Film history in the making

Film historiography, digitised archives and digital research dispositifs

Olesen, C.G.

Publication date
2017

Document Version
Other version

License
Other

Citation for published version (APA):
Olesen, C. G. (2017). Film history in the making: Film historiography, digitised archives and digital research dispositifs.

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
Chapter 1

1.0 Film Archives and Film Historiography

This chapter discusses how shifting paradigms of historiography have shaped the conception of film as an archival medium, and the networks within which this occurs. As such, it provides the basis for the analyses of the disposits of the case studies and examples in Chapters Two, Three, Four and Five. In three parts, the chapter maps a set of central definitions of archival film in relation to film historiography as respectively historical document, as art and as culture, to form the basis of Chapter Two’s discussion of the film histories reflected in contemporary mediations of digitised material. The temporal frame of the chapter’s examples spans from the late nineteenth century’s first pleas for scientific film archives and historical documentation, to the establishment of film history as an academic discipline and its turn to cultural theory in the 1970s and its repercussions in today’s film historiography.

As the chapter’s outline below testifies to, the range of examples it discusses are well-known within film archiving history and film historiography. However, the chapter’s perspective differs from the majority of film archiving histories in two respects. First of all it does not focus primarily on the biographies of its canonical figures, for example Iris Barry of the Museum of Modern Art, Henri Langlois of the Cinémathèque française, or Ernest Lindgren of the National Film and Television Archive. Instead, the chapter proposes a closer analysis of some of the foundational texts and institutions with an eye to theory of history and sociology of art to understand the foundation of film history and archiving as products of such. Consequently, I downplay the focus on the achievements of singular individuals or the frequent emphasis on technological developments - such as film’s transition to sound – which have hitherto provided prominent explanatory frameworks. Second, unlike existing studies, the chapter’s final part puts greater emphasis on the role of experimental uses of viewing and projection technologies in film archives, academia and contemporary art as a significant agent in film historiography, to open a discussion of today’s reliance on technology in digital research formats and the shifting technical basis and mediations of film history.

The chapter's first part, ”Film as Historical Document”, discusses the first pleas for film archives as well as the ”first wave” of historical and scientific film archives of the 1910s. The part focuses on the intricate links between contemporary scientific historiography around 1900 and the conception of film as an archival medium which could serve as finite historical documentation in government institutions, both as a medium of historical documentation and regulation. The discussion in this part will take its point of departure in the foundational writings of Polish
photographer Boleslas Matuszewski which have been widely perceived as anticipating the later foundation of film archives. However in contrast to the widely held conception of Matuszewski as a precursor to the later film archives, this chapter will understand his writings as reflecting a fundamentally different film history rooted in contemporary scientific historiography and republican archiving of nation-states. In this sense Matuszewski will be seen as an example which can elucidate the dynamic between historiography and film archiving also with regard to later film archives.

Part two, "Film as Art", discusses the formation of critical aesthetic discourses on film within specialised film culture in the 1920s as a precondition for film’s patrimonialisation in the early 1930s. The first section of this part discusses how early cinephile film criticism, theory and distribution networks in the 1920s formed notions such as film history and film heritage, with particular attention to the writings of French critic Léon Moussinac as a key example. The second section of part two discusses the conceptual relation between the view of film history developed in the early cinephile film histories, the early film archives and the general film histories emerging in the post-World War II era. In casting this perspective, the chapter follows contemporary research on film archiving history of scholars, archivists and conservators such as Karen F. Gracy, Malte Hagener and Christophe Gauthier, who each in their respective ways focus on the social contexts of the film heritage institutions’ emergence with attention to the hierarchies of taste reference frames that emanated from specialised film criticism in the 1910 and 1920s.

The chapter's third part, "(Re)Visions of Early Cinema: Academic Film Historiography and its Mediations", discusses the revision of early cinema in the 1970s and 1980s as the foundation for rethinkings of archive-based film historiography. However, this part goes beyond the scope of the previous two parts of mainly written film histories, to include also discussions of experimental film and research practice with a visual foundation. In doing so, the part takes its cue from film scholar Bart Testa's tripartite division of what he labels as "counter-myths" of film history emerging in the 1970s. This perspective allows for considering the period's revisionism as an interplay between contemporary ideological critiques of film technology, new empirical directions in film historical research and artistic appropriation practices in avant-garde filmmaking. Casting this perspective upon the period's film historiography, the part elucidates how artistic practice contributed to film historiographical debates in film criticism and academia. In doing so my discussion goes beyond the scope of primarily written film histories, in order to bring greater attention to the consequences of technological change and different technical practices for historical inquiry.

Summarising the key points from these parts in the chapter's conclusion, I make the case that different historical models must be regarded as existing synchronically today as a basis for
Chapter 1

understanding the historical perspectives on film archives which digitisation have given rise to. Throughout Chapters Two, Three, Four and Five I continuously return to these historical models to discuss how they underpin contemporary digital access and research formats and how film archives and scholars respectively condition and shape them. Furthermore, the conclusion singles out two focal points around which the subsequent chapters will be organised: first, the repertory and canons of films and their associated models and narratives of history, and, second, the technological basis through which archival material is researched and mediated. These aspects will frame the dissertation's following discussion to understand current dissemination of digitised film heritage and the fundament which new technologies provide for film historical research.

1.1 Film as Historical Document

We need to accord this perhaps privileged source of History the same authority, the same official existence, the same access that already established archives have.78

The epigraph quotes one of the earliest visions of a historical film archive. The words appear in the pamphlet entitled *Une Nouvelle Source de l’Histoire (Création d’un dépôt de cinématographie historique)* which was written and published in 1898 by Boleslas Matuszewski, a Polish photographer and cameraman based in Paris who advertised his enterprise as that of being official photographer for the Russian Tsar Nicolas II. The vision expressed by Matuszewski has become widely regarded as a foundational text within the histories of the archives gathered within the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) and film preservation as a visionary plea for film archiving *avant la lettre*. More recently however, scholars have also brought to light how the pamphlet’s conception of film as historical document closely reflects turn of the century historiography and can be seen in connection to what film scholar Paula Amad has characterised as a “first wave” of historical film archives in Europe: city archives, scientific and ethnographic archives.79 With attention to this recently developed perspective on the relation between Matuszewski’s writings, contemporary historiography and a first wave of film archives, this section discusses early film archiving as a prelude to later film preservation as a foundation for understanding the interrelation between historiography and film archiving.


Boleslas Matuszewski and Public Sovereignty in 19th Century Archives

Boleslas Matuszewski's *Une Nouvelle Source de l'Histoire* regarded cinema as a means of historic, scientific and judiciary documentation. As the pamphlet's title suggests, film could in its nature be considered a historical source. To lend a characterisation of Matuszewski's pamphlet given by film scholar Penelope Houston, Matuszewski propagated a view of film as first and foremost “...historical evidence a primary source in its own right”.80 Central to Matuszewski's idea of film as a historical document was that its depiction of real events represented an inherently truthful and incontestable link to reality. Because of this truthfulness, film could be, according to Matuszewski, the medium that would put an end to political conflicts as its ability to depict reality would leave no questions or doubtful points in dispute.

On the basis of this conception of film, Matuszewski presented an elaborate vision of how to organise and conceive a historical film archive. In the complementary pamphlet *La Photographie Animée - Ce qu'elle est ce qu'elle doit être*, also published in 1898, Matuszewski presented a detailed outline of a film institution comprising both a museum function and a legal deposit for films, explaining its potential role and benefits within society.81 A film archive, the pamphlets argue, should ideally be state-sponsored and belong to the sector of archives, libraries and museums under the tutelage of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.82 It should be equipped with publicly accessible projection rooms which would enable citizens to consult cinematographic sources that had been carefully selected by a committee.83 *Une nouvelle source de l'Histoire* describes the acquisition and access activities of such an institution in detail:

A competent committee will accept or discard the proposed documents after having appraised their historic value. The rolls of *negatives* that are accepted will be sealed in cases, labelled and catalogued; these will be the *standards* that will remain untouched. The same committee will determine the conditions under which the *positives* will be presented and will place in reserve those which, for certain reasons of propriety, cannot be released until after a certain number of years have elapsed.84

---

81 Boleslas Matuszewski, op. cit., 1898a, 9.
82 Ibid., 10.
83 Boleslas Matuszewski, op. cit., 1898b, 58.
In retrospect, this vision of a future film archive's organisation has been considered a remarkably concise definition *avant la lettre* of later film archives' core activities: selection, cataloguing, conservation and access.\(^85\) For this reason, the texts have appealed widely to film preservationists, and have become a reference point in film preservation literature after their reemergence in the 1950s in the context of FIAF.\(^86\)

However, striking as Matuszewski's vision may seem from a present-day perspective, it is important to keep in mind that its conception of the archive's core activities represents an ideal of historical and state archives typical of its time. For instance, Matuszewski argues that film, in addition to being able to depict and give access to significant historical events, could also be used as identity records of citizens, to serve a regulatory function of surveillance. This aspect is reflected in the language which pervades Matuszewski's suggestions for cataloguing. It adheres to official bureaucratic discourses of surveillance by using for example terminology from contemporary criminology.\(^87\) This is seen in *La photographie animée* which refers to the classificatory terminology of French criminologist Alphonse Bertillon when it states about a film archive that “It would be a system of *cinematographic index cards* next to anthropometric cards. It would be the absolute description...”\(^88\).

Moreover, film scholar Paula Amad has pointed out how closely Matuszewski's pamphlets reflect contemporary historiography and archiving with particular attention to the texts' French and international context. In France, the *école méthodique*, of which the text *Introduction aux études historiques* (1898) authored by historians Charles-Victor Langlois and Charles Seignobos is foundational, represented the dominant historiography in the late nineteenth century. This historiography relied on the archiving which had been consolidated as a scientific and republican discipline with the foundation of the École Nationale des Chartes in 1821, of which the educational program gained worldwide recognition as reflecting state-of-the-art archiving.\(^89\) To lend the words

---


\(^88\) Boleslas Matuszewski, op. cit., 1898b, 53. Original quote: "Ce serait un système de fiches cinématographiques à côté des fiches d'anthropométrie. Ce serait le signalement absolu..." (emphasis in original). *Description* is meant here in the sense of a report given on the appearance of a culprit by a victim of a crime used in *Anthropometry*. This was a descriptive system used for cataloguing criminals in France at the time. Alphonse Bertillon is widely credited for having created this criminological identification system and for inventing for example the "mug shot" taken of culprits upon arrestation.

of Amad, this paradigm regarded the archive as “a scientifically organised depository of interest to future historians”.

It represented a predominantly positivist conception of archival documents as containing a truthful and transparent testimony to history if studied rigorously by professional historians. In this view, documents were produced and conserved in Republican archives to sustain and produce national histories and identities.

Matuszewski also emphasised the importance of privileging public access to historical archives. This reflects how, internationally, and in particular in France, the period of the late-nineteenth century saw archival institutions becoming increasingly public. The conception of archival access changed from being more exclusively restricted to professional historians and the state to become regarded as a civic right.

State archives underwent a fundamental transformation which replaced secrecy and privacy in state archiving with notions of popular sovereignty and accountability by granting citizens unprecedented archival access. The consultation of sources would allow not only historians but also citizens to study past events themselves in an institutional setting regulated by the state.

This archival access allowed citizens to consult documents which were regarded as foundational and truthful records of an authoritative official history to nurture a process of identity formation for citizens and for the nation-state.

By situating Matuszewski within this context, Amad argues that his vision should be regarded as an intricate appeal to contemporary historiography, rather than as an isolated early attempt to found a film archive. As Amad writes with regard to Matuszewski:

Archivists were held in the highest esteem – even considered to be national heroes – within government circles. It is not an exaggeration to claim that to be an archivist in the Third Republic was to be on the frontlines of the battle for the modern French nation-state. No wonder then, that the recently arrived Polish immigrant Matuszewski would look to the institution of the history archive to launch his film archive in France.

From this perspective, the idea of film as a primary source of history, conserved in a publicly accessible state archive, can be seen as a reflection of the period's scientific historical and archival

---

90 Paula Amad, op.cit., 145.
91 Ibid.
93 Ibid.
96 Paula Amad, op.cit., 146.
Chapter 1

Matuszewski's vision of selection, cataloguing, conservation and access was thus closely tied to a conception of the archive as both authoritative and republican of which access reflected a contemporary prevalence for public sovereignty. While not immediately materialising, historical film archives relying on this model did emerge some twenty years later.

The “First Wave” of Historical Film Archives

While Matuszewski's pamphlets had little direct influence upon the foundation of historical film archives, its ideas had repercussions in subsequent pleas for film archiving in France and in some instances internationally. The pamphlets appear to capture the foundational thoughts of a number of historical film archives founded in the 1910s and 1920s which appeared in the form of military, city and private archives. Significant archives which were created in this early period in France were for example the conversion of the photographic military archive Section Photographique de L'Armée in 1917 into the Section Photographique et Cinématographique de L'Armée, which marked an extension of its activities to comprise filmic documentation in addition to photographic. The Cinémathèque scolaire de la Ville de Paris, which exists today as the Cinémathèque Robert-Lynen, opened its doors in 1926 as an initiative to integrate pedagogical film and artistic forms of filmmaking into teaching in the French educational system. Finally, the ethnographic and geographical Archives de la Planète founded by philanthropic banquier Albert Kahn represents a unique private initiative to establish a scientific archive of photographic and filmic documentation. Launching its activities in 1909, the aim of the archive was to document the surface and people of the world making use of the recently invented Autochrome color photography system developed by the Lumière brothers for the production of ethnographic photography in conjunction with films and written descriptions. What is particularly striking about Les Archives de la Planète, is that the films produced in this institutional context were never intended for distribution and were practically never lent to other institutions. The films were conceived exactly as historical documents in the sense that they could be consulted in an archive and not in a cinema. More, broadly, as Paula Amad points out, it is interesting to note that these early archives sustained a “myth of the archive as a site of unmediated access to the past” upon which scientific historiography relied. But they pushed this

98 Paula Amad, op.cit., 152. This archive is known today as the Etablissement de Communication et de Production Audiovisuelle de la Défense (ECPAD).
99 Ibid. See also Emmanuelle Devos, “Des principes d'une cinémathèque dédiée aux 'jeunes publics': La cinémathèque Robert Lynen” in Conserveries mémorielles, No. 16 (2014)
100 Ibid., 154.
logic further by advocating for film as a particularly privileged medium which could be considered even more indexically accurate than paper documents.\textsuperscript{101}

Also internationally, did this conception of film as historical document reflect itself in several pleas for and foundations of film archives. In Germany, Hermann Häfker's text Der [sic] Kino und die Gebildeten from 1915 formulated the idea of founding a public film archive of cultural interest as a part of the Royal Library in Berlin, without however leading to the foundation of such an archive.\textsuperscript{102} At the same time though, a number of historical film archives reflecting this conception were founded in Italy, Denmark and the Netherlands, primarily with the aim of collecting and saving the depictions of state leaders and significant historical events.\textsuperscript{103}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig4.png}
\caption{Film as Truth. Kong Frederik VIII Besøger Island (King Frederik VII visits Iceland, Nordisk Films Kompagni, 1907) a Nordisk production depicting a visit of the Danish King Frederik VIII to Iceland.}
\end{figure}

In Copenhagen, a national historical film archive, Statens Arkiv for Historiske Film og Stemmer, was founded April 9, 1913, under the custodianship of the Danish Royal Library.\textsuperscript{104} Parts of its films were shot by journalist Anker Kirkeby of the newspaper Politiken in the period between 1911-1913 in collaboration with photographer Peter Elfelt and director Ole Olsen of the Danish production

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 146.
\textsuperscript{102} Anna Bohn, Denkmal Film. Bind 1: Der Film als Kulturerbe. (Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2013) 159.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 160.
\textsuperscript{104} Esben Krohn, "The First Film Archive", in Dan Nissen, Lisbeth Richter Larsen, Thomas C. Christensen and Jesper Stub Johnsen eds., Preserve, then Show. (Copenhagen: Danish Film Institute, 2002) 188.
company Nordisk Films Kompagni. Other of the archive's films were earlier productions that were collected by the archive. The films documented significant historical events and customs of the Danish people, depicting for example visits of state leaders and royalties to Denmark and abroad as well as lectures given by contemporary intellectuals (see fig. 4).

Not unlike Matuszewski, Anker Kirkeby stated in retrospect concerning the selection of these films: “artistic films were in this period, in 1911, on a rather weak level, in such a way that we preferred to choose documentary films”\(^{105}\). In the Netherlands, a similar archive was founded in 1919: the Nederlandsch Centraal Filmarchief which collaborated closely with director Willy Mullens for the production of its films of historical documentation.\(^{106}\)

As film historian Anna Bohn has playfully suggested, monarchs and state leaders could be considered the “stars” of these first historical film archives, due to their frequent depiction in the historical films produced and conserved by them.\(^{107}\) In this respect, though several of the early film archives were short-lived and were eventually absorbed by later film archives which defined film primarily as an art form, they developed their own set of conventions in the creation of historical records.\(^{108}\)

However, it is again important to recall, that to depict state leaders in historical documentation was in no way an original convention of the production of filmic archival documents propagated by Matuszewski and his pamphlets' promotion of himself as Tsar Nicolas II's photographer. To create documents of state leaders can be ascribed to contemporary historiography's paradigm. In an international perspective, archives were generally conceived within a scientific paradigm of history focusing on state activities, best illustrated by the paradigmatic historiography of German historian Leopold von Ranke. Rankean historiography propagated a methodology based uniquely on primary sources as the basis for historical study.\(^{109}\) As within the *école méthodique*, this paradigm held that only the systematic study of primary sources by professional historians could reveal the sources' truth, to show, as says the line which has famously become associated with Rankean historiography “how things really were” (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*).\(^{110}\) Such studies would produce historical

\(^{105}\) Raymond Borde, op. cit.: 39. Original quote: “les films artistiques étaient de niveau assez faible, de sorte que nous choisissions de préférence les films documentaires”. This statement was put forward in the context of the third conference of the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) in Paris in 1946.


\(^{107}\) Anna Bohn, op. cit., 161.

\(^{108}\) The National Film Archive for Historical Films and Voices is now a part of the Danish Film Institute, whereas the Nederlandsch Centraal Filmarchief is now part of the Algemeen Rijksarchief/The National Archive of the Netherlands.


narratives of nation-states not only for professional historians but also for the benefit of a larger public.\textsuperscript{111} Archival scholars Francis X. Blouin and William G. Rosenberg provide a precise characterisation of Rankean historiography in historical archives, which can serve as an elucidation of the early film archives' focus on state leaders:

The documents they contained were not direct links to any random elements of the past, but to the functions and actions of the dominant political authorities whose transactions they reflected and whose interests and needs were served by their preservation. These logically became the agents to which scientific history assigned primary historical purpose.\textsuperscript{112}

The early film archives conceived within official contexts, it can be said, reflected such a conception of the archival record in their creation of records focusing on monarchs and state leaders.

While film in this period, was imagined and conceived as an archival medium which could be regarded as a source of history, the majority of early historical film archives were short-lived or characterised by shifting custodianship in the years following their foundation. One of the reasons which plausibly seems to explain this is that although these archives were founded upon enthusiastic visions, the idea of film as historical documentation was less enthusiastically received by professional historians. Film historians and archivists have emphasised this on numerous occasions, arguing that historians have not seriously embraced film's potential as a source of history. For example, film historian Jay Leyda in his classical study of propaganda and compilation films \textit{Films Beget Films} from 1964 writes that:

...in all these years and experience that have passed since Matuszewski's declaration this opportunity to use a new kind of research material has not (to my knowledge) lured one professional historian to associate himself with such a suspect medium.\textsuperscript{113}

Film, in other words, would become regarded primarily as a form of entertainment rather than history. In further support of such a viewpoint, film archivist of the Library of Congress Paul C. Spehr also critiqued in the mid-1990s that notions of visual film history, methodology and filmic source criticism were consistently lacking from academic curricula leaving film unexplored as a historical source.\textsuperscript{114}

\textsuperscript{111} Georg G. Iggers, op.cit.: 25.
\textsuperscript{114} Anna Bohn, op. Cit., 147.
Chapter 1

Conclusively, it could be suggested that because of their conception of film as historical documentation, the examples discussed in this section can appear as an apocryphal point of departure for understanding the film archives founded in the 1930s which regarded film as art. As Matuszewski clearly stated in his pamphlets, film could document existing art forms – for example a symphonic concert or a painting – but did not in itself represent an independent artistic potential. However, I would argue that these examples can provide relevant insights into the later film archives' conceptions of film as an archival object in two aspects. First of all, the scientific archives attitudes prompt us to think about the interrelation between historiography and film archiving with regard to the status of film as a source of history, also in history writing on film as an art form. Although rigorous historical methodologies were not immediately as pronounced in the 1930s film archives, they did reflect and sustain specific ideas of history in the ways in which film as an archival object was conceived. Clearly, the films preserved in later film archives did not regard monarchs and state leaders as its film stars. Yet, the scientific paradigms of historiography did determine how especially the later generalist film historians conceived of and studied archival documents as the basis for histories of film as an art form.

Second, it is also important to keep in mind that historical archives in several cases became absorbed by later FIAF-member archives. As a consequence, the notion of film as historical document remains, albeit if less prominent, an important part of the film history which film archives keep safeguarding and to which, as will be discussed in chapter two, film archives keep alluding in their promotion and legitimation of film heritage preservation and, today, digitisation.

Keeping these points in mind, the next section discusses the interrelation between film archives and film historiography with attention to the foundational moment of the 1930s and the written film histories which emerged around it, in the period between the 1920s and 1960s.

1.2 Film as Art

When film archives emerged in the 1930s they conceived film history in a way which was fundamentally different from the historical film archives. The foundational document of the Museum of Modern Art's Film Library (MOMA Film Library) penned in 1935, ”An Outline of a Project for Founding the Film Library of the Museum of Modern Art”, succinctly illustrates this: ”The art of the motion picture is the only art peculiar to the twentieth century”. Mainstream and avantgarde cinema which had emerged throughout the 1910s and 1920s had become considered

115 Boleslas Matuszewski, op. cit., 46/137.
expressions of a new independent art form which it was deemed necessary to preserve. In this respect it can be said that the logic of Matuszewski’s vision and the early film archives had been flipped around. Film was now worth preserving because it was an art form, not because of its evidentiary potential as a source of history.

Based on this conception, film archives were established in the 1930s throughout Europe and North America. The four most profiled archives – referred to also as the "Big Four" - were the Reichsfilmarchiv in Berlin (1934), the MOMA Film Library in New York (1935), the British Film Institute Film Library in London (1935) and La Cinémathèque Française in Paris (1936).117 While these institutions relied on very different institutional models, they largely shared a similar model of film history.118 Institutionally, La Cinémathèque Française emerged out of the Parisian film club Le Cercle du Cinéma founded by cinéphiles and film collectors Georges Franju, Jean Mitry and Henri Langlois. It appealed to mainly a young audience of cinephiles.119 Conversely, the BFI's Film Library was granted public subsidies by arguing its relevance for the British educational sector.120 It addressed itself not only to film enthusiasts but also served an important function for public schools. In spite of these different institutional models, these film archives’ collections reflected remarkably similar histories of film by largely deeming the same European and North American films from the late silent era as masterpieces, and operating with similar notions of aesthetic “schools” and styles to explain film art’s development.121

To understand how this film history had emerged, it is necessary to look back at the formation of specialised film culture in the late 1910s and 1920s. In this decade an appreciation of cinema as an art form and as cultural heritage emerged in film criticism and programming in film clubs in large capital cities outside of mainstream distribution circuits. In these film clubs, debates on film art took place and distribution catalogues of films were created, which established an evolutionary historical view on film’s aesthetic development, relying on notions such as film auteurs and classics.122 In this

---

117 Raymond Borde, op.cit., 57-70. Besides “the Big Four” also the Svenska Filmsamfundet founded in 1933 in Stockholm, and La Cinémathèque de Belgique in Brussels founded in 1938 were significant early film archives. In addition, Raymond Borde has discussed in his Les Cinémathèques a handful of film archives which were established in parallel to these archives as less official entities that prefigured later fully fledged institutions and institutions that disappeared after a short period: the Mario Ferrari Collection in Milan later to become the Cineteca Italiana (1935) the film archive of the VKIG - the national film school in Moscow - in 1934 which later became the Gosfilmofond and a short-lived film archive in Mexico, La Filmoteca Nacional, founded in 1936.

118 Penelope Houston, op.cit., 18.


120 Penelope Houston, op.cit., 22.

121 Malte Hagener, op.cit., 32.

Chapter 1

respect, cinephile culture in Paris in these years, can be considered a particularly apt entry point for understanding this history's emergence and subsequent preservation.\(^\text{123}\) As film scholar Robert Stam has pointed out, referring to French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, early French film clubs constituted a "cultural field" of judgment which distinguished aesthetically significant films:

> With its many specialized film journals and important figures (Jean Epstein, Abel Gance, Louis Delluc, Germaine Dulac, and Ricciotto Canudo), France became a privileged site of reflection on both commercial and avant-garde cinema. A constellation of institutions (a "cultural field" in Bourdieu's terminology) facilitated the exhibition and discussion of films.\(^\text{124}\)

In addition, film scholar and preservationist Christophe Gauthier has analysed, along the lines of a Bourdieuvian perspective, how French film club culture developed an aesthetic film history in an interplay between theoretical manifests, periodicals, conferences and museum exhibitions functioning as "modalities of legitimation", through which cinema becomes recognised as an art form worthy of preservation.\(^\text{125}\) In a two-fold movement, Gauthier suggests, cinema was patrimonialised through these forms of legitimation by first being appreciated as a distinct art form with its own aesthetic history which was then deemed worthy of preservation.\(^\text{126}\) Taking the cue from this perspective, the following sections discuss the patrimonialisation of film in early film club culture to expand its scope to the case of French critic Léon Moussinac's early film histories and foundation of film heritage institutions in the 1930s.

Cinephilia and the Historical View of the First French Film Avant-Garde

...film history is first and foremost a history created by cinephiles of whom the choices impose themselves in the specialised press in the beginning of the 1920s before being taken up by ciné-clubs.\(^\text{127}\)

In its broadest sense, cinephilia can mean simply the intense pleasure of "a strongly felt connection with the cinema" which a film experience can produce in a spectator.\(^\text{128}\) Yet, cinephilia is

\(^{123}\) David Bordwell, op. cit., 23.


\(^{125}\) Christophe Gauthier, op.cit., 65. Christophe Gauthier employs the term “modalités de legitimation”.

\(^{126}\) Ibid., 292-297.

\(^{127}\) Ibid., 88. Original quote: "On peut donc avancer que l'histoire du cinéma est d'abord une histoire faite par des cinéphiles dont les choix s'imposent dans la presse spécialisée du début des années 1920 avant d'être relayés par les ciné-clubs.”.

Film Archives and Film Historiography

a phenomenon with complex - but important - theoretical underpinnings. In the French context of cinephilia, the concept of photogénie of film directors and theorists Louis Delluc and Jean Epstein played a key role to claim cinema as an independent art form with an aesthetic history, consisting of important directors and national schools.\textsuperscript{129} Photogénie was here used a concept to claim the experience of a particularly sublime cinematic moment during the screening of a film. To have seen photogénie in a film was to have experienced a moment which held artistic properties essential to the medium and to understand what distinguished cinema as an independent art form. However, as a concept, photogénie is notoriously elastic and vaguely defined as it does not formulate a specific set of properties that define such a moment.\textsuperscript{130} What qualifies as photogénie depends: it can be the editing or rhythm of a film, a specific acting style or a particular type of mise-en-scène. As film scholar Mary Ann Doane has pointed out, cinephiles broadly used the notion to celebrate the ”...detail, the moment, the gesture, the trace”\textsuperscript{131}

In spite of its elasticity, the concept provided a structuring principle for 1920s film criticism to discern particularly significant films. In specialised film reviews in the early twenties, it was used to establish lists of the most significant films and to create a history of film, which would be used to educate cinema-goers and incite them to demand higher aesthetic quality.\textsuperscript{132} This is for example seen in the years 1918 to 1925 where film theorists and critics such as Riciotto Canudo, Léon Moussinac and Louis Delluc alongside critics and cinema directors such as Pierre Henry, Henri Diamant-Berger and Jean Tedesco sought to legitimise cinema as a respectable art form. Appealing at the same time to a specialised audience of cinephiles and to the French bourgeoisie their position discerned a historical line of cinema’s aesthetic development.\textsuperscript{133} Pierre Henry for example in 1920 proposed a periodisation of French cinema in to three periods in his article ”l’Évolution de l’art de l’image animée”.\textsuperscript{134} A first period which lasted till around the mid 1910s which was considered a theatrical form of cinema of which the staging and perspective conformed to theatre conventions of the period. A second period which saw the rise of film stars, characterised by actors whose acting could be regarded as more filmic than stage actors, for example that of Douglas Fairbanks. And finally, a third period, which Henry identified in the appearance of film auteurs in the form of directors whose films discovered cinema’s essential properties, in particular French directors Louis

\textsuperscript{129} Christophe Gauthier, op.cit., 84.
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{132} Christophe Gauthier, op.cit., 94.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 292.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 288.
Delluc and Marcel L'Herbier. Films which from this perspective had contributed to the development of film became considered "mature classics of the medium" which demonstrated the medium's evolution into an emancipated art form.\footnote{David Bordwell, op.cit., 20.}

This historical view manifested itself extensively in what film historian Richard Abel has characterised as an "alternate cinema network", which formed the basis for the creation of film repertories and collections of classics for programming and distribution in specialised film clubs, leading to their subsequent preservation.\footnote{Richard Abel, \textit{French Cinema. The First Wave, 1915-1929}. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984) 272.} In this respect, to create a catalogue could represent laborious efforts, in that it sometimes entailed striking or buying new prints. In Paris, perhaps the most illustrative example of this practice was the initiative of managing director Jean Tedesco of the Vieux-Colombier cinema to create a repertory of significant films representative of the medium’s development as an art form.\footnote{Christophe Gauthier, "1927, Year One of the French Film Heritage?", in \textit{Film History}, volume 17 (2005) 289.} In 1927, Jean Tedesco would for example strike a new print of Swedish director Victor Sjöström's \textit{Körkarlen} (\textit{The Phantom Carriage}, 1921) and buy several prints of Charlie Chaplin films for the specific purpose of programming.\footnote{Christophe Gauthier, "Archives et cinémathèques", in Antoine de Baecque and Philippe Chevalier eds., \textit{Dictionnaire de la pensée du cinéma} (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2012) 38.} Beyond the example of the Vieux-Colombier, from the early 1920s it became gradually more common to include film "classics" in cinema programming and to systematise repertory programming. In France, the foundation of an association such as the Ciné-Club de France in 1924 upon the initiative of directors and critics belonging to the circle around film critic Ricciotto Canudo marked a unification of film club activities which formulated a common goal to work for the recognition of film as an art form through improved programming, conferences and exhibitions.\footnote{Christophe Gauthier, op.cit., 1999, 111.} In the late period of the silent era, repertory programming constituted, according to Gauthier, around sixty-four percent of projections in specialised cinema circuits in Paris.\footnote{Ibid., 191.} In this respect, as Jean Tedesco pointed out: "…from the film repertory to film history, there is but one step.".\footnote{Quoted in Gauthier. Ibid., 120. Original quote: "…du répertoire du film à l’histoire du cinéma, il n’y a qu’un pas."} It is on this ground, that Gauthier argues that cinephiles can be seen to have founded film history as we continue to encounter it today.\footnote{Ibid., 1999, 88.}

But more importantly, with regard to the foundation of film archives, the repertory also nourished a conception of film as a heritage object in need of preservation.\footnote{Richard Abel, op.cit., 272.} At the same time, the development of a historical view on film as an art form gave rise to concerns about the preservation of...
of its future memory, thus representing a tandem between history writing and collection building which moved towards film art's patrimonialisation. The next section discusses this movement, through the key example of film critic and historian Léon Moussinac.

**Léon Moussinac's Film Historiography and Cinema's Patrimonialisation**

To illustrate how the step was taken from the repertory established in the alternate cinema network to film history and preservation, film critic Léon Moussinac’s film histories *Naissance du Cinéma* (1925) and *Panoramique du Cinéma* (1929), are particularly illustrative. They show how a frame of reference titles, schools and directors was created around the *photogénie* concept to form the basis of film historiography and how the preservation of these reference works became an increased concern.

*Naissance du cinéma* for instance, is pervaded by the concept which it lays out as a structuring principle in its first part, entitled "Conception théorique", as the foundation for an evolutionary history of film art. It provides an overview of the most significant stages of this history, "étapes", in a list preceding this first part. These stages comprise highlights of mainly the late silent American, Scandinavian, French and German cinema from 1895 to 1924, which reflect the repertory programming of classics in early 1920s Paris. To understand how Moussinac’s writings on film propagated an essentialist and evolutionary history of film and showed the cinephiles’ concern of legitimising film art, one needs only read the first lines of *Naissance...*s introduction:

> We are living in admirable and profoundly touching times. In the great turmoil of the modern an art is born, develops, discovering one after one its proper laws, marches slowly towards its perfection, an art which will be the very expression, bold, powerful, original, the ideal of the new times. And it is a long and hard stage, towards the beauty in which too few yet believe because they have not fully understood its astounding truth.

144 Christophe Gauthier, op.cit., 1999, 120.


147 Léon Moussinac, op.cit., 7. Original quote: "Nous vivons des heures admirables et profondément émouvantes. Dans le grand trouble moderne, un art naît, se développe, découvre une à une ses propres lois, marche lentement vers sa perfection, un art qui sera l’expression même, hardie, puissante, originale, de l’idéal des temps nouveaux. Et c’est une longue et dure étape, à la beauté de laquelle trop peu croient encore parce qu’ils n’en ont pas compris pleinement la formidable vérité."
If one looks a bit closer at how this development is depicted in the book's list of stages, it becomes clear how closely it reflects the repertory programming in Paris and early film criticism's evolutionary model of film history with its notions of stars, national schools and *auteur* films. As an example, the films from the 1921 stage in the book's list includes Marcel L'Herbier's *El Dorado* (France, 1921), Louis Delluc's *Fièvre* (France, 1921), Robert Wiene's *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (Germany, 1920) and *The Mark of Zorro* (USA, 1920) directed by Fred Niblo starring Douglas Fairbanks. In other words, it is a frame of reference which clearly reflects recently established notions of schools such as French Impressionism, German Expressionism and the American star system which had been discerned in cinephile film criticism.

Moussinac’s book *Panoramique du cinéma*, published four years later, is equally illustrative of the use of the *photogénie* concept as the basis of a historical understanding of cinema. Its use of the concept can be seen in how Moussinac discusses a moment of revolt in Soviet director Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) as a powerful moment to discern it as a particularly important film. As Moussinac writes about *Battleship*...:

> The screen has never seen anything more powerful before, neither more photogenically pure: the faces show the character, they express everything they have to and only what they have to, when they have to.

In this example Moussinac identified *photogénie* in the facial expressions in Eisenstein's film hailing it as a moment of unprecedented power on screen. In the same text, demonstrating the concept’s elasticity, Moussinac discusses the film's lesser moments which are not examples of *photogénie* but on the contrary demonstrate how the medium could be tied to the conventions of other art forms. Moussinac reproached *Battleship Potemkin* for having too many intertitles, making it appear too literary in some sequences. Nonetheless, he thought the film stood out because of this particularly cinephiliac moment and thus deserved a particular place in film history. *Panoramique du cinéma*, discusses fourteen European and North American films all from the late silent era which are considered in his work to be particularly significant for film art’s development in the 1920s, reflecting again central notions such as a film classic, national schools and stars.

---

148 Ibid., 19. Please note that the years indicated in Moussinac's book refer to their French premiere and not their year of production or completion.


150 Ibid.

151 These films are *The Big Parade* (King Vidor, 1925), *The Gaucho* (Douglas Fairbanks, 1927), *Variété* (Ewald André Dupont, 1925), *Napoléon* (Eisenstein, 1924).
In addition to affirming early film criticism's historical view, *Panoramique du cinéma* is also an early example of influential film history. According to film preservationist Raymond Borde, it became the early cinephile's "bible" and has in addition been widely perceived as reflecting an emerging concern for film preservation and film studies.\(^\text{152}\) For instance, in *Panoramique* Moussinac laments the condition or absence from distribution of prints of certain film classics and the destruction of negatives, highlighting the efforts of some film clubs, in particular the communist film club *Les Amis de Spartacus* - of which Moussinac was a driving force - to locate film prints of classics for repertory programming.\(^\text{153}\) More specifically, Moussinac discusses how these difficulties emerged when Jean Tedesco began to establish his repertory, in a manner which clearly underlined the necessity of preserving the early canon.\(^\text{154}\) Moreover, one of *Panoramique*...s last sections, "Sur la création et l'organisation d'une bibliothèque du Cinématographe", an article initially published in the review *La gazette des 7 arts* in 1927, articulates the need for establishing an international library of writings on cinema for the sake of cultivating the critical study on cinema, comprising themes on diverse aspects such as cinema history, aesthetics, criticism, technology, copyright and production.\(^\text{155}\)

Considered in relation to Gauthier’s typology of French cinephilia in the 1920s, Moussinac's publications illustrate the development of both a historical view on film art and of its patrimonialisation in film criticism. As pointed out by Richard Abel, this aspect of *Panoramique*... can be seen to reflect a larger tendency. *Panoramique*... appeared at a point in the late silent era which saw several notable efforts to present the works of forgotten directors anew or to ensure the sustained programming and history of works by acclaimed directors.\(^\text{156}\) The cinema of Louis Delluc, deemed so important to film art’s development, was ensured by creating new prints of his most highly regarded films, and a retrospective screening of Georges Méliès’ work, of which eight titles had been reconstructed and tinted, was presented by Jean-Placide Mauclaire, co-founder of avant-garde cinema Studio 28, in December 1929.\(^\text{157}\)

One can conclude from this, that when the film archives emerged in the 1930s, a specific film

---

\(^{152}\) Raymond Borde, op.cit., 49.

\(^{153}\) Ibid.

\(^{154}\) Léon Moussinac, op.cit., 1929, 108.

\(^{155}\) Ibid.: 118-128.

\(^{156}\) Richard Abel, op.cit., 272.

\(^{157}\) Ibid.
Chapter 1

history and to a certain extent also film preservation existed. As film scholar David Bordwell has suggested, the lists created in the late 1910s and 1920s cinephile culture formed a canon of silent films which persists up to this day and which constitutes the core of the majority of film archives:

The canon established during the 1910s and the 1920s remains with us today. It is the substance of most film history textbooks, most archives, repertory programming, most video releases of silent classics.\(^\text{158}\)

Evidently, this quote suggests that lists as the ones developed in 1920s cinephilia reflected a prevalence in the US and in Europe of regarding late silent era avant-garde and mainstream cinema from these geographical areas as constitutive masterpieces of film art. If seen in relation to the film criticism of the 1920s, the emergence of cinémathèques and film archives in the 1930s thus seems less to be caused uniquely by cinema’s transition to sound nor the particular individual efforts of the prominent founding figures of the first cinémathèques, but rather as a product of the cinephile historical view produced within its cultural field.

International Film Club Culture and the Foundation of Film Archives in the 1930s

While the section above has regarded the example of the French film avant-garde as a blueprint for understanding the emergence of film history and heritage, similar notions of film history existed concurrently in other countries, such as Germany, Great Britain, Belgium, Italy, Sweden and the US. Similar lists and discussions on what made a film ”classic” could be seen in the influential Swiss film review Close-Up which counted contributions from several significant European critics.\(^\text{159}\) Close-Up reflects to what degree this historical consciousness of the film medium flourished among filmmakers and critics at the time. In the journal's January edition of 1929 a praising letter penned by Sergei Eisenstein containing a photographic self-portrait to the editor of the review, K. MacPherson, was printed in the journal with a caption presenting Eisenstein's contribution as ”A valued tribute from S. M. Eisenstein, maker of film history”.\(^\text{160}\) Cinephile film culture and history was a transnational phenomenon in the 1920s. As pointed out by film scholar Jamie Sexton, this was clearly demonstrated in a journal such as Close-Up of which the film criticism reflected an international exchange between for example the Film Arts Guild in New York, the Film Society in London and the Vieux Colombier in Paris.\(^\text{161}\)

\(^{158}\) David Bordwell, op. cit., 12.


\(^{160}\) Ibid., ix.

\(^{161}\) Jamie Sexton, “The Film Society and the Creation of an Alternative Film Culture in Britain in the 1920s”, in Andrew Higson ed., Young and
As film scholar Malte Hagener has pointed out, an explanation of how film club culture spread between these venues can be found in the establishment and sustainment of repertory programming in an avant-garde distribution network between the larger European cities that connected film clubs, critics and filmmakers internationally. Film programming in the capital cities - London, Paris, Amsterdam, Berlin and Moscow - exchanged related conceptions between the cities' individual film societies through shared programming and developed similar models of film criticism reflecting them. An illustrative example of such international exchange can be found in the circumstance that a central French critic and director such as Louis Delluc regarded the magazine *Vogue* in its London, New York and Paris editions as a standard for cultural journalism in the fields of theater and the arts for French film criticism to follow.\(^{162}\) According to Malte Hagener, the foundation of the 1930s film archives thus represented an institutionalisation of the film history that had been established within this network.\(^{163}\)

Several of the individuals involved in creating the first film archives had a background in film club culture. Thereby they maintained, to the lend the words of David Bordwell "...the canon that had emerged in the silent era",\(^ {164}\) In collection building, in particular the choices of "the Big Four" can be seen as an example which reflected the repertories of film club culture and the early film criticism and written film histories from the 1920s in France, Germany, the US and Great Britain.\(^ {165}\)

In New York, British film historian and archivist Iris Barry was largely responsible for the creation of the MoMA Film Library in 1935. She had been a key figure in the development of intellectual film criticism in Britain as a co-founder of the Film Society in London and as author of the book *Let's Go to the Pictures* (1926)\(^ {166}\). When creating MOMA's Film Library she relied heavily on her film club experience and on the then existing film histories to select films: Guillaume-Michel Coissac's *Histoire du cinématographe* (1925), Léon Moussinac's *Naissance du cinéma* (1925), Hans Richter's *Filmgegner von heute – Filmfreunde von morgen* (1929) and Maurice Bardèche and Robert Brasillach's *Histoire du cinéma* (1935)\(^ {167}\). Also Paul Rotha's *The Film till Now* (1930) played

\(^{163}\) Malte Hagener, op.cit., 8.
\(^{164}\) David Bordwell, op.cit., 24. In addition to Mitry's, Langlois and Franju's connection to Le Cercle du Cinéma Bordwell points out that Iris Barry of the Modern Art Film Library had also been co-founder of the London's Film Society while the ciné-club Le Club de l'Écran pre-figured the Belgian cinémathèque.
\(^{167}\) Malte Hagener, op. cit., 32. As Hagener points out, Iris Barry had in addition to her role as film archivist and historian also translated Robert Brasillach and Maurice Bardèche's book into english which further testifies to how this particular film history informed the selections for the MOMA
Chapter 1

a central role in MOMA's collection policy. As for programming, MOMA was a particularly active institution of which the earliest programs clearly sustained the early canon. In the mid-1930s MoMA would show a program of films by French painter and director Fernand Léger in October 1935 followed by early American films and D.W. Griffith films in early 1936 to demonstrate the development of the distinguishing stylistic and narrative features of film art.

In Paris, one finds a similar connection in film critic and later film historian Jean Mitry who had been a central part of the ciné-club Le Cercle du Cinéma and one of the active youngsters in the cinephile circles throughout the 1920s. Working as the archivist of La Cinémathèque Française between 1936 and 1946 his work was as he explained "to constitute the documentary archives of the Cinémathèque, so to make this filmography (...) to establish the basis of a possible history". As in the case of MOMA, this filmography would largely be shaped by the historical understanding of cinephile culture of Paris' ciné-clubs and the existing film histories and repertories. Mitry later hinted at this connection to the early literature on film, when pointing out its significance in defining film as an art form:

The publishing on cinema before 1940 was very sparse. At least in numbers, because it is from these few works published in the twenties, in France, as abroad, that the first theoretical approaches, and the first recognition of cinema as an art take shape.

The Reichsfilmarchiv in Berlin which opened in 1935, represents a quite different institutional model with an overt nationalist conviction, yet to a large degree shared the legitimising position of cinephilia and its historical view on film as an art form. The Reichsfilmarchiv was founded by the National Socialist German Workers' Party's shortly after their election in 1933, and opened in 1935 following a charter by minister of propaganda Joseph Goebbels. The document Übersicht über die Filme des Reichsfilmarchivs nach Stande vom 15. September 1934, indicates the composition of

---

Film Library.

170 Raymond Borde, op. cit., 50-51.
the archive's film collection which counted 1085 films at this time.\textsuperscript{174} It predominantly included a wide variety of early one-reeler fictions, military films from the first world war and a small selection of thirteen silent feature films.\textsuperscript{175} These thirteen films reflected international cinephile tastes by including for example both Sergei Eisenstein's \textit{Battleship Potemkin} and \textit{Variété} (Ewald André Dupont, 1925), which, to recall the cinephile list-making in Paris, both appeared as masterpieces in Moussinac's \textit{Panoramique du cinéma}.

Through this collection policy, it can be argued that the Reichsfilmarchiv reflected a combination of the conception of archival film as historical document, which it privileged quantitatively, alongside film as an art form. Whereas the remaining three of the "big four" equally included educational, scientific and documentary films in their collections in smaller quantities, they restrained themselves mostly to titles that had been included in avant-garde film programming displaying scientific cinematography, graphic abstractions or a play with formal conventions akin to the avant-garde's experiments. In this respect, a film heritage institution resembling the Cinémathèque Française, the National Film and Television Archive and MoMA seems rather to appear in Germany with the foundation of the Deutsche Kinemathek in 1962 based on the collection of film director and collector Gerhard Lamprecht, more firmly rooted in the independent collector and repertory tendency of interwar film club culture.\textsuperscript{176}

Yet, the Reichsfilmarchiv has often been foregrounded as an exemplary institution in propagating a conception of film as an art form in spite of its collection's priorities and political convictions. Within FIAF, the Reichsfilmarchiv played a crucial role in establishing exchanges between collections, especially between France and Germany by clandestinely securing the safeguarding of numerous French classics, in spite of the apparent contradictions this represented in relation to the Nazi regime.\textsuperscript{177} For example, the role of director of the Reichsfilmarchiv appointed by Goebbels, Frank Hensel, remains emphasised as a particularly enigmatic cinephile gesture given the ideological circumstances under which he worked.\textsuperscript{178} What testifies to this is the Reichsfilmarchiv's leading role within FIAF, shortly after its foundation in 1938, in an atmosphere which seemed the least intensified by the prospect of war. As co-founder of the Cinémathèque française and film director Georges Franju vividly recalls in a radio interview with film critic Serge Daney from 1986, Frank Hensel, upon arriving in Paris in nazi uniform would be elected president of FIAF at the

\textsuperscript{174} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{177} Raymond Borde, op.cit., 88.
\textsuperscript{178} Ibid.
general assembly in July 1939 shortly before the outbreak of World War II.\textsuperscript{179} Or, as Director of the Cinemateca Portuguesa José Manuel Costa has described this moment, “the FIAF founding members sealed a pact above ideological or state barriers”.\textsuperscript{180}

To conclude, in spite of significant differences in organisational structure and political foundations, the early FIAF film archives shared a commitment to collecting cinematic masterpieces from primarily the late European and American silent era according to very similar aesthetic criteria of appraisal. Their collection policies emphasised the stylistic features of cinema as an art form with attention to distinct national styles as they had been discerned in 1920s film culture drawing extensively on the small number of film historical publications appearing throughout the 1920s. The collections in these early institutions reflected this historical view primarily through collection building, while a few also reflected it in programming. In the 1930s, a film history concerned with a masterpiece tradition developed in the 1920s was thus institutionalised.

In the post-World War II era, the landscape of film historiography changed significantly. The first general film histories emerged, which were more explicitly concerned with placing cinema in a broader historical context, and in developing scholarly methodologies. What characterises this development is that some of the early cinephiles also became the first general film historiographers, such as for example Jean Mitry, Lewis Jacobs and Georges Sadoul. Thus, the first avant-garde's historical view developed into a more elaborate art history based on a larger range of source materials.

**General Film Histories and Early Film Scholarship**

As a scholarly discipline, film history slowly emerged inside and outside of academic institutions in especially the US and in France. Within academia, film had been the subject of sociological and psychological studies in the 1910s and 1920s, as early film theory testifies to, whereas film history had been less prominent as a separate subject in academic curricula. As film scholar Dana Polan has pointed out, the courses taught by film historian Terry Ramsaye at the New School for Social Research in New York in the academic year 1926-27 shortly after the publication of Ramsaye's *A Million and One Nights* (1925) can be regarded as an influential early example.\textsuperscript{181} Its focus on great inventors, key directors and actors, forms a frame of reference for a great wealth of subsequent film

\textsuperscript{179} “Georges Franju; 2: Cinémathèque, cinéma”, *Microfilms*, France Culture, Paris, 05/10/1986, 00:11:40 – 00:12:00.


Film Archives and Film Historiography

historiography, following a conception of film as an art form focusing prevalently on film stars. However, in the US it appears that film studies is emerging later, in the early 1940s, when film historian Jay Leyda received funding from the Rockefeller Foundation to conduct research on Soviet director Sergei Eisenstein using MOMA's collections. As Haidee Wasson points out also cultural theorist Siegfried Kracauer received funding from the foundation to carry out his psychosocial studies on German Expressionism using MOMA's collections, resulting in his classic study From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film (Princeton University Press, 1947). In France, the inclusion of the recently founded Institut de Filmologie at the Sorbonne University in 1948 marked the foundation of film studies. This setting provided the institutional backdrop for French film critic and historian Georges Sadoul's teachings on the "evolution" of cinematic expression.

In the years leading up to and after World War II, the most influential film histories that appeared were monographs on national cinemas and general histories of film, which relied heavily on the canon of European and American films established in the 1920s, now accessible and circulating through the recently established archives' film libraries. In retrospect, American film historian David Bordwell has referred to these histories as a Standard Version. They were a more systematic version of earlier film histories which argued in an international perspective and with an emphasis on social, economic and psychological societal aspects "...that film style could be understood as a development toward the revelation of cinema’s inherent aesthetic capacities". In this respect, they shared the views of the earliest film histories, such as Moussinac's, that cinema had slowly evolved to discover “its proper laws”. These histories, identify this “revelation” in particular in the development of narrative film editing. Film editing was a central focal point in the film historical reference works that emerged in the US and France after the 1930s: Lewis Jacobs' Rise of the American Film: A Critical History (1939), Georges Sadoul's Histoire Générale du cinéma I-VI (1946 to 1952) and later Jean Mitry's Histoire du Cinéma I-V (1967-1980).

To illustrate this, one can consider how Jacobs, Sadoul and Mitry structure their film histories around the development of film editing. With reference to their geographical origin Sadoul's film history discerns in the early British films such as George Albert Smith's Grandma's Reading Glass (1900), James Williamson's Attack on a China Mission (1901) and The Big Swallow (1901) a so-

182 Ibid.
186 David Bordwell, op.cit., 27.
Chapter 1

called “Brighton” school of filmmaking. According to Sadoul, these films demonstrate a primitive use of close-ups and editing, which anticipates the emancipation of later cross-cutting and continuity editing in the American films of Edwin Stanton Porter. Sadoul claims that Porter was influenced by the Brighton school by stressing in particular the similarities between Williamson's film Fire (1901) and the editing style in Porter's The Life of an American Fireman (1903). Based on this observation, Sadoul's film history considers Porter one of the first to fully develop cross-cutting into a narrative form reminiscent of later cinema.

This idea was widespread, though it was not unanimously accepted amongst Sadoul, Jacobs and Mitry. Jacobs for example rejected this idea, claiming instead that Porter had been influenced by the editing in the films of French director Georges Méliès.\(^ 187\) Jean Mitry's later film history reflected this by basing its discussions of Porter on the histories and sources of Sadoul and Jacobs proposing a middleground which argued that Porter had been influenced by both the Brighton School and Méliès, sustaining the director's importance to the development of continuity editing.\(^ 188\) By having “invented” continuity editing, Mitry's history asserts in line with Sadoul and Jacobs, that Porter had developed cinema into an accomplished art form. Mitry's discussion of Porter in relation to the Brighton school clearly reflects this:

One could say, with more objectivity, that if the English have discovered the continuity and the montage, Porter, the first, understood that the art of cinema depended on this continuity and on this montage.\(^ 189\)

Though not entirely similar in their accounts, the film histories of Georges Sadoul, Lewis Jacobs and Jean Mitry were modelled on this revelatory pattern in their discussions of film editing, which Mitry's observation testifies to. This history of film, structured to a large degree around film editing, became a hegemonic history of film, widely influential in academic courses on film history in Europe and in North America as a text book version of film history.\(^ 190\)

Beyond the indebtedness to cinephile film culture, some scholars have, in retrospect, suggested that Sadoul's and Mitry's film histories can be considered methodologically related to the historical methods of contemporary French Annales-historians, and in particular Fernand Braudel's work. Italian film historian Gian Piero Brunetta has suggested this in relation to Sadoul on the ground that 

\(^{188}\) Ibid.
\(^{189}\) Ibid., 237. Original quote: “On peut dire, avec plus d'objectivité, que si les Anglais ont découvert la continuité et le montage, Porter, le premier, a compris que l'art du cinéma dépendait de cette continuité et de ce montage”. Emphasis in original.
\(^{190}\) Ibid., 232-236.
Film Archives and Film Historiography

an industrial product as well as an artistic event and the history of the contemporary world.”\textsuperscript{191} Indeed, Sadoul's history had a global outlook to significant events in society, and a material focus on popular culture which was shaped on a Marxist dialectics.\textsuperscript{192} This material focus could be regarded as an approach compatible with that of some \textit{Annales}-historians who sought explanations – also sometimes through the lens of Marxist dialectics – in the configurations of material culture and popular cultural habits.\textsuperscript{193} British film scholar and historian Richard Maltby sees a similar form of history as pervading Jean Mitry's later \textit{Histoire du Cinéma} and its “total vision” of film history because it comprised aspects of mass psychology.\textsuperscript{194}

I shall return to a discussion of Mitry's model of history in relation to \textit{Annales} historiography in Chapter Four to elucidate their commonalities in greater detail. Yet, what I find important to stress here is that while these descriptions acknowledge the general histories' important efforts to explain cinema within its wider industrial and societal contexts, they cannot, I would argue, fully be characterised as \textit{Annales} historiography. For example, a crucial aspect to the foundational essay for \textit{Annales}-historiography by Fernand Braudel “L'Histoire et les sciences sociales: La Longue durée”, first published in 1959, was to reject a history based on singular significant events - what Braudel refers to as “l'histoire événementielle”\textsuperscript{195}. Mitry and Sadoul, in spite of their efforts, essentially wrote teleological event-driven film histories. The development of film editing in these histories – which the quote above from Mitry's history demonstrates - had a clear beginning point, development and end point, driven to a large degree by significant events, discoveries, inventors and filmmakers. Such a form of history would not correspond to a rejection of “histoire événementielle” and therefore to a large extent seems out of tune with \textit{Annales} historiography.

I would argue it seems more plausible to understand their historical model in the perspectives offered by David Bordwell, Christophe Gauthier and also film historian Bernard Eisenschitz. Bordwell regards these histories as closer to an idealist art history modeled on a birth-maturity-decline pattern seen in renaissance models of art history as the one represented by Italian painter and architect Giorgio Vasari or to the evolutionary path so succinctly depicted in Moussinac's opening to \textit{Naissance du Cinéma}.\textsuperscript{196} In spite of differences in their foundational assumptions and

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{193} Georg G. Iggers, op.cit., 82.
\textsuperscript{194} Richard Maltby, op.cit., 2006, 80.
\textsuperscript{196} David Bordwell, op. cit., 27. While David Bordwell does not point to this in his \textit{On the History of Film Style} which focuses predominantly on French film historiography, it is noteworthy that an early film history such as Terry Ramsaye's for example directly invoked Vasari as a model in its introduction.
\end{flushleft}
contrasting political underpinnings, they shared the basic assumption that cinema developed naturally from a primitive state into a narrative form, relying on cross-cutting and continuity. Additionally, Gauthier has proposed with regard to Sadoul's film history that while it indeed was a profoundly Marxist history of film as a popular culture, Sadoul's use and collection of sources in his writing was closer to the positivist historiography of the école méthodique, in particular in its heavy reliance on oral testimonies by for example Louis Lumière.\(^{197}\) Bernard Eisenschitz has pointed out that Georges Sadoul in the 1930s invoked the tradition of the école méthodique as a model for his own approach with specific attention to Charles Seignobos' historical studies of France.\(^{198}\) On this basis, it can be argued that to understand how the early film historians conceived of film as a source for writing the history of cinema as an art form, one must relate them to the scientific paradigm which had informed the first wave of historical film archives. The work of the first general film historiographers, who had in large part contributed to recognising film as an art form as young cinephiles and establishing film archives, to recall Mitry's point as the “basis of a possible history”, was imbued with positivist assumptions.

It could be argued that in the general film histories, the films and material held in film archives were seen to a certain extent as historical documents that testified to the evolution of film as an aesthetic art form driven by developments in narrative film editing. It is this view of the film archive as the basis and source of an emancipatory film history which was fundamental to the early film histories, but became challenged in new empirical and theoretical approaches to archives-based research, when film history was widely established as an academic discipline. The next section discusses how this reconceptualisation of film archives as sources of film history developed at a nexus of film theory, historiography and in contemporary filmic appropriation art which informed and developed in conjunction with these developments.

### 1.3 (Re)Visions of Early Cinema: Academic Film Historiography and its Mediations

The attempt(s) to think early cinema are certainly the dominant activity in current historical thought on cinema. Above all, there is more than simply historical writing itself but also the examination of what it means to do history.\(^{199}\)

Throughout the 1970s a "historical turn" occurred in film studies, which fundamentally

\(^{197}\) Christophe Gauthier, op.cit., 2002, 182.


challenged the paradigm of film as art in film archives and in film history.\footnote{Jane M. Gaines, op.cit., 71.} In this period, film historians increasingly conducted their research in recently established academic settings, developing approaches informed by contemporary theory of history, cultural studies and literary theory\footnote{Richard Maltby, op.cit., 2006, 76.}. For the younger film historians working in these settings this turn entailed the critical study of the source material of the general film histories, with particular attention to their accounts of film editing’s development and exhibition practices in the period of early cinema. In part, this development was encouraged by film historians from the previous generation. Film historian Jay Leyda announced for example in 1974 how his seminars with graduate students at the New York University would challenge the notion of national schools in film history by going ”...into unused archive materials and unfamiliar films (...) to exploit this new material in drafting an experimental international film history in a fresh form.”\footnote{Jay Leyda, ”Toward a New Film History”, in Cinema Journal, Vol. 14, No. 2, Symposium on the Methodology of Film History (Winter, 1974-1975) 40.}

Many film historians single out the particular event of the 34th symposium of FIAF in Brighton in 1978 as a demarcation between a new historical paradigm introduced by this turn and established film history. At this symposium, an audience of film archivists and historians gathered before screenings of approximately 550 films produced between 1900 to 1906 to revise the period's production of primarily fiction films in North America, France and the UK. This led, in the words of film historian Charles Musser, to “...a new integration of academic and archive-based history and fostered tendencies that contributed to the formulation of a new historiography”.\footnote{Charles Musser, ”Historiographic Method and the Study of Early Cinema”, in Cinema Journal, Vol. 44, No. 1 (2004) 101.} While, as I will discuss below, a sharp distinction between an old and new paradigm of film historiography as the Brighton symposium has come to symbolise is not unproblematic, the proceedings of the symposium did reflect the degree to which the period's film historiography developed theoretically reflexive approaches based on new archival research. In essence, the generalist film histories' perspective was challenged with the emergence of new historical models and analytical practices.

To structure my discussion of this development in academic film historiography, I draw on the discernment by film scholar Bart Testa of three interrelated film historical ”counter-myths”. Testa suggests that the general film histories representing a ”masterpiece tradition”, a label he lends from film historians Robert Allen and Douglas Gomery, were challenged by counter-historical discourses emanating from three areas: apparatus theory, New Film History, and independent filmmaking practices.\footnote{Bart Testa, Back and Forth. Early Cinema and the Avant-Garde. (Ontario: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1992) 33.} In film theory, reflections proposed by critics and scholars Noël Burch, Jean-Louis
Chapter 1

Baudry and Jean-Louis Comolli, voiced a material and ideological critique of film technology from marxist and psychonanalytic perspectives to counter linear histories which regarded scientific cinematography of the late nineteenth-century as constituting cinema's origins. Second, new empirical and conceptual approaches informed to a greater degree by recent theory of history and the film programming at a number of recently established archival film festivals and symposia emerged as New Film History, critically examining film editing's centrality in general film histories. Third, the strand of independent filmmaking emerging in the 1970s in North America and the UK, known as *structural* film, suggested formal investigations of early cinema which informed revisionist agendas and established a conceptual exchange between scholarly research and independent filmmaking.

I have chosen to take Testa's discussion as a structuring principle and elaborate on it to depict this historical turn, in particular because it emphasises the role of independent filmmaking and video editing in re-articulating archival film as a source of film history in scholarship and art. While the contributions made by artists tend to be acknowledged as significant in key texts from the period, I would argue that they could be discussed and revaluated in more detail in a present perspective to understand the current emergence of visual research *dispositifs*. With regard to today's digital turn in film historiography I find that they may yield productive insights into how the shifting technological basis and mediations of filmic sources impact their interpretation. The following discussion reflects how this tripartite division of counter-myths emerged at a nexus between film theory, scholarship and art. Moreover, I expand upon it by attending to a wider range of theories of history and appropriation works on film history than discussed by Testa, and by drawing parallels between appropriation art and concurrent scholarly pleas for a more visually grounded film history relying on new projection technology.

**Apparatus Theory and Film Historiography**

In early 1970s film criticism and apparatus theory, a poignant ideological counter-position to the general film histories’ view on film technology was articulated in film theorist Jean-Louis Comolli’s classic article series “Technique et Idéologie” (*Cahiers du cinema*, 1971-72) and critic Jean-Louis Baudry’s *dispositif*-articles. Jean-Louis Comolli’s articles discussed Jean Mitry’s, André Bazin’s and in particular Jean-Patrick Lebel’s writings on film history with critical attention to the role attributed to late-nineteenth century scientific cinematography as constituting cinema’s origins. With regard to especially Lebel’s *Cinéma et Idéologie* (*Éditions Sociales*, 1971), Comolli countered the position that film technology’s ties to scientific cinematography – cameras, lenses and screens – made it
essentially neutral, objective and non-ideological. Comolli fervently countered this view, claiming instead that film technology was ideologically constructed and should be regarded as constellations shaped by cultural and economic forces. From this position, Comolli argued that the origins of film history could just as well be identified earlier than scientific cinematography, namely with the establishment of Quattrocento renaissance perspective, to understand how cultural conventions had shaped screen dimensions, thereby stressing that film history could be written in innumerable different ways. As Comolli writes:

...we must point out the symptomatic fact that all film historians (...) are embarrassed at having to choose an anterior limit to their research: only utterly arbitrary decisions make them designate an event, a date or an invention as the inaugural moment of their work.

Elaborating on this point, Comolli’s article series formulated a fundamental critique of what it held to be an inherent teleology of film history, pointing out that for example the metaphor of a birth of cinema so recurrent in film history, essentially could be regarded as questionable attempts to claim cinema as an independent art form which had logically progressed from a primitive state of being. This is encapsulated in the following lines from Comolli’s articles which have become widely associated with their critique of conventional film history at the time:

[C]ausal linearity, a claim for a dual autonomy of the “specificity” of the cinema and of the model of idealist histories of “art,” a teleological concern, the idea of “progress” or “increasing perfection” not only of technique but of “forms”

In line with Comolli, Jean-Louis Baudry argued from a Marxist-Freudian perspective, that the cinematic screening situation imposed a bourgeois and capitalist world view upon the spectator. Far from being ideologically neutral, the technology's arrangement in the screening situation was deeply rooted in Western monocular Rennaisance perspective, claiming that this perspective

---

206 Ibid., 130.
208 Ibid., 137.
positioned the spectator within its underpinning ideology.\textsuperscript{211}

In a broader perspective Apparatus theory's critique of history writing reflected contemporary tendencies in humanistic disciplines. As American historian Robert F. Berkhofer has pointed out, in literary studies and in history many scholars abandoned grand narratives of emancipation and grand theories' "search for formal systems" to fundamentally question the nature of historical truth, knowledge and representation, in favour of social constructivist and postmodern approaches\textsuperscript{212}. Historians increasingly became aware of the role of language and culture in historical explanation informed by a work such as for example Hayden White's \textit{Meta-History}, which countered claims to scientific objectivity by drawing attention to the literary and narrative conventions of history writing.\textsuperscript{213} In this respect, film history as a discipline in the 1970s moves closer to the discipline of history where, according to historians and archival scholars Blouin and Rosenberg, these theoretical turns were challenging "...any attempt to define a singularly comprehensive and archivally grounded past".\textsuperscript{214}

It is also relevant to invoke the distinction made in French New Historicism and philosophy between \textit{document} and \textit{monument}, in for example the historiography of historian Jacques Le Goff and in Foucault's archaeology. Of these different conceptions the notion of the archival record as \textit{document} supports an authoritative and “official” event-driven historiography, while its conception of it as \textit{monument} in a foucauldian sense refers to a critical engagement with and interrogation of it, which elicits hidden meanings and seeks to understand the conditions of documents’ existence and interpretation.\textsuperscript{215} As Foucault writes with regard to this move away from the conception of the historical record as authoritative:

\begin{quote}
...history now organizes the document, divides it up, distributes it, orders it, arranges it in levels, establishes series, distinguishes between what is relevant and what is not, discovers elements, defines unities, describes relations. The document, then, is no longer for history an inert material through which it tries to reconstitute what men have done or said, the events of which only the trace remains; history is now trying to define within the documentary material itself unities, totalities, series, relation\textsuperscript{216}
\end{quote}

This view reflects in the apparatus theorists' problematisation of origin points in film history. By

\begin{itemize}
\item[211] Ibid., 16 and 36.
\item[213] Francis X. Blouin and William G. Rosenberg, op.cit.: 76. See also Hayden White, op.cit.
\item[214] Ibid.
\item[215] Ibid.
\end{itemize}
expressing a concern with periodisation and by emphasising the role of ideology in shaping cinema, the apparatus theorists opened for an understanding of the medium which inscribed it into different cultural series to understand the underlying assumptions of its configurations and conventions, thus contradicting claims to objectivity and truth as propagated in the earliest film histories. As the next section discusses, this reflexive approach to film history which emerged in the early 1970s can be said to develop in tandem with increased archival access to and interest in previously neglected archival sources and new theoretical directions in the humanities in revisions of early cinema and to provide the core theoretical assumptions or reference frame for New Film History.

Early Cinema Studies and New Film History

Film studies' "historical turn" in the 1970s and 1980s was nourished in large part by new studies of the general film histories' sources as well as an expansion of their empirical basis in order to challenge them. To depict this change, it is illustrative to attend to the shifting scholarly conception of Edwin S. Porter's films and their role in the general film histories’ account of narrative film editing’s development.

The centrality of film editing's development in general film histories had been contested in specialised reviews since the mid-1970s – for instance in *Les Cahiers de la cinémathèque* - in particular with regards to Porter's *Life of an American Fireman* (1903). For several years the film had circulated in two versions: one distributed by the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and one by the Library of Congress in Washington D.C. The montage of the versions differed substantially, with one of them being difficult to fit into the accounts offered by Jacobs, Mitry and Sadoul. The MoMA version contained continuity editing in the film's climax scene, while the LoC version did not. The film's climax scene depicts the rescue of a woman and her child from a burning house. The MoMA version cross-cuts this scene between the exterior shot of the house where a group of firemen come to their rescue, with the room in the house in which they are trapped. The Library of Congress version on the other hand, contains no cross-cutting. It shows the rescue action two times in first an interior shot then an exterior shot. The careful scrutiny of the different versions by film historians Charles Musser and André Gaudreault - as confirmed by the former at the 1978 Brighton Symposium - showed that the version without cross-cutting was the one initially copyrighted and released for distribution in 1903, whereas the MoMA version presumably had been re-edited later to fit the tastes of audiences used to a greater degree of continuity editing. Up to that point, when

confronted with the LoC print, film historians had failed to realise that a narrator had explained the
film’s action to contemporary audiences to guide it through the storyline and add dramatic effect to
the repetition of action. The lack of this insight is what Elsaesser in retrospect has characterised,
through analogy to a Sherlock Holmes novel, as “the dog that didn’t bark” because it reflects how
scholars were unaware of the period's cultural conventions, in particular the mediating agents
between screen and audience.219 Perhaps most prominently, as Gunning and Gaudreault suggested
with their concept of “cinema of attractions”, partly inspired by Donald Crafton’s suggestion of the
term in the early 1980s, scholars needed to understand the different relationship between actor and
camera, screen and spectator in early cinema, to grasp its relation between the films' formal
dimension and their cultural conventions.220 Films in the period purposefully sought to show and
attract audiences to depictions of spectacular events not to tell stories through continuity editing.

As a consequence of this revision, scholars achieved a clearer understanding of the structure of
the Library of Congress’s print of Life of an American Fireman and of the distinct, cultural
conventions of cinema exhibition that shaped film editing before the development of cross-cutting.
Observing that Life had not initially relied on cross-cutting, the new generation of film historians
undermined the histories of Sadoul, Mitry and Jacobs and their focus of film as an art form in which
Porter had played a central part. The latter's model now seemed flawed. Subsequently, film
historians went on to question the core notions of film history up to then, along the lines of
Apparatus theory: periodisations, inventions, national schools, the development of formal systems,
the focus on individuals and key events organised into teleological accounts. Moreover, what the
particular example of Life’s re-editing brought attention to was that film history, as had been the
case in the masterpiece historiography, from Moussinac to Mitry, could not be written around
specific years which could be laid out as logical steps in the medium’s artistic progression. Film
history had to consider the films’ historical performances as well as their reception and circulation
beyond their initial release to grasp their formal aspects.

Departing from this observation, film historians began developing new research methods with
critical attention to the status of archival sources and the role of performance, language, rhetorics
and culture in writing history, while acknowledging the contingencies of historiography and its
possible multiplicity of viewpoints. In what is widely referred to as New Film History these
methods increasingly created a field of historical inquiry deeply engaged with contemporary theory

219 Thomas Elsaesser, “Early Film History and Multi-Media. An Archaeology of Possible Futures?” Wendy Hui Kyong Chun and Thomas Keenan
of history throughout the 1980s. In this respect, the rewriting of early film history, fuelled by the discussions of the Brighton symposium became, as American film scholar Dana Polan has pointed out, a catalyst for film historians to examine ”...what it means to do history”. An example of this is the table by Edward Branigan which I cited in the introduction. Outlining the different historicisations of film color technology to elucidate their types of historical inquiry and underlying assumptions - from Terry Ramsaye to Jean-Louis Comolli – it sought to understand ”What forces and events are singled out by a given historian as 'significant' and how [they] are arranged into a narrative of time” to compare ”...different types of questions that a historian may ask and thereby to reveal what kind of history arises”. Suggesting a new Marxist technological history, Branigan's work reflected the wide resonance of Comolli's critiques and equally testified to the increased use of perspectives deriving from Cultural Studies. Coinciding with increased institutionalisation of film studies throughout the 1970s and 1980s, this new awareness of historical representation and narrative became common in film historical research seeing more scholars making their historical methodologies increasingly explicit while remaining critical of their own results.

Revolving around a rediscovery and reconceptualisation of early cinema as an analytical object, New Film History's main characteristic, it can be said, is that it nourished a methodological stratification by integrating a range of integrative historical methods and approaches from other research fields, in particular social and economic history, which enabled film historians to analyse a much broader range of cinema's historical development as an art form and as an industry. A much-cited remark by Thomas Elsaesser from a book review of several of the period's key monographs on historical methodology, published in Sight & Sound in 1986, encapsulated this ambition:

To do film history today, one has to become an economic historian, a legal expert, a sociologist, an architectural historian, know about censorship and fiscal policy, read trade papers and fan magazines, even study Lloyds Lists of ships sunk during World War One to calculate how much of the film footage exported to Europe actually reached its destination.

Addressing in particular Douglas Gomery and Robert C. Allen's introductory textbook Film History: Theory and Practice, widely used in universities and high schools, Elsaesser's remark

221 Dana Polan, op. cit.
222 Edward Branigan, op.cit., 16 and 30.
clearly reflects the interdisciplinary exchange which shaped film historiography's development in these years. I shall discuss the implications of Allen's and Gomery's model of historiography in more detail in Chapter Four, with particular attention to its relation to *Annales* historiography. What I would like to emphasise here is that Allen and Gomery's book is also interesting insofar as it reflects that while film historians were widely informed by Apparatus theory's critical stance, many scholars did not subscribe to its emphasis on ideology and rejection of empiricism in favour of theory. Instead, they conceived their methodologies by positioning themselves against them, while showing awareness of historiography's inherent contingencies. In this regard, it is characteristic that Allen and Gomery present their method as a "realist response" which strived to foster productive combinations between "conventionalist" critiques and empiricism, by raising a counter-critique of how the former might potentially lure historians into unproductive relativisms.

On the basis of their counter-critique they articulated a theory of film history, drawing among others on the critical realism of philosopher Roy Bhaskar, which acknowledged historiography's contingencies by considering sources as mediated and partial - but still factual – and by de-emphasising event history. As they write in this regard:

Evidence provides the historian access to the facts of history; it enables the historian to describe historical events so that the existence of those events can be agreed upon by other historians. However, in the Realist view, the events or facts of history in no way speak for themselves, nor is the historian's job finished when a chronology of events has been compiled. The object of historical study for the Realist is not the historical event itself, but the generative (causal) mechanisms that brought that event about.

In this respect, it is important to highlight that the emergence of New Film History reflected an institutionalisation of film historical methodology insofar as it introduced a greater variety of contemporary theories of history without resulting in a unified methodological stance. Rather, it was considered to introduce a more conscientious scrutiny of a broader variety of archival sources than the generalist histories. Furthermore, it is also important to highlight that the advent of New Film History did not result in an abandonment of aesthetic, generalist histories. In undergraduate film studies curricula the most widely used introductory textbook today, Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell’s *Film History: an Introduction* (first published in 1994), clearly propagates and echoes for instance the discernment of aesthetic schools suggested in Georges Sadoul's and Jean Mitry's

---

227 Ibid., 14.
228 Ibid., 16.
generalist histories. Thus, it departs from the repertory established in 1920s cinephilia, arguably reflecting its universalist aspirations and theoretical underpinnings. Yet, Thompson and Bordwell's film history is also much more reflexive and methodologically acute than the early film histories. This can be seen in how it draws attention to the findings of the FIAF Brighton symposium in its discussion of early cinema. Moreover, its introduction's emphasis on history as discourse which explains central abstract concepts such as chronology, causality and influence, drawing in part on Allen's and Gomery's work, testifies to the period's increased theorisation of academic film historiography in line with contemporary debates on theory of history.

Furthermore, as media scholar Philippe Gauthier has recently argued, early cinema studies and New Film History have in retrospect become increasingly critiqued for inadvertently creating its own teleological account of film historiography’s development. This account implies that the film histories preceding it are considered primitive as opposed to the methodologies emerging after the watershed revisionism of the 1978 FIAF Symposium. CEO of the Ingmar Bergman archive Jan Holmberg, has humorously phrased this critique, by arguing that the 1978 FIAF Symposium has acquired the status of a “Woodstock of film archiving” in which historians and archivists came together in ecstatic celebration to embrace each other's insights and conceive film historiography properly.

To elaborate on these recent critiques I would also add that it is necessary to keep in mind that the generalist historians, for instance Georges Sadoul, showed greater concern for film historiography's philological aspects in their methodologies than perhaps tends to be acknowledged after the debates surrounding Porter's Life. For example, in his essay on historical methodology "Matériaux, méthodes et problèmes de l'histoire du cinéma”, Sadoul problematised the fact that quickly made dupe prints without faithful reproductions of colours or grain formed the basis of most historians understanding of silent cinema. Observing such problems, Sadoul urged scholars to go into the archive to scrutinise their source material in order to understand and carefully conceive of their analytical objects.

---

229 Bernard Eisenschitz, op.cit., 125.
231 Ibid., xxxvi-xlil.
233 Jan Holmberg, “Bergman the Archivist” (paper presented at The Film Archive as a Research Laboratory – First International Symposium, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, February 15, 2013).
Chapter 1

Yet, regardless of the events one chooses to emphasise in the history of film historiography and
the methods which the generalist film historians had previously developed, the period of the 1970s
and 1980s did articulate a fundamentally new role for historians and film archives in historical
research and fostered a contestation of how film historiography had been practiced up to that point,
through increased collaboration between them. Furthermore, it broadened the scope of film
historical research showing increased scholarly attention to film-related sources in order to produce
historical inquiries into contextual aspects of film history beyond the film artefact.

To depict this change in greater detail, I will discuss in the following section how film heritage
institutions played a crucial part in this development through the concurrent emergence of archival
film festivals and film restoration theory.

Archival Film Festivals and Restoration Theory
With film studies' historical turn, film archives acquired a new role in film historical research. As
André Gaudreault has pointed out, they became sites of "applied study" seeing film archivists and
historians working more closely together forming "An Alliance of Archivists and Film Scholars".235
Testifying to this is the foundation of a number of archival film festivals in the 1980s and the early
1990s devoted to the revision of film history through screenings of rare and restored archival films.
Through these initiatives, the film festivals reflected an increased theorisation of film restoration
practice pertaining to contemporary film historiography's critical approaches to archival prints and
to film archives as providers of source materials for academic film historiography.

In this period, archival film festivals such as Le Giornate del Cinema Muto (1982-) and Il
Cinema Ritrovato (1986-) in Italy, Cinémémoire in France (1991-1997), San Francisco Silent Film
Festival (1992-) appeared, of which in particular the Italian festivals became important fora for the
exchange of knowledge between film archivists and historians from all around the world.236 The
silent film festival Le Giornate del Cinema Muto in Pordenone (1982) associated with Gemona's La
Cineteca del Friuli and Il Cinema Ritrovato (1986) organised by La Cineteca di Bologna which
comprises films from a wider range of periods, are in different ways, surrounded by an aura of
"rewriting film history" through the programming of unseen films and restored classics.237 While
sharing many similarities, it could be said that, roughly, the difference between the two is that Le
Giornate initially focused on presenting complete programmes of a certain director, period or

236 Francesco di Chiara and Valentina Re, op.cit., 133.
237 Ian Christie, "New Lamps for Old: What Can We Expect from Archival Film Festivals?", in Alex Marlow-Mann (ed.), Film Festival Yearbook 5: Archival Film Festivals. (St Andrews: St Andrews Film Studies, 2013) 41.
production company, whereas *Il Cinema Ritrovato* had a stronger emphasis on film restoration.\(^{238}\)

According to film preservationist Paolo Cherchi Usai, who became associated with *Le Giornate* in 1984, the years 1988 to 1994 represented a particularly fruitful period in the festival’s history fulfilling the promises of a “long-sought synthesis between film preservation and access”.\(^{239}\) In this period, a wide variety of aspects and periods of silent cinema in film historical research developed along the lines of the festival’s programming. For instance, as I shall discuss in greater depth in Chapter Four, the use of color in silent cinema and Italian diva films underwent a fundamental revision following screenings of films from the Nederlands Filmmuseum’s Jean Desmet Collection in the late 1980s.\(^{240}\) Furthermore, the festival’s 1989 program of 1910s pre-revolutionary Russian films engendered a rediscovery of an otherwise largely neglected period and in particular the work of director Yevgeni Bauer.\(^{241}\)

*Il Cinema Ritrovato* on the other hand, in addition to the rediscovery of rare archival films, also reflects an increased theorisation of film restoration practice.\(^{242}\) Bologna, where *Il Cinema Ritrovato* resides, has become known for its strong emphasis on film restoration within both the academic film studies curriculum at the University of Bologna and the pioneering restoration work of the laboratory L’Immagine Ritrovata which both collaborate closely with the festival and the Cineteca. More specifically the work of scholars, restorers and archivists Michele Canosa, Gianluca Farinelli and Nicola Mazzanti form what has been labelled a ”Bolognese school” of film restoration of which the theoretical foundations were articulated in a number of essays published in the early 1990s.\(^{243}\)

Fundamental to this school is a philological approach, which critically interrogates the status of archival prints to reconstruct their circulation history and understand the historical circumstances which have shaped their physiognomy to create new restored versions from them. Film scholar Simone Venturini dates the emergence of philological film restoration theory to the early 1980s, and as happening in concurrence with the rise of early cinema studies.\(^{244}\) According to Venturini, one of

---


\(^{241}\) Ian Christie, op.cit., 2013, 45- 46.


\(^{244}\) Ibid., 19.
Chapter 1

film philology’s most significant contributions to film restoration theory is its emphasis on archival film as a reproduced or duplicated object, in contrast to theories which seek to restore a ‘definitive’, original version, as for instance early restorations of films such as Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* (Germany, 1927) attempted.\(^{245}\) Film philology instead implies a scrutiny of archival prints to achieve an understanding of the physical characteristics of existing archival elements as departure points for presenting an edited history of a film title.\(^{246}\) In this regard, edge marks, tear, wear or for instance generational loss of image quality are all characteristics which tell something meaningful about an element’s history, its period and circumstances of production. They are perceived as gateways into the object’s history and should therefore remain visible in one way or another to the archivist and historian. However, as Michele Canosa notes, this stance should not be taken to imply an empiricism which purports to bring out the object’s truth. Though the position does hold that it approximates the film object on its own terms to a greater extent, the philological undertaking equally serves to underline the present perspective which the object is situated in to emphasise the temporal distance which separates object and restorer.\(^{247}\) Providing a theoretical frame for *Il Cinema Ritrovato*, this line of thinking reflects the concern of understanding the artefact's appearance in relation to its distribution history and life, beyond its year of production. In this regard, it reflects the concerns of empirical debates surrounding Porter's *Life*, and sustains the reflexive interrogation of the nature of historical evidence between historians and archivists. Thus, the archival film festivals make a larger corpus of films known to film historians, while reflecting the underlying contingencies of their appearance.

However, it is debatable to what degree the festivals engender new forms of film history or subvert old ones. As film scholar Ian Christie has pointed out, canonised directors such as Griffith and Eisenstein remain focal points in for example Pordenone through extensive programming. As Christie argues, *Le Giornate*’s high-profiled Griffith Project which consisted in publishing a series of twelve monographs between 1999 and 2008 to accompany festival screenings of Griffith's surviving films on the one hand offered an opportunity to assess Griffith’s filmmaking in greater detail than ever before, thus perhaps downplaying his *oeuvre*’s importance by displaying its lesser moments. On the other hand it consolidated his production as one of the most widely studied and

---

\(^{245}\) Ibid., 28.

\(^{246}\) Ibid., 26.

\(^{247}\) Michele Canosa, ”Immagini e materia. Questioni di restauro cinematografico”, in Simone Venturini (ed.), *Il Restauro Cinematografico. Principi, teorie, metodi.* (Pasian di Prato: Campanotto Editore, 2006) 75. In line with a large part of Italian and 'Bolognese' film restoration theory Canosa lends this attitude towards the object’s history which balances empirical considerations with a present perspective from art historian Cesare Brandi’s classic work *Teoria del restauro* (Roma: Edizioni Storia e letteratura, 1963).
canonised. However, in spite of this potentially contradictory dynamics, the archival festivals have become central platforms for discussing, developing and questioning new insights into film historical research.

The revisionist program's counter-myths did not only find its outlet in new historical methods, film festivals and restoration theory. In the late 1970s, a number of prominent scholars - such as Raymond Bellour, Vladimir Petric and Noël Burch - experimented with and increasingly pleaded for a more active visual analysis of films and quantitative approaches to archival prints to support their research. These scholars argued that film historical research could achieve a closer approximation to its object of study than written film history had allowed for, by interacting with films analytically using flatbed editing tables or stop-motion projectors, to produce shot outlines or filmic appropriations. Taking the cue from Bart Testa's work on appropriation film, the following sections discuss how this position developed in a conceptual exchange between independent filmmaking and scholarship, while paying attention to these practices’ view on archival films as sources of film history. Elaborating on this discussion in a present perspective, a concluding section will argue that this exchange continues to produce fruitful encounters between academia and independent filmmaking today. In Chapter Five, I shall return to this discussion to further argue that contemporary appropriation practices may acquire a new role in developing critical perspectives on contemporary visual analytics' conventions.

Audiovisual Film Histories

The plea for audio-visual film histories which emerged in the 1970s was a marginal one within academia. However, the period nevertheless saw an increased interest in audio-visual forms of analysis of archival film, manifesting itself in experimental scholarly approaches and independent filmmaking. As film scholar Bart Testa has suggested, the fact that film scholars began devoting attention to contemporary appropriation works marked the advent of a highly fruitful exchange of counter-historical ideas between independent filmmaking practice and academic film historiography. The practices and milieux of film historians and filmmakers were brought closer to each other, seeing contemporary avant-garde films becoming considered as "pedagogical interventions" whose appropriations of archival films fuelled revisionist film historiography. Gradually, such forms became reference points for film historians in developing their historical arguments and methods.

---

248 Ian Christie, op.cit., 2013, 8.
249 Bart Testa, op.cit., 20.
250 Ibid.
With regard to the pleas which emerged in academia, French film theorist Raymond Bellour's article “The Unattainable Text” (first published in French as “Le texte introuvable”, 1975), is frequently pointed out for its discussion of the problems that the film scholar encounters when having to cite films in written analysis. According to Bellour, film was a text of which the meaning revealed itself for the scholar only when scrutinised on an editing table, which allowed for manipulation of playback speed and direction.\footnote{Raymond Bellour, “Le texte introuvable”, in Raymond Bellour, L'analyse du film, (Paris: Editions Albatros, 1979[1975]) 40.} The analytical experience enabled by the editing table, was crucial to the scholar’s work, Bellour argued, yet impossible to convey in writing: film was a text which could not be quoted.\footnote{Ibid., 36.} For instance, text could not reflect the temporal aspect and iterative process of the analytical experience and interpretation, not even through the reproduction of photograms within a text, as it would not reflect the scholar's scrutiny at the editing table. At that point in time, a format which came close to conveying such an experience of a film print were published shot by shot descriptions or scripts. In France for instance a journal such as L'Avant-scène - Cinéma – a journal which still exists today – would publish an outline of an entire film with still illustrations.\footnote{I would like to thank postdoctoral researcher at the University of Amsterdam Liliana Melgar Estrada for drawing my attention to these journals based on her research interviews with media scholar Frank Kessler conducted for her dissertation From Social Tagging to Polyrepresentation: A Study of Expert Annotating Behaviour of Moving Images (PhDiss, Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, 2015).}

A year before Bellour, Soviet cinema scholar and founding Curator of the Harvard Film Archive Vladimir Petric raised similar concerns in his article “From a Written Film History to a Visual Film History”. It argued that research should be conducted on “analyzers” in film archives to develop a quantitative approach to film editing. In contrast to Bellour, who emphasised the temporal experience of the scholar's interpretive work at the editing table, Petric's ambition reflected a more scientistic conception of film history by arguing that historians should rely on extensive shot outlines as an empirical tool to correct imprecise stylistic analyses which had flourished up to that point.\footnote{Vladimir Petric, “From a Written Film History to a Visual Film History”, in Cinema Journal, Vol. 14, No. 2, Symposium on the Methodology of Film History (Winter, 1974-1975) 21. Petric addresses in particular the research of Georges Sadoul, Rachael Low, Lewis Jacobs and Lotte Eisner.} Departing from this observation, Petric's article argued that film archives should accommodate for the production of shot outlines to enable a visually anchored film historiography. As Petric concluded:

...the appropriate methodology of film history cannot be attained in our time without the full cooperation of the film archives, which possess the prints and have access to technical facilities, without which it is impossible to grasp the cinematic structure of a film.\footnote{Ibid., 24.}
Although Bellour's and Petric's pleas reflected opposite epistemologies, they shared the view that film analysis should be anchored in the editing table’s analytic mode of viewing. From this perspective, film analysis and history up till then had not only applied the wrong research models but also the wrong tools for analysis. While such pleas remained marginal, film scholars and archivists became alert to independent filmmaking's appropriations of archival film, which they perceived as a form of film historical research which stood at the nexus of film archiving, historiography and appropriation art. Consequently, as I shall discuss in further detail below, a little group of filmic appropriation works became reference points for film historians which played a crucial role in their development of new historical insights and provided their research with a visual anchorage.

Along the same lines, one may consider Jean-Luc Godard's vision of an audio-visual film history from a filmmaker's perspective, expressed in the theoretical considerations anticipating his later television work *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988-1998). This vision inscribed itself in a revisionist critique of the general film histories in close dialogue with film historians and archives and drew on *Annales* historiography's critique of event history, to claim a new role for the latter in film historical research. Godard expressed this in a roundtable discussion with Jean Mitry and co-founder of La Cinémathèque Suisse Freddy Buache at the FIAF conference in 1979 in Lausanne:

Little by little I became interested in cinema history. But as a filmmaker, not because I’d read Bardèche, Brasillach, Mitry, or Sadoul (in other words: Griffith was born in such and such a year, he invented such and such a thing, and four years later Eisenstein did this or that), but by ultimately asking myself how the forms I’d used had been created, and how such knowledge might help me.

And as he added:

And little by little, I had a project, three or four years ago, to begin to do what I would call a “visual history” (…) a visual history of cinema and television.

Such a history of film, Godard argued, should compare the key films of the general film histories

---

256 Michael Witt, op. cit., 84.
257 Jean-Luc Godard, "Les cinémathèques et l'histoire du cinéma", in Jean-Luc Godard, eds. Nicole Brenez and Michael Witt, *Documents* (Paris: Editions du Centre Pompidou, 2006) 287. Original quote: "...j'avais lu Bardèche ou Brasillach, Mitry ou Sadoul (c'est-à-dire: Griffith est né en telle année, il a inventé tel ou tel truc, quatre ans après Eisenstein a fait telle ou telle chose), mais en me demandant moi-même, finalement, comment des formes que j'utilisais s'étaient créées, et comment cette connaissance pouvait m'aider. Et petit à petit, j'ai eu un projet, il y a trois ou quatre ans, de commencer à faire ce que j'appellerais une 'histoire visuelle' (…) une histoire visuelle du cinéma et de la télévision.". The first part of the above translation is taken from Michael Witt, op.cit., 10.
to challenge connections between for example the cinema of Griffith to that of Eisenstein as the basis for an account of film form's development. To enable such comparisons, according to Godard, film archives should be involved in an active role as a kind of “laboratory” where film historians and filmmakers could make films on film history, making use of video editing equipment. Godard had developed this idea in a lecture series given at the Université de Montréal throughout 1979, published in 1980 as Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma (Editions Albatros, 1980). Introduction..., states that this history should be considered not simply a chronological one, but rather a biological, archaeological history which would place cinema more broadly within a spectrum of the arts and society, in relation to for example the development of pictorial perspective in painting. Films should be compared not only to films but also paintings in order to understand the development of filmic conventions. While Introduction claimed to have developed the method for such a history, it stated, in line with Petric, that the equipment required for realising it was too expensive and accessible only to television stations and cinémathèques. Therefore, Godard argued that cinémathèques held a special obligation to grant filmmakers access to their equipment for research purposes.

However, while Godard proposed a non-linear film history which was critical of film technology’s ideological conventions in line with the impetus of 1970s Apparatus theory, its vision of film history can be regarded as closely tied to the cinéphile canons associated with a review such as Cahiers du cinéma and its prevalence for narrative auteur cinema. As film scholar Christa Blümlinger has suggested with regard to the later Histoire(s), its historiographic concerns reflected a different theoretical foundation than the Anglo-American strand of 1970s independent filmmaking, which would inform early cinema scholars through its primary focus on early cinema's different forms of address and narration. Along these lines, film scholar André Habib has argued that experimental filmmakers played a crucial role for early cinema studies' revisionism by nourishing fruitful interpretive encounters with scholars. As Habib argues:

...the dialogue between early cinema historians, restorers, archivists and experimental filmmakers, this movement back and forth between historical understanding of the past and its reactivation in artistic

---

258 Ibid.
259 Ibid., 291.
261 Ibid., 23.
262 Ibid.
works is essential for illuminating our knowledge and enriching our experience of film history and, in a more general way, our apprehension of what is in the film archives. (…) this historical mobility and flexibility invite new ways of thinking and writing film history departing from its historical mediations…264

This concerned in particular filmmakers commonly referred to as “structural” filmmakers, whose formal experimentation produced original perspectives on film form’s development and which resonated in film historiography, by propagating a conception of early cinema as a candid, independent form of filmmaking, devoid of the narrative conventions established in the 1910s.265

These filmmakers regarded the forms of early cinema as akin to their own formal experiments and engaged with them, to lend the words of Noël Burch “…as 'found objects' which can be said to have stimulated the sense of recognition…”266 This was done through an experimental use of film projection and duplication technologies to manipulate the playback speed, direction and scale of archival films, as an exploration of non-narrative forms to convey the point that filmic narration was a cultural convention, and not an inherent feature of the medium. As suggested by Testa, in its use of technology to this end, structural filmmaking represented a congruency with emerging culturalist and materialist approaches in its rejection of an essentialist view on film art and established “…a mode of cinema critical of orthodox histories of cinema and allied with apparatus theory.”267

Ken Jacobs’ classic Tom, Tom the Piper’s Son (1969-1971) is a particularly illustrative work of this development, in its use of film technology and conception of film as an archival medium. It reflects apparatus theory’s anti-essentialist perspective and the revisionist histories' scrutiny of archival film as a means of acknowledging early cinema's different formal conventions. As David Bordwell has stated: "Jacobs' reworking of the film was as important as any archival research in suggesting that early cinema operated with a distinctive and oppositional aesthetic".268

---


265 Noël Burch, La lucarne de l’infini. Naissance du langage cinématographique. (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2007 [1991]) 10. Film scholar P. Adams Sitney coined the denominator “Structural Film” to distinguish a common stylistic trend of formal experimentation in primarily North American and Austrian independent filmmaking in the 1950s to the 1970s. First appearing in an article in volume 47 of the American review Film Culture in the summer of 1969, the term has since become widely applied by film scholars to experimental filmmaking but is also increasingly contested for being reductionist.


267 Bart Testa, op. Cit.: 20.

268 David Bordwell, op.cit.: 103.
Chapter 1

In 1969, Ken Jacobs created the first version of this work out of cameraman Billy Bitzer's *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son* (American Mutoscope and Biograph, 1905) from a 16mm print distributed by the Library of Congress.\textsuperscript{269} The film had been made available through the recently finalised restoration project of the so-called paper print collection. The paper print collection had been created as a means for production houses to copyright their moving picture production on paper rolls in the late 1890s but had been neglected after copyright registration of motion pictures on film had been approved in 1912.\textsuperscript{270} When Jacobs rented the film from LoC for use in the teaching of a filmmaking course at the SUNY Binghamton, he was astonished by the film's form. He perceived it as remarkably different – or "visually busy" as he has phrased it - from later narrative cinema’s conventional analytical editing, in particular that of Griffith, and found it difficult to orient himself in the film’s frame and discern its central action and characters.\textsuperscript{271} As a means of exploring this form of composition, Jacobs began performing with the film on an analytical projector with a variable-speed function in reverse and forward projection mode and to focus on details in the image to discern the film’s action, filming it from behind a translucent screen. From the material filmed during these performances, Jacobs created his now classic version of *Tom, Tom the Piper's Son*, which stretches the ten minutes of Bitzer's film into a two-hour investigation of its form, to show, among other things, that early film represented an alternative to conventional narrative cinematic forms.\textsuperscript{272} Furthermore, by appropriating what had initially been registered at the LoC as a copyrighted record, the work demonstrated an approach to archival film which differed from earlier conceptions in both scientific and general film histories of archival film as a finite documentation.

*Tom, Tom...* had repercussions in contemporary writings on film historiography and has since been considered, as pointed out by Christa Blümlinger, a film which signals a paradigm shift to New Film Historicism.\textsuperscript{273} In particular Noël Burch’s article "Primitivism and the Avant-gardes: A Dialectical Approach" (1986) stressed the film’s role in the recognition of early cinema’s different formal conventions, just as Burch’s seminal study *La lucarne de l'infini. Naissance du language cinématographique* (1991), suggested that *Tom, Tom...* represented a 'modern look' on the period which foreshadowed 1970s revisionism in pondering over the difficulty of understanding early


\textsuperscript{271} David Shapiro, "An Interview with Ken Jacobs", in *Millennium Film Journal*, vol. 1 no. 1 (Winter 1977-1978) 171.


\textsuperscript{273} Christa Blümlinger, op. Cit., 63.
cinema from a contemporary perspective. Beyond *Tom, Tom...* structural filmmaking fuelled the scholarly revision of early cinema through its approximation of experimental cinematic forms to early cinema conventions. Tom Gunning’s article ”An Unseen Energy Swallows Space: The Space in Early Film and Its Relation to American Avant-Garde Film” (1983) clearly encapsulates this point:

Comparing early film to recent films of the American avant-garde frees the early works from the ghetto of primitive babbling to which the progress-oriented model of film history has assigned them. If we cease to see early films simply as failed or awkward approximations of a later style, we begin to see them as possessing a style and logic of their own.275

In Gunning’s view, structural filmmaking exteriorised early cinema’s different formal logic through its scrutinies, thereby establishing a counter-position to the general film histories’ model which held a liberating potential for revisionist scholarship. This can be said to reflect a concentrated effort in the late 1970s to review early cinema from the vantage point of independent filmmaking. As André Habib reminds us, Gunning’s essay was presented in the context of a symposium organised by the Whitney Museum of American Art entitled “Researches and Investigation into Film: its Origins and the Avant-Garde” where also Noël Burch’s “Primitivism and the Avant-Gardes...” was first presented.276 The symposium provided a framework for the discussion between film archivists and historians of early cinema and included four programs of experimental films containing amongst others Ken Jacobs’ *Tom, Tom...,* Ernie Gehr’s *Eureka!* (USA, 1975) and films by avant-garde directors such as Stan Brakhage, George Landow and Kenneth Anger. These were screened in conjunction with programs of “Historical Films” from for example the catalogues of production houses such as Edison, Biograph and Pathé.277

However, these discussions did not mark a merging of academia and independent filmmaking. The respective production contexts and intellectual environments of academic research and films remained too incompatible.278 For example, on a conceptual level, a very significant difference between early cinema historians and filmmakers was that the former opposed itself to the understanding of early cinema as a particularly pure and innocent filmic language. This is perhaps most vehemently illustrated in Noël Burch’s position that ambiguously resorted to the vantage point

---

276 André Habib, op. cit., 150-151.
277 Ibid., 150n12.
278 Bart Testa, op.cit., 18.
of structural filmmakers first to illustrate the significance of studying early cinema as pertaining to a
different set of cultural conventions, to then distance himself clearly from structural filmmaking's
longing for early cinema as unsullied, by arguing that later narrative cinema could not be regarded
as intrinsically conformist.\footnote{Noël Burch, op.cit., 2007 [1991]), 10.}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.7\textwidth]{image1.jpg}
\caption{In Noël Burch's \textit{Correction Please: or, How We Got into the Pictures} (1979) the same sequence is repeated five times inter-cut with examples from early films to explain film form's development. First, the sequence appears in early cinema tableau style with \textit{a bonimenteur} and audience sounds on the soundtrack respectively explaining the action and giving an impression of the screening's atmosphere (image) to then, in its fifth iteration contain analytical editing and sound effects in a style from the early 1930s.}
\end{figure}

On the other hand, as pointed out by Testa, Burch's activities from the late 1970s onwards also
represents an exception to this division, as he directed films and television documentaries which
merged academic film historiography with structural filmmaking.\footnote{Bart Testa, op.cit., 49.} In his film on film style from 1979, \textit{Correction Please: or, How We Got into the Pictures}, Burch investigated French, British and
American cinema's development of form and modes of address from the years before 1906 until the
early 1930s.\footnote{Michèle Lagny, op.cit., 1992, 266.} In what was perceived as a structuralist mode of filmmaking at the time, \textit{Correction Please} iterates the same dramatic scene five times, with each repetition responding to the style of a
particular period's editing and use of sound, alluding to the style of particular films and intercut with films from cinema’s earliest period. Following this structure, the first depiction of the scene employs a frontal tableau style with a voiceover mimicking the style of an early cinema narrator - which in cinema's earliest years explained screen action to audiences – while the last depiction shows the scene as it could have been edited and sonorised in the early period of sound film (see fig. 5). Because he is working at this intersection of academia and filmmaking, Burch can be considered one of the few “scholar-filmmakers”, whose practice illustrates the exchange between experimental filmmaking and scholarship in the revision of early cinema.

Conclusively, it can be argued, that while structural filmmaking was in general not integrated into scholarly practice, it was embraced by scholars as an audio-visual approach to film historiography which, beyond its revisions of early cinema, prompted scholars to think about their source materials' mediations and the adequacy of their analytical tools. Moreover, as the next section will discuss, structural filmmaking did establish an exchange which has continued to develop up to today in found footage filmmaking practices and recycled cinema which reflect current archival research into neglected areas of film archives and, to lend Habib's words, “invite new ways of thinking and writing film history”.

Contemporary Dialogues of Filmic Appropriation, Archiving and Historiography

Filmic appropriation works beyond structural filmmaking, commonly denominated as found footage or recycled cinema, continue to nourish new directions in film historiography. Today, a dynamic between film historiography, film archiving and artistic appropriation drives a re-evaluation of hitherto neglected material such as industrial, “orphan” and educational archival films in numerous works by independent filmmakers. Such archival material is becoming increasingly appreciated as an integral part of film heritage by film scholars and artists seeing film archives, museums and academics encouraging such material's valorisation. To this end, Thomas Elsaesser has argued the urgency of nurturing collaboration between a set of three A's – the archive, the academy and the avant-garde. As an early example of this can be mentioned for example the 40th...


283 With regard to the making of Correction... Noël Burch has pointed out the following periods and films as corresponding to the styles of the film's five different segments: "...the mature primitive years (ca. 1905), Griffith's middle period at Biograph (ca. 1910), the more mature films which Reginald Barker made for Thomas Ince (ca. 1915), Fritz Lang's Mabuse dyptich [sic] (1922) and, finally, the era of 'canned theatre', insofar as it is that of so many films made between 1929 and today". Noël Burch cited in Bart Testa, op. cit., 50.


87
Chapter 1

FIAF congress held in Vienna at the Österreichisches Filmmuseum in 1984, which comprised a series of film screenings compiled by the institution's co-founder and filmmaker Peter Kubelka, screening films by avant-garde filmmakers such as Ernie Gehr and Jonas Mekas alongside for example cigarette commercials and home movies.\(^{286}\)

From a present-day perspective, as film scholar Eric Thouvenel has pointed out on the basis of a comparison between Ken Jacobs’ and Austrian filmmaker Peter Tscherkassky’s works, “found footage” films nourish reflection on film historiography through their predominant focus on lesser known or anonymous film to propagate a “film history with little ‘f’” along the lines of structural filmmaking's counter-myth.\(^{287}\) In their focus, such works tend to downplay classic notions of auteurs and schools to comprehend the forms of neglected material through appropriation. While there is a large corpus of films demonstrating this dynamic, a recent work which illustrates the continued role of filmic appropriation in scholarly revisionism of archival film and its ties to the debates around structural filmmaking in early cinema studies clearly, is Austrian filmmaker Peter Tscherkassky's Coming Attractions (2010). Coming Attractions appropriates rushes from commercials from the conceptual vantage point and frame of reference of early cinema studies with particular attention to Tom Gunning’s essay “An Unseen Energy Swallows Space”.\(^{288}\)

As film critic Catherine Giraud writes in her introduction to Coming Attractions, the film suggests that commercials can be seen as one of three “cinemas of attractions” alongside early cinema and avant-garde film.\(^{289}\) The film uses the concept of “cinema of attractions” to understand the looks of the actors in commercials by playing puns on reference films and concepts of early cinema scholars in its inter-titles. Playing on the observation which Tom Gunning made concerning the different relationship between actor and camera, screen and spectator in early cinema, Coming Attractions conceptualises the seductive conventions of the commercial as a pendant to early cinema’s direct address, and establishes this by playing on the title of Gunning’s essay, changing it into “Cubist Cinema No. 1. An Unseen Energy Swallows Face”. Furthermore, close-ups of products being advertised are ascribed the same spectacular qualities of for example the depiction of locations in early cinema travelogues in the inter-titles’ play with words. The close-up of a sparkling soda of which the soundtrack amplifies the crackling sounds of bubbles and ice cubes is presented as the “Rough Sea at Nowhere”, thus alluding to the title of the famous travelogue filmed by British


cameramen Robert W. Paul and Birt Acres in 1898 “Rough Sea at Dover”. Through the conceptual frame of early cinema studies, *Coming Attractions* thus transforms the incognito rushes of commercials and its anonymous settings into a revisionist excursion into film history and the shadowy corners of the film archive, testifying to the continued dialogue between film historians, archivists and independent filmmakers today.

Beyond this particular example, it is symptomatic that the film history festivals *Il Cinema Ritrovato* and *Le Giornate del Cinema Muto* have included filmic works of appropriation in their programming. For example, *Il Cinema Ritrovato* established a subsection entitled “Cinema: Old Images, New Films” in 2001, with the specific purpose of programming works of an older generation of independent filmmakers such as Al Razutis, Paolo Gioli and Harun Farocki alongside more recent films by for example Peter Tscherkassky, Gustav Deutsch and Martin Arnold. More recently the inaugural exhibition of the EYE Filmmuseum in Amsterdam in April 2012, which has a long-standing tradition of encouraging artists to create appropriation works from their collections' holdings, was themed *Found Footage – Cinema Exposed*, including a retrospective dedicated to these strands of filmmaking.

1.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed two central aspects of the relation between film archiving and film historiography. First of all, how the status of film as an archival medium and the organisation of film archives' core activities reflect and are defined by contemporary theories of history. Second, how film historiography and archival research became increasingly defined within a new network of institutions and agents consisting of academic film studies programs, film history festivals and symposiums, specialised restoration laboratories, new projection and viewing technologies and artistic appropriation.

To summarise the first aspect of this discussion, it is clear from the vantage point of theory of history, that changing conceptions of archival film and access to it can be explained through shifts in different paradigms of historiography. Boleslas Matuszewski and the first wave of film archives represent a scientific film history which understood film as a finite historical documentation and which in the access it provided to it, sought to include citizens in an official narrative of national identity. Conversely, the foundational moment of the 1930s reflected a conceptualisation of film as a patrimonial object which sustained a vision of film as an international art form from an essentialist

---


Chapter 1

...in this last comment on cinematographic 'truth' can we say that the years have contradicted Matuszewski; even the retouching of a strip of film is no longer considered a feat, and other forms of distortion are regarded complacently as basic practice.²⁹²

In other words, the conception of archival film as a finite manifestation of truth had little currency already by the 1960s, when the slightest appropriation of film became regarded as common, as could be said to be the case today.

However, to grasp the broader picture of contemporary film historiography, and to recall the critique of New Film History’s view on the development of film historiography, it would be reductionist to claim that one historical model or research practice, or historical “science-fiction” if we like, can be considered paradigmatic today. To a large extent, what one can regard as paradigmatic depends on the place of knowledge production and institutional contexts one considers. In the field of early cinema studies for instance, as I have discussed in this chapter and will return to in Chapter Four, there is and remains a division between an empiricist wing of film historians and archivists and a wing which is founded predominantly in cultural, literary and critical theories. Empiricist scholars, such as Stephen Bottomore and Ian Christie for instance, propagate a

²⁹² Jay Leyda, op.cit., 1964, 10.
Film Archives and Film Historiography

view of film history as a soft science. On the other hand, film historians such as Tom Gunning and André Gaudreault continue to develop critical historiographies drawing on critical, literary and cultural theories. Furthermore, as I discuss in greater detail in Chapter Two, it is important to point out that FIAF, while founded primarily upon a conception of film as art, recurrently – and increasingly it seems - recourses to a conception of film as historical document to promote its mission of preservation and by embracing film archives with a predominantly documentary scope. As FIAF’s *A Handbook for Film Archives* (1980) reminds the reader in the book's introduction, written by then director of the Jugoslovenska Kinoteka Vladimir Pogagic, film's value as historical source remains an important reason for preserving films regardless of artistic qualities. As Pogagic writes: "If not all that has been recorded on film is art, still every film is a document. Even the most inferior shows and proves something about its time". In this regard, it is crucial to regard the historiographies discussed in this chapter as existing synchronically today. They occasionally replace each other or intertwine, supporting the priorities and agendas of contemporary film heritage institutions in different contexts and are being recast in the methodological frameworks and digital *dispositifs* which currently emerge in film and media studies.

To elaborate on this conclusion and to lead up to Chapter Two, I would like to point back to the dissertation's first research question to specify which aspects need further elucidation to understand the epistemologies of digital access formats and *dispositifs*. In light of the developments discussed in this chapter, it appears crucial to understand how the availability of sources and composition of digitised collections of film and related material condition specific models of history. To elucidate the implications of the digital turn, it is necessary to understand which sources digitisation has made available to scholars, how the technical procedures of digitisation and restoration of film heritage institutions can shape these sources and how scholars can intervene analytically into them. The following chapter investigates the agendas behind digitisation in film archives in order to understand the priorities and choices that film archives make in providing digital access to archival material. The chapter sets out to characterise the corpus of material which is digitally available in primarily a European context, focusing primarily on film, to understand how it reflects and recasts the models of history discussed in this chapter.

---