‘Programming allows works to contaminate one another’—this quotation by Dominique Paini (1992: 25), former director of the Cinémathèque française, sums up the following chapter in a nutshell: namely, the way films ‘contaminate’ one another when shown together in the same programme. A similar phenomenon occurs in museum displays and exhibitions. In the field of museology, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998) has coined the phrase ‘in-context presentation’ to describe how contagion works in these settings. An in-context presentation is created by means of a number of different strategies. The first entails positioning objects adjacent to one another, connecting them spatially; this spatial relationship then produces a semantic connection between the objects. However, film museums do not usually align their archival offerings spatially but temporally when they screen them as part of their film programmes. Jean-Luc Godard (1980: 130) was an exception—the director was a great advocate for film museum presentations that would literally show films side by side. The most common way of presenting films ‘in context’ with each other, however, is by screening them on the same evening.

The second way museums present objects ‘in context’ is by connecting them to textual resources containing explanations or offering ideas about the exhibited material (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998: 21). In the case of film museums, these resources predominantly comprise programme booklets, posters, exhibitions, introductory lectures, and other forms of information that determine the content and meaning of the films and film programmes. The titles of the programmes and retrospectives also help guide the audience’s reading of the films in a certain predetermined direction. For this reason, I frequently include these textual messages in the following analysis of film programmes.

The problem with the concept of in-context presentation is that it contains the term ‘context’. Structuralist and literary theorist Jonathan Culler was
deeply critical of the term and submitted it to a sharp interrogation in the late 1980s. Ever since then, it has always been viewed by those involved in the field of cultural studies as highly problematic. In the preface to his book Framing the Sign (1988), Culler indicates that the relationship between the context and the contextualised has often been presented as far more straightforward than it actually is, with the context described as if it were a fixed element providing the contextualised object with meaning. Culler is of the opinion that it is in fact a far from static relationship, with a constant exchange of influence and meaning. The meaning of the context is also variable, according to what it contextualises. To prevent the analysis of signifying elements from falling back on a static image of signs operating within a fixed context, Culler suggests that we should refer not to ‘context’ but to ‘framing’:

[O]ne might try to think not of context but of the framing of signs: how are signs constituted (framed) by various discursive practices, institutional arrangements, systems of value, semiotic mechanisms. (Culler, 1988: ix)

In her book, Travelling Concepts, Mieke Bal bases her analysis of museum presentation on flexible semantic systems by addressing the concept of ‘framing’. Bal’s (2002: 135-136) conclusion is that the display of museum objects is always an event, which means that it entails constant change. As it stands now, what Kirshenblatt-Gimblett calls the in-context presentation consists of placing museum objects alongside other museum objects, providing each other with (shifting) meanings. In-context presentation, in this sense, is actually a form of framing that allows objects to ‘contaminate’ one another, producing a constant stream of flexible meanings.

Research into programmes, programming, and programme structures has emerged as a field of interest in film history over the past two decades. As with many other film historical issues, the recent research on this theme began, for the most part, in the field of early film, in which programming is considered to be one of the most important components of the film culture (Kessler, Lenk, and Loipendinger, 2002). However, studies by Tom Gunning and Malte Hagener draw attention to the fact that programming also played a major role in film leagues and ciné-clubs (Gunning 1999; Hagener 2006). In this chapter, I show that it was an equally important component in the history of film museums, precisely because it could either block or stimulate historicising, aestheticising, or other sorts of readings.

To gain a deeper insight into the interaction between the components of the various film museum dispositifs, I will look at the three periods that parallel the three different interiors of the Filmmuseum, analysing the institute’s
programming strategies and the way these changed over each period, as well as at the structure of the programmes and how they were framed textually. The question I investigate is the way in which the film museum produced certain reading modes through its programmes of film screenings.

**FILM AS ART OR FROM ‘THE OLD BOX’?**

In its founding report in 1946, the Nederlandsch Historisch Film Archief (Netherlands Historical Film Archive) stated that it wanted to focus mainly on the history of film art; thus, right from the start, it pledged to follow the route laid out by classical film historical discourse. The Filmmuseum also publicised its ambition to familiarise cinema audiences with ‘good’ films, and it aimed to achieve this by, for example, a series of courses it offered in 1958. In addition, the institute made known its ambition to educate its audience by programming what counted as ‘good’ films.

The programmes the Filmmuseum prepared with this goal in mind were shaped in various ways. The initial format consisted of screening an individual film as a complete full-length programme, which then took the title of the film. As these films stood alone, they were removed from any film historical context and placed on pedestals as independent works of art. According to Greenblatt (1991), viewing a work of art in isolation helps evoke an essential sense of wonder. By presenting an individual film as a full evening programme, the Filmmuseum guided its audience towards an attitude imbued with this feeling of awe. Examples of this include the films _Greed_ (Stroheim, 1923) and _Cabiria_ (Pastrone, 1914), which the institute presented as full evening programmes in the 1950s and 1960s. It emphasised the artistry of the films in the accompanying texts, such as the *Filmmuseum Mededeling*, an informative programme leaflet that the Filmmuseum sent to its members. In some cases, it cited the opinions of other renowned institutions in the cultural film field – it reported, for example, that _Greed_ was ‘generally considered to be the best film by Von Stroheim and was elected one of the twelve best films of all time […] at the Expo in Brussels in 1958’. By referring to the Brussels Expo, an established authority in the cultural field (works by Corbusier and Varèse were also exhibited at this international exhibition), the Filmmuseum indicated that this film had been anointed as a work of art. With other films such as _Cabiria_, the institute announced (in its own words) that it was ‘one of the highlights of the Italian “silent” period’. In cases such as these, the Filmmuseum itself acted as an authority in the field of cinema.

With the help of these accompanying texts, the Filmmuseum guided the audience in the direction of what Odin (2002) calls an ‘aestheticising reading
mode’, which invites the spectator to pay attention to the aesthetic values of the film. Generally, there is a third party, in this case the Filmmuseum, that indicates that the film is worthy of such a reading (Odin, 2002: 45-46). This was the strategy that institutes such as MoMA’s Film Library in New York adopted during the 1930s, often using terms such as ‘genius’, ‘masterpiece’, and, more generally, ‘brilliance’ in their programme guides (Wasson, 2005: 152).

Although screening a single film as an entire programme was, of course, a way of presenting it as a work of art that deserved a reaction of wonder, most films were too short to fill the rather long Filmmuseum evenings at the Stedelijk Museum. The institute, therefore, often presented a programme with a number of shorter art films. In some cases, two films were shown, one before and one after the interval. CHELOVEK S KINO-APPARATOM (Vertov, 1929) and GOLUBOY EKSPRESS (Trauberg, 1929) were both shown in a programme entitled Russian Film. The Filmmuseum used its cinematic resources to inform the audience that these films were special. In the event of even shorter films, such as experimental films, the Filmmuseum would show more than two in one evening. On the 13 and 14 March 1957, for example, it screened a programme called The French Avant-garde, which contained FAITS DIVERS (1923, Autant-Lara), LA COQUILLE ET LE CLERGYMAN (1927, Dulac), L’ÉTOILE DE MER (1928, Man Ray), ENTR’ACTE (1924, Clair), and UN CHIEN ANDALOU (1929, Buñuel). These five experimental films were introduced to the Netherlands by the Nederlandsche Filmliga – and came to the Filmmuseum through the Uitkijk Collection –, which christened them as avant-garde movies. By exhibiting them in one programme, the Filmmuseum presented them as a corpus of works. In addition, it showed that it regarded them as equivalent to one another by paying equally strong attention to each film in its guide, the Film-museum Mededeling.40

For some programmes, this textual guidance was a key element of the presentation strategy. In 1955, for example, the films THE KID (Chaplin, 1921) and THE GENERAL (Bruckman and Keaton, 1927) formed the programme American Humour.41 In these films, Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton, respectively, played the leading roles. The titles of the films and the programme appear to imply an evening of entertainment and laughter rather than a night of watching serious, museum-quality films, but the programme notes made sure to alert the viewers to the artistic value of such comedies. In order to convince its audience, the Filmmuseum quoted from De komische film, written by Constant van Wessem in 1931, as part of the series Monografieën over de Filmkunst, which states that ‘it is a mark of superficial consideration when one neglects comedy in the reflections on film art’ (van Wessem, 1931: 3). Van Wessem believed that comic film was initially more of a ‘film an sich’ (that is, a film of an intellectual nature) than ‘dramatic film’. Comic effects were indeed
achieved by means of technical experimentation: speeding up, slowing down, and other technical tricks (van Wessem, 1931: 5). By combining these films with quotes from van Wessem, the Filmmuseum presented them within the tradition of art film. These connotations not only arose because of the content of the citations, but also because van Wessem and the monograph series were deeply embedded in the Filmliga tradition, which, as mentioned earlier, was the starting point for the discourse on film art in the Netherlands. The textual and programmatic presentation of these silent comedies is a good example of the guiding effect of accompanying texts.

The Filmmuseum programmes almost always had an overarching theme. In this way, it framed the films historically and thematically – that is, it placed them within one, mostly classical, film historical frame so that they were seen to resonate with the appropriate part of (classical) film history. In addition, because they were often presented within the framework of a genre that was taken to represent the aesthetic development of film into an art form, the programmes duly encouraged the effect of wonder.

The Filmmuseum also presented programmes that exclusively contained film fragments. An example of one such was Marie Seton on the work and person of Sergei Eisenstein, presented in May 1953. During this programme, excerpts were screened from Eisenstein’s films – BRONENOSETS POTYOMKIN (1926), OKTYABR (1928), STAROYE I NOVOYE (1929), ALEXANDER NEVSKY (1938), and IVAN GROZNYY (1944) – and combined with a lecture by Marie Seton, whose biography about the filmmaker, a personal friend, had appeared a year earlier. The excerpts were literally cut out of their original context and deployed as ‘signs’ within a new structure illustrating the various stages in Eisenstein’s work. As a result, the images were given a new meaning, which differed greatly from the one they possessed as part of the film they derived from.

The Filmmuseum thus constructed its film historical arguments based on fragments from the films in its collection. They functioned as a pars pro toto (representatives of the whole) on two different levels. First, the institute described these fragments by the titles of the films they originated from, but in most cases their actual content remained without mention – the fragment was simply a means of illustrating the film title. In a further move, the Filmmuseum turned the film titles themselves into elements of a whole film historical narrative. In this way, the fragments that were used in the programme on Eisenstein stood in for each of his films, and this allowed the Filmmuseum then to use these film titles to illustrate its narrative about the development of Eisenstein’s genius.

In other cases, the Filmmuseum presented film fragments as independent aesthetic objects – for example, the fragments showing the Odessa Steps sequence from BRONENOSETS POTYOMKIN and the cream separator sequence...
from *Staroye i Novoye*. When the Filmmuseum showed these fragments as a prelude to the reprise of *Time in the Sun* (Seton, 1939/1940) in 1957, they were specified as ‘De Odessatrappenscène’ and ‘Melkseparatorscène’, respectively. As mentioned earlier, this first sequence was celebrated as one of the highlights of Soviet montage, and acted as a guarantee of artistry. This was also the case, although to a lesser extent, for the cream separator scene. In a way, Eisenstein himself wrote this sequence into film history because he used it as an example of how to construct emotional scenes using non-emotive imagery (Eisenstein, 1949: 77). Bertina (1950: 91) considered the use of Soviet-style montage to be a prerequisite if a film was to be considered art. He attributed a pioneering role to the Russian filmmakers: ‘The Russians clearly proved that film art needs to use montage as the essential starting point for an art of movement.’ B.F. Hoyer (1932: 24), who wrote a booklet, *Russian Film Art*, as part of the series *Monografieën*, also stated that editing was the starting point of film art. As a result, a fragment that functioned as a *pars pro toto* for Soviet montage met the aesthetic standards of the time, and could not but be an example of film art.

The fragments that were programmed during this period were mostly acquired actively; it seems obvious that the reason they are in the archive is because the Filmmuseum wanted to show them in this form. We can see in retrospect that, besides the motivations behind the Filmmuseum’s acquisition policies mentioned in Chapter 2, in many cases, its programming and presentation strategies also provided a rationale for the collection and acquisition of specific film material.

In addition to the way the Filmmuseum structured its programmes, it also connected various evening screenings to each other by giving them an overarching theme and title, presenting them as a single episode in film history. This seems to have been a deliberate strategy, devised to present film history on the screen in a more complete and coherent way. However, despite the fact that such a series allowed the institute more time to work intensively on one historical episode, there was still a need for selection and exclusion. Still, because the selection of films was less limited by the constraints of time, a closer reading of these series should provide us with an insight into the other reasons behind showing particular films. For example, the retrospective, *40 years of Russian Film from 1917 to 1957*, illustrates which films from this historical period the Filmmuseum considered the most important. The retrospective consisted of eight screenings, during which it showed eighteen films illustrating the history of Russian film. The institute, however, clearly excluded those films made before the Russian Revolution. Within the dominant film historical narrative at the time, these pre-revolutionary films were considered bourgeois and anti-artistic (Hommel and Meyer, 1989: 50). This perspective
was present in the Netherlands from very early on: for example, in 1932, Hoyer wrote that Russian films made before 1917 were not very different from those made in Western countries. Besides, he argues, these films were hardly shown or seen in the West and, consequently, they barely played a role in the development of (Western) cinema – the fact that, by 1932, almost no one remembered Yevgeni Bauer or Iosif Ermoliev indicates that these films were not been very valuable. Hoyer (1932: 3) ended his chapter on pre-revolutionary Russian film by claiming that ‘Russian national cinema was born in the month of October in the year 1917, in “the last days of St. Petersburg” – “ten days that the shook the world”’.49

In 1958, the Filmmuseum repeated Hoyer’s claim almost verbatim in a publication it released to accompany its Russian retrospective. It is striking that these pre-revolutionary films had been shown a year before during the first Congrès international de la recherche historique in Paris, organised by the Cinémathèque française and FIAF in November 1957, where they were hailed as a major discovery (Mannoni, 2006: 251-252). Yet, just a year later, the Filmmuseum excluded these seminal films of the Russian silent film era from its programme. This shows that it kept strictly to the dominant film historical ideas as applied to Russian cinema, despite the fact that the FIAF archivists had drawn the opposite conclusion. Le Giornate del Cinema Muto showed these early films in 1988, causing a general surge of excitement over their ‘rediscovery’. But the prevailing assumption that this corpus of films had been starved of the appreciation they deserved due to lack of access to the Soviet Union’s film archives was belied by the fact that they had been shown in Paris in 1957.50 It seems more likely, therefore, that the general unfamiliarity with and lack of appreciation for these films was mainly because of the persistence of certain dominant film historical ideas.

Another retrospective that closely followed the film historical perspective of the time was Van Caligari tot Hitler (From Caligari to Hitler) (1952-1953), based on the 1947 book by Siegfried Kracauer. In a series of six programmes, the Filmmuseum demonstrated the development of German film, starting with Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari (Wiene, 1919) and ending with Triumph des Willens (Riefenstahl, 1935). In an almost flawless chronological line, it showed a series of fifteen films, all discussed by Kracauer. Because the Filmmuseum decided to base this programme on Kracauer’s book, any film not mentioned in the text was excluded from the very start, and it limited itself even more by following the period mentioned in the title of the book, starting with Caligari and ending with the propaganda films of the Third Reich. This is in contrast to the book itself, which begins with a description of the earlier period in the history of German film. It is also notable that the Filmmuseum chose to screen only the well-known films Kracauer discussed, even though he
also wrote about films that were far less well-known. By following Kracauer, the Filmmuseum decided to present a different, more socio-historical perspective on film history, but, when it came to selecting a number of films from his book for its final programme, the canon once again re-emerged. So we can discern several conflicting approaches in the one programme series.

Aside from the connections it made between the films in its retrospectives, the Filmmuseum also drew parallels between those films it screened completely independently from one another. For example, it informed its members about the screening of Cabiria in these terms: ‘It is therefore interesting to be able to compare “Cabiria” with what is still one of the most impressive presentations from the history of film, Griffith’s “Intolerance”, which was recently screened at the NFM.’ By making these connections, the Filmmuseum again followed an existing discourse: Cabiria was one of W. D. Griffith’s favourite films. Moreover, these observations reveal that the Filmmuseum used the entire programme to construct a film historical argument, and it again placed the emphasis on producing an aesthetic reading of the film by comparing Cabiria with the aesthetic value of the highly appreciated film Intolerance.

The programme formats discussed so far always displayed the films as equivalent in status. However, the Filmmuseum also deployed certain strategies when it wished to infer distinctions, giving some films more emphasis, and hence more importance, than others. One strategy the institute used was the prelude – that is, by showing a film as an introduction to the main film. A clear example of this format was the programme Menschen Geobserveerd (People Observed), containing the film Menschen am Sonntag (Siodmak and others, 1929-1930). In the programme notes, the Filmmuseum clearly laid out the structure of the programme and the different status of the films shown as the prelude and the film shown as part of the main programme. ‘In the prelude, some films are being shown that, as well as the main film, observe man in his daily life: Images d’Ostende (1929), Dagjesmensen (1929), A propos de Nice (1929).’ As with the main film, the three short films comprising the prelude all derived from the avant-garde tradition; however, the three shorts were shown together before the interval, while the main film was programmed afterwards and shown in isolation, which signifies that its presentation was intended to evoke a sense of wonder.

A prelude was also sometimes made up of fragments. One example is the screening in 1954 of TIME IN THE SUN (Seton, 1939/40), which was preceded by excerpts from Eisenstein’s films Bronenosets Potyomkin, Staroye i Novoye, and Romance sentimentale (1930). These fragments positioned Seton’s film within the tradition represented by Eisenstein’s classic films, effectively focusing audience attention not on the film made by Seton but on
those by Eisenstein. Remarkably, this example concerns the screening of a main film that was not (yet) part of the canon; by programming it in combination with fragments derived from canonised art films, the Filmmuseum positioned it within the canonical framework, so that it would be ‘contaminated’ by the artistic connotations of Eisenstein’s films. In fact, the programming even pushed the spectator in the direction of a reading that took Eisenstein to be the maker of the film, rather than Seton. This programme structure produced a so-called ‘artistic reading mode’, which is activated when a spectator follows the promptings of an ‘expert’ considered to be part of the institution of art (Odin, 2002: 47).

Often, preludes only consisted of a single fragment. For example, in November 1960, the Filmmuseum screened Dr. Mabuse, der Spieler (Lang, 1922) twice, preceded by an excerpt from Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari (Wiene, 1919). The latter was a film the audience was assumed to know, at least according to the text in the accompanying Mededeling, which connected the films to each other by means of quotations from the aforementioned book, From Caligari to Hitler (1947). The combination of the text and the fragment positioned Dr. Mabuse, der Spieler within Kracauer’s film historical framework.

In addition to the canon, the Filmmuseum also showed unknown silent films that it considered ‘primitive’. Because these films had been awarded a lower status since the 1920s, they contrasted perfectly with the films it presented as ‘art’. Therefore, whenever the Filmmuseum showed both ‘types’ of film in one programme, this resulted in what I would call ‘contrast programming’. By emphasising the presumed difference in the quality of the films in the accompanying Mededeling, the Filmmuseum strengthened the effect of contrast.

One way of encouraging the emergence of such a contrast was to show a canonical film immediately after an unknown ‘primitive’ film. An example of this tactic is seen in a programme with the ambiguous title, Van film drama tot absolute film (From Dramatic Film to Absolute Film) (1957). Before the intermission, the Filmmuseum showed Fior di male (Gallone, 1914), an Italian silent film that the institute indicated was both ‘precious’ and a ‘curiosity’. It placed this in contrast to the one shown after the break, Berlin. Die Sinfonie der Grossstadt (Ruttman, 1927), which it stated was one of the finest examples of ‘absolute film’. Finally, the Filmmuseum literally announced the comparison it wished the audience to draw between the two films by saying that Berlin created a ‘wonderful contrast’ to Gallone’s film. From this example, it is clear that art films could hold extra allure when contrasted with so-called ‘primitive curiosities’. Those films included in the institute’s programme that it thought of as less valuable were also termed ‘primitive progenitors’.
Another presentation structure that promoted this form of contrast programming was the prelude mentioned above. In this scenario, a series of unknown silent films was screened as a prelude to the pièce de résistance shown after the break. For example, in June 1954, the Filmmuseum presented a programme called The Western, consisting of the film Stagecoach (Ford, 1939), preceded by The Stagecoach Driver and the Girl (Mix, 1915), The Great Train Robbery (Porter, 1903), and Árie prérie (Trnka, 1949). The accompanying text said the following about Stagecoach: ‘In this so-called ‘Western’ [the content] is given a more responsible form and meaning […] than in the previous films of this genre, in which fighting and shooting [is shown] from beginning to end.’ The first two films were just such ‘previous films of this genre’. In the above quotation, the Filmmuseum presents The Stagecoach Driver and the Girl and The Great Train Robbery – clearly two Westerns of an earlier date that it labelled as ‘primitive’ – as a prelude to Stagecoach, which the institute described in the text as the peak of this genre.

Programmes showing fragments as a prelude could also be used to produce a contrast: for example, on 25 and 26 November 1953, the Filmmuseum showed Jonge harten (Huguenot van der Linden and Josephson, 1936) in a programme entitled Oude mislukkingen en Jonge harten (which roughly translates as Old Failures and Young Hearts). In the early 1950s, the Filmmuseum had recovered this film, which A. van Domburg (1936: 70) had raised to the level of art, in a number of small pieces. Based on these fragments, and with the help of Huguenot van der Linden, it reconstructed the director’s version. Subsequently, the Filmmuseum’s 1953 programme showed the recently reconstructed film in contrast with excerpts from three ‘failed’ ‘old’ Dutch films. The so-called failures were presented as anonymous pieces of film without mentioning their creators or their year of production; they were simply presented as old and unsuccessful, in marked contrast to the announcement of Jonge harten, in which the Filmmuseum credited not only the director, but also the cameraman and actors. The fact that these ‘failures’ were not further specified shows that their only value was as examples of ‘primitive’ film.

The idea of contrasting film art with old ‘failures’ also appears in the film historiography of this period, in which early films were often described as ‘primitive’. Apart from these parallels with the dominant film historical perspective, this type of programme also shows striking similarities to the screenings organised by the Filmliga (1982: 34) from the 1920s on, in which it also showed both old and new films in what it called Querschnitt (literally, cross-section) programmes that made visible the ‘progress’ that cinema had made since the beginning of the 20th century. According to Gunning (1999: 242), this format was also seen at similar film associations in other countries. Hagener (2006: 270-273) argues that this type of programming fitted within the broader
programming strategies that characterised avant-garde screenings: the pro-
grammes consisted mainly of films that appeared to conflict, stimulating their
audiences to analyse what they saw. This was at odds with the tactics used by
commercial cinemas, where spectators were not encouraged to think but to
immerse themselves in the spectacle. The Filmmuseum wielded similar strat-
tegies, aimed at producing an active spectator with the help of contrasting pro-
grammes and, as became clear in the previous chapter, hard seating.

The Filmmuseum also screened programmes that contained exclusively
‘primitive’ films. These often had more general titles than their regular pro-
grammes, such as Uit de oude doos (From the Old Storage Box), Uit oude tijden
(From Olden Times), or Uit de oude draaidoos (From the Hand-Cranked Cinemat-
ograph). These programmes were made up of what the Filmmuseum called
‘old failures’ and ‘odious films’. In 1956, the institute announced such a pro-
grame as follows:

Film history has experienced many highlights that are just as many mile-
stones in its development. Between these highlights are periods during
which films were made that only are of interest as historical-romantic
documents [...] and that take us back to earlier times, the period of ‘odi-
ous films’ and comical one-reelers.99

This text divides the corpus of silent films into two very different parts, and
it does this in two different ways. On the one hand, the Filmmuseum dif-
ferentiates the highlights and successes of film history from the ‘historical-
romantic’ documents of lesser value, which were made in the periods between
what it believed to be cinema’s early failed experiments in film and its later
incarnation as art. On the other hand, the institute connects these so-called
historical-romantic films to the early period of film history. Indeed, the writ-
ten sources of classical film history reveal that these early films were accorded
less value. In general, the classical film historians skipped the more commer-
cial productions that were made in the period between the alleged highlights;
the Filmmuseum, however, programmed these early pre-war films, although
any potential interpretation of these films as aesthetic or artistic objects was
blocked in advance. Notably, the Filmmuseum also showed three comedies
from the 1920s, one with Buster Keaton, in its 1958 programme, From Olden
Times. This appears to be contrary to the idea mentioned earlier that comedies
should be regarded as art films. These two different presentation strategies
also encouraged the adoption of two contrasting ways of reading such films:
on the one hand, the Filmmuseum presented comedies as progressive experi-
ments leading to the development of film as an art form; on the other hand, it
contrasted these films with that same tradition of film art.
Finally, coloured films also played a role in this programming strategy. As the Filmmuseum screened its nitrate prints during this period, the audiences must have seen the tints, tones, and hand and stencil colourings. An example of this was the screening in March 1956 of the programme called *Uit de oude doos* (*From the Old Storage Box*), containing two Pathé films. The Filmmuseum announced both films as ‘hand-coloured films by Pathé Frères’. Interestingly, this seems to have been the only time that it paid any mind to these colourations, even though the colours must have been visible in many other screenings (for example, the aforementioned projection of *Fior di male*). By drawing attention to the coloured films within the framework of an ‘historical-romantic’ programme, the institute presented their colours not as intrinsic to these films but as curious additions, preventing any potential aesthetic appreciation of them.

The colouring of silent films only began to be considered artistic around the mid-1980s. By gathering together the available facts, we can conclude that canonical films were more likely to be shown in black and white than ‘primitive’, often unknown, films. First of all, the Filmmuseum projected nitrate without any problems, and this was often the case for the so-called ‘primitive’ films. After all, the purpose was to show a random selection of films and every film archival institute had at least a few examples of such films in its collection. However, canonical films were duplicated far more frequently, mainly to provide film museums that did not possess these titles with projection prints. As we saw in Chapter 5, film museums generally used black-and-white material for duplication, and as a result, these canonised titles were spread around the archives in the form of black-and-white prints. The chance that film museums would show well-known titles in black and white was many times greater than for ‘primitive’ or ‘curious’ examples from film’s early period. It seems likely that, due to these mechanisms, art film became increasingly associated with black and white, while colour was connected to the far less valued early part of film history.

By presenting early films as curiosities from ‘the old storage box’, the Filmmuseum followed a different strategy than, for example, MoMA, which tried to create an aestheticising reading mode for these films. However, the audience refused to follow the discourse MoMA tried to promote and instead produced a very different reading, as Peter Catapano (1994: 39) shows: ‘[A]udiences sometimes displayed a more raucous pleasure often expressed in outbursts of laughter at what were sometimes simply referred to as “old films”.’ Another example of a different presentation strategy can be seen in the screenings of Méliès’ films in France during the late 1910s and early 1920s. Hagener (2006: 274) explains that writers, artists, and critics active in the avant-garde movement claimed that these films could be considered examples of an alter-
native form of cinema that resisted conventional narrative structures. In this sense, they exhibited the prevailing modernist belief in the disruption of narrative forms and their replacement with abstraction. Remarkably, however, the Filmliga did not draw the same conclusions. This is probably due to the extremely rigid way it adhered to the ‘doctrine’ of abstraction as defined by Menno ter Braak (1929) in his theory of ‘absolute film’.

TRANSITIONS

The Filmmuseum’s move to the Vondelpark Pavilion signalled the start of its pursuit of an individual identity. However, its conversion into an independent film museum that functioned without the support of the Stedelijk Museum had begun a little earlier. For example, four years before the move, the Filmmuseum launched a magazine called Filmmuseum · cinemateek, containing background information about the institute and its film programmes. In the first issue, it explained that the emergence of the journal was ‘the sign of a new turn in the course of the development of the Filmmuseum’; it was a manifestation of the direction the institute intended to follow. An image of the Vondelpark Pavilion graced the first cover, indicating this new direction.

During this period, a number of changes also took place in the Filmmuseum’s programme strategies and structures. Remarkably, the differences in status between the films screened together in a single programme decreased, although there was still a clear distinction between, on the one hand, programmes in which the Filmmuseum presented lesser-known films, and on the other hand, its programmes of art films. Both categories, however, were presented in novel ways.

The display of art films showed some striking changes, increasing the focus on the main film. For example, on the 10 March 1971, the Filmmuseum showed Inflation (Richter, 1928), Polizeibericht Überfall (Metzner, 1928), and Die freudlose Gasse (Pabst, 1925). The first two films, which formed the prelude to Die freudlose Gasse, had no relationship whatsoever to the theme of the evening, a retrospective of the work of Asta Nielsen. The main feature was the only film on the programme that fit the overall theme. The brief overview of the programme on the back of Filmmuseum · cinemateek mentions Die freudlose Gasse as a stand-alone; the films preceding it are not mentioned. As a result, the prelude appears to be included more because the Filmmuseum felt obliged to do so, rather than as a fundamental part of the evening programme. Another example is the screening on 3 November 1971 of a programme of films that made up part of a larger series, De nieuwe Zweedse film (New Swedish Film), in which a new Swedish film was preceded
by two Buster Keaton films that were neither Swedish nor new. This prelude once again did not add anything to the theme of the retrospective. As a consequence, the films before the interlude increasingly became a separate presentation, functioning less as examples of a film historical narrative and more as independent screenings.

A year later, the Filmmuseum stopped programming films as a prelude to the main film entirely. All the films it screened as part of a programme were given equal importance, and it only showed programmes that consisted of more than one film if they formed some sort of unity, or when the programme was part of a retrospective. Shorts were presented in special ‘short film’ programmes. Films were therefore no longer programmed as a sort of ‘compare and contrast’ exercise for the audience, and the prelude disappeared. Meanwhile, the Filmmuseum also reduced the duration of the programmes to a maximum of two hours, allowing the spectators to devote their whole attention to watching a specific film. Overall, a clear shift is apparent – away from programmes that combined films in ways that reinforced a certain film historical argument towards a more individual presentation. This focus on the individuality of each film, seen in isolation from the rest, echoes the aims of the Invisible Cinema, which attempted to construct an environment in which nothing could distract from the particular film on display.

A simultaneous change occurred in the way art films were screened and the reading modes they produced. For example, in 1982, the Filmmuseum used its Filmliga films to tell the story of the history of modernism in the Netherlands in the programme De eerste FILMLIGA films – 1927/28/29 (The First Filmliga Films – 1927/28/29). The occasion for this programme was the reprint of the journal Filmliga. Hans Schoots states that the reprint was an expression of the revival of the modernist approach to film. The re-evaluation of the Filmliga followed Dutch film critic Jan Blokker’s attempt in the 1960s to banish these ideas (Schoots, 1999: 150-51). The Filmmuseum wrote an introduction to the programme in Filmmuseum · cinemateek that gave a short summary of the history of the Nederlandsche Filmliga. The programme itself consisted of four films, each of which illustrated a certain moment in the history of the Filmliga. These films were DE BRUG (Ivens, 1928), which the Filmliga had presented as the first film made in the Netherlands; OPUS 2, 3, 4 (Ruttmann, 1921-1925), an illustration of ‘aesthetic thinking’ about film; UN CHIEN ANDALOU (Buñuel, 1929), which was used to illustrate the fierce debates among the Filmliga members on what to show and what not to show; and MAT (Pudovkin, 1926), whose screening in the 1920s was perceived to be the reason for setting up the Filmliga in the first place. Unexpectedly, though, the order of the films did not follow the chronology of the accompanying film historical story: the programme started with DE BRUG and ended with MAT (Pudovkin, 1926),
even though, in reality, the Filmliga story started with Mat and ended with De Brug. This seems to have been the result of a practical choice to screen the three short films first and then show the longer film as a feature. Apparently, the grip of the traditional programming format, which always started with the shorts and ended with the feature, proved stronger than the chronological demands of classical film historical discourse.

The descriptions of the films, which were direct copies of contemporary articles in the journal Filmliga, written by Filmliga members, positioned the films within this history. The texts were peppered with the latest ideas about film art and art film from the 1920s and, by reprinting them, the Filmmuseum quite transparently presented these films as artistic works. The institute, in fact, frequently used existing reviews or similar texts to describe the films in its programmes and, in nearly all cases, this had a double effect: it placed the films in a film historical framework while retaining the existing discourse on their artistic value.

What stands out in this period, however, is the increasing appearance in the programmes of films that were not considered film art. They were no longer labelled ‘curiosities’ as in the preceding period; instead, the Filmmuseum now presented these films as relics of film history, traces of the unknown past. As a result, these more ordinary films also gained stronger film historical connotations. A good example of a programme that presented early films in this way was the retrospective De Amerikaanse zwijgende film (American Silent Film) in 1973. This differed from earlier similar programmes in many ways. First, the number of silent films included had increased remarkably: the retrospective consisted of 37 films, spanning twelve evening programmes. This contrasts greatly with previous programmes with the same theme – for example, the retrospective held on 29 May 1957 consisted of just three films, including a 1955 documentary on the subject. The 1973 programme, therefore, offered a far more extensive and detailed insight into the development of American silent film. The Filmmuseum also emphasised that this programme consisted of films that were previously unknown and had never before been viewed in the Netherlands. Another striking detail is that a large part of these unknown films dated from before 1900. Until the time of the retrospective, the Filmmuseum had shown exactly one film from before 1900, L’arroseur arrosé (Lumière, 1895), in 1971. The fact that such a large number of films from that hitherto neglected period were shown in one programme was certainly an important development.

In 1985, the Filmmuseum presented the programme Hommage aan Jean Desmet (A Homage to Jean Desmet) in the Cinema Parisien, Desmet’s old cinema, in celebration of its 75 years of existence. The Filmmuseum reported in its journal that it wished to reconstruct the programmes screened in the 1910s
just as Desmet had presented them. However, due to the composition of the Desmet Collection, it was impossible to reconstruct the original programmes authentically: the collection simply did not cover enough genres. Thus, it was Desmet’s later selection choices (described in Chapter 1) that determined the Filmmuseum’s programming possibilities. Besides which, as digital humanities project Data Driven Film History has shown, Jean Desmet often screened films he rented from other distributors in his theatre, making it practically impossible to reconstruct these programmes using only films from the collection. This was reinforced by the fact that the institute had almost exclusively preserved the collection’s longer feature films – a marked example of the repercussions of preservation decisions on later programming activities.

In the end, the Filmmuseum decided to limit itself to six reconstructions that were ‘as close as possible’ to the ‘original’ Desmet programmes. What was remarkable was the way the Filmmuseum openly discussed the limitations of the archive as a film historical instrument in its descriptions of this programme in its journal.

The Filmmuseum also wrote about similar problems with its film prints, mentioning, for example, if they were complete or not. In contrast to earlier times, when the Filmmuseum had presented film fragments as a deliberate programming choice, the reference to incomplete films drew attention to the vulnerability of the film material. The institute emphasised the limitations of the material as a source of film history. This more historically critical approach to its film prints occurred simultaneously with the shift in focus at the end of the 1970s away from the construction of film vaults to the problems of preservation. The preservation of films necessitated the study of the film prints, and these new activities resulted in the discovery of new forms of information that shed light on their film historical value. The Filmmuseum used these new ideas to revise the framework within which it presented its films.

Although, during this time, the Filmmuseum increasingly regarded early, unknown films as significant film historical documents, it continued to present them as ‘primitive’ testimonies from a less sophisticated stage in film history. Despite the fact that, by 1985, it had begun to mention judiciously and frequently the possible beauty of these films, it still felt constrained to add that this quality was probably coincidental. Its comments on an unidentified Kalem film is an example of this approach:

The Kalem films are known for their sophisticated photography, with a high degree of naturalness. This is also very visible in this film. However, this quality mostly arose by chance, as is often the case with cinematic discoveries in the period of silent film.
The Filmmuseum seemed to mix ideas from the emerging new film history with those from classical film history. For example, when discussing a film by Edwin S. Porter, it stated:

New film history is working towards a more nuanced and better documented perspective, which shows that Porter was one of the better directors of the ‘primitive’ period. This is shown in this film by, among other things, the composition of the well-defined shot.79

In one sentence, the Filmmuseum showed itself to be aware of the new film historical research that was attempting to establish a more nuanced perspective on film history, yet still rehashed the old ideas about the ‘primitive’ nature of early film. It seems that the teleological view that new film history denounced kept reappearing in film museum practice. As a result, programmes such as the Desmet retrospective, mentioned above, became a patchwork of detailed research on a micro-level, interspersed with classical views on the ‘primitive’ status of the films on show.

EDUCATIONAL DISCOVERIES

As previously mentioned, film museum practice underwent a number of changes in the late 1980s. This not only took the shape of a new approach to the preservation of nitrate films, but also resulted in new programming policies. For example, the Filmmuseum decided it would mainly show films from its own archive from then on.80 During this period, the institute frequently selected unknown films from the archive for preservation and restoration and, as such, for inclusion in the museum collection; hence, the canon gradually disappeared into the background. Since screening and collection policies were strongly intertwined at this time, these patterns were also reflected in the Filmmuseum’s programming. But what did this mean in terms of the film historical discourse?

The Filmmuseum mostly presented unknown silent films from the museum collection in thematically structured programmes. These often comprised multiple evening shows, during which the Filmmuseum showed sometimes one but, more often, several films. The programmes developed sub-themes that were explained in the programme notes and in its NFM-Themareeks, a series of publications on film museum discoveries.81 In this way, the Filmmuseum was able to present unknown films in a new film historical context.

One example of a programme in which the Filmmuseum organised this new form of ‘retrospective’ was Film en de Eerste Wereldoorlog (Film and the
First World War). The programme was shown in July 1993, at the same time as the IAMHIST (International Association for Media and History) conference on the same subject, which was also taking place in Amsterdam. As part of the overall theme, the Filmmuseum put forward several sub-themes, such as newsreels and German propaganda films, two genres that were very under-researched.\(^2\) In the programme Amsterdam-Venetië in het Nederlands Filmmuseum (Amsterdam-Venice in the Netherlands Filmmuseum), the Filmmuseum screened underexposed nonfiction genres, such as early ‘travelogues’.

In addition to these previously unknown films, it also brought attention to underexposed techniques: in 1992, for example, it presented a programme about coloured films entitled Een staalkaart van kleur (An Overview of Colour). This programme included three evening shows covering three sub-themes: namely, the extravagance of the early use of colour; the use of colour to satisfy the prevailing obsession with realism; and the dramaturgical use of colour.\(^4\) It particularly focused on the various functions of colour in early film, the different styles of colour in the early period, and the interrelationship between style and technology.

What is striking about the thematic programmes is that they appeared to breathe an atmosphere of surprise: the Filmmuseum presented its programmes as voyages of discovery, in which the public could partake in unravelling the secrets of silent films. On some occasions, the Filmmuseum even referred to this sense of discovery in its thematic title, such as Heroïsche Omzwervingen – de gouden jaren van de expeditiefilm 1900-1940 (Heroic Wanderings – the golden years of the expedition film 1900-1940). In this programme, it showed sixteen unknown early films of expeditions, all of which were silent, and released a series of publications on the theme entitled, Heroïsche omzwervingen met de camera (Heroic Wanderings with a Camera), a description of the work of three travelling cameramen from that era. Peter Delpeut introduced it with a short biography of the three filmmakers, followed by excerpts from their writings, in which they describe the hardships they had to endure in order to bring these ‘unknown’ parts of the world to the viewing public. Indeed it was often through their efforts that audiences in the first decades of the 20th century discovered these faraway places. In a later parallel, the Filmmuseum’s archival explorations enabled its audiences to re-discover these films that so vividly represented a particular part of the history of film.

Film historical discoveries often returned in the programming. For example, in March 1990, the Filmmuseum invited its audience to undertake a joint film historical quest in a programme it dedicated to the theme of exoticism and film. First, it explained in the programme guide what it meant by ‘exoticism’ and the special role this theme had played in the history of cinema. The fact that the reason why and the means by which cinema embraced the exotic
had not yet been investigated\textsuperscript{86} meant that the Filmmuseum was able to ask the members of the audience to watch the films together and discover for themselves how the idea of the ‘exotic’ and film were related. This way, the museum participated in the endeavour of film historical research in an intoxicating exploration of unknown films, as well as in the quest to identify other potential gaps in film history as it was written during the classical period.

The Filmmuseum introduced this new experimental programming policy at approximately the same moment as Dutch universities started to view media studies more seriously and to integrate it into their curricula. Both Utrecht and Amsterdam universities introduced a chair of film studies, enhancing its academic status, and Eric De Kuyper established a course called ‘Film en opvoeringskunsten’ (‘Film and Performance Arts’) at the University of Nijmegen. In 1993, this professionalisation of the field of media studies in academic research and university programmes in the Netherlands was central to a debate organised around the title, ‘The Future of Media History’, by the Vereniging Geschiedenis, Beeld en Geluid (Association of History, Image and Sound) and the Committee to Promote Media Historical Research, founded by the Sociaal Wetenschappelijke Raad (Social Science Council) (Vree van and Slot, 1993-1994: 4).

This focus on film history and the desire to enrich the discipline were best reflected in the workshops and themadagen (theme days) organised by the Filmmuseum. I discussed in Chapter 3 how, during these workshops, the Filmmuseum showed films that still lacked historical resonance as a way of prompting a discussion about them. These screenings further operated as a programming strategy, in which the Filmmuseum was able to show a large number of its films over a short period of time to a select audience of film historians and archivists. In addition, the institute provided a time and place where these two groups of people, who were equally part of the ongoing film historical discourse, could meet, allowing them to discuss with and learn from each other.\textsuperscript{87} Finally, because the Filmmuseum published books based on their discussions, the workshops also provided a film historical framework for the films it screened in its regular programmes.\textsuperscript{88}

During the same period, the Filmmuseum also preserved many unknown silent films from the archive, simply because of their quality and beauty, and mentioned this when announcing the screening of these films.\textsuperscript{89} However, it did not appear so easy to convince audiences of the beauty of this ‘new’ old material. In its programme notes, the Filmmuseum printed an article by De Kuyper in which he gave a detailed description of his experiences as a programmer, revealing that, although he lovingly showed all kinds of special unknown films, the audience still preferred the more famous ones. De Kuyper uses the metaphor of a cook who introduces a novel menu to explain that an
audience needs to learn how to appreciate certain flavours and tastes. He concludes: ‘They do not know what is good and tasty [...] But I have stamina. And I will serve it again another day’ (Kuyper De, 1989).90

The audience therefore had to develop a taste for these films; it would need to learn from its viewing experience before it could see for itself the beauty of these unknown gems. To accomplish this, the Filmmuseum employed three strategies. First, it continued to programme unknown films, with hopes that Dutch film-lovers would stand up and be counted (Hommel, 1991b: 44). In addition, De Kuyper produced a booklet on the character and aesthetics of early 20th-century commercial films, entitled ‘De vreemde taal van de stomme film – film in de periode 1910-1915’, which appeared in the NFM-Themareeks (Kuyper De, 1992b; 1992c). In this essay, he argues that these films were artistically valuable, even though there was still no defined paradigm or aesthetic standards by which to judge them.91 Third, the Filmmuseum organised a series of courses on film history called Kijken is een kunst (Watching is an Art).92 Not only were these films declared to be of aesthetic value, but the recognition of this value was also promoted to the status of an artistic activity.

All in all, the Filmmuseum created a profile for itself as an institute that knew which films were valuable and beautiful, giving it an educational purpose. The institute indeed continuously stressed the aesthetic value of the unknown silent films it showed: for example, it described the film fragments in its Bits & Pieces collection as ‘a lush bouquet’,93 and it entitled a programme of early shorts as Kort & Prachtig (Short and Beautiful).94 Besides this, it regularly reminded the audience that the ‘brilliant colours’ and ‘brilliant documentary footage’ in the films had remained undiscovered until that moment.95 All this shows that the Filmmuseum clearly wanted to produce an aestheticising reading mode for these films, inviting the audience to interpret them as aesthetic objects. As such, it pursued a strategy it had often used since the 1950s. The difference was that the visitors were now invited to aesthetically appreciate a very different category of film.

The Filmmuseum also continued to use strategies that guided its audience into an art-reading mode by using the concept of the ‘auteur’ to describe a filmmaker in order to bestow value on a film. This seems a surprising move, given that the classical film historical discourse that gave birth to this term was no longer predominant. However, the institute dealt with these auteurs and their oeuvres in a different way: whereas classical film historians usually named a few masterpieces made by a proclaimed auteur, in the 1970s, both film historians and museums showed an increasing interest in the unknown films of the ‘masters’, and these started to appear in film museum programmes. A good example of such a director was D.W. Griffith. In the 1970s, for example, MoMA organised a retrospective of his hitherto unknown
work, accompanied by an extensive study by film historian Tom Gunning, who was then just starting his academic career (Gunning, 1991). The Filmmuseum mounted the same retrospective in November and December 1976, showing 33 films made by Griffith. Until that moment, the Filmmuseum had only shown two of his films – namely, the well-known, canonised titles, The Birth of a Nation (1915) and Intolerance (1916). The film festival, Le Giornate del Cinema Muto in Pordenone, even organised a retrospective of all Griffith’s retrieved films from 1997 to 2008. This shows that, on the one hand, the desire to see the films of famous auteurs was as strong as ever; on the other hand, there was an emerging need to see unknown films, reflecting the fascination with new discoveries that was so characteristic of this period of film historical research.

Added to this, film museums also introduced ‘new’ auteurs such as Jevgeni Bauer, Léonce Perret, and Alfred Machin, valorising their previously unknown, recently rediscovered early films. Film museums first disinterred and preserved the films of these directors, and then initiated research into the filmmakers in order to inform audiences about their work, cinema environment, and status as auteurs (Kuyper De, 1993; 1995). Film museums and film historians used the old parameters to consecrate unknown films as potential masterpieces. The Filmmuseum, for example, organised retrospectives on these auteurs, presenting the films within a newly constructed historical framework. As with the presentation strategies for unknown films mentioned above, which helped produce an aestheticising reading, the Filmmuseum also programmed its audience to adopt an art-reading mode. By presenting the unknown films in a programme framed by these newly discovered auteurs, the institute guided the audience in the direction of seeing them as works of art, a mode of reading that becomes functional as soon as the creator of the film is perceived to be an ‘artist’. This pattern is so deeply embedded in our culture that it is nearly impossible to eliminate the idea of the artist/auteur from our film historical views. The film museum made (and continues to make) full use of this.

In the various publications the Filmmuseum produced on these newly discovered filmmakers, it explains why it considered them auteurs by referring to classical film historians. For example, it writes that it considered Perret’s films to be of a ‘stunning visual quality’, and that ‘[b]oth Jean Mitry and Georges Sadoul indicated that in those years that Perret remained far ahead of his contemporaries in terms of mise-en-scène and narration’. Thus, the texts accompanying the screenings used the views of classical film historians to endow Perret with the status of auteur. Furthermore, the Filmmuseum stated that Perret’s films were distinguished by his deployment of exposure and exteriors, and it considered his use of decor very sophisticated for an early
filmmaker. These statements are consistent with Sadoul’s comments on Perret in his *Histoire du cinéma*:

> Before 1914, Léonce Perret seems to have had a greater feeling for art than Feuillade. He took great care [with] his photography, used backlight, used artificial light in a dramatically effective way, worked systematically with close-ups, etc. (Sadoul 1962: 77)

Consequently, the Filmmuseum presented Perret as an auteur both directly and indirectly by citing Sadoul and Mitry. In addition, the line of argument it used when presenting Perret as a genius who made aesthetically pleasing films, despite the constraints of the primitive system he worked within, reminds us of the discourse of the auteur critics of the 1950s. The Filmmuseum was using old, familiar film historical patterns and structures, on various levels, in order to convince its audiences that these unknown silent films were actually works of art.

In 1991, the Filmmuseum first presented its collection called Bits & Pieces by spreading the fragments over several programmes. In each newly released programme, Bits & Pieces was presented as a testimony of the most recent discoveries from the archive. In this respect, we can consider Bits & Pieces to be a series in which the story of the archive was highlighted in several episodes. As mentioned earlier, the collection largely consisted of unidentified film fragments that had no place in the official film historiography. In particular, during the period in which the dominance of classical film history ensured that the gaps in the archives were ignored for the most part, such material caused discomfort among both film archivists and historians. But the new film historians also struggled with this material. This new form of film history writing expressed a desire to bring the archive’s lacunae to the surface in order to examine them, and the historians therefore visited the film archives with the purpose of approaching and investigating films as film historical sources. However, when they did so, they found that the archives were even more patchy and fragmented than they anticipated. This was partly due to the way the films had been acquired, but it was also a consequence of the transience of the film material. As a result, the archive, with all its gaps and discontinuities, showed that the ambition to record the complete history of film was, in fact, impossible.

In 1991, De Kuyper wrote an article in the journal *Versus* on the denial by film historians of the incompleteness of the archive:

> [Does it not] falsify the history of film, when one gives the impression that it is complete, closed and linear? Should film historiography not
bear witness to the situation and recognise that it works with lacunas and loopholes in its actual data and historical facts? (Kuyper De, 1991a: 10)

Here, De Kuyper gives voice to his belief that film history, in a similar way to archaeology, has to accept that its source material is fragmentary. With Bits & Pieces, the Filmmuseum highlighted the similarities between the state of the film archives and archaeological remains. Just like archaeological excavations, Bits & Pieces revealed the past in fragments and, as such, it made visible only that part of film history that had survived in these pieces of film. The difference is that archaeological excavations display the ruins and remains of the past in location, or they take that location into account when putting them on display elsewhere, whereas the Bits & Pieces fragments were displayed on the screen. Another difference is that the fragments discovered in archaeological excavations are usually identified. By contrast, the collection’s fragments mainly consisted of unidentified material, and as such, turned this programming format into an even stronger metaphor for the inaccessibility of the past (Verhoeff, 2006: 14). As a result, Bits & Pieces represented the ragged edges of film history and the film archives on the silver screen.

As well as a programming format, the fragments found in the Bits & Pieces collection could also be seen as so-called ‘found-footage’ films. Starting in the early 1990s, the Filmmuseum became actively involved in the production of such films: it invited filmmakers such as Gustav Deutsch, Vincent Monnikendam, and Fiona Tan to compile new films out of the archival material. These films, such as the Gustav Deutsch series, FILM IST... (1998; 2002; 2009), often provided alternative perspectives on film history. Deutsch ordered the images thematically, reflecting the thematic programming of the Filmmuseum but using fragments instead of entire films.

An example of a found-footage film born entirely inside the Filmmuseum archive is Delpeut’s LYRISCH NITRAAT (1991). Delpeut (cited in Bosma, 2010) states that the film was the logical consequence of his work as a programmer at the institute. Other film scholars have analysed this film, mainly focusing on the way it presents the decaying beauty and nostalgic power of the fragments (Kamp Op den, 2004; Habib, 2005; Blum, 2013). And, indeed, the film itself warns us: ‘All nitrate films in their original state will be irrevocably lost.’ However, Dino Everett (2008: 28) argues that this is not the only message Delpeut is communicating: ‘[T]he film does not appear to use deterioration as its motivation, especially because it announces upfront that the colors being viewed were restored by the Nederlands Filmmuseum.’ According to Everett, over and above the fragility of the fragments and their deterioration, the film testifies to the work of the Filmmuseum in saving this material, especially its colours.
In his presentation at the 2015 conference, *The Colour Fantastic*, Delpeut (2017, forthcoming) remarked that, in retrospect, he saw the film as ‘a pamphlet, a celebration of unknown beauty, as well as an accusation of [those who] had kept that away from us’. In addition, it was a visual presentation of a new film historical perspective on early cinema. Delpeut explained that the film was intended to convey four important messages about early cinema: first, it had colour; second, it was hand-cranked and had no stable speed; third, it was more than just slap-stick, and in fact was comparable to opera; and last, by showing the decay of the filmic image, the film emphasised that ‘the richness of early cinema was on the verge [of] vanishing; nitrate couldn’t wait’.

However, Delpeut also explained that he was confronted by a series of constraints when making the film. The idea for it began to form after he encountered the Desmet Collection in the late 1980s. However, when Filmmuseum director Hoos Blotkamp allowed him to make the film in 1989, it was on the condition that he would only use fragments of films that had already been preserved. As a result, he was not allowed to choose from the entire Desmet Collection but was restricted to a very select group of films. This meant that he also had to use earlier duplicates that were made in black and white, resulting in a film that did not reflect the actual colours of the collection itself. Taking this into consideration, the film could be said to represent an accumulation of moments of choice. The first choice occurred when Jean Desmet decided to buy a certain film for his distribution company, and the second, when he decided to keep the film in his later collection rather than sell or discard it (see Chapter 1). The third moment of choice came when the Filmmuseum decided to preserve the film in either colour or black and white, the fourth when Delpeut chose to use it as one of a particular set of titles to make his film, and the fifth was the moment he picked certain fragments from the film and left others out. As a result, this film did not reflect the history of film distribution from the 1910s, nor did it reflect the way the Desmet Collection was shaped in 1989; rather, it was an entirely new product that not only represented Delpeut’s perspective on film history, but also reflected (due to the constraints on its creation) the collection and preservation history of the Desmet Collection.

Overall, then, the thematic structure of the Filmmuseum’s programming made it possible to present certain topics in-depth. However, the disadvantage of this format was that it introduced large portions of film history that were totally unfamiliar to audiences, so, in order to avoid incomprehension and keep its screenings accessible, it decided to show films from the canon in addition to its programmes of unknown and unidentified films. The institute showed these canonical films in series, framed by overarching programme titles, on a regular basis. It decided to use these films to give an overview of film history: in January 1989, for example, it began a series of screenings entitled
Repertoire, presenting the canonical films it had preserved or rehabilitated. In the screenings, the institute showed film history with a twist: in addition to the classic titles ‘that every cinephile must have seen’, it also showed ‘either the lesser known, or perhaps somewhat overlooked titles of important directors’. The strategy of including the unknown titles of well-known directors introduced a new film historical element into the Filmmuseum’s programming, despite its focus on the canon and canonical filmmakers.

Soon, the Filmmuseum split the Repertoire programme into two separate series, each, in its own way, referring to the classical film historical discourse. In one, it initiated the so-called ‘series of classics’, in which it screened canonical films from its own archive. The screenings were introduced by specialists and accompanied by textual information. It was particularly striking that the criteria the Filmmuseum used to select these films were closely related to that espoused by classical film history: the series consisted of films that were either still well-known or were illustrative of a step forward in the development of film into an art form, reviving the teleological conception of film history prevalent before the 1970s. In addition, the Filmmuseum introduced a series called Film History from A-Z, which it presented in a daily evening programme. In order to show, as the title suggests, film history from ‘a’ to ‘z’, it also screened ‘more obscure films’ and ‘average’ film productions, since they were also part of the history. It showed this alleged cross-section of film history in chronological order. The idea of presenting film history through a series of ‘highlights’ shows parallels with classical film historical discourse. In this series, the Filmmuseum did not go against the doxa or accepted beliefs in the way it did when showing ‘forgotten’ films in its thematic programmes; rather, the canon was the starting point for the search for other potentially ‘important’ films. Thinking in terms of – and presenting – the canon and its highlights remained on the institute’s agenda, although it supplemented the canonical films with rediscovered (forgotten) ones. This, of course, represented, to a certain extent, a revision of the existing discourse, but it had a less than revolutionary effect.

Although the Filmmuseum composed this programme series very carefully, it presented the more radical thematic programmes as unique productions. For example, these programmes were much more visible in the accompanying texts, and much more elaborately developed. This created a situation in which the screenings of the canon mainly contextualised or framed the other, thematic programmes. Hence, there was a reversal in status: the films that used to be considered the most important and artistically valuable films were now mostly used to show the (old) film historical story, while the newly discovered, unknown silent films were presented as aesthetic objects, important museum artefacts that any self-respecting film enthusiast could not deny him or her-
self. In addition to a shift in status, there was also a change in the meaning that the Filmmuseum gave these films. The canon reinforced a more historicist reading, while the rediscoveries were bestowed with a sense of wonder, which guided the spectators in the direction of an aestheticising mode of reading.

With this series, the Filmmuseum also gave new audiences the opportunity to experience (and old ones to stay informed about) the classical canon. Although these canonical films had been repeatedly screened over a long period of time, it cannot be assumed that they were generally known as there will always be newcomers to a cultural field or an academic discipline. As De Kuyper (cited in Hommel, 1991: 44) put it during an interview: ‘[O]ne generation of film students after the other should be able to get an idea of what film history has been.’ Indeed, most of the Repertoire programme was screened in collaboration with the University of Amsterdam. These screenings were designed to familiarise new generations of film students with the canon, a purpose that emphasises the fact that this canon remained of great importance as the doxa of the discipline.

The Filmmuseum also turned to another approach as part of its new presentation strategy: its screening of the programme Hommage aan Jean Desmet in his old film theatre on the Nieuwedijk appears to have been a prologue to the policy that it adopted a few years later of presenting film as performance art. To emphasise this approach, the Filmmuseum turned Dutch film culture into its main area of interest, including the history of cinema and film screening in the Netherlands. This resulted in, among other things, the reconstruction of Dutch versions of the institute’s archival films. (The installation of the interior of the Cinema Parisien in the Vondelpark Pavilion was a further result of this new approach.) We can also recognise the idea of film as performance art at a programming level – for example, in the revival of programmes from the early years of film. In July 1993, the Filmmuseum reconstructed two theatre performances with the theme, Film and the First World War. In addition, in October 1993, it reconstructed a film programme from the first decade of the 20th century. The programme guide declared: ‘On the basis of six short films from the period 1909-1913, the audience gets an idea of what a cinema performance looked like in the 1910s.’ The institute clearly intended to use these programmes to reconstruct the history of cinema performances and give an impression of how films were screened and seen during these early years. While the Filmmuseum’s 1985 programme had tried to reconstruct historically Desmet’s programme of film screenings as faithfully as possible, this time, by contrast, it was mainly concerned with giving an impression of an early film presentation. The element of surprise played a big role in these programmes, particularly in relation to the variety of the genres and the beauty of the films. Within the framework of a reconstruction, the Filmmuseum gave
itself the freedom to (re)construct programmes with films from the archive that allowed the audience to enjoy an aesthetic experience and to encounter feelings of surprise and wonder, combined with a sense of touching history.

This analysis of the Filmmuseum’s programmes over the years has shown that expanding the division of this period from two parts to three is justified. The new period, which is characterised by the search for a ‘film museum identity’, can be inserted between the two periods traditionally adopted by film historiography. It is notable that, during this additional period, the Filmmuseum seemed to search for a compromise between the old discourses and the new – a search that finally resulted, nevertheless, in film museum practice finding its place within the film historical debate and taking a new position in relation to the aesthetic and film historical value of early films. This translated into a new receptivity to the films of that era, encouraging a diversity of film historical expression.