

Panoramic Visions of the Archive in EYE's Panorama: A Case Study in Digital Film Historiography

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Abstract

Recent years attest to a significant change in the representational practices of film historiography. As a consequence of digitization, visual display formats occupy a more prominent role in scholarly and museum practices as means for contemplating the historicity of archival film. This development prompts a discussion of how we might appreciate digital formats as “visual secondary sources” which reproduce and recast historical tropes. To address this discussion the article proposes a combination of institutional and medium specific analysis as a framework for analysing this transition’s consequences. The permanent *Panorama* (2012) installation at EYE Film Institute Netherlands – a multiple-screen installation which offers a panoramic vision of film history using video excerpts from EYE’s digital collection – constitutes the article’s core example. The article analyses how the installation’s arrangement as a panorama situates the excerpts within two different film histories. First, the analysis attends to how the installation’s taxonomy suggests a connection to former deputy director Eric de Kuiper’s philosophy of film history and emphasis on cinema’s intermediality. Second, it considers the installation in relation to classic, cinephile conceptions of panoramic vision. Conclusively the article provides some brief remarks on how the analysis’ findings might help us further our discussion of visual display formats as visual secondary sources.

The past decades have witnessed the emergence of an array of digital access and reuse formats for film heritage, in scholarly and museum contexts. In these contexts, formats such as interactive diagrams, video essays, DVDs, maps and museum installations provide new techniques for visualizing, representing and contemplating the historicity of archival material. Since the mid-1990s CD-ROM and DVDs have been developed into advanced, annotated, historical-critical formats for the scholarly study of film history as have online maps.¹ And in more

¹ Film historian Yuri Tsivian’s award-winning CD-ROM *Immaterial Bodies: Cultural Anatomy of Early Russian Films* (1999) or the annotated, historical-critical Hyperkino DVD editions of film

recent years a number of online platforms and museum displays have emerged from a range of European film heritage institutions.

In light of this development, it appears urgent to understand how the disciplinarity and epistemology of film history is negotiated with digital forms of visualization and moving image appropriations. Film scholars are beginning to draw attention to this consequence of digitisation, voicing a need to analyse and theorize in greater depth how social and technical factors condition this shift in representational practice. Film scholar Vinzenz Hediger has for instance highlighted that the role which film historians, archivists and curators play as decision-makers in conceiving access and reuse formats potentially becomes more crucial than ever before in developing new traditions in the digital age.² Katherine Groo conversely argues, drawing on Lev Manovich's new media theory, that digital techniques of moving image appropriation, to a greater degree "foregrounds the contingent and dialogical encounter between historian and artefact."³ In a proposition which echoes literary scholar George P. Landow's hypertext theories from the early 1990s, Groo suggests that the non-linear and open-ended nature of digital representations foster a convergence between post-structural forms of narration and historiography.⁴ This development, according to Groo, deauthorizes film history by inviting alternative interpretations which emphasize film historiography's contingency.

These points reflect that film scholars are beginning to nurture a discussion on the status of digital formats as historical representations in a manner which parallels on-going debates in the discipline of history. As historian David J. Staley has made the case for over a decade, visualizations of archival material in diagrams, videos and museum installations need to be taken seriously as "visual secondary sources" in their own right which fundamentally shape contemporary historical understandings.⁵ In this regard, digital representational practices suggest a radical departure from and end point for established historiography as they instantiate new forms of access to and experiences of film history, which can appear fragmented, open-ended and non-narrative in respect to linear, written prose. As David J. Staley argues, digital visual history as opposed to prose, introduces a new set of distinct representational modes which work differently; for instance by analogy rather than logic, or synthesis rather than analysis by relating events

historians Natascha Drubek and Nikolai Izvolov or the Austrian Filmmuseum's ground-breaking DVD editions of Dziga Vertov films testify to this development.

² Vinzenz Hediger, "Politique des Archives. European Cinema and the Invention of Tradition in the Digital Age," in *Rouge*, no. 12, 2008.

³ Katherine Groo, "Cut, Paste, Glitch and Stutter: Remixing Film History," in *Frames Cinema Journal*, no. 1, 2012, p. 13.

⁴ *Ivi*, p. 3. This view is also one of the key tenets in the hypertext theory of literary scholar George Landow, see George Landow, *Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1991.

⁵ David J. Staley, *Computers, Visualization and History*, M.E. Sharpe, Armonk - London 2003, pp. 59-60.

in dense, “thick depictions” without a linear mode of access.⁶ In this respect, it is pertinent to say, that a significant development is taking place, when it comes to the forms which film historiography begins to take on.

Yet, one may also argue that these points overemphasize digitisation's transformative effect upon historiography from primarily a technician, formalist perspective which neglects the role which institutions continue to play in a digital age. As media scholar and political theorist Régis Debray has stressed on several occasions since the early 1990s, digitisation should theoretically make cultural heritage institutions as physical sites superfluous and privilege general users, but in fact often tend to nurture the opposite effect.⁷ Debray proffers that “the centrifugal dematerialization of data's supporting base increases our need to re-centre ourselves on the basis of symbolic reference points.”⁸ Mindful of this point we should remain attentive to how digital representational practices pertain to the contexts they emanate from and reflect institutional priorities.

In this article I address this discussion through an analysis of a particular exhibition format; EYE Film Institute's Panorama. The Panorama is part of the permanent exhibition area the Basement located in the EYE Film Institute Netherland's recently inaugurated museum building at the river IJ in Amsterdam. Using state-of-the-art digital projection, the format offers an interactive environment, in which video clips from EYE's digitised collection can be projected and explored. Installed in a fully darkened room, the eleven wide-angle beamers which make up the installation form a 360-degree projection to evoke the format of a historical panorama: a cylindrical painting that visitors could behold from a central position, typically depicting significant historical events. To find out what exactly could be the history which the spectator can behold in the Panorama, is the main objective of this article, which also tries to make the case that film scholars need to be more attentive to the institutional environments in which digital formats emerge to understand how established historical tropes are reproduced in digital moving image appropriation practices. To this end I discuss the Panorama in relation to its institutional context to understand how its exhibition design reflects the archival policies and visions of film history of EYE (previously the Nederlands Filmmuseum). In this regard, I draw on historian and anthropologist Michel de Certeau's concept of “historiographical operation”⁹ and its tripartite division of historiography as constituted by 1) a social place of production, 2) a practice conditioned by specific techniques and supports of inscription – whether a role of papyrus, note blocks or computers and 3) a representation – a staged form of writing which eliminates the signs of institutional as well as technical

⁶ *Ivi*, p. 55.

⁷ Régis Debray, *Transmettre*, Odile Jacob, Paris 1997 (Eng. ed. *Transmitting Culture*, Columbia University Press, New York 2000, p. 60).

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ Michel de Certeau, *L'Écriture de l'Histoire*, Gallimard, Paris 1975 (Eng. ed. *The Writing of History*, Columbia University Press, New York-Chichester, 1988, pp. 58, 69, 86).

procedures which led to its appearance. My analysis considers a select number of clips in relation to the installation's arrangement in comparison to previous projects at the Nederlands Filmmuseum and to classic, cinephile film history writing to elicit the format's underlying philosophy of film history. Conclusively, I provide some brief remarks on how my analysis may further our understanding and discussion of the current shift in film history's representational practices.

Space as a Key to Historical Abstraction in a Digital Age

While museum scholar Andrea Witcomb in the following quote summarizes debates on digitisation in museum studies, it can be taken to succinctly encapsulate a recurrent premise of debates surrounding film heritage digitisation:

*For those who interpret it as a threat, the implications are a loss of aura and institutional authority, the loss of the ability to distinguish between the real and the copy, the death of the object, and a reduction of knowledge to information. For those who interpret it as a positive move, such losses are precisely what enable new democratic associations to emerge around museums. For them, the loss of institutional authority equates with the need for curators to become facilitators rather than figures of authority...*¹⁰

On the one hand, a number of film preservationists and historians take digitisation in film archives and its forms of access to undermine the core values of a classic, cinephile mode of museum exhibition. This position holds, that the critical function and autonomy of the curator as well as the material experience of archival film disappears, when digitised collections are made available to general users with a less genuine interest in film. This is a view which has been proposed by film preservationists and curators such as for example Freddy Buache, Raymond Borde and Alexander Horwath. As argued by Horwath, digitisation seems for example more driven by the market's desire to create immaterial, free-flowing "image-banks,"¹¹ or as opined by Borde and Buache, by detached, bureaucratic concerns which embody in database management.¹²

On the other hand, a position has emerged, which perceives digital access

¹⁰ Andrea Witcomb, *The Materiality of Virtual Technologies: A New Approach to Thinking about the Impact of Multimedia in Museums*, in Fiona Cameron, Sarah Kenderdine (eds.), *Theorizing Digital Cultural Heritage. A Critical Discourse*, MIT Press, Cambridge (MA) 2007, p. 35.

¹¹ Alexander Horwath, "The Market vs. the Museum," in *Journal of Film Preservation*, no. 70, 2005, pp. 6, 8.

¹² Raymond Borde, Freddy Buache, *La crise des cinémathèques... et du monde*, L'age d'homme, Lausanne 1997, p. 6. As Buache and Borde write: "Les cinémathèques sont aujourd'hui des cliniques du film. Les techniciens en blouse blanche évaluent, diagnostiquent et restaurent du matériel laissé sur le bord de la route par le cinéma. Une objectivité foudroyante préside à leurs travaux. Ils opèrent sur ordinateur. Ils ne sont ni des chercheurs de trésors, ni des partisans. Ils voient les collections qui se déroulent sur leurs machines, comme les fondés de pouvoir entretiennent et surveillent les actifs d'une banque."

formats as harbingers of a more democratic engagement with archival collections. This view implies that digital access formats emancipate and empower the user as an active co-producer and creator of texts, narratives and meanings. Such a vision is prominently discernible in Lev Manovich's foundational book *The Language of New Media*.¹³ A key tenet in Manovich's new media theory is that hyperlinking in databases and multimedia formats breaks down established narratives and hierarchies, to allow users to create new ones, when navigating through non-linear pathways.¹⁴ In Manovich's view, the database does not represent a constraining bureaucratic logic but conversely holds a liberating potential. With regard to film archives, such a view arguably reflects in media scholar Jamie Baron's argument that the meaning of digitised archival footage is defined predominantly in the viewer's experience and appropriation, rather than in an archive's authoritative definition.¹⁵

While proposing antagonistic ideological responses to digitisation, both positions identify a subversion of institutionalized historical narratives, in the transformation of collections into either immaterial "image-banks" or user-generated multimedia appropriations. In this respect, both positions arguably nod to Walter Benjamin's materialist historiography, articulated in the emblematic phrase that "History decomposes into images, not into narratives," to indicate an inherent contingency of image-based historiography, as a distinguishing feature not only of modern visual culture but also in particular of databases and digital culture.¹⁶ In different ways these positions point to the problem formulated in the introduction, that to understand what constitutes a historiography in digital formats is no longer a matter of analysing history as a language system with attention to causation, for example, as proposed by key theorists of the 1960s and 1970s' "linguist turn" such as Hayden White and Richard Rorty. This rather becomes, one could argue in line with Staley, a matter of analysing how digital techniques and tools of visualization are used to establish analogies between historical events and moments to sustain historical tropes. Faced with digitisation, these positions propose analytical foci for understanding the transformation of film historiography which identify the core agents of this process outside of traditional institutions. Along those lines institutions have only little or no say in shaping this process.

Conversely, as suggested by Hediger, the activities of film archivists, historians and curators might on the other hand give a privileged insight into how film heritage institutions define film history through digital moving image appropriations. This view seems particularly pertinent when considering that digi-

¹³ Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, MIT Press, Cambridge (MA) 2001, p. 76.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ Jaimie Baron, *The Archive Effect. Found Footage and the audiovisual experience of history*, Routledge, Abingdon (Oxon) 2014, pp. 7, 142.

¹⁶ Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, MIT Press, Cambridge (MA) 1991, p. 220.

tal techniques – as in other sectors of society – increasingly permeate everyday life, both in film heritage institutions and academic settings where they become embedded in the agendas of specific archival policies and research programs.¹⁷ From this perspective, it appears necessary to reintroduce a focus on the agency of institutions into the discussion as a way of understanding how the shift in representational practices is molded. In this regard, one could take Certeau's notion of "historiographical operation" to be also encompassing digital practices, as it conceptualizes of tools of visualization as more than mere auxiliary inscription devices, but also as constitutive of historiography in specific knowledge spaces.¹⁸

Consequently, a focus on sites of production and institutional practices may provide a key to understanding how historical tropes are reproduced in digital formats, and might enhance our apprehension of digitisation's transformation of historiography. From this conceptual vantage point, the following sections analyse the permanent Panorama installation at EYE Film Institute Netherland's museum building in Amsterdam as a form of film historiography, by eliciting the conditioning factors which can be found in the institution, such as established archival taxonomies, philosophy of history and previous moving image appropriation practices.

Panorama/Panoramique

EYE Film Institute's Panorama (2012) is part of the permanent exhibition area the Basement located at the recently inaugurated museum building at the river IJ in Amsterdam. The installation is produced and designed in collaboration with local companies Beamsystems and Submarine and draws inspiration from a panoramic exhibition format developed by museum scholar Sarah Kenderdine and multimedia artist Jeffrey Shaw at the City University of Hong Kong's Applied Laboratory for Interactive Visualization and Embodiment (ALIVE).¹⁹ Installed in a fully darkened room, the eleven wide-angle beamers which make up the installation form a 360-degree projection that surrounds the visitor. Four of the installation's eleven beamers cover the room's corners with what reminisces vertically running film strips, while the remaining seven are connected to individual consoles spread out through the room (fig. 1).

¹⁷ Marianne van den Boomen, Sybille Lammes, Ann-Sophie Lehmann, Joost Raessens, Mirko Tobias Schäfer (eds.), *Digital Material: Tracing New Media in Everyday Life and Technology*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam 2011, p. 8.

¹⁸ Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, cit.

¹⁹ Giovanna Fossati, *Found Footage Filmmaking, Film Archiving and New Participatory Platforms*, in Marente Bloemhevel, Giovanna Fossati, Jaap Guldemond (eds.), *Found Footage. Cinema Exposed*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam 2012, pp. 182.

Panoramic Visions of the Archive in EYE's Panorama



Fig. 1 – Wide-lens view of the EYE Panorama's interior. Source: www.eyefilm.nl

Each console enables the projection of sixteen thirty-second film fragments on the screen facing the visitor, in juxtaposition with clips on the adjacent screens controlled by other visitors. To facilitate the visitor's selection of clips, the consoles represent individual themes: *Magic*, *Color*, *the Netherlands*, *Exploration*, *Film Stars*, *Slapstick* and *Battle*. The sources of the clips vary greatly, drawing from European avant-garde and art cinema to Hollywood blockbusters and unidentified bits of travelogues, creating an eclectic encounter of titles and periods for the visitor walking through the installation's consoles. In the *Color* console, an excerpt from Peter Greenaway's *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* (1989) meets the Dutch absolute film *Diepte* (1933) by Frans Dupont. The console themed *Exploration* brings together travelogues and ethnographic films with an excerpt from Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968).

Clearly, EYE's installation evokes the format of a moving, historical panorama; a cylindrical painting that visitors could behold from a central position, typically depicting significant historical events. But at a first encounter with the installation, it does not seem evident which film history the format exactly proposes. EYE provides only a sparse blurb of the installation's set-up, selection of clips and function in the Basement area on the museum's website, which does not appear in the on-site installation. It reads as follows:

*The highlight is the Panorama, a room where visitors will be surrounded on all sides by film fragments, and where they can browse through EYE's collection with the help of seven control panels. There are nearly one hundred regularly changing scenes that can be viewed, and these are grouped around the themes Discovery of the World, Film Stars, Colour, the Netherlands, Slapstick and Battle.*²⁰

²⁰ See <http://www.eyefilm.nl/en/node/992238>, last visit 18 February 2014. Note that the categories used in this description diverges slightly from the categories used in the installation's current set-up.

The absence of the blurb in the on-site installation, invites the visitor to make sense of the images' juxtaposition in the installation, and to draw instead on his or her respective frames of reference, to discern the format's film historical vision. In this respect, the installation's eclectic juxtapositions might initially appear as disjunctive, and be perceived as a particularly a-hierarchical film history which privileges primarily the user's experience of reception, in line with new media theories which align digitality with critical theory. On the other hand, the taxonomy used in the installation and the inclusion of a particular set of clips might suggest, for the museum visitor who is familiar with EYE's previous exhibition formats, that the Panorama proposes a regime of interaction which relies on concepts of film historiography closely associated with the institution's history. It is this latter point which I would like to pick up in relation to the Panorama, based on my own experience of walking through the installation. Because it seems that an attentiveness to the life cycles of some of the clips, their juxtaposition and the format's taxonomy in relation to EYE's vision of film history and prior exhibition practices, might elucidate how the Panorama to some degree pertains to a specific institutional vision of film history and how it develops it.

Departing from this observation, I suggest in the following analysis, that EYE's Panorama appears to be playing with two different, to some degree opposite conceptions of panoramic vision of film history. On the one hand, the appearance of a small number of clips and categories suggests that the Panorama sustains a more revisionist model of film history, related to the institution's philosophy of film history as articulated in the late 1980s by former deputy director Eric de Kuyper. On the other hand, the Panorama's taxonomy also seems to draw on a more classic, cinephile conception of panoramic vision – a *panoramique* – which sustains notions such as national cinemas, stylistic developments and genres as a precondition for film historiography, which proposes a more canonical film history.

The Panorama and Eric de Kuyper's "Aesthetic of Film History"

Walking through the Panorama, the appearance of one particular film excerpt in the console themed *Magic* seems to invite an approximation of this installation to the philosophy of film history articulated at the Nederlands Filmmuseum in the late 1980s; an excerpt from the early trick film *La fée aux pigeons* (Pathé, 1906) by Segundo de Chomón and Gaston Velle in which a fairy transforms handkerchiefs into pigeons. As film historian Juan-Gabriel Tharrats concisely summarizes this Pathé production from 1906 the film is "A magical story, that justifies all kinds of scenery, transformations and apparitions."²¹

The excerpt is recognizable from a different context in which it has been pre-

²¹ Juan Gabriel Tharrats, *Segundo de Chomón – Un pionnier méconnu du cinéma européen*. L'Harmattan, Paris 2009, p. 97.

sented in a play with cinematic categories reminiscing the ones in EYE's Panorama and which opens itself up to the following reflection. This is in the context of Austrian filmmaker Gustav Deutsch's found footage work, *Film Ist. 7-12* (2002) which consists partly of footage from EYE's collection. As EYE's Panorama, the chapters of Deutsch's film is divided into different cinematic categories – 7. *Comic*, 8. *Magic*, 9. *Conquest*, 10. *Writing and Language*, 11. *Emotions and Passions*, 12. *Writing and Document* – to explore different aspects of the film medium through the juxtaposition of film fragments and excerpts. In the eighth chapter entitled Magic, the excerpt from *La fée...* included in the Panorama's Magic console appears. This chapter of Deutsch's film opens with a text simply stating "Film IS Magic," and aims at demonstrating, as Deutsch explains on his website, the development of special effects in early cinema by intercutting fragments from *La fée...*, with other early Magic films of de Chomón, for example *Le Spectre Rouge* from 1907, to create a historical exploration of trick and féerie films, pointing toward later horror films.²²

In EYE's Panorama, as in Deutsch's film, the fragment from *La fée...* is presented in the console themed Magic with a display text stating: "Film IS Magic." The display text echoes Deutsch's description of his Magic chapter. Whereas Deutsch's *Film ist. 7-12* for example only includes early cinema excerpts, the Panorama Magic console groups together excerpts from several Segundo de Chomón and Georges Méliès films with snippets of John Landis' *An American Werewolf in London* (1984) and *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (2001), among others.

In the larger framework of Deutsch's film, *La fée* is juxtaposed with the other chapters' fragments, which centre on different themes and draw on a wider variety of sources. Chapter nine for example, *Conquest*, focuses on colonial film or chapter eleven, *Emotions and Passions*, centres on Italian diva films from the 1910s. Thus, in the overall context of *Film ist 7-12*, Deutsch juxtaposes the excerpt from *La fée...* with excerpts from a colonial film such as *By Aeroplane to Pygmyland* (1926), or with shots of Italian diva Lyda Borelli from Amleto Palermi's *Carnevalesca* (1918) (fig. 2).

²² Gustav Deutsch's description of the Magic chapter reads as follows: "8. Magic. Early masters of film such as Georges Méliès often came from the milieu of showmen and magicians. It was only logical therefore that they would be responsible for inventing all the tricks and reality alienations which only film techniques could produce – stop tricks, time lapse, superimpositions and reverse action in all manner of combinations. Film replaced trapdoors, levers and invisible ropes. It was enough to stop the camera while the lady left the stage. The transformation, when someone or something became something else became the central theme of the majority of magic-films. Later the same tricks were built into normal plots and so became essential elements in early fantasy and horror films." See <http://www.gustavdeutsch.net/index.php/en/films-a-videos/72-film-ist-7-12.html>, last visit 27 February 2014.



Fig. 2 – *La fée aux pigeons* appearing in chapter 8. *Magic* of Gustav Deutsch's *Film Ist. 7-12* (2002).

These juxtapositions seem to have left a residual in the Panorama. Also appearing in the Panorama is the clip from the aforementioned colonial film *By Aeroplane to Pygmyland*. While Deutsch uses this clip in chapter 9 *Conquest*, it appears in the Panorama in the *Exploration* console together with an excerpt from Stanley Kubrick's classic *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). Furthermore, while no diva films are included in the Panorama, it does comprise a section of clips with famous film personalities in the *Film Stars* console.

Film archivist and historian Nico de Klerk who worked on the production of *Film ist. 7-12* has stated that Deutsch's use of sources represents a vision of film history, which in making these juxtapositions is more democratic. As de Klerk writes:

*...home movies rub shoulders with the first Lumière films, a classic of the silent avant-garde blends in with early farce. All these materials find themselves in a democratic mix (...) Deutsch strips the films he re-uses of film history as we know it.*²³

Considering the arrangement of EYE's Panorama, this a-hierarchical vision of film history that levels canonized films and masterpieces with industrial film seems to be echoed in the installation and account for parts of its structuring principle, providing a possible explanation as to why *By Aeroplane to Pygmyland* "rubs shoulders" with *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

²³ Nico de Klerk, *Designing a Home. Orphan film in the work of Gustav Deutsch*, in Wilbirg Brainin-Donnenberg, Michael Loebenstein (eds.), *Gustav Deutsch*, Österreichisches Filmmuseum/ SYNEMA – Gesellschaft für Film und Medien, Wien 2009, pp. 117.

But one can go further back than *Film ist* to argue that such a vision of film history is historically closely tied to EYE as an institution. Beyond the parallel between the Panorama and *Film ist*. 7-12, one sees this vision in the philosophy of film history developed at the Nederlands Filmmuseum in the 1980s and the 1990s. In the early 1990s, then deputy director Eric de Kuyper proposed a meta-historical approach to film history which he dubbed an 'aesthetic of film history, that articulated a set of problems with film history writing as it was then widely practiced. A contention toward mainstream film history in de Kuyper's critique was, that film historians who conducted research in the film archive, seldom accounted for the scarcity and contingency of film history's source material as experienced by film archivists. In the late 1980s, archivists at the Nederlands Filmmuseum felt that film historians coming to the archive were too concerned with establishing linear film histories based on notions of schools and national styles, neglecting that film archives contain anonymous fragments which do not fit into these accounts. The existence of these fragments in de Kuyper's view suggested an impossibility of writing comprehensive, teleological film histories and should instead prompt film historians to acknowledge that film history is synecdochic and can have multiple developmental lines, appearing as a "Swiss Cheese" full of holes, where the holes are just as significant as what is left.²⁴ As de Kuyper suggested:

*The story of film aesthetics could have a very different developmental line than that of other film histories, giving more space to ruptures and discontinuities, the interplay with other aesthetic domains, and more generally accepting the fact that we have to work with "fragments of a history of film" where the holes and losses are even as significant as what is still there!*²⁵

With its suggestion to recognize alternative developmental lines, de Kuyper's essay proposed an acknowledgement of the intermediality between cinema and other visual display formats from before the emergence of cinema. This can be regarded as a point which derives from early cinema studies, and in particular American film historian Charles Musser's "history of screen practices," or to go further back the seminal *Technique et Idéologie* – essays published by film theorist Jean-Louis Comolli in *Cahiers du cinéma* in 1971-1972 and its critique of among other things contemporary periodisations in technological histories of film.²⁶

To promote this understanding of film history and of the film archive, the Nederlands Filmmuseum produced numerous compilation films and TV documentaries using neglected parts of its collection. Films such as Peter Delpout's *Lyrical Nitrate* from 1991, the television documentary *De Tjdmachine: Overpeinzingen bij 100 jaar beeldcultuur* (*The Time Machine: Reflections on 100 Years*

²⁴ Eric de Kuyper, "Anyone for an aesthetic of film history," in *Film History*, no. 6:1, 1994, p. 106.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁶ For the most recent anthologized and update edition of these essays, see Jean-Louis Comolli, *Cinéma contre spectacle*, Verdier, Lagrasse 2009.

of *Image Culture*, 1996), *Diva Dolorosa* from 1999 directed by Delpout and produced by Frank Roumen, the *Bits & Pieces* programs which circulated in festivals, and later found footage films by filmmakers such as Gustav Deutsch.²⁷ These multiple re-workings, foregrounded the fragments and conceived them as malleable objects, of which the meaning could be constructed in numerous ways from multiple entry points in relation to other fragments and well-known films, thereby questioning and challenging the historical status of the latter.²⁸

In the Panorama this philosophy seems to be reflected in the taxonomies, display texts and clips proposed in the consoles. Thus, it seems that the format proposes a regime of interaction within which the visitor can create encounters between clips, which ties up to this philosophy. From this perspective, EYE's use of the panoramic format to display parts of its digitised collection might then encourage visitors to think critically of film history's foundations and developmental lines.

On the other hand, as the next section discusses, holding up this philosophy of film history and the comparison between *Film ist. 7-12* against another substantial part of the Panorama's consoles and clips, also suggests a more canonical film history in this particular format.

The Panorama as Panoramique and Cinephile Film History

In contrast to the "aesthetic of film history" discussed above, a more canonical frame of reference also characterizes the selection of clips in the Panorama and could be said to shape its historical vision. In the installation's first consoles *Netherlands*, *Film Stars* and *Slapstick*, excerpts from a range of canonical titles appear, which by being grouped into these particular categories seem to a lesser degree to "strip film history as we know it" but instead to reinstall it.

As the first console which meets the spectator, the *Netherlands* console for instance explicitly invokes the notion of a Dutch national cinema, by containing excerpts from some of the most canonized Dutch films such as Paul Verhoeven's *Spetters* (1980). This is followed by the console themed *Slapstick* offering among others a visual reference to Chaplin. Arguably, these categories sustain more traditional notions and guiding principles of film historiography such as national cinemas and stylistic schools, representative of the historiography which an 'aesthetic of film history' sought to challenge.

²⁷ Itzia Gabriela Fernandez Escareño, *La Compilation, un outil paradoxal des films muets recyclés par Peter Delpout et coproduits par le Nederlands Filmmuseum (1989-1999)*, PhD dissertation, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris 3, 2009, pp. 19, 440.

²⁸ Furthermore, it is particularly suggestive in relation to the EYE's Panorama, that Deutsch's *Film ist* project, has also been displayed as a panoramic installation on several occasions for example at the 2002 International Filmfestival Rotterdam, which also aligns with a wider tendency in found footage filmmaking. See Christa Blümlinger, *Kino aus zweiter Hand: Zur Ästhetik materieller Aneignung im Film und in der Medienkunst*, Vorwerk 8, Berlin 2009 (Fr. ed. *Cinéma de seconde main. Esthétique du remploi dans l'art du film et des nouveaux médias*, Klincksieck, Paris 2013, pp. 286-287).

With their appearance in the Panorama, these categories and clips could be said to inflect a historical vision upon the installation, which pertains to a more classic cinephile film history and its conceptualization of panoramic vision as a structuring principle for discerning masterpieces. Looking beyond the Panorama, and the history of panoramas as a visual display format culminating in the nineteenth century, it seems pertinent to recall that the panoramic also carries a particular meaning in cinephilia and in film historiography as a mode of perception and vision which lays the foundation for a film history of masterpieces.

With regard to classic cinephilia from the 1920s and the 1950s-1960s, the panoramic can for example refer both to ritualized viewing habits and to the panorama of masterpieces which early film histories would promote through their discernment and comparison of particularly beautiful cinematic moments. As a ritualized viewing habit, panoramic vision refers to idiosyncratic, spectatorial postures which enhance the identification of such moments, to create the fundament for a masterpiece model of film history. Filmmaker and key figure of the French Nouvelle Vague Jean Douchet, has described for example his own spectatorial habit of choosing a specific position in the cinema, in order to privilege a "sweeping vision" of the cinema screen, which may increase his possibilities of identifying remarkable, hidden cinematic moments and details of beauty in the frame.²⁹

Such ritualized, subjective spectatorial habits, have sustained the writing of film histories since the early cinephiles in the 1920s – Louis Delluc, Marcel L'Herbier and Germaine Dulac – promoted the concept of *photogénie* as a way of discerning moments of cinematic beauty based on their subjective viewing experiences. While these habits are arguably less common today, this vision provided a basis for some early film historians to create canons and to write internationalist, general film histories, which were attentive to different national schools and styles, and which linked filmic moments kaleidoscopically across time and space as a *panoramique* of film art's development.³⁰

This model of history is discernible particularly in French film historiography which emerged out of "first wave" cinephilia in the 1920s. The 1920s writings of French film theorist, historian and ciné-club activist Léon Moussinac can be regarded emblematic in this respect. Establishing a historical understanding of cinema as an art form by using *photogénie* as its theoretical conception, Moussinac's *Naissance du cinéma*³¹ was central in creating a frame of reference films, drawing examples from the repertory of contemporary film distribution in Paris. This reference frame would later, as we now know, become institutionalized in cinémathèques and film libraries when the film preservation movement gained

²⁹ Christian Keathley, *Cinephilia and History, or the Wind in the Trees*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 2006, p. 45.

³⁰ Bernard Eisenschitz, *Die Utopie einer Weltfilmgeschichte. Französische Ansätze der Filmhistoriografie*, in Hans-Michael Bock, Wolfgang Jacobsen (eds.), *Recherche: Film – Quellen und Methoden der Filmforschung*, text + kritik, München 1997, p. 120.

³¹ Léon Moussinac, *Naissance du cinéma*, J. Povolozky, Paris 1925.

momentum in the 1930s. The title of Moussinac's later *Panoramique du cinéma* (*Au sans pareil*, 1929), is directly suggestive of a panoramic model of vision, which compares key moments particularly from a set of North-American and European films as absolute cinematic masterpieces.³² While these early histories were linear and overtly teleological, in their pursuit to promote the recognition of cinema as an art form, they established an internationalist referential system – a panorama – of films to sustain their conception of film history as an art form.

The choices in the Panorama can be said to evoke these highlights and stages of development in film by revolving around concepts such as distinct national styles in an internationalist perspective, the development of cinematic acting – slapstick for example and the development of film as an art form, as demonstrated through the appearance of Frans Dupont's *Diepte* among other titles. In this regard, while a part of the Panorama seems to suggest an 'aesthetic of film history' another part seemingly invokes a classic, canonical, cinephile film history, corporealised in its immersive, panoramic set-up using a "thick description," to use Staley's words, to invoke the cinephiles' comparisons of moments and eclectic encounters of films across time and geographical origin.

In this respect, the format arguably displays both a classic, "amateur" paradigm of film history pointing back to the heydays of first wave cinephilia historiography, while at the same time including perspectives from a later more academically informed film historiography and its emphasis on intermediality and the contingency of historiography.³³ If compared to de Kuyper's "aesthetic" it appears then that the particular format of the Panorama suggests a move towards a more easily recognizable frame of reference and canonical film history, in its use of the set-up's "thick depiction," thus leaning towards a traditional film history.

Conclusion

In this article I have addressed the emerging debate on film history's shifting representational practices in a digital age, departing from the propositions put forward by respectively Vinzenz Hediger and Katherine Groo. Subsequently addressing the antagonistic responses to digitisation's consequences for film archives and heritage institutions, I have made the case that processes of social appropriation and institutionalized historiography continue to play a crucial role in reproducing historical tropes in digital access and reuse formats. In doing so, I have borrowed Michel de Certeau's concept of "historiographical operation" which has enabled me to analyse

³² Also Georges Charensol, *Panorama du cinéma*, Kra, Paris 1930 can be seen as a suggestive example of early film historiography in this respect.

³³ Philippe Gauthier, "L'histoire amateur et l'histoire universitaire: paradigmes de l'histoire du cinéma," in *Cinémas: revue d'études cinématographiques / Cinémas: Journal of Film Studies*, vol. 21, no. 2-3, 2011, p. 88.

the case of EYE's Panorama in relation to the specific, institutional context within which it emerged.

In my analysis of the Panorama, based on the comparisons with Gustav Deutsch's *Film ist. 7-12* and Eric de Kuyper's "aesthetic of film history" it appeared that the installation contains residuals of *Film ist's* taxonomic juxtapositions. This observation led me to the conclusion that as a panoramic display format, the Panorama partly underlines cinema's different beginning points and developmental lines, potentially inviting the beholder to think of cinema's possible, multiple origins. At the same time, the installation, by introducing and relying on more traditional categories seems to approximate this philosophy to a canonical film history's notions of national cinemas, acting styles and film art. As I have argued, the use of a 'thick depiction' in the panoramic format can be seen in this regard as vital in embodying a classic type of cinephile, panoramic vision. This provided an example of how a traditional film history can be conveyed by effectively using the specific representational forms of digital display formats.

In making these points, my discussion of EYE's Panorama showed, how an attentiveness to institutional processes of technological appropriation may yield an understanding of the ways in which institutions make sense of digitised collections and create historical understandings through analogies and taxonomies drawn from established historical paradigms. Analysing the Panorama from this vantage point, it is possible to counter the strong notions that digital formats either subvert traditional forms of historiography or create entirely new ones. Through this intervention I have downplayed the materialist, formalist implications of digital formats as a radical departure from existing historical tropes and sought to balance it with institutional analysis. I have argued that it is necessary to take such an approach in this transitional moment, to provide an analytical avenue which may fruitfully reorient and further the critical discussion of film historiography's digital representational practices. As a concluding remark, I am in this respect sympathetic to Régis Debray's point that in order to understand technological change it is necessary to acknowledge the *longue durée* of ideas and mentalities as a long history which circumscribes that of the rapid development and evolution of techniques.³⁴ I believe that in order to apprehend the current digital transition we should – as Debray suggests – first take a diachronic look at how "founding ideas [were] themselves founded" to then take a synchronic look at how ideas are transmitted through the material organisation of contemporary technical systems.³⁵ To apply this perspective, I would argue, could lead us to deeper insights on how digital media specificities are negotiated and used to recast film historiographies. Furthermore, it could pave the way for a more historically informed discussion of how digital formats rearticulate or (re-)invent new traditions through digital, material practices.

³⁴ Régis Debray, *Cours de médiologie générale*, Gallimard, Paris 1991, pp. 51.

³⁵ Régis Debray, *Transmitting Culture*, cit., p. 99.