Film Museum Practice and Film Historiography

Lameris, Bregt

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The change in archival priorities more or less paralleled developments in film historiography, causing film museums to re-evaluate what they considered to be, in Bourdieu’s words, re-evaluating their ‘specific capital’. This consisted of old film titles that were at risk of perishing or already listed as ‘lost films’. The focus on endangered and lost films was clearly in tune with the new ideas that had started to dominate film historiography: the aim appeared to be to acquire as many unknown films as possible and rehabilitate them by including them in the museums’ programming and in the new film historiography. These shifts in priority, however, introduced a number of new problems. The first was practical: from the 1970s, institutes gradually ceased to project nitrate material; instead, they began showing newly made acetate duplicates, giving these acetate prints a new status – namely, that of a presentational museum artefact. However, because there was not enough money to duplicate the entire stock of nitrate prints, the institutes had to make choices and thus consciously think about their selection criteria. In the case of the Dutch institute, this led to a new collection policy in 1989, the essence of which was recorded in the so-called Conserveringsplan 1989-1992 (Preservation Plan 1989-1992). The plan, which was quite revolutionary, was the first statement of the new director Hoos Blotkamp and her deputy director Eric De Kuyper, whom she appointed in the same year.

The Conserveringsplan records the Filmmuseum’s resolution to view all the nitrate films in its possession in order to decide whether or not they were eligible for duplication. Since the production of nitrate stopped in the 1950s, this automatically meant the older films in the archive were given priority. An argument for starting with the early nitrate films was that the oldest films were in the worst condition, and needed to be saved first; however, the mechanisms referred to in the last chapter also seem to have played a role.
in the selection process: the older and scarcer the material, the more it was valued.

The institute’s new policy led to a phase that was characterised by a re-classification of its archive. First of all, the entire collection of duplicates became the ‘museum collection’. In this way, the films to be preserved were distinguished from those that were not, because the Filmmuseum assumed that the footage of those nitrate films not selected for preservation would disappear within ten years or so. As a consequence, the choice for or against duplication held much greater significance than during the preceding period. However, this did not mean that the Filmmuseum, nor other film institutes for that matter, literally divested themselves of all their nitrate material; most of these rejected nitrate films remained in the archives. Put bluntly, the institutes created huge internal garbage bins. Since this part of the archive was excluded from the museum collection, I will call it the ‘non-collection’. The remaining part of the archive consisted of the museum collection (already duplicated films) and potential candidates for the museum collection (films that had not yet been viewed and assessed).
AESTHETIC VALUE

In 1989, the Filmmuseum indicated in its new collection policy that it wanted to make clear that ‘film culture and film history is more than just the sum of the highlights on which everyone agrees’. As a result, the collection was intended as the main reservoir for the institute's programming, which also included the screening of previously unknown films. Nevertheless, this did not mean that the Filmmuseum acquired and preserved every film ever made in an indiscriminate fashion: there was still a selection process, based on the viewing experience of a number of Filmmuseum staff. In this way, the institute aimed to compose a museum collection with a ‘distinct identity’, formed by ‘the choices of those who [are] responsible for the content of the collection’. This meant that the only possible reason for the institute to select certain unknown films was the confidence it invested in the visual discrimination of its employees, despite the fact that there were as yet no official parameters by which to assess their discriminatory powers. The Filmmuseum therefore decided to define new selection criteria, declaring that the aesthetic value of a film should be paramount. Unknown foreign film material qualified for the collection if it stood out as ‘the particular, the [...] surprising and intriguing or simply the beautiful’. The advantage was that the Filmmuseum selected unknown films because of the way they moved or fascinated its employees.

It is noteworthy, however, that even though these criteria appear rather arbitrary, they did seem to function. This was probably due to the fact that they were at one with the broader cultural tradition of museum presentation, which Stephen Greenblatt describes as the attempt to capture and project a sense of ‘wonder’. He defines this concept in his 1991 article ‘Resonance and Wonder’:

By wonder I mean the power of the displayed object to stop the viewer in his or her tracks, to convey an arresting sense of uniqueness, to evoke an exalted attention. (Greenblatt, 1991: 42)

‘Wonder’ here indicates the possession of a force that draws the attention of the viewer to an object in such a way that he/she will think of nothing else: as you look at the object, it pulls you in, as if into a bubble, and all contextual images that could provoke additional thoughts become meaningless to your evaluation of it (Greenblatt, 1991: 49).

The most extreme example of the films the Filmmuseum selected for its museum collection in this way were the unidentified fragments it presented as ‘Bits & Pieces’ during the late 1980s and early 1990s. The institute detected some gems among the objects in the archive that were ultimately destined for
the waste bin – the unidentified film fragments – that it thought needed to be preserved and shown. For this reason, it stressed the need not to skip a single film image in the archive. In fact, this meant the Filmmuseum was implicitly criticising its former way of treating films, implying that, by following the canon, the institute had deprived audiences and film historiography of these beautiful images for years. The new policy was synchronous with the upsurge in revisionist thought in film historical discourse, which similarly emphasised the importance of previously unknown films. The origin of the images in the Bits & Pieces collection was indeed unknown in almost every case: the fragments bore no recognisable references to filmmakers or artistic movements. Their appreciation derived accordingly from no other source than the formal and aesthetic qualities of the image – those who looked with attention would recognise the power of these fragments, which, the Filmmuseum (1991: 64) claimed, possessed intrinsic value.

According to writer, filmmaker, and former deputy director of the Filmmuseum, Peter Delpeut, these fragments emerged as a result of the ravages of time. Various forms of destruction and the loss of film material caused many films to only survive in fragments. In his 1990 article, ‘Bits & Pieces – De grenzen van het filmarchief’, Delpeut writes that it became clear that many hitherto undiscovered treasures lay hidden among all these unidentified film fragments. Soon, the surprises were the rule rather than the exception (Delpeut, 1990: 78). It is worth noting that these fragments were, indeed, often of exceptional beauty, even though they were supposed to have emerged as a result of coincidence. However, my research into the creation of the Filmmuseum archive has made clear that a large amount of these fragments did not occur accidentally, because they often arrived as parts of larger personal collections. Compilations of loose newsreel items, documentaries, or feature films edited by exhibitors, collectors, or distributors were an additional source of images. The Filmmuseum removed the fragments from these existing compilations in order to add them to its new Bits & Pieces collection. As mentioned earlier, collectors, distributors, and exhibitors all had their own reasons for collecting films and film clips, and no doubt these images also astonished, surprised, or perhaps touched them. Because the Bits & Pieces compilation partly derived from these pre-selected sets of fragments, the choices and motivations of these personal collectors continued to resonate throughout the new series.

The Filmmuseum (1991: 64) has explained why, after 70 years, a large number of these fragments still makes such an impression: it believes that what it calls the ‘power of the images’, or their inherent beauty, transcends space and time. This means that these images evoke wonder, and, according to Greenblatt (1991: 52), an object that is wondrous possesses intrinsic and lasting
value. However, others state that this apparently lasting aesthetic effect is not necessarily intrinsic to the images but is due to the survival of certain categories and conceptions of beauty. For example, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998: 25), professor of performance studies at New York University’s Tisch School of Arts, writes: ‘The ability to stand alone [says] less about the nature of the object than about our categories and attitudes.’ The (re-)evaluation of these fragments, years after they were put in a can by a collector, tells us more about our aesthetic concepts and categories than about the ‘inherent aesthetic strength’ of the footage, leading to the conclusion that beliefs about the aesthetics of the filmic image remained quite similar over a period of 70 years. This is very probable, especially in the Netherlands, if we take into account the fact that a modernist conception of cinema, as formulated by the Filmliga in the 1920s, certainly remained active well into the 1980s (Schoots, 1999: 202–214). Nevertheless, without this new policy, which included unknown films in the selection process, the beauty of these fragments could easily have been overlooked. During the period of classical film history, the museums were almost exclusively interested in canonical films made by established filmmakers; in this new period, existing film historical frameworks were renounced and an opportunity was created to declare other films masterpieces too.

Besides the criterion of ‘beauty’, the Filmmuseum also selected fragments that it considered ‘surprising’ or ‘intriguing’, categories that also fit with the tradition of wonder. Greenblatt explains that the ‘wonder cabinets’ of the early modern period were the starting point of the presentation mode, ‘in-wonder’. This exhibition tradition allowed visitors to behold objects that explorers had brought back from distant lands. It was not only the beauty of the objects that evoked wonder, but also, and perhaps especially, the knowledge that they had never before been seen in the West (Greenblatt, 1991: 50). In this sense, the term perfectly describes the sweep of discoveries that were housed in film archival institutes and documented by film historians at the time. If the Filmmuseum staff had not dug up these unknown film snippets or developed the Bits & Pieces collection, such ‘visual treasures’ would probably have remained invisible. By putting these unknown and unidentified fragments on display as museum artefacts, the institute stilled the hunger for new historical film material, and, by comparing their ‘discovery’ with an expeditionary venture full of astonishing surprises, it implicitly linked its Bits & Pieces collection to the tradition of wonder cabinets (Filmmuseum, 1991: 64). In the same way as these evoked the experience of travel to ‘exotic’ parts of the world, still little-known to the West, the Bits & Pieces collection reflected the Filmmuseum’s explorations in the archive, with the difference being that the film fragments represented treasures from a distant past, while the early modern objects of curiosity came from afar.
FROM WONDER TO RESONANCE

The Filmmuseum not only selected unknown film material for its collection according to whether it possessed this element of wonder, but it also emphasised that these miraculous films should be recognised as such by the film historical discourse. However, without any clarity as to how to rewrite film history, it was of course difficult to decide on what constitutes historical interest. The Filmmuseum accordingly formulated a set of historical questions based on its archive. This desire to ask new questions was in line with new film history, and it resulted in the Filmmuseum’s decision to make “‘exemplary” choices from film history, enabling further discussion of types, genres, techniques, et cetera’. The selected films were to function as examples of new perspectives on specific aspects of film history. Nevertheless, these new historical questions mostly emerged after the films had already been selected for the museum collection based on their power to evoke a sense of wonder. The musealisation of early colour films is a good example of this. These tinted, toned, or coloured films had received little or no attention in classical film history; when film historians discussed these films, they often did so with a degree of disdain or even contempt. For example, in 1936, Adrianus van Domburg wrote the following about the colour films produced by Georges Méliès:

They were more or less ridiculous things that could be construed as exemplary samples of patient labour. Méliès did not pretend to use colour as an aesthetic factor but, rather, as an extra curiosity in this so curious complex of film. (Domburg van, 1936: 59)

Besides, the impossibility of preserving and screening the Desmet Collection, which contained a large part of these early colour films, also meant that they remained largely invisible.

As soon as the Filmmuseum staff started to watch the unknown films in its archive, however, they were riveted by the films’ beauty. This was a pleasant surprise for the Filmmuseum, and it began to select these films for its museum collection on a frequent basis. During his presentation, ‘Colour in the 1920s’, at the The Colour Fantastic conference, organised by EYE in 2015, Peter Delpeut testified to the fact that the invisibility of these early colours had so angered him at the time that it further fuelled his desire to select them for preservation and presentation. Due to the large proportion of colour films that subsequently became part of its collection, questions about the history of the films forced themselves onto the Filmmuseum. Its decision to preserve and then screen masses of these colour films brought the museum’s early techniques into the spotlight in the 1980s and 1990s, and impelled film his-
torians to start investigating them. In this way, film museum practice introduced these films into film historical discourse as serious objects of research, supplanting the previous conception of them as examples of faintly ridiculous, failed attempts at using colour techniques in the early days of cinema.

Another example is early documentary film. Classical film history held that documentary film only emerged in the 1920s with Nanook of the North (Flaherty, 1922). Film historians and critics defined all previous such films as simple attempts to record reality, lacking the sort of creative intervention that turns a documentary film into art. The discovery that much special, surprising, intriguing, and often gorgeous documentary film material was made before Flaherty again came as a surprise, and stimulated the Filmmuseum staff to preserve large amounts of this material and to add it to the museum collection. Initially, these films were also selected because of their ‘wonder’ effect. However, the way such films contradicted the classical historical discourse also raised further film historical questions.

Accordingly, the Filmmuseum initiated a number of activities and research projects based on these films, helping bring them to the attention of film historians. The best-known initiative was the so-called Amsterdam Workshop, which the institute first organised in 1994 (as mentioned in Chapter 1), with the first two workshops including early documentaries and colour films in their programmes. The Filmmuseum then published a series of books containing transcripts of the discussions (Hertogs and Klerk de, 1994 and 1996). As the experience was so positive, the institute decided to continue organising regular workshops.

The Amsterdam Workshop will be fed by the, often very practical, questions and problems that arise in the preservation and programming activities of the Filmmuseum. These concerns [...] make the Workshop an ideal refuge for ‘impossible’ research topics and topics that film history has not yet begun, or is only just beginning, to tackle. (Hertogs and Klerk de, 1994: 6)

The Filmmuseum used the workshops to show these ‘foreign objects’ from the archive to an audience of specialists, who were then able to discuss the historical importance of the material. In this way, it successfully stimulated historical research into films that had initially been ignored. The results of this research provided the institute with important knowledge about the films’ cultural context, which ensured that the films it had selected because of their ‘wonder’ effect were also provided with historical meaning or ‘resonance’. The latter term also derives from Greenblatt, who defines it as follows:
By resonance I mean the power of the displayed object to reach out beyond its formal boundaries to a larger world, to evoke in the viewer the complex, dynamic cultural forces from which it has emerged and for which it may be taken by a viewer to stand. (Greenblatt, 1991: 42)

As a result of the workshops, many archival films were transformed from meaningless pieces of nitrate into objects of historical importance. Whereas the film historical field seemed to have been leading the pas de deux up to this point, the Filmmuseum now took over and made the film historians turn some quite demanding mental pirouettes.

Another way in which the Filmmuseum encouraged film historians to investigate the films in the collection was by making them easily accessible. In 1991, it began to transfer these films to video, and to provide access to this video (and later DVD) collection at its library, encouraging film historians to use them as an historical resource. In addition, it described and catalogued the museum collection more accurately than the films from the non-collection, making them easier to find. All this affected the research corpus of film historians and, as a result, the Filmmuseum initiated the development of a new film historical canon. However, because it selected the unknown foreign films first and foremost for their aesthetic value before looking for possible historical significance (resonance), revisionist film history based on this collection investigated those films that the institute considered beautiful. The aesthetically less-esteemed films were not preserved and consequently did not become new sources of historical understanding.

The tendency to work with films deemed beautiful, and only then move on to films of historical significance, is something Greenblatt (1991: 54) notes when he says it is always easier to shift from wonder to resonance than vice versa. The fact is, objects that do not evoke a sense of wonder in some way hold little value for an institution like the Filmmuseum, which places itself in the category of art museums: if art museums do not prefer beauty to historical relevance, they simply become archival institutes, as its director Blotkamp made clear in 1998 (Blotkamp, 1998).

**CANONICAL SELECTION**

In 1989, the Filmmuseum decided that it wanted to show more than just the highlights of films that were known to everyone, but it also felt that its old repertoire, or the (classical and new) canon, still had to be present in the collection. This enduring interest in already-known films was analogous to developments in the film historical debate. Despite new film history, the canon
remained sacrosanct and the directors of these films maintained their status as artists (Lagny, 1992: 139-144). By choosing to maintain the classical repertoire in the collection, the Filmmuseum also continued, in part, its earlier collection policy. This is consistent with the idea that, in the case of a so-called ‘paradigm shift’, old traditions and ideas will continue to exist alongside new ones for a long period of time, a phenomenon that philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn discussed in his seminal work, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962). In Kuhn’s (1962: 149) opinion, the sciences move from paradigm to paradigm, and new scientific paradigms are always strongly linked to preceding ones. Bourdieu takes this further, stating that a ‘revolutionary’ scientist should always take cognisance of the preceding scientific discourse:

A true revolutionary in the scientific field is someone who knows the tradition very well (and not someone who makes [a] tabula rasa [of] the past, or who simply ignores the past). (Bourdieu, 2001: 38)

Bourdieu concurs with Kuhn in concluding that it is impossible to overthrow or ‘correct’ a tradition without proper knowledge of what it is one wants to overthrow. By extension, a scientific revolution never takes place from one day to the next (Kuhn 1962: 150-151); such a fundamental change always requires time, and as long as the new paradigm is not yet fully crystallised, the previous one will continue to re-emerge. Foucault also writes about this phenomenon, stating that, as soon as a new discourse is introduced, the rules of the old discourse ‘go underground’. Developing Foucault’s insight, Gilles Deleuze remarks that a new discourse never appears in one bound, but is a process that occurs in stages, and, therefore, elements of the old discourse will live on within the new one – although they will probably function in new ways, if only because they operate under new discursive rules (Lambrechts, 1982: 32).

In the same way as a new scientific paradigm, film museum practice can also only define the ‘other’ on the basis of what is ‘normal’. By selecting the old canon for the museum collection, the Filmmuseum preserved what it perceived as ‘normal’. As a consequence, it could not be separated from the new selection of films; instead, the films from the old repertoire received a new position in relation to the rest of the collection, and they simultaneously positioned and contextualised the previously unknown films. This meant that, in the period after 1989, the function of the canonical films was considerably different from that of the previous period: these films, which used to represent the symbolic capital of the institute, now became the historical context for its new source of cultural capital, the newly ‘discovered’ films. In accordance with Deleuze’s theory, because they were now set within new discursive rules, these films changed in value and meaning.105
The Uitkijk Collection is a prime example of a series of canonical films that the Filmmuseum has explored and presented within several different contextual frames. After its changes in policy, the Filmmuseum spent a long time searching for a new approach to this collection of art films. This eventually led to the creation of a large preservation and research project in 1999, resulting in a book and an extensive film programme on the history of the Nederlandsche Filmliga. What is remarkable about this case is that, whereas the Filmmuseum originally used these films to illustrate the development of film art, it now approached them from another angle, using them as historical sources for a literary and filmic history of the Filmliga. In this way, as well as promoting innovative film historical research into previously unknown films from its collection, the institute presented its already well-known films in a new perspective.

However, the Filmmuseum also had a more institutional reason for the integral preservation of the Uitkijk Collection. As Robert Muis (1999: 1) says, the institute considered it to be ‘one of the pillars supporting the entire collection of the [...] Filmmuseum. As a part of the history of the institute this collection should be cherished.’ This argument corresponded to a broader movement taking place in the museum world: museums were increasingly engaging with their own histories, beginning to investigate themes such as the history of acquisition and the uses of collections.106 Following an increase in flexibility in the handling and presentation of collected objects, and the promotion of their significance, museums started to use their collections to present their own histories. Anke te Heesen and E.C. Spary (2001: 8) comment that, within such exhibitions, ‘not only [were] larger thematic structures [...] discussed, but also the (re)discovery of older collections and museums [on] the margins’.107 The decision to preserve the Uitkijk Collection as an integral whole and to investigate its history followed this trend. The Filmmuseum accordingly drew parallels between the Filmliga’s programming strategies and its own,108 particularly as it also distributed contemporary experimental and other artistic films in a similar fashion to the Filmliga. According to this perspective, the Filmmuseum functioned as a distributor within the champ de production restreinte, a role emphasised by its presentation of the Uitkijk Collection as the historical connection between the Filmmuseum and the Filmliga.

In addition to preserving the existing canon, film museums also maintained the auteur as a valuable category. As mentioned earlier, the idea of the artist as genius was prevalent in classical film historical discourse, and art films were almost always associated with such an auteur. However, the valuation of artworks based on the identity of the maker is a pattern that reaches much further back than the period of classical film history. Since the begin-
ning of the modern era – that is, the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries – Western culture has considered the artist as the singular creator without whom a work of art cannot possibly come into being (Vattimo, 1998: 17-18). This legacy became so well-established that the artist/auteur figure has continued to re-emerge, even though this concept has been declared dead several times. Even at a time when classical film history was no longer dominant, the strongly established premise that an artwork emerges out of the genius of its creator remained remarkably stable. Foucault (1979: 19) contests that an artist is more than a person who has happened to make a work of art; rather, an artist is an entity that groups a series of works together and, as such, differentiates them from other works. This is probably the most interesting function of the artist, especially with regard to the fact that certain auteurs or artists bestow these works with a high artistic value.

Nonetheless, a change can be observed in the way that these artists were addressed. Whereas classical film historians usually foregrounded a couple of masterpieces, which they ascribed to an auteur, the interest of film historians and film archives shifted in the 1970s towards the lesser-known films of these ‘masters’. In this way, they killed two birds with one stone: they satisfied the wishes of the audience to see films made by famous filmmakers, and, at the same time, managed to assuage the film historians’ appetite for new discoveries. The works grouped under the name of an auteur – viewed as a ‘grouping entity’ – define said auteur; once this group shifts, the meaning of the auteur’s name also changes (Foucault, 1979: 18). This is also the case for the groups of auteur films in film museums and archives. Whereas a film museum might previously have held a more or less complete oeuvre but considered only two or three of these films as ‘masterpieces’; according to the new paradigm, all the films made by one auteur were of equal importance. As a result, the series suddenly proved far from complete, reinforcing the idea that the archive itself was incomplete.

Aside from unknown films by well-known auteurs, film museums also introduced ‘new’ auteurs of unknown early films. Yeyseny Bauer and Alfred Machin are two fine examples. Film museums rediscovered and preserved the films of these directors as they started to investigate their oeuvres (Kuyper De, 1993; 1995). To justify why these unknown films were selected for preservation, the film museums turned to the well-known parameter of the ‘auteur’. As a result, these filmmakers were given the status of artists and elevated to the canon, together with the films they made.

Despite all the new features attributed to these films, film historians and museums also continued to consider those films already declared canonical by the classical film historical discourse as works of art. This is consistent with the hypothesis that even though the historical discourse changed drastically,
classical ideas about film aesthetics and film art remained partially intact. This implies that, in addition to their new role of contextualising newly discovered treasures from the archives, these canonical films kept their status as part of the cultural capital of film museums, in line with the ethos of other institutions such as art museums, where the canon also stands to this day. By continuing to champion the canon, the Filmmuseum adapted itself to its broader cultural field.

**ECLECTIC CONSEQUENCES**

The collection that contains the preservation and restoration prints in the Filmmuseum’s archives is characterised by its diversity. This diversity came about, first of all, because of shifts in selection priorities that occurred over the course of the period under review. The changes in criteria reveal interesting parallels with shifts that took place in the film historical debate. On the one hand, the previous emphasis on canonical titles was transformed into an interest in the lesser-known films re-discovered in the archive; on the other hand, after 1989, the Filmmuseum’s selection policy was characterised by an emphasis on the preservation of as much material as possible. This inclusive attitude was also the basis for the diversity of the final film museum collection. Its eclecticism was analogous to the new ideas emerging in the film historical debate, which turned to focus on all these previously unknown films as they became increasingly available.

The films that were excluded from the museum collection due to financial limitations were still kept in the archive – the unpreserved nitrate records were kept in the form of a ‘non-collection’. Because the Filmmuseum decided not to throw these nitrate prints away, this group of films remained as a tangible entity. This policy has four distinct advantages. First of all, it is always possible to reconsider an earlier decision: as long as the nitrate still exists, it can be duplicated.\(^\text{10}\) If, in ten years’ time, the Filmmuseum should develop a very different perspective on this material, it will always be possible to change its policy and still preserve the films that were relegated to the non-collection during an earlier period.\(^\text{11}\) This consideration of future alternative perspectives is, again, analogous to the idea that arose within new film history.\(^\text{12}\) Secondly, the non-collection remains accessible, provided the researcher meets certain requirements. Thirdly, due to the new digital technologies, the Filmmuseum has the potential to provide access to the films in the non-collection.\(^\text{13}\) Finally, the material in the non-collection discloses which films the institute did not consider valuable enough to become part of the museum collection during this period. As a matter of fact, the history of the Filmmuseum archive, and
the personal collections it contains, can be traced in the museum collection in several ways. For example, the films that were part of Desmet’s personal collection are still considered as a whole; they remain as a sub-collection that continues to bear his name. The preference for canonical works is also still visible in the museum collection, since the Uitkijk Collection has been attributed a similar status as the Desmet Collection. The history of both the private collectors and the Filmmuseum’s acquisition policy thus remains visible in the way its archive, museum collection, and sub-collections are structured.

Acquisition and collection histories are never solely the product of chance and coincidence. In the case of the Filmmuseum, for example, all the situations described above are effective cases of ‘con-signing’. Silent films mostly came to the institute via personal collectors who, through their activities, had already structured and labelled the collected objects. In addition, the blind adoption of individual films was often based on existing categories (title, director, date). All these cases demonstrate how the existence of structuring, labelling, classifying, and other such operations produced certain kinds of meaning. Furthermore, the follow-up activities of a collecting institution such as the Filmmuseum also re-structured the collected objects in many different ways: by defining them as new (sub-)collections, for example, it awarded these silent films a new position within the archive’s greater whole, and they were given a new function and different meaning.

Interestingly, these structures – which are constantly subject to change – are essential to the continuous activities of a film museum or institution. By making choices, re-structuring, and reassembling, the practice of ‘con-signing’ continues to re-appear at the levels of restoration and presentation. Even more interesting is the fact that this process of transformation not only affects museum activities, but also the writing of film history. In fact, the historical work exhibits strong parallels with the work taking place in the archives: it also consists of mapping, structuring, and re-combining sources, and it is indisputable that these sources have been granted new functions and meanings. For this reason, the pas de deux between film museums and film historiography was and is an inevitable, perpetual dance in which the new steps and insights of one partner have obvious effects on the steps of the other.