository relating to any aspect of the tradition and culture that I had grown up with and which was also part of the social fabric of the United Kingdom."[23] In the absence of an archive for the history of the fairground—an oral history, as much as one of unrecorded performances and memorabilia—its past was gradually disappearing together with the show people.

Toulmin was the first in her family to receive higher education, "possibly Britain's only PhD who regularly spins candyfloss at the weekend," as she defines herself. Her hitherto neglected heritage found a home in the NFA, which, thirty years after its foundation, stands as one of the world's leading repositories of the history of fairground entertainment. Toulmin's research into the history of popular entertainment is part of a trend that since the 1960s has seen British social historians investigate sites and institutions of social leisure such as "television, fairs, seaside holidays, pubs, horse racing, libraries, gambling, youth movements, professional football, cinemas, Sunday Schools

and temperance associations ...."[24] The first generation of social historians, often coming from lower class backgrounds benefitted from post-war education reforms, such as the 1944 Education Act, which gave them unprecedented access to university education. In the same tradition, Toulmin's research on the history of popular working-class entertainment is, in the words of social historian Peter Bailey, "preoccupied with class because it is itself the product of class."[25]

As historian Henry Morley writes in 1859 in the first systematic study of fairs in Britain, despite their centuries-old history, itinerant fairgrounds have long been an "unwritten portion of the story of the people."[26] With the establishment of the NFA, show people's personal records moved from their "no fixed abode" status—as show people's birth certificates often reported, and the archive's acronym also stood for—to the stacks of a university library. These personal records, photographs, and memorabilia entered a distinct set of institutional and discursive regimes that officialized their history into a coherent narrative. Professional history, library science, and heritage discourse provided the rationale to identify, classify, index, and preserve these newly acquired historical objects. These branches of knowledge acted as Foucauldian "authorities of delimitation," that is, as "institutions possessing their own rules, as a group of individuals constituting the ... profession, as a body of knowledge and practice, [and] as an authority recognized by public opinion, the law, and government."[27] As a result, the traveling fair turned from a largely uncodified set of practices and a community of similarly unknown individuals into a defined object of historical discourse, subject to the archive's system of conventions and statements.[28]

As Toulmin clarifies, archives "have traditionally been the repository of the administrative records of a community; they have a link to the community they serve." While the NFA does not exercise administrative functions, its links with the traveling show people community make it what Toulmin calls a "living archive." As she illustrates,

> the NFA continues to live, representing the showmen's world and responding to its needs and changes. We are interested in contemporary material as much as in documents from a hundred years ago. The NFA is a "living archive" that constantly changes and develops.[29]

Its "living" relationship with the fairground business helped the archive acquire and expand its collections and expertise while securing the success of its outreach projects. The NFA has maintained its links with the fairground community over the years by regularly displaying its holdings at local fairs in towns such as Nottingham, Hull, and Ilkeston and collaborating with artists

from the burlesque and the vintage fair scenes. Besides evoking this enduring partnership, the metaphor of the "living archive" points also to the organization's commitment to enliven those same records by reenacting show people's exhibition and performance practices.

The initial bulk of the NFA's collections came from donations by three principal stakeholders: funfair businesses, fairground enthusiasts, and show families. The Showmen's Guild of Great Britain loaned to the Library the entire set of the funfair trade newspaper *The World's Fair* from 1904 to support Toulmin's doctoral research.[30] Jacqueline Leeson, daughter of fairground enthusiast Jack Leeson, loaned her father's collection of 12,000 cross-referenced photographs, negatives, notebooks, and sound recordings documenting the aesthetic, technical, and social transformations of fairs from 1949 to 1992.[31] A third important donation came from the Shufflebottom show family that toured the UK with its Wild West Show from the 1890s to the 1960s. Circus performer William Shufflebottom (who took the pseudonym of Texas Bill) saw Buffalo Bill's show during a journey to North America with a circus act in the 1860s, inspiring him to start his own traveling attraction as Buffalo Bill's impersonator. When moving images appeared, the Shufflebottoms incorporated them in their specialty acts (which ranged from sharp shooting to knife throwing and from the art of snake charming to equestrian vaulting) and took them for the first time to regions such as North Wales.[32]

Despite the NFA founders' decision to financially invest only in the acquisition of learning resources (books, databases, and microfilm) and rely exclusively on donations and loans, the archive's collections have grown steadily since its foundation. In 1997 their size was significant enough for the archive to apply for a Heritage Lottery Fund grant, thanks to which in 1998 it started indexing and digitizing 30,000 photographs, which can now be accessed online.[33] In the year 2000, the archive received circus legend Billy Smart's collection, which allowed the NFA to expand its focus to include circus entertainment, whose history preceded that of the modern theme park and was intertwined with that of the fairground.[34] This new research and collection area continued expanding with the donation of the Circus Friends' Association Library in 2001. The acquisition of the Association's complete archive in 2016, comprising posters, programs, photographs, films, handbills, scrapbooks, original artwork, and ephemera from the nineteenth century onward, led the NFA to change its name to the NFCA.[35]

Starting from only ten boxes, the archive has grown into a library department with dedicated storage space, a reading room, a digital suite, and five staff members. Today, the NFCA holds more than 150,000 photographs, 4,000 specialized books and journals, over 20,000 items of ephemera (posters, handbills, programs, etc.), original artwork, early films, amateur films, and family

and business records. Thanks to these acquisitions, the archive became a multimedia repository of a wide array of entertainments and attractions that over the years has come to include: "Circus, Fairgrounds, Dwellings and Transport, World's Fairs, Magic, Americana, Menageries, Side-Shows, Variety, Wild West, Early Cinema, Boxing, Performers, Showmen, Rides, Fairground Art, Seaside Entertainment and Amusement Parks."[36] Its collections have not only facilitated research on previously neglected portions of popular entertainment history, such as fairground rides' design or crowd-management practices, but have also featured as items of display in their own right, in exhibitions such as *Marvelosa* (2014) and *Spectacle and Wonder: The Circus Friends Association Archive* (2016–17).[37]

UNLOCKING THE MITCHELL & KENYON FILMS

Between 2001 and 2005, the NFA became involved in a major project with the BFI and later the BBC to conduct research and exhibit the newly discovered Mitchell & Kenyon collection of early local films. The fate of this collection became entwined with that of the NFA, which enabled the investigation of these early films' circulation within the dispositif of the itinerant fairground, shaped by show people's exhibition, performance, and management practices. The discovery, interpretation, preservation, and exhibition of the Mitchell & Kenyon collection within the intermedia constellation of fairground-allied entertainments spurred new historiographic work around early fairground cinema, which inspired the NFA's curatorial and exhibition strategies.

In the summer of 1994, in the same months in which early talks about creating the NFA were taking place at the University of Sheffield, a team of workmen made an unexpected discovery in the cellar of a former video shop in the northern British town of Blackburn. What they found were three metal drums crammed with 826 rolls of nitrate films, which were handed to the local optician and film enthusiast Peter Worden. Worden removed each film from their canisters and painstakingly annotated all the information he could retrieve from stylus-scratched inscriptions on film headers, attempting to preserve the films at his own expense. Faced with the quixotic task at hand, in July 2000 he transferred the whole collection to the BFI's J. Paul Getty Conservation Centre in Berkhamsted.[38]

As BFI curator Patrick Russell explains, "the survival of [these] barrels crammed with nitrate" since 1922, when the Mitchell & Kenyon firm ceased activity, through the 1960s and 1970s, when their store became a toyshop, until its renovation in 1995, "was surprising to the point of miraculous."[39] The over 800 film rolls turned out to be original camera negatives of actual-

ity films and local topicals shot in the Midlands, Northern England, Scotland, and Ireland. Their acquisition increased the size of the BFI's collection of early British films by circa 20 percent. Before then, only a few fictional Mitchell & Kenyon titles, including *The Tramp's Surprise*, *Kidnapping by Indians*, and *The Tramps and the Artist*, all made in 1899, were known to have survived.[40] With the Blackburn find, this archival collection turned from a small repository of early fictional works to a huge catalog of non-fiction films, revealing the cultural significance of local filmmaking within early film history. Such a comprehensive and coherent corpus of early films was comparable to the Edison Company's and the Lumière brothers' collections. The discovery of the Mitchell & Kenyon collection turned the two Blackburn filmmakers, until then considered minor contributors, into key players within the British film canon.[41]

Mitchell & Kenyon films capture scenes of community life, such as the procession of school children we see marching past the camera in the 1905 title *Special Parade of St Matthews Pupils and Special March Past of St Joseph's Scholars*, shot in Blackburn. As children parade along the school's stone walls and towards the camera, we glimpse their bewildered expressions, their teachers' dignified demeanors, and everyone's sheer excitement when instructed to wave at the cameraman. The subject that features most prominently in the collection is factory gate exits, which Mitchell & Kenyon shot outside mills, steelworks, and collieries at the end of working shifts.[42] Once restored, the films unveiled a whole spectrum of reaction shots of workers walking forward towards the camera, including the amusement of kids, often working already from the age of six, the cautious scrutiny of older boys, women's hesitance, and the restraint of white collars looking down. According to Gunning, films like *Messers Lumb and Co. Leaving the Works, Huddersfield* (1900) and *20,000 Employees Entering Lord Armstrong's Elswick Works* (1900) are what poet Vachel Lindsay defines as "pictures of Crowd Splendor," filling the frame with the passions of masses of people.[43]

Surviving nearly a century of oblivion, such splendor has reached our screens thanks to the ambitious BFI restoration of each of the 826 reels of Mitchell & Kenyon films. Due to the original negatives' discoloration, shrinkage, and tear, the BFI reengineered the gate of an Acme optical printer to duplicate the films without altering the integrity of the found material. The ambitious restoration yielded stunning results, with a vividness that both specialist audiences and the BBC public have since associated with the Mitchell & Kenyon footage.[44] As Russell highlights, these restored versions may well look more beautiful than the original prints that Mitchell and Kenyon likely used to produce in a hurry and within the same hand-cranked camera they used for shooting. Thanks to their restoration, in his words, these films now are "more photographically 'true' to the lost world they depict than those seen by

its original inhabitants."[45] By producing Digital Betacam masters, the BFI also ensured the films' subsequent digital circulation.[46]

The films' limpidity enhances the workers' direct address and forward movement in these factory gate films. They seem to hail and stare at both the camera and their prospective viewers, endowing the images with a spectral quality. These early images engender a sense of inescapable intimacy that makes contemporary viewers feel emotionally implicated in the lives and expressions of the women and men captured in them. As journalist Ian Jack reported from the Mitchell & Kenyon premiere at the BFI, "they walked, they ran, they clowned at the camera or self-consciously ignored it. … Now they were walking towards me, sometimes staring boldly at me, on a screen in central London in late 2004."[47] The long takes of the Mitchell & Kenyon films, with only sporadic jump cuts, give them a certain Bazinian realism. The beauty and realism of the footage intensify the indexical bond of the images with their referents—a working-class youth that would have lost their lives in the Great War—of which in Roland Barthes' words these films are spectral indexical "emanations."[48]

However, despite the amount of photographic detail that restorers managed to preserve, little was known about the history of the Mitchell & Kenyon films' production, circulation, and exhibition. Stylus-scratched inscriptions on the negatives reported the shooting location, the year the films were made, and annotations such as "Kemp" or "Green," the meaning of which historians and archivists initially ignored. In 1998 Toulmin accidentally noticed that an article in a local newspaper mentioned the exhibition of factory gate films at a fairground in the town of Stalybridge. As she explains, it was a revelation:

> I suddenly realized that the key to understand Mitchell & Kenyon was not in the films themselves but in their original exhibition patterns. … They were shown in fairs and it was possible to trace both the venue where they were shown and the name of the showman who commissioned them. "Kemp," for instance, turned out to be President Kemp, a showman who only travelled in Lancashire. Another name was that of George Green that toured in Scotland.[49]

Rather than in their textuality or photographic quality, the clue to unlocking these films' historical significance—why they had been made, why in those locales, and for whom—was in retrieving their original context of circulation and off-screen exhibition practices which popularized them among local audiences. Investigating Mitchell & Kenyon's exhibition trail, in Gadamer's terms, revealed the "purpose, function, [and] the significance" the films had in relation to the world past in which they circulated.[50]

While cities like Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow, and Cardiff offered several permanent film exhibition venues, such as penny museums, penny gaffs, and department stores, traveling showmen dominated the film exhibition business in smaller industrial towns.[51] According to Alfred Bromhead (who started off as a showman and became Head of British Gaumont in 1933), before the spread of movie theaters, traveling show people dominated the market, exhibiting films in music halls, town halls, and fairgrounds.[52] Showman Randall Williams, for instance, incorporated the cinematograph in his steam-powered traveling show as early as 1896, targeting large working-class crowds with admission tickets as cheap as one penny.[53] Fairgrounds toured from town to town during wakes weeks, which, following the industrial revolution, had become a secular tradition in northern regions and coincided with the seasonal closure of cotton mills and factories. In the holiday season, traveling exhibitors typically commissioned Mitchell & Kenyon to shoot popular topical subjects and exhibited their films at local fairs such as the Nottingham Goose Fair and the Hull Fair.[54]

Figures such as showman Arthur Duncan (A. D.) Thomas, who appears in several Mitchell & Kenyon films, seized upon the cinematograph's novelty and quickly adapted it to the different exhibition contexts of the fairground, town hall, and music hall.[55] He promoted films either by tapping into a sense of newness—with entertainments "entirely novel in idea, as well as in execution"—or conversely by shoring up a feeling of familiarity, harmonizing his show "with some particular event that is exciting the public mind, and exhibit[ing] it in realistic fashion ...."[56] With the help of music accompaniment (orchestras in the case of music and public halls, and steam organs in fair shows), special sound effects, and their rhetorical skills, the film lecturer accommodated the "living pictures," as films were called at the time, to different audiences. Film lecturers and show people used their "fresh talk," that is, their entertaining and ironic knowingness (as opposed to the "dryasdust" knowledge exhibited in educational panorama and lantern lecturers) to market films as a relatable local affair.[57] This explains the popularity of the Mitchell & Kenyon repertoire of local films.

Prior to the discovery of collections such as the Mitchell & Kenyon and the emergence of the orphan film movement, local films were, according to film historian Uli Jung, "a blind spot in film historiography." "Probably," she argues, "the bulk of these films were printed only once (which at the same time may explain why most of the local films must be considered lost), since they were playing only at one cinema and probably not for a long period of time."[58] Despite such paucity, the preservation of collections such as the Mitchell & Kenyon, Peter Marzen's films in Germany, George Green's Topical Production in Scotland, and H. Lee Waters' local film production in North America has helped shed light on the history of early local film circulation.[59]

According to Stephen Bottomore, a local film not only depicted a certain locality but also featured a "considerable overlap between the people appearing in the film and those who watch it or are intended to watch it."[60] Its profitability was tied to the local audience it captured and its life cycle was thus relatively short, capitalizing on principles contrary to those of scalability. Local films kept production costs low and filmed as many people as possible, who would then pay to see themselves on screen.[61] This explains the popularity of communal subjects such as factory gate exits, which allowed hundreds of faces to be shot at the same time and attracted a large public. Audiences' taste for local films and the dynamic of self-recognition that exhibitors encouraged could also revolve around the fame and prestige of those filmed. In the case of town halls screenings, which typically did not show proletarian factory gate films, local films could fulfill a public relations function by depicting local politicians and thereby contributing to the producer's "respectability branding."[62]

Even after the opening of purpose-built cinemas, people kept flocking to see themselves on screen and the success of local films was still unfailingly guaranteed. As Kinematograph & Lantern Weekly's 1914 *Handbook for Proprietors, Managers, and Exhibitors* makes clear, "there can be no two opinions as to the value of the local topical film as a means of filling your theatre. Everyone loves to see himself, or herself, or friends, or children, on the screen, and the local topical is the best means of gratifying this desire."[63] Local films drew upon a tradition of popular entertainments and apparatuses that capitalized on audience's desire for self-recognition—an aspect I will return to in my analysis of the different exhibition dispositifs in which the Mitchell & Kenyon film restorations have recently circulated. Such tradition goes back to attractions such as the "looking-glass curtain" (a curtain of mirrors lowered on theatrical stages before performances so that spectators could admire their reflected image), the Daguerreotype, chronophotography, photographic portrait flick books, and the Cinematograph, initially devised as an amateur apparatus to make living portraits of family members.[64] "Come inside and see yourself on the screen," roared show people, inviting audiences to indulge in recognizing familiar landscapes, faces, or perhaps a friend's clumsy pose. By spotting their own grotesque expressions on film, the luckiest audience members would typically win a free ticket to the following show. A century after their initial release, thanks to their restoration, the Mitchell & Kenyon films enjoyed renewed popularity, spurring an analogous desire for self-recognition among contemporary audiences.

Following the success of the Mitchell & Kenyon project, in 2005 the great-granddaughter of George Williams, a British showman who toured Great Britain in the mid-1890s, donated his collection of early films to the NFA. According

to correspondence dating to October 1896, Williams' freak show at the Hull Fair hosted a magic lantern performance, an Edison phonograph, and a small cinematograph, screening films such as *Boxing Match* and the comedy *Landing at Low Tide*, both from 1896.[65] The family collection includes magic lantern slides, letters, film catalogs, photographic plates, and previously unknown films by Thomas Edison and Birt Acres. Among the Edison titles in the Williams collection, four were new discoveries, including previously unknown versions of *Sandow* (1894), *Carmencita* (1894), and *The Hornbacker-Murphy Fight* (1894).[66] As to Acres's films in the collection, such as *The Boxing Kangaroo* and *The Arrest of a Pickpocket*, they all resulted from his brief collaboration with Robert Paul in 1895.[67] Despite accounting for only 1 percent of the NFCA's holdings, the Williams collection is a rare document of the decade between 1896 and 1906, when temporary and itinerant film exhibition dominated the market and permanent picture houses were just beginning to spread across the UK. It records a time when performing animals, boxing matches, crime fiction, and freak shows circulated as intertextual and multimedia attractions across a variety of performance venues and media, including popular press, *cartes de visite* (visiting cards), penny gaffs, and traveling cinematographs.[68]

SMALL-TOWN MODERNITY THESIS

By contextualizing such collections within its multimedia repository of popular entertainments, the NFA provided a historical framework to better understand what André Gaudreault calls "the polymorphous nature of the Cinematograph," incarnation of various cultural series including photographic views, *projections lumineuses* (light projections), vaudeville, and café-concerts.[69] Early cinema's subjects, visual registers, and mise-en-scène repurposed aesthetic tropes drawn from magic theater and vaudeville, as in the case of George Méliès' trick films or Edison's Kinetoscope.[70] In ushering in the new medium, as Joe Kember notes, show people's "provision of novelty was a highly institutionalised affair," which provided turn-of-the-century audiences with consolidated interpretive habits and skills.[71] Show people's tale-telling seamlessly tied film within earlier entertainment institutions and industries. Year after year, the traveling fairground visited local towns with lecturers, front shows, and parades repackaging and trading in the exotic appeal of modern wonders and oddities of all sorts. As Kember writes:

> The performances of the showman-orator, scantly clad dancers or corporeal and ethnographic freaks tended to place the films themselves, which were often rather familiar and innocuous 'old favourites,' into an appar-

ently unrelated infrastructure …. Exploiting the lewd promise of dancing girls or the fascination of the freak show, the fairground Bioscope show-men exaggerated the sense of alterity that had been associated with the medium of film from its beginnings.[72]

Through their fresh talk and allusive knowingness, show people "enfreaked" early films, to use David Hevey's term, now enticing crowds' curiosity, now taming their diffidence and sense of uncanny, while endlessly recycling exhib-itors' stock.[73] As Charles Musser highlights, the meaning of individual films varied according to the function they played within a program, and the trave-ling exhibitor modulated the impact of attractions, now playing it out, now mitigating it, in order to build up climax.[74] As show people's old saying goes: "it was not the show it was the tale that you told!"[75]

Show people sought out the latest sensations—modern prodigies, steam rides, the phonograph first and later the cinematograph, the Roentgen rays, and the engine—displayed amidst old-time curiosities and novelties. The fair was always new, while conversely, the new would regularly become old, return-ing to town year after year and century after century.[76] The time of the fair was that of the return, the return of the new within the same. If the appearance of the cinema of attractions in turn-of-the-century metropolises was, in Gun-ning's words, "the irruption of a different, nonconfigured temporality," the fairground cinematograph ushered in and negotiated modernity within the cyclical temporality of the local fair.[77] Rather than part of a visual and cultural landscape marked by perceptual discontinuities, the display of modern won-ders, technical and scientific innovations, exoticized landscapes and people, and bodies presented as aberrations was, according to Kember, "predicated upon deeper continuities (e.g., a need for comfort or for reinforcement of deeply engrained social values of gender, nation, class or race) that appeared under threat at the fin-de-siècle."[78]

Unlike the impersonal scenario of the metropolis that Gunning's cinema of attractions depicts, the NFA's revisionist historiography highlights the role show people had in tying their early film exhibition strategies to local com-munities' geographical, social, and cultural milieus. According to Toulmin, British film historiography has overtly relied on frameworks derived from the North American early film history. Historians such as Rachael Low and John Barnes, for instance, assume that "because of the importance of vaudeville in the United States, the British model must be similar and follow the same pat-tern." "The importance of the nickelodeon business in the United States from 1905," Toulmin adds, "does not appear to have a parallel in the United King-dom," where historians have given the music hall greater importance than it deserved, at the expense of fairground cinema.[79]

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Similarly, while the cinema of attractions and the so-called modernity thesis draw similarities between early cinema and the amusement park, they overlook show people's performative role and interpersonal mediation with local audiences. Visual historian Ben Singer, for instance, compares early cinema's sensationalist appeal and sensory hyperstimulation to the newly opened attraction of Coney Island. While this may at first appear similar to the fairground, the former was a permanent entertainment venue and a much more institutionalized business, which soon after its 1895 opening introduced highly regimented behavioral codes that marginalized the mediation of show people.[80] As Musser summarizes, these histories of early film exhibition and spectatorship tend to center around the screen, emphasizing the novelty of the medium's visual features at the expense of its encapsulation of elements from preexisting folkloric and oral traditions.[81]

The Mitchell and Kenyon films, by contrast, reveal previously neglected facets of early cinema, such as show people's presence on and off-screen, their continuous exchange with the crowd and the camera operators, cross-media and cross-cultural references, and stage management bravura. As Toulmin explains:

> The collection draws us into a world before cinema became an institution, where different strands of performance and exhibition history impose their own particular modes of apparatus on its exhibition. By examining the role of the showmen, we can start to understand how they shaped this new medium until it became a stand-alone attraction.[82]

Two 1901 Mitchell & Kenyon films, *Miners Leaving Pendlebury Colliery* and *Sedgwick's Bioscope Showfront at Pendlebury Wakes*, offer an illustrative example of early fairground cinema's exhibition dispositif. The first film captures a procession of miners at the end of their shift, soon intercepted by showman Albert Sedgwick, whom we see addressing the cameraman and arranging the crowd to the latter's best advantage. The film ends with a gag card advertising Sedgwick's coming show at Pendlebury's wakes. The second film takes us exactly there with the camera positioned amidst the crowds of Pendlebury wakes' visitors. From this vantage point, the film captures a comedic act reproducing Edison's *The Barbershop* (1894), performed on the front stage of Sedgwick's bioscope to entice patrons to purchase tickets for the film program. At the end of the farcical number, we see Kenyon inviting audiences to join the stage, directing their movement up and down the stairs before the camera.

Mitchell & Kenyon's films take us back to a moment in film history when exhibitors shared creative responsibilities with production companies. In early fairground cinema, screen, stage, and off-screen spaces were contiguous

and blurred the boundaries between filmic text, tale-telling, and programming. As public performances and community events, bioscope shows shared some of the features Hansen observes in the nickelodeon, where "technologically mediated forms of publicity coexisted with forms of public life predicated on face-to-face relations."[83] The spread of the rental system (in place of the purchase of film prints) led to the emergence of a separate sphere of film distribution, a process that in Britain culminated with the 1909 Cinematograph Act. This in turn increased the demand and circulation of film titles, pushing traveling show people out of the market and curtailing the novelty and popularity of the bioscope.[84] Cinema, which had until then been dominated by craftsmanship, improvisation, and appropriation, began developing into an organized industry. Early films thus turned from adaptable texts into self-enclosed commodities, making show people's presence superfluous.

The Mitchell and Kenyon films not only shed light on the specific economy and exhibition dispositif of the fairground bioscope but, within the context of British film historiography, shift the geographical focus from Britain's southeastern regions to the industrial Midlands, Northern England, Scotland, and Ireland. Before the collection's rediscovery, historians had traditionally concentrated on the work of the Brighton School (namely, George Albert Smith and James Williamson) and London-based pioneers such as Cecil Hepworth, Paul, and Charles Urban.[85] The Mitchell and Kenyon films offer instead a vivid and at the time unusual picture of working-class leisure and entertainment, specifically in the towns around Manchester and Salford and the industrial areas of eastern and central Lancashire.[86] This repositioning entails a better understanding of the sociology of early cinema in the industrial North, where since the first industrial revolution, wakes weeks and local fairs had dominated factory workers' leisure time.[87] The Mitchell & Kenyon films' "anarchic northern humour is very different from the more genteel output from contemporary Brighton studios" and relies on the alliance between commissioning show people, filmmakers, and local audiences.[88] At the same time, the collection reveals "how commercial entertainment was packaged, promoted, and consumed locally, outside major metropolitan areas"—a field that scholars have traditionally neglected according to Gregory A. Waller.[89]

The rediscovery of the Mitchell and Kenyon collection and the historiographic work that the NFA and the BFI led at the start of the 2000s offers a different picture of modernity from the one the cinema of attractions and the modernity thesis have advanced. Historians such as Gunning, Singer, Leo Charney, and Vanessa R. Schwartz theorize the emergence of cinema within an urban context that philosopher Georg Simmel conceptualizes in "deep contrast with small town and rural life with reference to the sensory foundations of psychic life."[90] Inspired by Simmel's, Walter Benjamin's, and Siegfried

Kracauer's conceptualization of the modern metropolis, this historiography inscribes the emergence of cinema against the backdrop of modern transformations marked by perceptual discontinuities, social disintegration, and existential fragmentation. As Benjamin argues in the "Work of Art" essay, film "corresponds to profound changes in the apparatus of apperception—changes that are experienced on the scale of private existence by each passerby in bigcity traffic ...."[91] Drawing on a 1910 survey of New York's city life, Singer elaborates on the same motif, identifying modernity as hyperstimulus and a "radical increase in nervous stimulation."[92] Accordingly, cinematic attractions were, in Gunning's words, "a response to an experience of alienation, and for Kracauer (as for Benjamin) cinema's value lay in exposing a fundamental loss of coherence and authenticity."[93]

Unlike this framework, modeled on 1920s and 1930s readings of the modern metropolis and the standardization of mass production, the Mitchell & Kenyon films allow a glimpse of small-town life in pre-Fordist industrial Britain. This centrifugal move away from the metropolis towards local towns has led historians to take distance from the cinema of attractions' emphasis on astonishment, shock, and trauma.[94] Film historian Nico de Klerk, for instance, questions Gunning's identification of early film audiences predominantly as "sophisticated urban pleasure seekers," and invites scholars to investigate what he provocatively calls the "country bumpkins'" experience of the cinematograph.[95] The fairground bioscope belonged to a milieu where aspects of rural community life coexisted with industrial rationalization and alienation. Early fairground cinema existed in a historically specific moment of transition from agrarian to industrial capitalism, which one can only dismissively classify as a premodern temporality, or in de Klerk's words, as a "realm of the pastoral, ... a kind of pre-lapsarian world."[96] By documenting life in towns like Pendlebury, Creswell, St. Helens, and Warrington—the pulsating heart of industrial and imperial Britain—the Mitchell & Kenyon films and the NFA offer a nuanced record of such transition. They reveal the contradictions and overlaps between two distinct models of production, social organization, and cultural expression. Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci identifies such a period of historical change as one suspended between the persistence of European feudal structures and the process of Fordist Americanization. As he argues in "Americanism and Fordism" (1934), the Fordist reorganization of industrial production led to an apparent capitalist egalitarianism, epitomized by the emergence of the mass worker, a "new kind of man [*sic*]" living in the modern city. However, the introduction of such productive structures in Europe, according to Gramsci, clashed with the "old, anachronistic, demographic, social structure" inherited from the feudal class system.[97] By capturing the modern fascination with tram rides and speeding trains along with the archa-

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ic work conditions and Dickensian atmospheres of Victorian factories, Mitchell & Kenyon uniquely testify to a moment at the crossroad of such processes of modernization.[98]

In the early industrial towns that Mitchell & Kenyon shot, rural communal rituals muffled, domesticated, and mediated the experience of modernity with which they coexisted. With their knowingness and art of negotiation, fairground *bonimenteurs* and *bonimenteuses* acted, in Germain Lacasse's words, as "mediators of modernity," framing film's novelty and modern attraction within the familiar folkloric tradition of the fair and Victorian popular entertainment culture.[99] Inspired by such work of conciliation across different brands of modernity, the NFA began performing a reversed kind of temporal mediation in its early film exhibition initiatives in the mid-2000s. Adapting elements of fairground showmanship, Toulmin embraced the function of modern-day *bonimenteuse* during the public screenings of the Mitchell & Kenyon restorations. In her new role, she acted as an intermediary between local audiences in these now postindustrial northern towns, eager to recognize familiar places on screen, and these communities' former industrial past recorded on film.

SPACES OF RECOGNITION

The NFA's research into the Mitchell & Kenyon films' exhibition patterns positions early fairground cinema within a long genealogy of popular working-class entertainments and culture. This work unveils show people's role in molding cinema as a mass medium, incorporating the cinematograph among their fairground attractions, and marketing it among working-class audiences. Combining "a highly polished and 'fresh-talking' performance with a capacity for exaggeration and outright deception," showmanship thrived within proletarian and illegitimate entertainment milieus.[100] However, as show people did not follow scripts and only scant records of the lectures accompanying screenings survive, the history of early film showmanship has for long remained unwritten.[101] As with the histories of other popular leisure activities such as football, film histories have expunged cinema's working-class origins from their accounts. As social historians Eileen and Stephen Yeo write in 1981, scholars have often compiled histories of sport and leisure from the vantage point of these activities' capitalist developments. However, they argue, "we cannot explain the *particular* forms of change which have occurred and become dominant in sport, or anywhere else, without understanding the real possibility of other forms, less adequate for emergent shapes of capitalist social relationships."[102] Starting in the late 1970s, a similarly revisionist strand of film historiography aimed to dismantle teleological explanations assimilat-

ing early cinema to its later institutionalization and capitalist transformation into a mass entertainment industry. However, according to Marxist film historian Michael Chanan, by concentrating on early cinema's formal and perceptual characteristics, the cinema of attractions ignores questions of historical materialism.[103]

Gunning identifies the Mitchell & Kenyon factory gate films as a "moment of self-presentation of workers (and often their families, children mainly, who seem to have come to the gate to greet parents or relatives, possibly bringing lunches) leaving a modern factory."[104] However, while this may appear the case, it was actually film technology impresarios who arguably made these films, not blue-collar workers *by*, *of*, and *for* themselves. Unlike the workers they filmed, Mitchell & Kenyon had invested their capital in a commercial enterprise, comfortably crossing various social and business spheres and trading with show people as well as with wealthier music hall managers. The relationship between working classes, factory gate films, and the new medium is thus more complex than one of self-presentation. As an expression of popular culture—which Hall defines as "the culture of the working people, the labouring classes and the poor"—the traveling cinematograph was a site fraught with contradictions, amidst societal transformations during Britain's transition to industrial capitalism.[105] Before being institutionalized with the 1909 Cinematograph Act, fairground cinema worked as a site simultaneously for what Hall calls the "containment" of laboring classes and their "resistance."[106]

As with all popular culture phenomena, the Mitchell & Kenyon factory gate films occupy a hybrid position between the sphere of labor culture and that of purely commercial leisure. They function neither as genuine forms of working-class expression nor exclusively as examples and instruments of social restraint. Paraphrasing Bailey's words, these films feature at the same time the "authentic and the bogus" working-class culture, that is, instances of both class agency and internalized subordination.[107] *Parkgate Iron and Steel Co., Rotheram*, for example, captures working people of all generations, those visibly aged by years of toil and half-time children, in this barren industrial site defined by windowless architecture, chimneys, and dirt roads. We see them bonding, chatting, posing for the camera, fooling around, smoking a cigarette with a coworker, and engaging in a fist fight. In this short film (just above two and a half minutes long), expressions of roughness and anger, including an employee menacingly confronting the cameraman while queueing to receive his pay, coexist with seemingly harmonious work relationships. The ambiguous presence of both class tensions and benevolent acquiescence in films like *Parkgate Iron and Steel Co., Rotheram* opens what Hall identifies as a "space of recognition." This interstice, which, in his view, is defined by politically and culturally contradictory representations, offers working people an opportuni-

ty for self-recognition and to "rework the[ir] interior contradictions of feeling and perception."[108]

More than a century later, by circulating on TV, in movie theaters, on DVD, on YouTube, and the BFI Player, the Mitchell & Kenyon films have opened new *spaces of recognition* for modern audiences to understand, identify, and empathize with the historical subject depicted. Each of these viewing contexts has enacted a distinct media experience and different degrees of interaction between the films and their (physical and virtual) viewers, furthering different historical narratives around the Mitchell and Kenyon films. By doing so, each exhibition dispositif has enabled a *space of historical recognition*, to paraphrase Hall, enacting a different curatorial approach, hermeneutic mediation between the past and the present, and politics of historical interpretation.

Conducted by art historian Dan Cruickshank, the BBC series *The Lost World of Mitchell and Kenyon* aired in January 2005. It tells the story of the Mitchell & Kenyon films' extraordinary discovery, placing them in a past that the TV presenter defines as a "remote Edwardian world."[109] The documentary describes the late Victorian and early Edwardian periods as times of remarkable improvement in general living conditions, fixing this moment in time as a "lost world," somewhat historically alien to present spectators. Unlike the BFI's DVD "Electric Edwardians," which dedicates a stand-alone section titled "Workers" to factory gate films, the BBC documentary blends images of Britain's workforce across its three episodes, titled "Life & Times," "Sport & Pleasure," and "Saints & Sinners." Cruickshank guides us into the world that Mitchell and Kenyon filmed, a "world of ordinary people a hundred years ago, … going about in their daily lives, leaving work, watching football, catching a tram in the rush hour."[110] As he speaks, we see footage of crowds leaving work, watching football, and crammed high streets amidst horse-powered trams.

About halfway through the first episode, Cruickshank interviews Trevor Fallows, grandson of an employee working at Platt's foundry when Mitchell & Kenyon shot *Workmen Leaving Platt's Works, Oldham* (1900). Replying to an insert the BBC and BFI published in the *Oldham Advertiser*, Fallows shares memories of his grandfather, who spent his working life attempting to unionize the plant's unskilled workers. While watching footage of workmen swarming out of the factory gate on his TV screen, Fallows observes, "it was a dreadful place to work in. It's interesting that none of them are smiling." Then recalling the days of mass employment in the manufacturing sector, he adds with a hint of nostalgia and pride, "but look at the number of people who used to work there," over 6,000 workers by 1901.[111] Other interviews follow Fallow's. These include, for instance, one with Mary Moran, daughter of an employee at Vickers Shipbuilding in Barrow-in-Furness, and a filmed meeting with Catherine and Clive Wilson, grandson of Lieutenant Clive Wilson, whom we see

returning from the Boer War in Mitchell & Kenyon's *Lieutenant Clive Wilson and the Tranby Croft Party, Hull* (1902).

With the Wilsons' appearance, the documentary juxtaposes conversations with descendants of blue-collar workers alongside interviews with successors of those from wealthier backgrounds, carefully balancing the politics of social class representations. *The Lost World of Mitchell and Kenyon* takes us to the Wilsons' elegant home in Hull as they watch footage of local crowds warmly welcoming the return of Lieutenant Wilson. He was in his mid-twenties when he was awarded a Distinguished Service Order after losing two fingers on the Boer War front. Unlike the interviewees before them, who were unable to identify their relatives among the masses of workers appearing in Mitchell & Kenyon's films, the Wilsons recognize and name several members of their wealthy shipping family as they parade outside their mansion. The documentary alternates between the historical footage and shots of descendants filmed in the very act of watching the Mitchell & Kenyon films on their TV sets, singling out meaningful details and recognizing their family histories on screen. In this instance of media reflexivity, *The Lost World of Mitchell and Kenyon* invites us to join the interviewees' intimate space of remembrance, encouraging us to double their act of *historical recognition*.

The documentary plays out a historical continuity between the "ordinary people" Cruickshank identifies in the Mitchell & Kenyon footage and the putative general audience that the show addresses. In doing so, *The Lost World of Mitchell and Kenyon* situates itself within a long media genealogy that, in Chanan's view, at least since the magic lantern has molded and popularized "the myth of the average member of society, 'the man in the middle,' the modern citizen of the modern democratic state."[112] However, despite its nostalgic overtones and class-neutral rhetoric, the personal stories punctuating the documentary have the power to open intimate *spaces of historical recognition* within its narrative, inviting viewers to engage with the contradictions of the past of which Mitchell & Kenyon's films bear testimony.

Starting on the same day as the BBC broadcast, the Mitchell & Kenyon theatrical tour visited the same towns where the films had originally been shot, including Chorey, Derby, Morecambe, Carlisle, and Stoke.[113] Before the screenings, the BFI published announcements in the local papers to reach out to descendants of the people appearing in the films, further amplifying audiences' sense of anticipation and the enthusiasm the BBC documentary had generated. In their restored version, the Mitchell & Kenyon films were just as popular with the modern public as they had been with their early local audiences. Both then and now, the key to their success was not just in their textuality and representations, or in the beauty of the restored footage, but also, importantly, in the modes and contexts of their exhibition. The NFA's

strategy of display and outreach refashioned both Mitchell & Kenyon's habit of exhibiting local films to local audiences and fairground exhibitors' ability to tie the films to the life of local communities. As Toulmin illustrates, the original "Mitchell & Kenyon 'exhibition trail' indicated both the methodology of historical research and the strategy for outreach and dissemination."[114]

In the mid-2000s, local sports clubs, art galleries, primary schools, historical societies, and local associations commissioned Mitchell & Kenyon screenings, which the NFA tailored to each exhibition venue.[115] "Following on from the practice of the original showmen in the 1900s," explains Toulmin, the new programs of Mitchell & Kenyon films "featured four or five titles unique to each town, [in which] the films were presented."[116] After the first shows, it became clear that local films were what audiences most eagerly waited for. "The films were suddenly being used for a variety of reasons ranging from local anniversaries, civic occasions and a means of involving the community," sparking historical awareness and civic pride.[117] Their 2008 screening in the historic working-class seaside resort of Blackpool on the occasion of its UNESCO World Heritage Site application and in Liverpool as part of its Capital of Culture events drew in crowds of thousands.[118] A century after their original exhibition, these early films lived again as public performances and community events, shaping a new public sphere of circulation for the Mitchell & Kenyon films.

Each Mitchell and Kenyon screening was different. Like with the traveling bioscope, various communities' histories, urban landscapes, and architectures—from Leeds' Headingley Stadium to Frank Matcham's Grand Theatre in Blackpool—framed these local film exhibition dispositifs. Each context, whether institutional or informal, prompted distinct historical readings for the films. They variably stood out as documents of the hardships of child labor, traces of bygone industrial prosperity, or a visual homage to Liverpool's Edwardian splendor, "capturing its heyday as the port of the Empire."[119] Audience members' lively reactions—cheering upon the *recognition* of a familiar face or corner of town, commenting on the pictures with nearby spectators, and chanting local or sports anthems—crossed the two-dimensional threshold of the screen, entering the space of the exhibition dispositif. What kept together this highly volatile and unpredictable dispositif was the charismatic presence of a modern-day *bonimenteuse*—half lecturer, half show-woman.

In the Mitchell & Kenyon film shows, Toulmin, a.k.a. Professor Vanessa, turned into a master *bonimenteuse*, reenacting the early film lecturer's charismatic, knowledgeable, and witty figure.[120] Like the bioscope lecturer, who blurred class-inflected distinctions between knowledge and knowingness, "between bourgeois improvement and popular commonsense," Professor Vanessa connected the academia, the fairground world, and local audienc-

es.[121] She skillfully tailored the programs to each taste and context, provided contextual information, and, in her own words, "translated" the films into stories about communities' shared past, making them accessible to a non-specialist public. Coming from the fairground world, she brought what she had learned of the family trade: the art of tale-telling, the craft of mastering crowds, and the wit to let them fill the narrative gaps. If the traveling cinematograph lecturer was a "mediator of modernity," ushering in and helping early audiences familiarize with modern filmic attractions, Professor Vanessa embodied its temporal reverse, that is, a mediator between today's audiences and that past modernity.[122]

The NFA's practices encouraged audiences' participation and appropriation of the films and the narratives around them (to the point that in 2008 during a show in Morecambe, an amateur historian in the audience repeatedly interrupted Toulmin challenging her version of the town's history).[123] Over one hundred shows have taken place since 2005.[124] Just as in the early days of their exhibition in town halls and fairgrounds, the Mitchell & Kenyon restorations elicited anticipation and a desire for *self-recognition*, identification, and a sense of historical belonging. In the early days, "seeing themselves as objects worthy of the camera's attention, enabled such audiences to see themselves partially as others did" and, as Kember suggests, "to consider their everyday lives to be part of the cinematograph's modern landscape."[125] Similarly, present-day spectators rejoiced in *recognizing* their towns, moments of community life, and the expressions of those who might have been their ancestors in the historical footage on the screen. Then and now, the Mitchell & Kenyon success was due to their ability to evoke a shared "sense of history" that transcended contemporary spectators' individual lives.[126] Toulmin's curatorial approach tapped into modern audiences' eagerness to identify with a mediatized, spectacularized, and customized past, otherwise perceived as remote and irrelevant. The success of the recirculation of Mitchell & Kenyon's films reflected what Vivian Sobchack identifies as a "hunger for a lost historical object," particularly in those communities whose recent history has been marked by dissolutive processes of deindustrialization.[127]

By contrast, YouTube, on which the Mitchell & Kenyon films began circulating a few years later, encourages an individual rather than a communal form of interaction and *recognition* with the footage, now accessible through a self-customized, non-linear kind of navigation amidst thousands of archival clips. In 2008, the BFI uploaded the whole collection of over eight hundred Mitchell & Kenyon titles with Toulmin's commentary on its YouTube channel, collecting thousands of views and comments since then. As we shift from theatrical and television dispositifs to this streaming platform, we trade what William Uricchio defines as temporal "montage" for a spatial "collage." While

television and, by extension, film programming present a "*durational* assemblage of divergent materials, [relying] upon sequence," he notes, YouTube transcends the logic of temporal succession. As with collages, here, "visual elements from various provenances and with different histories are uprooted" and juxtaposed next to each other in a non-linear manner.[128] On YouTube, the Mitchell & Kenyon films' contextual narrative breaks into a multitude of algorithmically customized, loosely related videos. A playlist of recommended archival material—ranging, for instance, from a 1944 Government film about Youngstown, Ohio to an excerpt from a televised debate with Rotherham's Labour MP Sarah Champion—provides a non-linear metahistorical horizon for Mitchell & Kenyon films such as *Parkgate Iron and Steel Co., Rotherham*. The entry point into Mitchell & Kenyon's historical world, as well as the narrative sequence tying the archival material together—what Thomas Elsaesser, using a formalist term, refers to as *syuzhet* (plot)—depends entirely upon users' choices.[129]

The BFI's YouTube channel allows ample margins for relatively unmonitored debate and heated if inconclusive exchanges.[130] For instance, dozens of YouTube users dropped comments below the clip of *Parkgate Iron and Steel Co., Rotheram*, often conversing with each other and providing historical context to the film clip. Here too, as in the BBC documentary and the NFA's curated screenings, users *recognize* glimpses of their local and family histories. To one comment mourning the lost innocence of olden times, another user replies polemically, "the good old days of child labour, working 80 hours a week, dangerous unsafe conditions, all to get just about enough money to buy a loaf of bread," concluding, "fuck nostalgia!"[131] The reception of these early local films on YouTube dissolves the illusion of a politically neutral historical reading for the Mitchell & Kenyon films and testifies to audiences' appetite for critical engagement with their deep historical contradictions.

As part of their digital afterlives, in the early 2010s the BFI uploaded the Mitchell & Kenyon films on its video-on-demand platform, the BFI Player, available exclusively in the UK. Here, users can explore the Mitchell & Kenyon films within two distinct exhibition dispositifs: through the interactive map Britain on Film and as part of the BFI Player's free online collection Edwardian Britain on Film.[132] By typing a location in Britain on Film's search engine, users gain access to a map of the chosen area with a list of films depicting that place. "Ever wondered what life was like in the town you grew up in before you were born?" the BFI Player asks, suggesting "Now you can through Britain on Film." In so doing, the platform invites (British-raised) users to locate their history on a map of Britain and acquaint with it through a selection of archival films including Mitchell & Kenyon's. Through the use of possessive pronouns—"*Our* lives. *Our* stories," "*Your* Britain on film"—the BFI's narra-

tive conjures up an imaginary national and territorial community of belonging that replaces class *recognition*.[133]

The second route to explore the Mitchell & Kenyon films on the BFI Player is through the curated section Edwardian Britain on Film featuring highlights from the collection, including the oldest footage of the Manchester United football team and a short documentary about the BFI's restoration. Twelve categories, ranging from "Edwardians at Work" to "Edwardian Football," encourage users to explore the collection thematically. In an introductory text, the BFI warns with benevolent irony, "this isn't the stuffy, middle-class world we usually see. These Edwardians laugh, grin and point at the camera, even make rude gestures." Despite its casual class reference, the archive's player expunges critical analysis—let alone class politics—from its discourse around the Mitchell & Kenyon films, replacing it with detailed descriptions of historical locations, clothing, public figures, and camera techniques. Here, narrative authority fully returns to the hands of curators, as the BFI Player allows limited opportunities for user interaction with the films beyond title selection. As we shift from the NFA's film screenings to the BFI Player, *spaces to recognize* and creatively interact with the cultural, social, and historical specificity of the working-class milieus depicted in the Mitchell & Kenyon films progressively restrict, within narratives and curatorial approaches that become gradually depoliticized.

CINE-VARIETY PASTICHE

The long-lasting success of the partnership with the BFI and the BBC and the popularity of the Mitchell & Kenyon itinerant programs gave the NFA's work increased exposure and marked the start of its ongoing experiments with early film exhibition.[134] The NFA's screenings incorporated live performance elements including the film lecturer's presence on stage, interaction with audiences, and the archive's collaboration with local contemporary artists, such as the martial industrial music band In the Nursery and the electronic music duo Lemon Jelly, who created soundtracks for the films. The NFA carried these elements into its following exhibition projects, such as Admission All Classes, Professor Vanessa's Twenty Performing Wonders, and Professor Vanessa's Wondershow, alternating early film screening with stage acts inspired by the traditions of the circus, freak shows, and variety theater.

Admission all Classes: A History of Entertainment 1850–1950 was a joint research project with Blackpool's city council, funded by the AHRC.[135] Its goal was to disseminate historical awareness about Blackpool's entertainment history, including fairground, music hall, local film, circus, and seaside attractions. Through an eighteen-month-long calendar of performances,

exhibitions, lectures, and revues, Admission all Classes aimed to restore Blackpool's fame as the capital of popular entertainment.[136] Variety performances by artists including comedy magicians Barry and Stuart and the queer working-class entertainment collective Duckie brought back the original glamour and spice of Blackpool's Grand Theatre. Modern contortionists and acrobats refashioned the shock and allure of early bodily attractions such as freak shows, while performers reenacted Loïe Fuller's serpentine dance, twirling their chiffon skirts in suggestive curvilinear motions. In January 2008, Professor Mervyn Heard projected magic lanterns with "colourful illustrated songs, comical stories, temperance warnings, advertisements and wonderful mechanical moving slides." As tradition had it, a projection of local films followed the magic lantern show at the Grand Theatre. Pianist Stephen Horne, Professor Vanessa, and historian John Walton provided music and verbal commentary to Mitchell & Kenyon films picturing Blackpool and Lancashire, such as *Blackpool Victoria Pier* (1904).[137]

With a mixture of contemporary cabaret and vintage performances, Admission all Classes actualized early cinema's popular intermedia context and carnivalesque splendor. Toulmin's 2009 inaugural lecture, Professor Vanessa's Twenty Performing Wonders, pushed the performative component of early film exhibition even further. She shared the stage of the University of Sheffield's Firth Hall with a silent mime act, a juggling acrobatic performance, and cabaret artist Miss Behave's sword-swallowing number. Toulmin laced these acts with early films such as *The Boxing Kangaroo* (1896), *Annie Oakley* (1894), featuring the famous sharpshooter, the early burlesque film *The Dancing Pig* (*Le cochon danseur*, 1907), and the fantastic *The King of Spades* (*Métamorphoses du roi de pique*, 1904).[138] In the role of early *bonimenteuse*, Professor Vanessa told the tale of early cinema, which, like a "cuckoo[,] first laid its eggs" in the nest of low-class popular entertainment's traditions, visual regimes, and performative apparatuses.[139] Professor Vanessa's Twenty Performing Wonders toured various international cultural institutions, including Eye, where Toulmin curated a program titled Circus Films alternating early films from the Desmet collection with live performances.[140]

In 2012, Toulmin presented Professor Vanessa's Wondershow as part of the Roundhouse Circusfest in London. In this exhibition dispositif, a central stage surrounded by sideshow booths substituted the two-dimensionality of film projection. Inspired by the spatial arrangement of a circus ring and a fairground, this setting allowed spectators to walk freely, moving from one sideshow to the other. In the role of ringmaster and "mistress of ceremony," Miss Behave told "the story of how [the] Wondershow came to be, and how she won it in a card game." From the central stage, she incited spectators to explore sideshow attractions such as the Headless Lady, Cleo, the Girl in the Goldfish

Bowl, and Electra, the 27,000 Volt Girl.[141] Originally belonging to showman, fire-eater, and curiosity museum proprietor Jon Gresham, all the sideshow booths were restored to splendor by magician Jon Marshall.[142] While strolling across decades of fairground entertainment history, spectators unexpectedly encountered the Kingdom of Shadows, a cinematograph booth screening a program of early films.

Admission All Classes, Professor Vanessa's Twenty Performing Wonders, and Professor Vanessa's Wondershow reenacted cinema's promiscuous and proletarian intermedia origins by refashioning itinerant fairground cinema's performative, unpredictable, and anarchic atmosphere. However, in such reenactments the NFA did not aim to authentically recreate the verisimilitude of historical details such as costumes, props, and locations, as historical reenactments typically do. Instead, starting with the Mitchell & Kenyon programs, the NFA has pursued a modern adaptation or translation of early cinema to present spheres of circulation. Commenting on the 2008 Mitchell & Kenyon film exhibition in Liverpool, Toulmin explains:

> [Musician] Stephen [Horne] told me that we would never have been allowed to use those songs or programme format at the [BFI] National Film Theatre as we had split up titles, played anachronistic music, and curated the show as a modern performance piece rather than a historical recreation. I responded by explaining that this was a local show for local people and as such required a particular style of programming that was relevant to the knowledge and experience of the audience.[143]

In other words, the NFA's curatorship blends historically different materials, conventions, and practices, hermeneutically adapting them to present exhibition contexts to better render the spirit of early fairground cinema.

With its mix of seemingly historically inappropriate materials and its imitation of fairground stylistic conventions, the NFA's curatorship metahistorically resembles what Dyer defines as "pastiche." In his analysis of neo-noir films, such as François Truffaut's *Shoot the Piano Player* (1960), Dyer argues that rather than authentically reproducing a genre, what pastiche imitates "is not straightforwardly noir but the memory of noir, a memory that may be inaccurate or selective."[144] The possibility of pastiching with historical genres and conventions always presupposes a selective memory and an arbitrary interpretation of the historical referent (film noir in Dyer's example). Pastiche here functions as a hermeneutic category of historical mediation—in Dyer's words, "always and inescapably historical"—and a mode of metahistorical discourse.[145] Similarly, I read the NFA's curatorial and hermeneutic work in events such as the Mitchell & Kenyon programs, Admission All Classes,

Professor Vanessa's Twenty Performing Wonders, and Professor Vanessa's Wondershow as a kind of cine-variety pastiche. They reenact a selective, chronologically and geographically circumscribed history of early cinema, when the fairground cinematograph and film showmanship thrived among popular working-class entertainments, before disappearing with the consolidation of industrially standardized practices of production, distribution, and exhibition. Through pastiche, the NFA hermeneutically and metahistorically bridges this selective, remembered, partly imagined, and refashioned history of working-class popular culture with its postindustrial present.

Throughout its history, the NFCA has provided a home to various records (including memorabilia, ephemera, administrative documents, and personal belongings) documenting the life, work, and cultural significance of itinerant show people, from the nineteenth century to the present. The institutionalization of these records has formalized the existence of a group of historical phenomena that became identified as "fairground and allied entertainments."[146] This archival work has prompted new historiographic research, rediscovering early cinema's historical affinity with the world of low-class popular entertainments. Mixing up academia's high culture and low-brow leisure, the NFA's exhibition practices celebrate the multifarious cluster of popular entertainments, media, and performances, among which early cinema first made its appearance, winning popularity among the masses.

The NFA's early film exhibition projects have adapted the presentation style of fairground show people, encouraging different modes of spectatorship (interactive, mobile, bodily) and opening the cinematic space to other media (such as the magic lantern), forms of entertainment like modern burlesque, and performances, including those of cabaret artist Miss Behave.[147] Unlike GEM's and Eye's curatorial practices, the NFCA's curatorial approach defamiliarizes contemporary audiences from the comfort of medium-specific narratives and screen-centered exhibition practices. While a materialist analysis of cinema's working-class origins falls beyond the scope of much historiography around early fairground cinema, by repositioning it within the specific context of proletarian, illegitimate entertainments, such as penny gaffs and fairgrounds, the NFCA foregrounds the politics of revisionist historiography. In contrast with the logic guiding early and silent film curatorship at Eye and GEM, the NFCA's work exposes the social, cultural, and geographical situatedness of the history it addresses. Its archival, historiographic, and curatorial work reminds us that historical interpretation is always selective, unveiling the intrinsically iterative hermeneutic dynamic in film curatorship.

Historical reworkings are intrinsic to the fair, with its cyclical returns and history lost in the centuries. As Gadamer explains, the fair or, in his terms, the *volksfest*:

is not an identity like a historical event, but neither is it determined by its origins so that there was once the 'real' festival—as distinct from the way in which it later came to be celebrated. From its inception—whether instituted in a single act or introduced gradually—the nature of the festival is to be celebrated regularly. Thus its own original essence is always to be something different ….[148]

The identity of moving-image media—like that of the fair—is also dispersed in time. Their purposes, cultural functions, and significance have continuously changed often to the point of appearing unfamiliar. Curating film history today entails the possibility of re-staging moving-image media's plural pasts and hermeneutically imagining their future identities in the age of new media.

ENDNOTES

1   This chapter is based on fieldwork I conducted at the NFCA in January 2016, which included interviews with Vanessa Toulmin, Research Director at the National Fairground and Circus Archive, and Arantza Barrutia-Wood, Collection Manager at the National Fairground and Circus Archive. I also interviewed Patrick Russell, Senior Curator of Non-Fiction Films at the British Film Institute National Archive. In what follows, I will use the acronym NFA to refer to the archive's history and activities prior to 2016, the year in which it changed its name into NFCA. When talking more generally about the archive, I will use its current name NFCA.

2   Vanessa Toulmin, "The National Fairground Archive: Its Origins, Development and Holdings," *Local Historian* 33.2 (2003): 74.

3   Here I use the terms "freak" and "freak show" exclusively within the historical context of traveling fairs, carnivals, and circuses. See Ann Featherstone, "Showing the Freak: Photographic Images of the Extraordinary Body," in *Visual Delights: Essays on the Popular and Projected Image in the 19th Century,* ed. Simon Popple and Vanessa Toulmin (Trowbridge, UK: Flicks Books, 2000), 135–42; and David Hevey, *The Creatures That Time Forgot: Photography and Disability Imagery* (London: Routledge, 1992).

4   Sarah Munro, Mark Copeland (The Insect Circus), and Jon Marshall (restorer of sideshow illusions including The Headless Lady) are only a few of the artists with whom Toulmin collaborated as part of the NFA's exhibition projects. See "The Insect Circus," accessed June 20, 2016, http://www.insectcircus.co.uk; and "Live Shows, Bizarre Visual Magic, Horror & Freakish Fun," Sideshow Illusions, accessed June 20, 2016, http://www.sideshowillusions.com/.

5   Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 3.

6   Vanessa Toulmin, "'This Is a Local Film': The Cultural and Social Impact of the Mitchell & Kenyon Film Collection," in *The Public Value of the Humanities*, ed. Jonathan Bate (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011).

7   Patrick Russell, "Parenthood: Nurturing and Developing the BFI National Film and Television Archive," *Screen* 46.1 (Spring 2005), 111. Vanessa Toulmin, interview by the author, January 20, 2016.

8   Due to space limitations, this chapter will not address questions of geographical and cultural specificity related to the Mitchell & Kenyon films shot in Scotland and Ireland, nor the exhibition of their restorations in these regions.

9   Vanessa Toulmin, "Within the Reach of All: Travelling Cinematograph Shows on British Fairgrounds 1896–1914," in *Travelling Cinema in Europe: Sources and Perspectives*, ed. Martin Loiperdinger (Frankfurt on Main: Stroemfeld Verlag, 2008), 19.

10 See Vanessa Toulmin, "The Fairground Bioscope" and "Bioscope Biographies," in *In The Kingdom of Shadows: A Companion to Early Cinema*, ed. Colin Hardin and Simon Popple (London: Cygnus Arts, 1996), 191–206 and 249–61.

11 The BBC released its documentary series on DVD a few months later. See "News," *Who's Who of Victorian Cinema*, accessed April 7, 2022, https://www.victorian-cinema.net/news.

12 Toulmin, "This Is a Local Film," 95.

13 "News," *Who's Who of Victorian Cinema*.

14 Miriam Bratu Hansen, "Early Cinema, Late Cinema: Permutations of the Public Sphere," *Screen* 34.3 (1993): 208.

15 For the NFCA's initiatives focusing on circus history and the role of show people during WWI, see "Projects," The National Fairground and Circus Archive / The University of Sheffield, accessed April 7, 2022, https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/nfca/projects/atoz.

16 Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," trans. Alan Williams, in *Movies and Methods. Volume II*, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 531–42. For a discussion of the role of the *bonimenteur* see Germain Lacasse, "The Lecturer and The Attraction," in *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 181–91.

17 Toulmin, "This Is a Local Film," 95–96.

18 Claude Bertemes, "Cinématographe Reloaded: Notes on the Fairground Cinema Project Crazy Cinématographe," in *Travelling Cinema in Europe: Sources and Perspectives*, ed. Martin Loiperdinger (Frankfurt on Main: Stroemfeld Verlag, 2008), 193.

19 "National Fairground Archive – Two Decades of Delight," *ClipUpdate* (August 2014): 27.

20 *ClipUpdate*, 27.

21 Toulmin, "National Fairground Archive," 76.

22 Toulmin, interview.

23 Toulmin, "National Fairground Archive," 74.

24 Eileen Yeo and Stephen Yeo, "Ways of Seeing: Control and Leisure versus Class and Struggle," in *Popular Culture and Class Conflict 1590–1914: Explorations in the History of Labour and Leisure*, ed. Eileen and Stephen Yeo (Brighton: The Harvester Press Limited, 1981), 128.

25 Peter Bailey, *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 5.

26 Henry Morley, *Memoirs of Bartholomew Fair* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1859), vii.

27 Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), 46.

28 See ibid., 145–46.

29 Toulmin, interview.

30 Toulmin, "National Fairground Archive," 76

31   "Jack Leeson Collection," The National Fairground and Circus Archive / The University of Sheffield, accessed April 7, 2022, https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/nfca/collections/leeson.

32   "Shufflebottom Family Collection," The National Fairground and Circus Archive / The University of Sheffield, accessed April 7, 2022, https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/nfca/collections/shufflebottom; and Toulmin, "National Fairground Archive," 77. Buffalo Bill's international popularity and the spread of impersonators and Wild West attractions around the world exemplify the role played by fairs in the process of Americanization. See Robert W. Rydell and Rob Kreos, *Buffalo Bill in Bologna: The Americanization of the World, 1869–1922* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

33   "National Fairground Archive," British Universities Film and Video Council, accessed April 15, 2016, http://bufvc.ac.uk/archives/index.php/collection/347; *ClipUpdate*, 29.

34   Ian Herbert, "Billy Smart Made Spy Films of Reals to Teach His Acts New Circus Tricks," *The Independent* (June 28, 2000).

35   Toulmin, interview; and "Circus Friends Association Collection," The National Fairground and Circus Archive / The University of Sheffield, accessed April 7, 2022, https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/nfca/collections/cfa.

36   "Collections at the National Fairground and Circus Archive," The National Fairground and Circus Archive / The University of Sheffield, accessed April 7, 2022, https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/nfca/collections. See also Amanda Bernstein and Vanessa Toulmin, *Till the Fall of the Curtain: Treasures from the National Fairground Archive* (Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 2014) and National Fairground Archive, *National Fairground Archive: 2 Decades of Delight* (Sheffield: National Fairground Archive at the University of Sheffield, 2014).

37   The NFCA has promoted fairground knowledge and safety collaborating with the UK's national Health and Safety Executive. See *ClipUpdate*, 31. Marvelosa exhibited authentic archival items alongside the work of six artists (Anthony Bennett, Mark Copeland and Sarah Munro, Paul Evans, Florence Blanchard and Pete McKee) that took the NFCA's collections as a source of inspiration. See "Marvelosa Exhibition," The National Fairground and Circus Archive / The University of Sheffield, accessed April 15, 2016, https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/nfca/news/nfa20-1.427756; and "History of the Circus Marked at University of Sheffield Exhibition," *BBC News*, November 7, 2016, https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-south-yorkshire-37878476.

38   See Timothy Neal, Vanessa Toulmin, and Rebecca Vick, "Mitchell and Kenyon: A Successful, Pioneering and 'Travelled' Partnership of Production," and Patrick Russell, "Truth at 10 Frames per Second? Archiving Mitchell and Kenyon," in *The Lost World of Mitchell & Kenyon: Edwardian Britain on Film*, ed. Vanessa Toulmin, Simon Popple, and Patrick Russell (London: BFI, 2004), 3–20.

39   Russell, "Truth at 10 Frames per Second?," 13.

40 Neal, Toulmin, and Vick, "Mitchell and Kenyon," 7; and Vanessa Toulmin, Patrick Russell, and Timothy Neal, "The Mitchell and Kenyon Collection: Rewriting Film History," *The Moving Image* 3.2 (Fall 2003): 4. The Cinema Museum in London restored Mitchell & Kenyon's fiction films and Boer War reenactments. The nitrate negatives are at the BFI's J. Paul Getty Jr. Conservation Centre in Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire. See "Mitchell & Kenyon," The Cinema Museum, accessed May 20, 2016, http://www.cinemamuseum.org.uk/2010/mitchell-kenyon/#more-914.

41 Compared with other archival collections, such as the Joye and Henville Collections, the Mitchell & Kenyon is a much more comprehensive and complete corpus of original camera negatives. See Russell, "10 Frames per Second?," 14.

42 On factory gate films see Stephen Bottomore, "From the Factory Gate to the 'Home Talent' Drama: An International Overview of Local Films in the Silent Era," in *The Lost World of Mitchell & Kenyon: Edwardian Britain on Film*, ed. Vanessa Toulmin, Simon Popple, and Patrick Russell (London: BFI, 2004), 34–35.

43 Tom Gunning, "Pictures of Crowd Splendor: The Mitchell and Kenyon Factory Gate Films," in *The Lost World of Mitchell & Kenyon: Edwardian Britain on Film*, ed. Vanessa Toulmin, Simon Popple, and Patrick Russell (London: BFI, 2004), 57. Leo Enticknap discusses deep focus in Mitchell and Kenyon's factory gate films in "'A Real Break on Progress'? Moving Image Technology in the Time of Mitchell and Kenyon," in *The Lost World of Mitchell & Kenyon: Edwardian Britain on Film*, ed. Vanessa Toulmin, Simon Popple, and Patrick Russell (London: BFI, 2004), 23–27.

44 Russell, "10 Frames per Second?," 15–17.

45 Ibid., 19.

46 Ibid., 15–17.

47 Ian Jack, "The Lost World," *The Guardian,* January 7, 2005, https://www.theguardian.com/film/2005/jan/07/1.

48 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 80. For a discussion of documentary realism in Bazin and Barthes see Malin Whalberg, *Documentary Time: Film and Phenomenology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

49 Toulmin, interview.

50 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 78.

51 For a history of penny gaffs see John Burrows, "Penny Pleasures: Film Exhibition in London during the Nickelodeon Era, 1906–1914," *Film History* 16.1 (2004): 60–91 and "Penny Pleasures II: Indecency, Anarchy and Junk Film in London's 'Nickelodeons,' 1906–1914," *Film History* 16.2 (2004): 172–97.

52 See Vanessa Toulmin, "Cuckoo in the Nest: Edwardian Itinerant Exhibition Practices and the Transition to Cinema in the United Kingdom from 1901 to 1906," *The Moving Image* 10.1 (2010): 52–79; and Deac Rossell, "A Slipery Job: Travelling Exhibitors in Early Cinema," in *Visual Delights: Essays on the Popular and Projected Image*

in the 19th Century, ed. Simon Popple and Vanessa Toulmin (Trowbridge, UK: Flicks Books, 2000), 50–60. Music hall programs in venues such as the Argyle Theatre of Varieties in Birkenhead or Blackpool's Tower Pavilion featured films amidst attractions such as the world-renowned Leamy Ladies Circus and the Gotham comedy Quartette. The NFCA holds posters of these venues. For reproductions see Toulmin, "Cuckoo in the Nest," 57–58. On the history of world-famous trapeze artist Lillian Leitzel see Dean Jensen, *Queen of the Air: A True Story of Love and Tragedy at The Circus* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2013). Other public venues like St George's Hall in Bradford featured "high class" programs focusing exclusively on film, presented by master showman A. D. Thomas or traveling lecturer Waller Jeffs. See Richard Brown, "New Century Pictures: Regional Enterprise in Early British Film Exhibition," in *The Lost World of Mitchell & Kenyon: Edwardian Britain on Film*, ed. Vanessa Toulmin, Simon Popple, and Patrick Russell (London: BFI, 2004), 69–82.

53   Toulmin, "Cuckoo in the Nest," 61. As Toulmin explains, with an admission price of one to two shillings, town halls programs appear "prohibitive in comparison with the music hall admission, ranging from two shillings for a good seat in the circle to one shilling in the stalls and balcony to six pence in the circle downstairs and the pit and three pence in the gallery …—and a penny up front charged for the fairground experience." Ibid., 66. For an account of itinerant fairground bioscopes in Italy see Aldo Bernardini, *Gli Ambulanti: Cinema Italiano delle Origini* (Gemona, Italy: La Cineteca del Friuli, 2001).

54   See Vanessa Toulmin, *Electric Edwardians: The Story of the Mitchell & Kenyon Collection* (London: British Film Institute), 57–84; and Vanessa Toulmin, "We Take Them and Make Them: Mitchell and Kenyon and the Travelling Exhibition Showmen," in *The Lost World of Mitchell & Kenyon: Edwardian Britain on Film*, ed. Vanessa Toulmin, Simon Popple, and Patrick Russell (London: BFI, 2004), 59–68.

55   Cecil M. Hepworth, *Came the Dawn: Memories of a Film Pioneer* (London: Phoenix House Limited, 1951), 58. Quoted in Toulmin, *Story of the Mitchell & Kenyon Collection*, 75.

56   Ibid., 61.

57   See Joe Kember, *Marketing Modernity: Victorian Popular Shows and Early Cinema* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2009), 45–46 and 57.

58   Uli Jung, "Local Films: A Blind Spot in the Historiography of Early German Cinema," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 22.3 (2002): 255. Cited in Vanessa Toulmin and Martin Loiperdinger, "Is It You? Recognition, Representation and Response in Relation to the Local Film," *Film History* 17.1 (2005): 7.

59   Ibid., 10.

60   Bottomore, "From the Factory Gate," 33.

61   Ibid., 36.

62   *Bradford Daily Argus*, review, February 22, 1902. Quoted in Brown, "New Century Pictures," 76–77.

63 Kinematograph & Lantern Weekly, *How to Run a Picture Theatre: A Handbook for Proprietors, Managers, and Exhibitors* (London: E. T. Heron & Co., 1914), 121.

64 Toulmin and Loiperdinger, "Recognition, Representation and Response," 9. See also Stephen Herbert, "Animated Portrait Photography," *History of Photography* 13.1 (1989): 65–78.

65 Vanessa Toulmin and Charles Musser, "The Williams Find," in *Le Giornate del Cinema Muto 25 (October 7–14, 2006): Catalogue*, ed. Catherine S. Surowiec, 116–18.

66 The collection also includes Edison's *Annie Oakley* (1894) and *New Bar Room* (1895). William K. L. Dickson often shot the same performers multiple times on separate negatives, for instance when the original negative would get too damaged, as in the case of *New Bar Room*. The George Williams Family collection challenges archival identification practices, underscoring "the complexity of establishing a definitive filmography of early Edison films." Toulmin and Musser, "Williams Find," 119. See also Charles Musser, *Edison Motion Pictures, 1890–1900: An Annotated Filmography* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press and Le Giornate del Cinema Muto, 1997).

67 Toulmin and Musser, "Williams Find," 116–18.

68 Toulmin, interview. See also Toulmin, "Fairground Bioscope," 193; "Cuckoo in the Nest," 55; and Ann Featherstone, "Showing the Freak," 135–42. On early cinema's affinity and business alliance with traveling shows, the circus, and prizefight see Dan Streible, *Fight Pictures: A History of Boxing and Early Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

69 André Gaudreault, "The Diversity of Cinematographic Connections in the Intermedial Context of the Turn of the Century," in *Visual Delights: Essays on the Popular and Projected Image in the 19th Century*, ed. Simon Popple and Vanessa Toulmin (Trowbridge, UK: Flicks Books, 2000), 13.

70 Matthew Salomon, "Fairground Illusions and the Magic of Méliès," in *Travelling Cinema in Europe: Sources and Perspectives*, ed. Martin Loiperdinger (Frankfurt on Main: Stroemfeld Verlag, 2008), 35–45.

71 Kember, *Marketing Modernity*, 21.

72 Joe Kember, "The Functions of Showmanship in Freak Show and Early Film," *Early Popular Visual Culture* 5.1 (2007): 2.

73 Hevey, *The Creatures That Time* Forgot, 53. Quoted in Kember, "Functions of Showmanship," 2.

74 Charles Musser, "Rethinking Early Cinema: Cinema of Attractions and Narrativity," in *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 391–92. See also Robert C. Allen, *Vaudeville and Film 1895–1915: A Study in Media Interaction* (New York: Arno Press, 1980), 47.

75 Tom Norman, "Memoirs of Tom Norman the Silver King, Late Vice President Showmen's Guild, Auctioneer, Showman" (manuscript, 1928), 13, NFA, later published as Tom Norman, *The Penny Showman: Memoirs of Tom Norman the Silver King*

with Additional Writings by His Son, George Norman (London: privately published, 1985). Quoted in Toulmin, *Story of the Mitchell & Kenyon Collection*, 57.

76 See Ann Featherstone, ed. *The Journals of Sydney Race 1892–1900: A Provincial View of Popular Entertainment* (London: Society for Theatre Research, 2007), 78–89.

77 Gunning elaborates on the motif of early cinema's "temporal irruption" in Tom Gunning, "'Now You See It, Now You Don't': The Temporality of the Cinema of Attractions," in *The Silent Cinema Reader*, ed. Lee Grieveson and Peter Kramer (London: Routledge, 2004), 45.

78 Kember, "Functions of Showmanship," 3.

79 Toulmin, "Cuckoo in the Nest," 57. See Rachael Low, *The History of the British Film, 1896–1906, Volume 1* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1948); and John Barnes, *The Beginnings of the Cinema in England, 1894–1901, Volume 2* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1996–98).

80 Ben Singer, "Modernity, Hyperstimulus and the Rise of Popular Sensationalism," in *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, ed. Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 88. As Tony Bennet notes, "unlike the traditional travelling fair, the fixed-site amusement parks gave a specific embodiment to modernity, they were also unlike their itinerant predecessors in the orderly and regulated manner of their functioning. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the fair had served as the very emblem of the disorderly forms of conduct associated with all sites of popular assembly. By contrast, early sociological assessments of the cultural significance of the amusement park judge that it had succeeded in pacifying the conduct of the crowd ...." Bennet, *Birth of the Museum*, 4.

81 Musser, "Cinema of Attractions and Narrativity," 403. See also Charles Musser and Carol Nelson, *High-Class Moving Pictures: Lyman H. Howe and the Forgotten Era of Traveling Exhibition, 1880–1920* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991). On early cinema's adaptation of oral traditions see Germain Lacasse, *Le bonimenteur de vues animées: Le cinéma "muet" entre tradition et modernité* (Québec: Nota bene, 2000).

82 Toulmin, *Story of the Mitchell & Kenyon Collection*, 61.

83 Hansen, "Early Cinema, Late Cinema," 208.

84 Michael Chanan, *The Dream That Kicks: The Prehistory and Early Years of Cinema in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1996), 188–89. See also "Showmen and the Cinematograph Bill," *The World's Fair*, September 14, 1909, reprinted in Hardin and Popple, *Kingdom of Shadows*, 206.

85 Toulmin, Russell, and Neal, "Mitchell and Kenyon Collection," 2. See for instance Barnes, *Beginnings of the Cinema in England*. On Robert Paul, see Ian Christie, *Robert Paul and the Origins of British Cinema* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).

86 Toulmin, *Story of the Mitchell & Kenyon Collection*, 202.

87 Ibid. See also Toulmin, *Story of the Mitchell & Kenyon Collection*, 228–31.

88 "Mitchell & Kenyon," The Cinema Museum.

89 Gregory A. Waller, *Main Street Amusements: Movies and Commercial Entertainment in a Southern City, 1896–1930* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), xiii.

90 Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, ed. Kurt H. Wolff (New York: Free Press, 1950), 410. Quoted in Singer, "Modernity, Hypersimulus," 73.

91 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version," in *Selected Writings: Volume 3: 1935–1938*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991–99), 132n33. (The passage in the second edition of Benjamin's essay, to which I refer in this book, is slightly different from Gunning's quote.) Quoted in Tom Gunning, "An Aesthetics of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator," in *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*, ed. Linda Williams (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1995), 125. See also Mike Savage, "Walter Benjamin's Urban Thought: A Critical Analysis," in *Thinking Space*, ed. Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift (London: Routledge, 2000), 37.

92 Singer, "Modernity, Hypersimulus," 74–75.

93 Siegfried Kracauer, "The Cult of Distraction," *New German Critique* 40 (Winter 1987): 91–96. Cited in Gunning, "Aesthetics of Astonishment," 128.

94 Gunning's cinema of attractions famously interprets early cinema's spectatorial impact through Sergei Eisenstein's concept of attraction and Futurists' ideas of the "direct assault on the spectator." See Sergei Eisenstein, "How I Became a Film Director [1945]," *Notes of a Film Director*, ed. R. Yurenev, trans. X. Danko (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1959), 16; and Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "The Variety Theater [1913]," *Futurist Manifestos*, ed. Umbro Apollonio (New York: Viking, 1973), 127. Both quoted in Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attraction[s]: Early Film its Spectator and the Avant-Garde," in *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 387.

95 Nico de Klerk, "'Pictures to Be Shewn': Programming the American Biograph," in *Visual Delights: Essays on the Popular and Projected Image in the 19th Century*, ed. Simon Popple and Vanessa Toulmin (Trowbridge: Flicks Books, 2000), 206. David Bordwell, Charlie Keil, and Kember highlight the limits of historiographic models that, like the cinema of attractions, derive an understanding of early film aesthetics and spectatorship from modernist readings of processes of modernization epitomized by the rise of urban life. See Kember, *Marketing Modernity*, 18; David Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 141–46; Charlie Keil, "'Visualised Narratives,' Transitional Cinema and the Modernity Thesis," in *Le Cinema au Tournant du Siècle / Cinema at the Turn of the Century*, ed. Clair Dupré la Tour, André Gaudreault, and Roberta

Pearson (Lusanne/Quebec: Éditions Payot Lusanne / Éditions Nota Bene, 1999), 133–47.

96 De Klerk, "Programming the American Biograph," 217.

97 Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 280.

98 On the theme of the train as modern paradigm for and within early cinema see Lynne Kirby, *Parallel Tracks: The Railroad and Silent Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

99 Lacasse, "Lecturer and The Attraction," 181–91.

100 Kember, "Functions of Showmanship," 3.

101 On film lecturers' absence from cinema histories see André Gaudreault and J-P. Sirois Trahan, "Le retour du [bonimenteur] refoulé … (ou serait-ce le bonisseur-conférencier, le commentateur, le conférencier, le presentateur ou le 'speacher'?)," *Iris* 22 (1996): 20. Cited in Kember, *Marketing Modernity*, 69.

102 Eileen and Stephen Yeo, "Ways of Seeing," 135.

103 Chanan, *Dream That Kicks*, xii.

104 Gunning, "Pictures of Crowd Splendor," 54.

105 Stuart Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Popular,'" in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, ed. John Storey (Pearson: Prentice Hall, 1998), 442.

106 Ibid., 443.

107 Bailey, *Popular Culture*, 126.

108 Hall, "Deconstructing 'The Popular,'" 447. Incidentally, Hall's notion of space of recognition here shares similarities with Hegel's theorization of the dialectics of historical understanding as recognition, which I referred to in chapter 1.

109 Dan Cruickshank, "Life & Times," *The Lost World of Mitchell & Kenyon*, episode 1, BBC broadcast January 14, 2005 (BBC and BFI Co-production), DVD. "The team from the BBC selected key individuals from the films and researched them by advertising in local newspapers, on regional television, in libraries and record offices with the intention of finding any living descendants." Toulmin, "This Is a Local Film," 95.

110 Cruickshank, "Life & Times."

111 "Workforce of Parkgate Iron and Steel Co., Rotherham (1901)," BFI Player, accessed April 7, 2022, https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-workforce-of-parkgate-iron-and-steel-co-rotherham-1901-1901-online.

112 Chanan, *Dream That Kicks*, 13.

113 Toulmin, "This Is a Local Film," 95–96.

114 Toulmin, interview.

115 Art-house venues that showed the Mitchell and Kenyon films included the Flatpack Film Festival in Birmingham and Manchester's Cornerhouse Cinema. See Vanessa Toulmin, "Programming the Local: Mitchell and Kenyon and the Local Film Show," in *Early Cinema Today: The Art of Programming and Live Performance,* ed. Martin Loiperdinger (New Barnet: John Libbey Publishing Ltd, 2011), 71.

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116 Ibid., 70.

117 Ibid., 71.

118 Ibid. The program of Mitchell and Kenyon films as part of Admission All Classes, curated by Vanessa Toulmin, was part of the events organized by the city of Blackpool in the context of its UNESCO World Heritage application. See "Admission All Classes – A History of Entertainment 1850–1950," The National Fairground and Circus Archive / The University of Sheffield, accessed April 7, 2022, https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/nfca/projects/admissionallclasses; and "Blackpool and the North West on Film," The National Fairground and Circus Archive / The University of Sheffield, accessed April 7, 2022, https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/nfca/projects/aac/blackpoolandthenortwestonfilm.

119 Toulmin, "Programming the Local," 73.

120 Toulmin, "Bioscope Biographies," 248.

121 Kember, *Marketing Modernity*, 45.

122 Lacasse, "Lecturer and The Attraction," 181–91.

123 Toulmin, "Programming the Local," 72.

124 Toulmin, "This Is a Local Film," 101.

125 Kember, "Functions of Showmanship," 19.

126 See Adam Grace, "Restored Old Films Are Moving Pictures in Every Sense of the Word," *The Universe*, January 23, 2005.

127 Vivian Sobchack, "History Happens," in *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television, and the Modern Event*, ed. Vivian Sobchack (New York: Routledge, 1996), 7.

128 William Uricchio, "The Future of a Medium Once Known as Television," in *The YouTube Reader*, ed. Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau (Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2009), 32–33.

129 Thomas Elsaesser, "Tales of Epiphany and Entropy: Around the Worlds in Eighty Clicks," in *The YouTube Reader*, ed. Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau (Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2009), 180.

130 See Jean Burgess and Joshua Green, *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Polity, 2009), 12.

131 "Parkgate Iron and Steel Co., Rotheram (1901)," BFI YouTube Channel, July 10, 2008, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I64ewblmTUY.

132 See "Your Britain on Film," BFI, accessed April 7, 2022, http://www.bfi.org.uk/britain-on-film; "Britain on Film," BFI Player, accessed April 7, 2022, https://player.bfi.org.uk/britain-on-film; and "Edwardian Britain on Film," BFI Player, accessed April 7, 2022, http://player.bfi.org.uk/collections/edwardian-britain-on-film/.

133 "Your Britain on Film"; emphasis added.

134 The NFA's first major exhibition project was *Pleasurelands*, which took place in 2003 at the Millennium Gallery in Sheffield, in Croydon, and Edinburgh. A multi-sensory display of photographs, documentaries, slot machines, barrel organ music, a Mutoscope, and a peep show, *Pleasurelands* was a nostalgic journey across two centuries

of fairground spectacles and life behind the scenes. See Vanessa Toulmin, *Pleasurelands* (Sheffield, UK: National Fairground Archive at the University of Sheffield Library, 2003).

135 See "Admission All Classes."

136 Admission All Classes took place at various historical entertainment venues in Blackpool, including the Winter Gardens, the Tower Ballroom, the Circus Theatre, the Grand Theatre, the Spanish Hall, the Opera House, and the Pier. See Vanessa Toulmin, "Introduction," *Admission All Classes: The Show You'll Never Forget*, Blackpool 2007–08, Official Souvenir, 2.

137 See "Blackpool and the Northwest on Film," *Admission All Classes*, 18–19. See also "Blackpool and the Northwest on Film," National Fairground Archive / The University of Sheffield.

138 Eddie Daws, "Professor Vanessa's Twenty Performing Wonders," 277–78, NFA Press Reports. Toulmin's inaugural lecture took place on December 17, 2009, at the University of Sheffield as part of Sheffield Entertained: Admission All Classes. See *Sheffield Entertained: Admission All Classes*, Official Souvenir 2008–10, 34.

139 Toulmin, "Cuckoo in the Nest," 54.

140 "Circus Films: Professor Vanessa's Wondervoorstelling," Eye, accessed April 7, 2022, https://www.eyefilm.nl/en/whats-on/circusfilms-professor-vanessas-wondervoorstelling/268868.

141 Lyn Gardner, "Professor Vanessa's Wondershow – Review," *The Guardian*, April 27, 2012, https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2012/apr/27/professor-vanessas-wondershow-review; and "Professor Vanessa's Wondershow, Roundhouse – Review," *Evening Standard*, April 26, 2012, https://www.standard.co.uk/culture/comedy/professor-vanessa-s-wondershow-roundhouse-review-7681354.html.

142 See "Live Shows, Bizarre Visual Magic, Horror & Freakish Fun," Sideshow Illusions.

143 Toulmin, "Programming the Local," 73.

144 Richard Dyer, *Pastiche* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 124.

145 Ibid., 131.

146 Toulmin, interview.

147 Michael Cowan discusses mobile spectatorship within the context of nineteenth-century world fair exhibitions and 1920s exhibition advertisements in German speaking countries. See Michael Cowan, "From the Astonished Spectator to the Spectator in Movement: Exhibition Advertisements in 1920s Germany and Austria," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 23.1 (Spring 2014): 2–29.

148 Gadamer, 126.

Moving-Image Curatorship Beyond Film Heritage

The idea for this book began taking shape when I set foot in a cinematheque for the first time to watch a silent film with live music accompaniment. It was September 2010, and I saw Buster Keaton and Donald Crisp's *The Navigator* (1924) accompanied by pianist Alexander Zethson in the Bio Victor Theatre, named after Victor Sjöström, at the Stockholm Cinematheque. Keaton's film appeared to come to life in that unique conjuncture where its projected 35mm archival print, the small audience gathered in the Bio Victor, and Zethson's musical improvisation came together.[1] I was in awe. To my eyes, it felt like a newly rediscovered Pompeian mosaic, unearthed after centuries of being buried under volcanic dust and detritus, and presented to a new audience.

That first cinephilic encounter triggered my fascination with the materialization of silent images from the past—Keaton's thick make-up, the film's symmetrical mise-en-scène, and the scratches and tears here and there on the print—into the digital present. It spurred a question about the time and history that exist between archival images and us. Two strands of inquiry have since guided my work. The first one is the investigation of the multiple empirical, site-specific, and historical conditions that have framed the survival and circulation of early and silent films within film preservation institutions. The second one is the close analysis of the kind of historical, metahistorical, and hermeneutic mediation that these same institutions have staged between the moving-image past and the media present. Examining the work of Eye and GEM—two institutions interpreting the transition to digital in nearly oppos-

ing ways—seemed like a natural place to start. With its enthusiasm for the new opportunities for dissemination allowed by digitization, Eye has devised new modes of accessing and interacting with archival moving images inspired by new media and participatory practices. At its antipodes, GEM's initiatives have showcased the irreplaceable features of analog film and the theatrical film experience, considered under threat by the feared obsolescence of film stock.

By closely examining Eye's and GEM's curatorial work, I have foregrounded the promises and limits of their exhibition strategies. Eye's crowd curatorship and digital remix may indeed provide generative premises for new forms of mediation between digital audiences and cinema's past. However, as I argue in chapter 1, user- or automatically generated archival remixes have at times failed to create what Gadamer calls a "hermeneutic play," a participative, interpretative space (or dispositif) for new critical readings of early and silent film cultures. The analysis of GEM's initiatives in chapter 2 highlights that, while the museum has the merit of advocating for the preservation of analog film's unique material and aesthetic characteristics, its discourse is based on a conservative aesthetics of abstraction. The museum's understanding of films as material works of art and its mission to educate audiences in what it deems the correct appreciation of analog film's aesthetics—a process Gadamer termed "aesthetic differentiation"—has naturalized the heteropatriarchal paradigms and established hierarchies of value that have contributed to the formation of GEM's collections.

Rather than being determined solely by their choice of analog or digital exhibition technologies, I argue that Eye's and GEM's modes of mediating between different media temporalities depends on a myriad of other contingent elements, including their institutional histories, considerations around film's cultural value, and chosen historiographic approach. The study of the NFCA's curatorial work helped sidestep medium-specific considerations, focusing instead on the site-specificity, performative elements, and the multimedia character of its exhibition dispositifs. Investigating the NFCA's history and historiographic work, which shed light on the previously neglected history of early fairground cinema in northern UK regions, has revealed the degree of arbitrariness and creativity always at work not just in film curatorship but also in the definition of the very objects of historical investigation and archival preservation. By examining the NFCA's exhibition strategies, in chapter 3 I point out that cultural politics is at play in every phase of the preservation and circulation of early and silent films.

Specific conditions ranging from architecture, location, and institutional history make up a film exhibition dispositif, making each archive and film preservation institution worthy of close examination. While not necessarily

representative of other film museums and archives, this study of Eye, GEM, and the NFCA argues that no media, film, nor any historical object is meaningful in itself nor automatically generative of specific modes of engagement. Instead, such objects always circulate within specific discourses, signifying practices, and under (often unstated) cultural-political premises. In keeping up with Lisa Gitelman, I conceive of media as

> socially realized structures of communication, where structures include both technological forms and their associated protocols, and where communication is a cultural practice, a ritualized collocation of different people on the same mental map, sharing or engaged with popular ontologies of representation.[2]

Archival Film Curatorship understands film museums as complex dispositifs at the intersection of new media protocols and obsolete media, which, as with nitrate film, both retain some of their original cultural usage and acquire new significance. Here, as historically layered records, archival films open to new cultural-political readings. Within these composite intermedia contexts, curatorial discourses selectively emphasize particular artifacts, meanings, and media of display, tying them together within coherent historical narratives.

Communication theorist Harold A. Innis, whose work has inspired several media archaeologists, distinguishes between hard and durable media (such as stone or clay), on the one hand, and comparatively lighter and portable ones (like papyrus or paper), on the other.[3] Accordingly, one may classify analog film, for instance, as a harder and more durable medium compared to paper records or digital files, which are so ephemeral to be virtually ubiquitously transmittable through the Internet. The case of Eye's removal of its Scene Machine platform from the Internet and its storage on external hard drives and servers appears to confirm Innis's binarism and extend it to the domain of digital media. The migration of this net artwork onto more permanent media of storage ensured its durability while collaterally hampering its potential for circulation.

However, the NFCA's preservation work and collections prove that the opposite may be true as well, as in the case of century-old ephemeral handbills which have survived the harder and more durable prints of the films they advertised. Similarly, the history of the Desmet Collection is a powerful reminder that, due to shifting cultural and historiographic assumptions, the very same media artifacts and film texts may fall in and out of curators' favor even within the short time span of a decade. The institutional histories of Eye, GEM, and the NFCA I recount in this book demonstrate that media durability and historicity are a function of shifting cultural investments in particular

media objects, practices, and discourses, rather than being intrinsic properties. In the last eighty years, for instance, film archives have radically altered film's functions and permanence across time, turning it from a disposable commodity into an archival record and from a medium of display to one for long-term preservation. Climate- and humidity-controlled archival vaults have allowed film's photographic emulsion and (nitrate, acetate, or polyester) base to retain visual information for over a century, preserving the medium's material features and maximizing its durability.

Media archaeologists such as Siegfried Zielinski and Wolfgang Ernst understand media's capacity to store time within timescales that transcend historical signifying practices. Zielinski, for instance, talks about the "deep time of the media," molded after geological time, while Ernst advances an archaeology of "microtemporal media," which, in his view, store data regardless of human notions of time.[4] While such accounts relativize the notion of recorded time in generative ways, they also run the risk of abstracting media from the political and cultural networks that enable and actualize technological usage. Unlike these archaeologies, the case studies I discuss in this book trace histories in which moving-image temporalities are indissolubly tied to the cultural history and politics of the institutions that invest them with meaning. I read these institutional histories and curatorial work within the framework of Hans-Georg Gadamer's "historically effected consciousness," wherein contingent epistemologies, practices, and metahistorical narratives have had direct consequences on which films historians, curators, and spectators have identified as worthy of appreciation, investigation, and preservation. By investigating Eye's, GEM's, and the NFCA's histories in "historically effected" terms and the ways in which curators' hermeneutic work translates in metahistorical discourses, I hope to have at least partially rehabilitated causally linked histories and narrative as a viable organizing metahistorical principle.

Through Gadamer's concept of hermeneutic circle, I have drawn attention to the circularity with which the exhibition of scarcely known early and silent films has led to the rediscovery and historical investigation of hitherto neglected portions of film history, which in turn has provided new coordinates for revisionist archival and exhibition practices. By interrogating this interplay between film historiographies, artistic and amatorial film practices, and archival curatorship, I have attempted to offset the risk of retrospectively projecting a continuity over such a network of agencies. Relying on interviews with present and past curators, as well as on their memoirs, correspondence, and speeches may at times have led me to overemphasize their biographies and personal influence. Similarly, my choice to organize this study of archival film curatorship in the guise of institutional histories and case studies may have endowed the work of Eye, GEM, and the NFCA with a unity and coherence

that, like any other cultural organization, they lack. However, by mobilizing concepts such as that of historiographic and hermeneutic dispositif and Gadamer's interpretative play, I have attempted to account for the multiplicity of technological, discursive, architectural, and site-specific elements that define the film archive, hopefully minimizing the risks of such oversimplifications.

In *Archival Film Curatorship*, film archives and museums have functioned as the elective terrain to interrogate the encounter—what Gadamer calls the hermeneutic play—between two temporalities and entwined historicities, that of the interpreter and that of the object of interpretation. As I mentioned in this book's introduction, this question, at the same time historical, pragmatic, and philosophical, had so far remained marginal in the work of film historians and archival scholars. In addressing this question, I hope to have helped define new objects of historical and theoretical analysis in film and media studies: audiovisual curatorship and a cultural history of film archives and museums.

In the past few years, the Museum of Modern Arts (MoMA) and the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) have published online an increasingly large number of internal records, encouraging precisely this kind of scholarly pursuit and unlocking the potential for new critical readings of their practices and holdings. In 2016, MoMA began uploading past exhibition catalogs, press releases, and installation photographs, starting with its first display in 1929.[5] Similarly, the internal archival records that FIAF has made available online comprise old publications, deliberations from FIAF's congresses until 1978, and reports from the Federation's executive committee meetings.[6] This digital repository includes, for instance, minutes of FIAF's first congress on June 9, 1938, attended by John Abbott (USA), Georges Franju and Henri Langlois (France), Olwen Vaughan (Great Britain), and Nazi officer Frank Hensel.[7]

With *Archival Film Curatorship*, I hope to foster greater awareness of institutional and archival histories, aiding present and future film curators and archivists address some of the challenges they face. Global migrations, particularly following the process of decolonization, and the wide reach of digital media have altered the demographic make-up of cultural institutions' audiences, virtual and physical. At the same time, new media allow film archives to reach a diversity of audiences beyond national borders, prompting curators to engage with questions of cultural politics, the politics of representation, and decolonization.[8] While film archivists and curators are very aware of the politics of film curatorship, the rhetoric of film heritage and the language of preservation seldom interrogate the epistemological assumptions that guide their understanding of moving-image history. In the 2016 report of FIAF's interest group about the future of film archiving, Charles Fairall, for instance, asks:

What is the future of film archiving? … How do we protect the *interests of film* as the world spins more and more digital—and how much will it cost? There's no doubt, daunting prospects lie ahead as we face soaring expectations for viewing access coupled with the inevitability of tightening financial constraint.[9]

The urgent tone of Fairall's questions aims to alert FIAF members to future challenges in the face of decreasing public subsidy in the age of neoliberal austerity—a choice that, one may add, is political rather than inevitable. While FIAF's concerns about the sustainability of access-centered archival policies are undeniable, one registers the absence of discussion around the very terms of the discourse.[10] To Fairall's questions, I add: what are the "interests of film?" Does film have interests? And more specifically, what is *film*?

This kind of rhetoric and its supposedly self-evident objects fail to account for the culturally, politically, and historically specific contexts in which film preservation institutions based outside the Global North operate. For instance, the bulk of the collections of one of Kenya's main audiovisual archives, the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC), is made up not of analog films but U-Matic and Betacam cassettes and videotapes, documenting the political, cultural, and entertainment history of Kenya since its independence in 1963.[11] In his short film, *A Third Version of the Imaginary* (2012), filmmaker Benjamin Tiven recounts his archival research into KBC's archive of missing tapes (often removed by other governmental agencies) and multiply layered broadcast recordings. In one shot, we see an archivist operating a projector that produces barely decipherable faint images of a public event's broadcast recording, while a voice-over explains:

> In Swahili, a drawing is "kuchora," a photograph is "picha," cinema is "sinema" and video is "video." But there is no naturally occurring word for just *image*. The *image* is an imported concept, a foreigner's concept. In Swahili, an image cannot exist without its medium. Perhaps we come closest to *image* in the word *taswira*, which can mean the sense of vision itself, or a glimmering image that one sees but doesn't believe. *Taswira* can mean a visual line of thought shared by a group …. *Taswira* is an image whose technological medium is in the mind. … And yet, there is no word to describe the images which are television's currency, nor recognize their storage in a library ….[12]

A Third Version of the Imaginary documents Tiven's search for fleeting archival images of Kenya's post-independence history. Once broadcast and seen by many, such images are now disappearing, devoid of any medium and lacking

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a corresponding linguistic signifier, if not in the language of the former colonizer. One may ask, paraphrasing FIAF's interest group's name, what is the future of film archiving in Kenya and Global Majority communities?

While the vocabulary of film heritage effectively evokes the cultural stakes in preserving archival film collections, it also puts forth a universalist conception of a shared heritage that whitewashes colonial legacies and cultural differences. We can see such conceptual limits at work in Eye's 2014 exhibition *Jean Desmet's Dream Factory: The Adventurous Years of Film (1907–1916)*, dedicated to celebrating the now famed Desmet collection, "inscribed in the UNESCO Memory of the World Register in 2011 because of its unique value as a document of world heritage."[13] In a darkened exhibition hall, populated by on-screen images of fluttering butterfly women, human-sized insects, and animated metamorphoses, visitors encountered the footage of bare-chested African women in traditional garments. It belonged to the 1910 Raleigh & Roberts film *Binnenland van Afrika* (Interior of Africa), depicting various economic activities in the territory around the Zambesi River, known as Rhodesia until 1979, after British imperialist Cecil Rhodes. The film displays colonialist imageries structured around binary oppositions: multitudes of indigenous people vs. white individuals; traditional clothing vs. western garments; and local rural economy (farming, pottery working, and hippo hunting) vs. modern diamond industry. *Binnenland van Afrika* was part of an exhibition section called Remote Worlds, along with titles such as the 1908 *Touaregs in Their Country* and Luca Comerio's *Tripoli* (1912). When confronted with the colonialist and racist tones in these images, one wonders, whose film heritage do these ethnographic films speak to? Are these images universally representative of a world heritage to be unequivocally celebrated?

The rhetoric of film heritage conceals the history of colonial violence—to which museum institutions in the Global North, including film archives, belong—heralding archival images as audiovisual records of a politically neutral past. "The logic of cultural heritage," Caroline Frick notes, "has traditionally worked to reify and strengthen ties to a particular level of authority and power, the nation, and thus to legitimize particular players and artifacts in the archival process."[14] In addition to the aforementioned work of Jacqueline Najuma Stewart as the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures' new Director, several initiatives have begun decolonizing film curatorship and critically interrogating the politics of intersecting film preservation and historiographic practices. In the late 1980s, Ngā Taonga Sound & Vision (the former New Zealand Film Archive) began addressing the growing demands of the Māori protest movement by restructuring the archive. In the last few years, it has revised its indexing, consultation, and digitization protocols to account for the shared bilingual heritage of Māori and Pākehā (people of European descent).[15]

CONCLUSION

In 2023, the June Givanni Pan African Cinema Archive (gathering more than 100,000 media and media-related items documenting the global African diaspora) launched its first public exhibition in London, exhibiting the work of the Chimurenga collective from South Africa next to posters from the Mogadishu film week and the Havana Film Festival.[16]

Despite these efforts, much work lies ahead. Many archivists experience their work as an exhausting quixotic struggle against chronic underfunding and the effects of digitization, including, for instance, the increasing price of film stock and digital preservation. Governmental funding and cultural policies often frame film archives and museums' work around the mission to rescue national film heritage, leaving little room for critical curatorship and revisionist historiography—it is no coincidence that none of this book's case studies is a film archive primarily preoccupied with this national paradigm. While *Archival Film Curatorship* is situated squarely within the context of European and North American film preservation, I hope it may provide useful frameworks and terms of comparison for archivists, curators, scholars, and students beyond these geographies. Conceiving moving-image curatorship as an open-ended hermeneutic practice, conducive to a plurality of historical narratives that keep reworking our understanding of media and history, has guided much of my own recent work critically engaging with colonial and post-colonial film archives.[17] It is only by substantially opening their collections to unorthodox readings and by actively reaching out to their diverse audiences, including marginalized and migrant communities, that film archives will be able to contribute to the work of decolonizing heritage.

ENDNOTES

1   Svenska Filminstitutet, "Buster Keaton," *Stockholm Cinemateket Programtidnig Augusti–September 2010*, 23.

2   Lisa Gitelman, *Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 7.

3   Harold A. Innis, *Empire and Communications* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).

4   Siegfried Zielinski, *Deep Time of the Media: Toward an Archaeology of Hearing and Seeing by Technical Means*, trans. Gloria Custance (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006); and Wolfgang Ernst, *Digital Memory and the Archive*, ed. Jussi Parikka (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

5   "Exhibition History," MoMA, accessed September 22, 2016, http://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/history. Michelle Elligott (Chief of Archives at MoMA), "Explore MoMA's exhibition history," *The Museum of Modern Art Newsletter*, September 15, 2016.

6   "Archival FIAF Documents," FIAF, accessed April 7, 2022, https://www.fiafnet.org/pages/History/Archival-FIAF-Documents.html. See Christophe Dupin, "First Tango in Paris: The Birth of FIAF, 1936–1938," *Journal of Film Preservation* 88.4 (2013): 43–58.

7   "Minutes of the First Meeting of the Founder-Members, 9 June 1938, Paris," FIAF, accessed September 22, 2016, http://www.fiafnet.org/images/tinyUpload/History/FIAF-History/Digitized-documents/Constitutional-papers/19380608_Minutes%20of%201st%20founding%20meeting.pdf.

8   Andrew Dewdney, David Dibosa, and Victoria Walsh, *Post-critical Museology: Theory and Practice in the Art Museum* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013).

9   Charles Fairall, "FoFA: The Future of Film Archiving," *Journal of Film Preservation* 94.4 (2016): 9, emphasis added.

10 On the issue of North American film archives' insufficient funding see Karen F. Gracy, *Film Preservation: Competing Definitions of Value, Use, and Practice* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2007), 31–32.

11 Brian Larkin, Tavia Nyong'o, and Benjamin Tiven, "Everyday Static Transmissions," *Triple Canopy* (May 2014), accessed September 22, 2016, https://www.canopycanopycanopy.com/series/media_studies/contents/everyday_static_transmissions/#title-page. See "Karl Griep's Report: Film Archives in Africa," FIAF, 14, accessed September 22, 2016, http://www.fiafnet.org/images/tinyUpload/Training/Film-Archives-in-Africa/Karl%20Griep%20Report%202011.pdf.

12 *A Third Version of the Imaginary* (2012), English subtitles. Translation/Narration: Kyalo Nzio.

13 See "Jean Desmets Droomfabriek," Eye, accessed September 22, 2016, https://www.eyefilm.nl/en/exhibition/jean-desmets-droomfabriek.

14   Caroline Frick, *Saving Cinema: The Politics of Preservation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 13.

15   Emma Jean Kelly, "The Adventures of Jonathan Dennis, Founding Director of the New Zealand Film Archive," *Journal of Film Preservation* 90.4 (2014): 37–42. See also "Tiakina Approach," Ngā Taonga Sound & Vision, accessed June 20, 2023, https://www.ngataonga.org.nz/taonga-maori/taonga-maori-english/tiakina-approach/.

16   See Leila Latif, "'A Cinema of Resistance': How June Givanni Amassed a 10,000-Piece Pan-African Film Archive," *The Guardian*, April 21, 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2023/apr/21/june-givanni-interview-pan-african-cinema-archive-resistance.

17   See, for instance, Grazia Ingravalle, "An Accidental Virtual Archive of Colonialism," in *Accidental Archivism: Shaping Cinema's Futures with Remnants of the Past*, ed. Stefanie Schulte Strathaus and Vinzenz Hediger (Lüneburg, DE: Meson Press, 2023), accessed June 20, 2023, https://archivism.meson.press/chapters/trajectories-of-restitution/an-accidental-virtual-archive-of-colonialism/.

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