‘The current discourse of film restorers is a model for history making because it makes transparent the ways that a history is spliced together’ (Jones, 2012: 138). This comment clearly summarises the focus of this chapter: the reconstruction of films and the consolidation of a film museum editing structure, literally ‘splicing’ the fragments of film history together. As with the activities of acquisition and collection, reconstruction is a matter of selection: the curator chooses which film clips will end up in the final restoration print. As a result, the reconstruction is generally aimed at ‘completing’ a film, making it into something that equates to what Meyer and Read (2000: 69) call the ‘original’.

This process, however, raises a number of problematic issues. The first major problem that occurs is that films were often distributed and displayed in multiple versions, which means that various editions of the same film, each displaying a different editing structure, could – with equal validity – be considered the ‘original’. Hence, it is important to ask which version was used as the starting material for a particular restoration, and how this influenced its reconstruction. A second problem is the aforementioned imaginary status of ‘original’ versions, which implies that reconstruction is always a creative process, determined by the prevailing ideas and opinions on film history and aesthetic value. Finally, the possibilities and limitations of the reconstruction methods and techniques available at the time also had an impact on the final result.

For these reasons, every reconstruction print is, in fact, a new version of the film, coloured by the attitudes of the time in which it was made. But the starting point of the process is also a crucial factor – that is, which of all the possible versions of the film was used as the starting material for the reconstruction? Ultimately, the question remains as to what extent different reconstructions reflect the historical taste of a given time and period.
THE DIRECTOR’S VERSION

The first version of a film is the so-called ‘director’s version’ and is generally one of the possible candidates for reconstruction. This is the version of the film as the filmmaker (presumably) delivered it. In the 1980s, the term ‘reconstruction’ implied that the restorer had traced and restored this version. This corresponded to the ideas of classical film history, which was dominant at the time, in which filmmakers were regarded as auteurs or artists and awarded an almost mythological status (Hommel, 1991: 137). Film critics and cinephiles, particularly those involved with the politique des auteurs movement (mentioned in the introduction), emphasised the filmmaker’s pre-eminence. This celebration of directors naturally led to a strong desire to watch the version of the film they made (Pinel, 1985).

Given this framework, it is not surprising that, during this period, the director’s version was considered to be the sole truly ‘original’ version. For example, Raymond Borde, founder and long-time director of the Cinémathèque de Toulouse, notes in Les Cinémathèques (1983) that the task of archivists is to reconstruct films that had undergone censorship and self-censorship by distributors or production companies, returning them to their ‘original’ state. To Borde (1983: 175), this ‘original’ version reflects the film the way it was before others made changes to it: ‘When we are sure of a mutilation, then there is no moral problem. We can be sure to be faithful to the author’s mind and give him the justice we owe him.’ A responsible reconstruction, according to Borde, will do justice to the auteur or the film artist. Since he considered gaps as indicative of changes to the ‘original’, we can conclude that he considered that only the most complete version of a film equated with this imaginary director’s version. Jacques Ledoux, director of the Cinémathèque Royale, was also of the opinion that comparing and combining all of the recovered and available material from a film title would lead to a reconstruction of the director’s version (Borde, 1983: 175). As a result, reconstruction in this period primarily meant filling in any recognisable gaps in a film.

The Filmmuseum also reconstructed (imaginary) director’s versions of films by collecting as much material as possible, comparing the different prints with each other, and cutting and pasting them into reconstruction prints. In 1961, for example, the institute made a reconstruction of The Robber Symphony (Fehér, 1936). This film was an all-time favourite of the Amsterdam art cinema, De Uitkijk, and had sustained a fair degree of damage due to its frequent projections. The print’s mutilations were so clearly visible that even the newspapers commented on its poor condition. As the damage to the film material was clear, a reconstruction made by filling these gaps would, according to Borde’s theory, be the best way to do justice to the film’s ‘auteur’.
This was exactly what the Filmmuseum did: it reconstructed the film as best it could by collecting what material was available and piecing it together like a jigsaw. Interestingly, this was not done with duplicates of the vintage prints; instead, fragments were literally taken from all the different vintage prints available, which were then edited into the most complete director’s version possible. The reconstruction print of such a film was thus a collage of vintage material from different origins. Remarkably, the ‘original’ prints themselves were not seen as valuable enough to be kept intact; on the contrary, they were approached as incomplete objects, which could be stitched together and reconstructed into a supposedly ‘original’ whole. This confirms the conclusions reached in Chapter 4 – that is, it was the film text, not the material, that was regarded as the work of art and the film museum’s true subject.

These ‘incomplete’ prints, however, remained the main source of information whereby the ‘original’ version of the film text could be retrieved. This led to several problems. Besides the fact that it is extremely difficult to reconstruct the ‘original’ narrative structure of a film solely based on retrieved fragments, this method ran the risk of what could be called ‘hyper-restoration’ – a sort of an overcorrection of the restoration. An example of this was the reconstruction of NOVYJ BABILON (Kozintsev and Trauberg, 1929) by Enno Patalas of the Filmmuseum München. Patalas found fragments of the film in a German archive that did not appear in the Russian vintage print, and he thought that, by adding this material to the Russian print, he could reconstruct what he assumed to be the director’s version. However, after Leonid Trauberg, the co-director of the film, saw the reconstruction, he commented that he had already removed these fragments before the film’s premiere: the imaginary director’s version, in the form of the most complete print, was found to deviate from the version that the director had actually released. The filmmaker’s intentions therefore cannot always be read from a compilation of all of the recovered material from a particular title. Incidentally, following Trauberg’s intervention, Patalas removed the excerpts from the reconstruction print (Hommel, 1986: 37).

In some cases, film museums invited the director to help reconstruct a film – after all, who would know better about the intentions behind the film than the creator? In this way, film museums hoped to achieve a result that was as close as possible to the actual director’s version. For example, the Filmmuseum solicited the help of Charles Huguenot van der Linden in the reconstruction of his film JONGE HARTEN (Huguenot van der Linden and Josephson, 1936). The institute had discovered pieces of what was once a vintage print at a cigar maker’s in Maastricht in the 1950s. Once the loose pieces were sorted out and glued back together, the Filmmuseum submitted the results to the director for inspection, and he declared himself very satisfied.

However, one problem with using filmmakers as restoration consultants
is that they are sometimes tempted to try to improve the film to fit their current tastes rather than to help contribute to the reconstruction of a work they completed many years before.\textsuperscript{102} This tendency not only caused problems for the deployment of directors as a source of information on the ‘original’ version, it also meant that they sometimes made several versions of the same film. In 1971, for example, René Clair made a whole new version of his first film, \textsc{Paris qui dort}, which was fifteen minutes shorter than the 1924 ‘original’ (Kaufmann, 2001: 121), so there are now two director’s versions of the one film title. And while, in the case of \textsc{Paris qui dort}, there is a clear distinction between the ‘early’ and ‘late’ director’s versions, in a number of other silent films, the difference is less clear. For example, Abel Gance repeatedly modified and ‘improved’ his 1927 film, \textsc{Napoléon} (Pinel, 1989a: 60). Thus, many director’s versions of this film exist, which only differ from one another in small details. In such cases, the restorer must choose which director’s version to reconstruct. The decision to reconstruct the director’s version therefore does not give a definitive answer to the question of what a reconstruction should look like, as many variables are possible, and, of course, there are also material constraints – which parts of a film have survived and which have been lost. Furthermore, the choice of which director’s version should be preserved also influences the final result.

**SHOWN VERSIONS**

After 1980, film restorers still regularly tried to restore the director’s version of films. One example is the reconstruction of \textsc{Menschen am Sonntag} (Siodmak, 1929-1930). The Dutch version of this film was found in the Filmmuseum’s archives. By supplementing this print with images from other recovered material, the pre-eminent restorer Martin Koerber reconstructed the ‘original’ German version in 1997.\textsuperscript{103} Koerber (2000: 231-237) believed that, since the German censors had not cut the film, this ‘German version’ matches the version Siodmak delivered in 1929,\textsuperscript{104} hence he made a concerted attempt to find as much material as possible to process back into the reconstruction.

Similar attempts were made with other film titles; in practice, this meant that the Filmmuseum followed an unspoken reconstruction policy that entailed attempting to get as close as possible to the director’s version. The fact that this practice was not mentioned in so many words may have been the result of an increased awareness of the impossibility of determining which version was the authentic director’s version. Additionally, the idea began to surface that the director’s version of a film was not the only version that could justifiably be called ‘original’. Vincent Pinel (1985), for example, claims that ‘it
is also important to know the work the way the audiences saw it, especially when the latter differs in important ways from the first [the director’s version]. The film the audience saw at the time could indeed differ greatly from the director’s version, because the production company had adapted it, for example, or the censors had required changes before they allowed it to be screened. All these versions also slowly started to acquire the status of ‘original’, and, as a result, the term ‘original version’ was interpreted in many different ways, rendering the concept barely viable. Despite this, it continued to recur in the writings of film archivists and historians, although it could now refer to the director’s version, the censored version, or indeed any other early version.

When the Filmmuseum changed its official policy in the late 1980s, and began to ascribe a more important role to the history of Dutch film culture, the version of foreign films shown in the Netherlands also gained museological interest. The institute’s 1989 collection programme stated that ‘[f]oreign nitrate material already preserved elsewhere will not be preserved by the Filmmuseum, unless it is considered important for the collection to preserve the version that was distributed in the Netherlands’. These screened versions were accorded an increasingly important place in the institute’s restoration policy. In 1999, for example, all the films from the Uitkijk Collection were re-restored, as the Filmmuseum decided to reconstruct the versions shown by the Filmliga and distributed by the Centraal Bureau voor Ligafilms (CBLF).

As mentioned earlier, it believed the majority of the films in the Uitkijk Collection were directly connected to these organisations.

The version [that] we secure, and preferably make visible, is the one that was distributed by the CBL[F] (eventually reconstructed in the best possible way). The choice for the distribution collection implies the choice for the film versions the way they were probably seen by the Dutch audience. Changes done by the censorship, or by the CBL before offering the print to censorship, are therefore not ‘restored’. (Muis 1999)

Because the Uitkijk Collection contained vintage prints, the Filmmuseum assumed that it reflected the film versions that were shown and distributed by the Filmliga. As a result, it was able to provide reconstructions of screened and distributed versions by means of a simple duplicate of the vintage material. However, the word ‘probably’ in the above quote by Muis shows us that the Filmmuseum was very much aware of the fact that it could never be entirely sure that these reconstructions were correct. After all, the history of each print would include many modifications, not only in terms of the quality of the image, but also at the editing level. According to Cherchi Usai (2000b: 159), therefore, when a film museum refers to the ‘shown version’, it generally
means the *earliest known* shown version, although the phrase might just as well mean any other possible version screened at a later date.\textsuperscript{111} Consequently, the term ‘shown version’ became increasingly broad, as any editorial changes in the structure of the film during the course of its history would effectively create a new version. If an institute really wanted to render the history of the film culture of a particular country visible, as the Filmmuseum did with Dutch film culture, then basically every version that had ever been shown should be worthy of reconstruction.\textsuperscript{112} To get around this problem when determining which shown version to reconstruct, film museums seemed to prefer to take the place of presentation into consideration rather than the date. For example, in relation to the film *ERDGEIST* (Jessner, 1923), the Filmmuseum decided to restore the ‘original’ German version, based on information found in sources from the German censors.\textsuperscript{113} The choice to reconstruct one particular version meant that any other shown versions that had been in circulation would not be reconstructed.

In some cases, however, the Filmmuseum chose to secure and restore two different versions of a film. As mentioned above, the Filmmuseum made a reconstruction of the ‘original’ German version of the film *MENSCHEN AM SONNTAG* in 1997 (Sidomak et al, 1929). By the ‘German version’, Koerber (2000: 232) means ‘the original version distributed in Berlin in 1930 – around 400 metres longer than the Dutch version’. However, within the framework of its Filmliga project, the Filmmuseum also reconstructed the Dutch version without the extra 400 metres (Koerber, 2000: 231-235).\textsuperscript{114}

**ARCHIVAL VERSIONS**

In the period after 1970, film museums increasingly chose to reconstruct films as they were found in the archive. As Cherchi Usai (2000b: 159) describes it, this meant ‘[t]he film [...] just as it was found, with all the gaps and imperfections it had when the copy became part of the archive's collection’. This version, which could be called the ‘archival version’, is a duplicate of the vintage print, without any further reconstructive activity.\textsuperscript{115} In the strict sense of the term, this type of restoration is not a reconstruction – indeed, it might be better to speak of a ‘non-reconstruction’.

There are three reasons why a film museum might opt for a direct duplicate of the vintage print. First, it might believe that the archival version must be safeguarded because it reflects the state of the film as it was encountered in the archives, in contrast with the reconstruction of the ‘original’ version, which is the result of an archivist’s interpretation of the film. Securing archival versions allows for reinterpretations and new reconstructions at a later date.
For this reason, FIAF agreed to secure, as much as possible, the archival versions of films. In reality, this meant that, when film museums used images from a vintage print to reconstruct a director’s version or a shown version, they also duplicated this vintage material on a negative or master print (Cherchi Usai, 2000b: 159). We must take care, however, in these cases, that we do not speak of film ‘restoration’ but, rather, of ‘preservation’.

Museums do not usually make these archival versions fit for projection, and these versions generally are not screened. However, archives and museums also tend to make direct duplicates of a vintage print when they believe that the archival version can be equated with the shown version – for example, when the Filmmuseum restored films for its Filmliga project, it made the assumption that the vintage prints probably corresponded to the versions that were shown by the Filmliga. Because the Filmmuseum’s vintage prints were regarded as ‘complete versions’ in this case, these restorations were not just preservations of archival versions. As a consequence, neither of these examples involve preservations of the archival versions in the strict sense of the word: in the first case, the FIAF members did not make duplicates of the archival versions for screening purposes, and, in the second, the institutes did not duplicate the vintage prints because they considered them to be archival versions, but because they regarded them as shown versions.

The only situation in which film museums restored archival versions was when vintage prints were duplicated with the intention of screening them as incomplete archival objects. A good example of such a deliberate choice to restore incomplete films is the Bits & Pieces project – the series of fragments that the Filmmuseum selected for their beauty, peculiarity or aesthetic value, or because they derived from a well-known film. In addition to these more aesthetic and classical film historical motives, the project also had a rhetorical function: Bits & Pieces made the effect of the decomposition of film prints abundantly clear. In this sense, it was at odds with the reconstruction practices described thus far. Whereas film museums generally tried to return a film to its ‘original’ state by restoring the ‘original whole’, the Bits & Pieces collection showed the patchy state of the films as they were found in the archives. Instead of hiding the fact that large parts of films and, therefore, of film history are lost to us, it emphasised the transience of the film material. This effect was enhanced when fragments originated from narrative films. Media philosopher Nanna Verhoeff (2006: 29) explains that encountering excerpts from a narrative always make us yearn for the original whole. The lack of this whole – the film’s narrative – imposes itself because the fragments begin and end in the middle of what was once a story. One of the characteristics of a narrative is the presence of a clear beginning, middle, and end; if this structure is lacking, it will be interpreted as incomplete. As Verhoeff (2006: 29) observes,
“[t]he bits and pieces are not whole, by a long shot, but somehow, in relation to the visitor to the archive, they strive toward wholeness.”

Besides the fact that a fragment always refers to its former whole, a broken item also possesses its own aura of authenticity (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998: 19). This is also the case for film fragments. The fragments in the Bits & Pieces series are proof of the former material existence of the originals they belonged to, and so they also refer to the lacunae in the archive. Moreover, the numbering of the fragments also brings to mind museum artefacts. All in all, Bits & Pieces displayed the fragmented reality of the historical remains in the archives, and in so doing, it set itself against the neatly fitting film historical narrative – with its own beginning, middle, and end – that classical film history strove to tell.19

This awareness that the archival remains of film history consist of fragments was one of the main preoccupations of new film history, which had come to dominance at the time the Bits & Pieces series was released. The presentation of the fragments referred directly to the fragmentary state of the archive and of written film history (Hertogs and Klerk de, 1996: 79). By referring to the lacunae in the archive, and its inability to fully reconstruct the history of film, the Filmmuseum also placed the rest of film history writing in an archival perspective. What was at stake here was the belief that every stored object is a fragment. As Verhoeff (2006: 27) says, “[e]very object found in a film archive is a fragment of an irretrievable, ever-widening whole: the “complete” film, the genre, the program, the cultural habits of watching films, the culture”. This puts the idea of ‘completeness’ underlying the reconstructions of ‘original’ director’s versions and shown versions into perspective. As with the fragments in Bits & Pieces collection, which are patches of films of which nothing more exists, these reconstructions were also fragments of film programmes that no longer existed. In this sense, in the case of complete reconstructions of the ‘original’ versions of films, large parts of film history still remained unseen and unremarked.

This continuous opening up to the forgotten, to that which was not saved and can no longer be seen, is the true essence of the archive. In Derrida’s (1996: 11) words, “[t]he archive takes place at the place of originary and structural breakdown of […] memory”. This essential feature makes it impossible to forget forgetting, no matter how much an archivist or restorer tries to make decay and loss invisible.
NEW VERSIONS

Given the high level of speculation involved in reconstructing a film, every restoration should, in fact, be treated as if it were a new version. However, film museums themselves only use the term ‘new version’ if the archival film has been reconstructed in a consciously creative manner as when a contemporary artist is asked to re-edit the ‘original’ version of a film, or a film museum adapts an archival film for a modern audience, making it suitable for a commercial re-release (Meyer and Read, 2000: 71).

An early example of a creative reconstruction is the Giorgio Moroder 1984 version of Metropolis (Lang, 1925-1927) (Cherchi Usai, 2000b: 160). This reconstruction is an example of the conversion of a film into a ‘new’ work of art. Another example of creative intervention is the construction of a sound version of Zeemansvrouwen (Kleinman, 1930). This film was once intended as the first-ever sound film produced in the Netherlands, but, due to technical and financial difficulties, it became instead the last Dutch silent film. At the beginning of the 21st century, the Filmmuseum invited musician Henny Vrienten to transform it from a silent film into a sound one by using actors to add spoken dialogue. The result was a new version of the film, which the Filmmuseum unveiled at its 2003 Biennale. This sound version simultaneously made it suitable for commercial exploitation and realised the hypothetical version that had been planned but never finalised. Both these examples demonstrate how a creative interpretation of the concept of reconstruction can make a film more attractive to a paying audience.

New versions also emerged through so-called ‘reconstruction to the letter’, in which the restorer deliberately made visible what he or she had added to the film and what was still missing. For example, restorers sometimes added pieces of black film to show where material was missing. But, as Pinel (1989b: 77) points out, although such a restoration is of course a loyal and literal reconstruction, it is also quite boring to watch. This rather ascetic reconstruction technique, however, was rarely used; the Filmmuseum only turned to it when absolutely necessary – for example, when it wanted to add an ‘original’ musical score. This was the case with the last reconstruction of Regen (Ivens, 1929). Hans Eisler had composed a score to accompany this film in 1941; however, when the Filmmuseum decided to reconstruct the film using this score, it discovered that the film and the music did not fit together because some of the footage was missing, so it filled the gaps with black film in order to synchronise the music with the images.

As well as the fact that watching sections of black film for minutes on end is less than riveting, these sorts of reconstructions using black film or intertitles gave no indication of what the unknown missing material may
have looked like. To solve this problem, restorers sometimes used images derived from non-film material (Cherchi Usai, 2000b: 159). An example of a film reconstructed with the help of such material is _Der var engang_ (Dreyer, 1922), made by the Danske Filminstitut in Copenhagen. The Danish restorers used set photos and film stills to replace the missing sequences.\(^{125}\) Even with this creative input, however, such a reconstruction can never be more than an impression of the ‘original’. The cinematographic qualities of the film, which are mainly related to the movement in the photographic images and the way they are edited, cannot be recovered using this sort of reconstruction method.\(^{126}\) Cherchi Usai (2000b: 67) is of the opinion that these cases can no longer be called reconstructions; instead, he introduces the term ‘re-creation’ to indicate that they are actually new films.

Reconstructions exclusively done ‘by the letter’ are quite rare. However, almost every reconstruction shows by-the-letter elements, such as the way in which intertitles are reconstructed. Film museums are usually very concerned about distinguishing between titles that are ‘original’ and those that are reconstructed. For example, sometimes restorers use a different typography for the new titles. The Filmmuseum distinguished these ‘new’ titles by deliberately not numbering them, in contrast to the intertitles on vintage prints in the archive, which almost always have a number. In the Dutch language, the titles themselves can also be distinguished by differences in spelling (which changed quite radically after the spelling reform in the Netherlands in 1947);\(^{127}\) the intertitles were only reconstructed with the former spelling in cases where the original text was found, for example, in a censor’s file.\(^{128}\)

What is striking about reconstructions ‘by the letter’ is that, on the one hand, they were made as the best possible reconstructions of the ‘original’, while, on the other hand, they render visible the incomplete state of the archival material. This had consequences for the audience experience: because these films constantly refer to the transience and materiality of the starting material, they encourage a reading of the film that could be called an ‘archival reading’, in which the film is interpreted first and foremost as an archival object, and only then as a fiction film, for example. This archival reading turns the ‘original’ viewer experience upside down. For this reason, Meyer (1986: 29) believes it is not advisable to exclusively reconstruct a film ‘by the letter’, showing all too clearly where and which pieces were missing.\(^{129}\) This fits with the Filmmuseum perspective that films should be considered primarily as ‘performance art’.\(^{130}\)

As a result, the institute not only reconstructed the editing structure of a film as faithfully as possible, but also the potential experience of it. Its restorers tried to hide the evidence of reconstruction; they were ‘artist-restorers’, as Pinel (1989b: 77) puts it. Instead of stressing where pieces are missing in a film, emphasising the fact that the film is old and damaged, the
artist-restorer tries to return the film to its former consistency, and, thus, to its role as a potentially pleasurable or stimulating viewing experience of a *moving* picture.

**UNITY IN PARTS**

In many cases, the aim of a reconstruction was to recover the former ‘unity’ of a film. This ever-elusive ‘original unity’, however, was not necessarily material, as is the case with other types of restoration practice; film reconstruction was, and is, focused on the reconstruction of the imaginary whole – that is, the ‘original’ film text. Film restorers, therefore, often used various known vintage prints of the film title. As a consequence, the reconstructions were often assemblages of what were once two or more prints, unlike the reconstruction of other museum artefacts such as vases, in which the remaining pieces of one formerly intact object are gathered together as much as possible.

Nicola Mazzanti explains that the use of different objects for the reconstruction of a former whole is a contradiction in terms as the reconstruction combines images, intertitles, and shots that were never part of the same print, and therefore never screened together (Comencini and Pavesi, 2001: 29). Not only are the various projection prints different objects, in the earlier period, films were also often filmed with more than one camera. Duplicate negatives were not made before 1930; instead, multiple cameras were used to produce several negatives for various regions (United States or Europe, for example). These negatives all differed from one another, since the camera positions were slightly different, but sometimes distribution negatives also consisted of different takes of a scene (Jones, 2012:148). As a result, a reconstruction print cannot, in truth, form a unity – a fact that rapidly became apparent in practice. In photochemical duplication, for example, the contrast in the image always increases, so the quality and details in the image always decrease (Meyer and Read, 2000: 1), with the result that prints of different generations differ greatly in quality. When restorers merge such strongly differing prints into a reconstruction print, it invariably has a patchwork appearance.¹³²

Film museums developed a number of techniques to try to suppress this effect (Meyer and Read, 2000: 73). One example is the reconstruction of *ERDGEIST* (Jessner, 1923). The Filmmuseum used two prints – the first, a very incomplete vintage print from the institute’s own archives, and the second, a master of a vintage print from the Gosfilmofond archives in Russia.¹³³ By Filmmuseum standards, the picture quality of the Russian master was rather bad: it was very dark and had a relatively high contrast. If the institute had simply edited the excerpts from this print into a preservation copy of its own
vintage print it would most certainly have shown the huge difference in quality. In order to avoid this, it struck new elements from the Russian master with the help of pre-flashing, which resulted in a lighter image.\(^{134}\) This helped the image quality of the Russian material to approach that of the reconstruction based on the Filmmuseum vintage print and, as a result, the fact that the starting material for this restoration consisted of two different prints is less evident on the final reconstruction print.

Such interventions helped limit the differences within the same reconstruction print. To a certain extent, this ensured a unity in the image quality, giving the impression that the restoration used only one print as starting material. In this way, film restorers tried to reconstruct the ‘unity’ of the imaginary original, avoiding the visible transitions from print to print that would disturb the viewing experience of the new (museum’s) audience.\(^{135}\) On the one hand, in terms of the overall smoothness of the image quality, the reconstruction print was indeed the best possible way to approach the ‘original’ version, but, on the other hand, it is striking that the film museum made concessions about the image quality. To guarantee a smooth image quality overall, the Filmmuseum did not only try to improve the poorer prints, but also slightly worsened the quality of the better ones in the process. It seems that it preferred to seek an overall evenness of the final print rather than to pursue the possibility of a better image quality at the level of individual shots. In the end, the final quality of the image naturally differed from that of the so-called ‘original’ image. The Filmmuseum seems to have prioritised the imaginary original unity of image quality over the best possible image quality at the level of the photograms or shots.

**ACADEMICS AND THE ‘ORIGINAL’**

In light of all these different ‘original’ and accidentally or deliberately created versions, Cherchi Usai (2000b: 160) has introduced the term ‘multiple object’ for archival films. By this, he indicates that films are not the immutable unitary objects that film museums and historians often assumed them to be; instead, they disassemble into separate surviving sets of prints. Yuri Tsivian (1996: 341) believes that this innovative idea of film as a ‘multiple object’ is very productive for film historical science, leading to a fresh perspective: ‘Cherchi Usai’s point is innovative because it invites us to perceive film history as a process rather than as a gallery of art objects.’\(^{136}\)

Classical film historians, like other academics from the schools of formalism and semiotics, described the history of film in general as a series of unchanging texts. This does not mean, however, that they were unaware
of the variability of film prints and, thus, of film texts. In 1964, for example, Lotte Eisner analysed the different prints of Nosferatu (Murnau, 1921) in her book, F.W. Murnau, and, in 1967, Sadoul noted that national versions of films could sometimes differ radically from each other (cited in Pinel, 1985). Visitors to the film libraries and museums were also able to see for themselves how incomplete some of the prints on display were. However, this growing awareness of the fact that the film texts survived in multiple prints on highly unstable surfaces was not reflected in the film historical discourse, or in the semiotic and formalist research. Moreover, academics did not take research into the various prints and consequently into versions of the same film text into consideration when undertaking a textual analysis of a film. According to William Routt (1997: 3), film analysts did not usually indicate on which print and thus on which version they had based their textual or semiotic studies, as he believes they felt uncomfortable with the idea of the filmic text’s instability. Gunning (1992: 102) also notes that film scholars continued to yearn for the ‘original’ film text: ‘The film as it originally showed itself, without the disfiguration of time and use, haunts the film historian as a spectral ideal.’

Of course, the dawning awareness that the ‘original’ is an unattainable ideal was not pleasant. Still, new film historians increasingly viewed film history more as a process and less as an accumulation of unchanging film texts. In the case of Tsivian’s personal project, an investigation into Russian cinema, this new perspective provided him with special insights. For example, he approached the re-edited Western films from the Soviet period as separate objects, and this enabled him to discover a very different historical story. Film historians, such as Tom Gunning, Frank Kessler, Nanna Verhoeff, William Routt, Giorgio Bertellini, Charles Musser, and Janna Jones, also shed new light on archival issues, and explored the implications for the discipline of film history.

The fact that, for a long time, the academic discipline failed to prioritise the problems of various prints and different versions most likely led to conclusions about film titles that said more about the print under investigation than the film text. In an interview about her reconstruction of the director’s version of La coquille et le clergymen (Dulac, 1927), Catherine Cormon notes that it is worth comparing the many different prints of a film in circulation, as well as the many different interpretations of a film made over the course of time (cited in Olcese, 2005: 5). In order to answer the questions Cormon poses, it is necessary to investigate all the prints of a given film title that were created and shown. This illustrates that the film, as an historical source, is also a multiple object. For this reason, it is extremely important for film historiography and film theory that ancient, even worn-out duplicates of films are preserved.

Reconstructions are not easy research subjects. As Charles Musser (2004:
recounts, ‘[o]ften “restorations” create synthetic texts that have no historical standing – mishmashes of variant prints that obscure as much as they illuminate’. The fact that Musser, an extremely experienced film historian, highlights this issue, indicates that the topic of reconstruction not only complicates the work of film historians, but also excites them. Cherchi Usai (2000b: 67) advises researchers to be very cautious because film is such a changeable subject. However, he believes that film archives, museums and restorers have a duty to provide the relevant information; good documentary evidence on how a reconstruction came about (and the purpose behind it) is often lacking. The paucity of information on the reconstruction of films means that film studies lags far behind other disciplines such as literary studies, wherein scholars have access to critical editions of ancient texts (Routt, 1997: 3).

However, film restoration practice has the advantage that the originals have basically remained untouched. With the restoration of a mosaic, for example, the loose pieces that once formed a whole must be reassembled somehow, whereas film historians only edit vintage prints together in some very early exceptions, such as THE ROBBER SYMPHONY, so, in most cases, the starting material remains untouched. A researcher who wants information about versions of a film other than the reconstructed one can always go back to the various surviving vintage prints. Insofar as they are not affected by the ravages of time, these prints are kept safe in the vaults of EYE.

Because film restorers make so many creative decisions during the restoration process, Hiley (1996) compares them to filmmakers and artists. In addition to Hiley’s comparison, I would also compare restorers to film historians, precisely because each restoration is an interpretation of the past based on the vintage prints in the archive. Film restorers are, in fact, creative film historians who render interpretations of film history visible: they create new versions of the archival films, which reveal the dominant film historical perspective at the time of restoration. Taking this more subjective side of film restoration into account, filmmaker and film restorer Ross Lipman (2009: 5) suggests that it would be better to use the term ‘faithful’ rather than ‘authentic’ when discussing the relation of the restoration to the imaginary ‘original’.

All in all, film restoration prints reflect historical taste, which can change – often significantly – from one moment to the next. Initially, the main aim of restoration practice was to ‘retrieve’ the director’s intentions on which to base a reconstruction of the director’s version. However, in the period after 1980, the perspective of film museums changed, shifting from a unique focus on the reconstruction of director’s versions to include shown versions and archival versions in their reconstruction repertoire. Furthermore, film museums started to consider the production of new presentation versions, which were often a combination of experimental film and found footage. These experi-
mental new versions made old films more attractive to a ‘new’ audience. At the same time, the perspectives on film history became increasingly diverse: instead of allowing for only one possible original version (the director’s version), the archives now took a plurality of potential ‘original’ versions into account, which meant that they could all be defined as the starting point for a reconstruction. However, this produced an uncertain situation—it was never quite clear which version was reflected in the restoration print. As a consequence, it has become even more important for film historians and analysts to be able to access information about the film museum’s restorations and reconstructions.

However, the reconstruction of director’s versions remained high on the priority list of film museums for some time. One explanation for the importance they continued to place on discovering the ‘intentions’ of the filmmakers could be that changes in perspectives and opinions often occur at different rates with different groups of people. Because the audiences of the Filmmuseum are so widely divergent – ranging from professional audiences of film archivists and historians to the general public – these two different tempos can also be found in the history of the institute. The Filmmuseum took great care restoring films, paying attention to the quality of the images, but it also reconstructed director’s versions of films by well-known filmmakers, prioritising the reconstruction of the editing structure over image quality. Because it incorporated these two different perspectives on the reconstruction of films, the Filmmuseum’s practice followed the different rhythms found in film historical discourse and, as a result, its restoration prints form an eclectic manifestation of film history.