# Introduction: Unpacking Film History's Own Histories

## Towards an Archaeology of Film Historiography

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Film is a historical object. This statement sounds simple and straightforward. But, as many assertions that appear self-evident at first sight, this turns out to be in actual fact a complex proposition with countless assumptions and preconditions, with many consequences and effects which this book will be devoted towards unpacking. History, the sequential, causal, and interpretative organization of past events, is a hermeneutical process which revolves around the selection of material, the connection of facts, as well as the argumentation of correlations and causations. An archaeological perspective on film history that this book proposes helps to shift attention towards the fragmentary state of sources, the material nature of records, and the necessarily constructivist manner of building evidence. While the academic discipline of history has made the turn towards a reflexive metahistory several decades ago,[1] film historiography appears to lag behind in this respect, as it still often clings to notions of natural evolution, national schools, and individual greatness.

In very general terms, film can be—and has been—historicized in many different ways: as an aesthetic and as a technological object, as a story of progress or decay, with a focus on the social effects of the films or on the economic trajectory of the business. While different approaches to film history—auteur and genre theory, new film history,[2] stylistic history,[3] media

1 See, for example, the writings of Michel Foucault, Hayden White, Stephen Greenblatt, Carlo Ginzburg, Aleida Assmann, or Reinhart Koselleck.

2 Robert C. Allen, and Douglas Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice* (New York: Knopf, 1985).

3 David Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1997).

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archaeology[4] and new cinema history[5]—have been proposed and discussed (and continue to do so), the constitution of film history itself has rarely been systematically addressed and studied in-depth. In the process, the elements that contributed to it and the factors that shaped it, the material base as well as the contingencies and necessities that account for its shape and development, have been examined and scrutinized mainly in passing and rather been taken for granted. Attempting to fill this gap, the present book suggests to retrace how film history became the way it is today—and why it does not look any other way. This includes not only an exploration of the emergence and development of persistent records and the lore of the filmic past as it has been preserved, but also a foray into the dead ends and forgotten threads of film history. While revisiting the well-known narratives that film history tells us, we—together with the authors that we have assembled—also look out for the stories untold and wish to listen to the voices that have often been ignored in the past. In taking film history as the object to be historicized, the volume intends to uncover and mine the complex and contested processes and politics involved in the making of film and cinema an object of historiography. Insight into the fabrication of film history and the discourses on its materials, methods, and theories in the past can contribute to a better understanding and critical reconsideration of film history today.

## What Are Film Histories? From Singular to Plural

Film history itself has a history that needs to be written—and constantly rewritten. It is a history of material objects (film prints, books, magazines, archival and non-archival documents, objects, studios, etc.) and their circulation and transformation, but it is also a story of immaterial things (ideas, theories, arguments, oral statements) and their afterlife. It is concerned in equal measure with theory and practice. It is a story of great men and women (from Iris Barry to the pioneers at the International Federation of Film Archives [FIAF] conference in Brighton in 1978), even though many names have been forgotten and will remain so. It also unfolds across

4 Thomas Elsaesser, *Film History as Media Archaeology: Tracking Digital Cinema* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016).

5 Daniel Biltereyst, Richard Maltby, and Philippe Meers, eds., *Explorations in New Cinema History: Approaches and Case Studies* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011); Daniel Biltereyst, Richard Maltby, and Philippe Meers, eds., *The Routledge Companion to New Cinema History* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019).

impersonal structures (government bureaucracies, studio hierarchies, institutional libraries, and university administrations), concrete things (film prints, annotated scripts, props, cinema theatres) and most often in hybrid networks of structures and actions, of personal dedication and utilized objects, of abstract ideas and concrete doings. From the prints themselves, their availability and physical condition, all the way to conversations and ephemeral encounters, film history has a basis in the sources that were—or were not—available at specific places and at specific times. So this approach also seeks to address the potential methods and tools at hand to write not one, but many histories of film history. In order to take a closer look at the shape of film historiography, we may need to employ digital methods as well as archival skills; theoretical reflection is no less important than creativity in placing documents or anthropological and ethnographic research methods. While this book will not transform the writing of film history single-handedly (no single tome would be capable of doing that), it sees itself as part of a larger movement towards integrating archival research with theoretically advanced considerations.

Film history has geographical biases, temporal prejudices, and institutional preferences—certain objects, places, times, and institutions promise more fame and glory than others. For example, film history as we know it today has to a very large extent focused on art cinema and commercial film-making and ignored as a consequence studying the use of moving images in the classroom, of audiovisual media in large-scale exhibitions (such as world expositions), and other fields of non-theatrical film culture. This bias towards fiction, mainstream film, and the classical movie theatre is in a (slow) process of transformation, as the last decade has seen a strong surge of interest in the field of "useful cinema."[6] Moreover, film history as we know it today has been written to a large extent in and about the films produced and seen in the Western world. Neglected in this process are non-Western subjects and practices, perspectives, and experiences. A

6 Some of the important volumes are: Charles R. Acland and Haidee Wasson, eds., *Useful Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Devin Orgeron, Marsha Orgeron, and Dan Streible, eds., *Learning with the Lights Off: Educational Film in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Vinzenz Hediger and Patrick Vonderau, eds., *Films That Work: Industrial Film and the Productivity of Media* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009); Scott Curtis, *The Shape of Spectatorship: Art, Science, and Early Cinema in Germany* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015); Alison Griffiths, *Shivers down Your Spine: Cinema, Museums and the Immersive View* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013); Bo Florin, Patrick Vonderau, and Yvonne Zimmermann, *Advertising and the Transformation of Screen Cultures* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021).

truly global film history should look at the reasons for such predilections that obscured alternative film histories, as well as at the blind spots that such a conceptual approach entails.[7] This anthology includes film histories from the Global South and studies idiosyncrasies as well as transcultural influences and exchanges in order to discover film history's diverse and entangled histories. Yet, we are also sensitive to the pitfalls of such an endeavour because it risks once again replicating a specific bias towards spectacular stories and shining discoveries. Covering every country or region with a text of its own is an impossible mission, first of all because it would go beyond the scope of this book, but more importantly such a procedure would be in danger of delegating non-Western history to a series of case studies while the West would be responsible for the theoretical reflection.

The essays in this anthology are transculturally informed and deeply entangled probes into the problems and issues of writing film history which are as much historical (Who had access to which material, who made which inferences, who influenced whom?) as they are conceptual (What does it mean to speak of film history? What does belong in film history? What does not belong?). Ultimately, these questions come down to the role of cinema: as a cultural actor, as a social force, as a political weapon, and as an economic factor. To write a history of the cinema—or of any aspect thereof—implies that the subject has value and significance.

While staying aware of film's specificity (in terms of its ontology, aesthetic forms, social contexts, institutional logics, and economic developments), the contributions in this book also address the transmedial nature of film history. The writing of film history cannot be done in splendid isolation; it has to think about radio and television, chrono-photography and computing, magazines and newspapers, magic lantern and photo journalism—just to mention some of the most obvious fellow travellers of film historiography. Such historiography does take film serious in its specificity, but it also keeps in mind the larger networks of media, infrastructures, and publics that have shaped our media and image culture in the past and continue to do so today. In this sense, this anthology is sensitive to recent proposals from media archaeology to shun away from a linear history of progress and to look instead at both the materiality of history and the dead ends of forgotten practices.

7 See also the revisionist feminist history/theory exhibition (at Berlin's Haus der Kulturen der Welt) and publication: Erika Balsom and Hila Peleg, eds., *Feminist Worldmaking and the Moving Image* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2022).

The influential film histories of the past have been written by single authors, usually male, from major countries in North America or Europe.[8] These works, sometimes single volumes, sometimes several tomes, have claimed their rightful place within the field and they have been useful to generations of students. From today's perspective, it appears increasingly megalomaniac to write a global film history single-handedly—too diverse are the traditions and sources, too broad is our knowledge spread out across very different domains, too high are the demands and expectations. Therefore, we speak here of film histories in the plural since we are faced not with one unified story, but with many (hi)stories—(hi)stories of many different places and aesthetic forms, (hi)stories of cinema memories and screening contexts, (hi)stories of movie palaces as well as political rallies, (hi)stories of factories, prisons, and museums as screening spaces. Films have been shown in many different venues and put to many different uses; they have circulated in many formats and audiences have reacted in very different ways. The plurality of the object cinema is crucial and consequently film history can only be imagined in the plural—as "film histories."

## When Was Film History? Beginnings and Developments

*The canon established during the 1910s and 1920s remains with us today.*
—David Bordwell (1997)[9]

What are the conditions of the possibility of writing and constructing a film history? Or rather, as we have argued for the plural, film histories? Why did a discourse that gave itself that name emerge some time between 1925 and 1935? History is predicated on temporality and transformation—it is dedicated to charting and explaining change over time. Therefore, only once the cinema was seen as a unified phenomenon worthy of consideration and endowed with a certain longevity in which transformations became visible that were structural rather than random and arbitrary did it appeal to people to think about film in historical terms. This was the case some time after World War I, when the feature film had become the standard

8 We are thinking here of the works of Paul Rotha, Georges Sadoul, Jean Mitry, Jerzy Toeplitz, David Robinson, David Cook, and Mark Cousins, but also of such teams as Maurice Bardèche and Robert Brasillach, Enno Patalas and Ulrich Gregor, and David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson.
9 Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style*, 12.

of the industry and a certain structure of production, distribution, and exhibition had been established.

Of course, there had been earlier attempts to write the history of the moving image that are noteworthy. Mostly, these early examples were histories of technological invention and development. Antonia and William Kennedy-Laurie Dickson's collection of essays on the *History of the Kinetograph, Kinetoscope and Kineto-Photograph* came out in 1895 when moving images were barely "born" and the Lumière brothers' first commercial screening of moving images to a paying public at the Grand Café on the Boulevard des Capucines in Paris was yet to come in the near future.[10] Henry V. Hopwood devoted a chapter of his 1899 book *Living Pictures* to their history (entitled "Chronophotography and the Practical Development of the Living Picture"),[11] the others being on photoproduction and practical working. Other early historiographic approaches from France, Germany, and Britain, respectively, include Georges Demenÿ's *Les Origines du cinématographe* (1909), Franz Paul Liesegang's *Das lebende Lichtbild. Entwicklung, Wesen und Bedeutung des Kinematographen* (1910), and Colin N. Bennett's *The Handbook of Kinematography: The History, Theory and Practice of Motion Photography and Projection* (1911).[12] Such efforts could be summarized under the tagline "future needs origin," which since the industrialization of the mid-1850s had been widespread to promote novelties in industries and corporate communications by rooting them in a certain tradition. In the preface of his book, Bennett writes:

> Thus, briefly, we have the history of the kinematograph—a history of development and improvement which has ultimately resulted in a scientific entertainment, the like of which has never been enjoyed and witnessed by the people of the whole world, the possibilities of which we can barely imagine, which gives employment to thousands and enjoyment to millions daily, and which amuses, educates, and brings into closer relationship the inhabitants of every quarter of the globe.[13]

10 See William Kennedy-Laurie Dickson and Antonia Dickson, *History of the Kinetograph, Kinetoscope and Kineto-Photograph* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1970 [1895]).
11 See Henry V. Hopwood, *Living Pictures: Their History, Photo-production and Practical Working* (London: Forgotten Books, 2015 [1899]).
12 See Georges Demenÿ, *Les Origines du cinématographe* (Paris: H. Paulin, 1909); Franz Paul Liesegang, *Das lebende Lichtbild. Entwicklung, Wesen und Bedeutung des Kinematographen* (Düsseldorf: Liesegang, 1910); Colin N. Bennett, *The Handbook of Kinematography: The History, Theory and Practice of Motion Photography and Projection* (London: The Kinematograph Weekly, 1911).
13 Ibid., v.

Apart from the teleological belief in progress that speaks from the quote and that is typical for such early historiographies that retrace a certain genealogy of the moving image, it also illustrates a discourse that is much infused with the promise of cinema's future. In addition, writings like Bennett's were usually authored by practitioners who had multiple purposes in mind—be they to explain and legitimize their business or to secure their place in history. This motivation to get involved in film history and historiography can, of course, be traced across the whole trajectory of the moving image and across all fields from avant-garde, experimental, and amateur film to what we call useful cinema today (see, for example, the essays by Cowan, Turquety, and Zimmermann in this volume). These early endeavours into the history of film are particularly interesting for their situatedness within a larger visual culture and multimedia history.

The first tentative steps in the direction of a historiographic discourse based on an assumed medium-specificity of film and on a particular interest in aesthetic properties emerged in the mid-1920s. Recent research has shown that a number of factors contributed to this development: the growing awareness of film's significance (as an art form, a cultural force, an educational tool, and a political and economic factor) was possibly the most important contributing aspect. The introduction of sound film in the second half of the 1920s made people conscious of the fact that an era was coming to an end (and instilled in some a nostalgic longing for silent cinema), while the sudden economic obsolescence of films without a sound track marked a watershed that was crucial for the growing sense of material heritage that was on the brink of destruction. At the same time, political tensions underscored the importance of the cinema in social terms.[14]

If we turn towards the beginning of this decade (1925–1935) in which (medium-specific) film history emerged, we find a book such as Iris Barry's *Let's Go to the Pictures*,[15] published in 1926, which was still suspended somewhat undecidedly between criticism, theoretical argument and historical overview. It arguably succeeded most consequently as a "report on the nature and rewards of filmgoing,"[16] as her biographer has characterized the book. The chapters of the book address different aspects that were being discussed at the time: specificities of the medium ("Dolls and

14 See the contributions in Malte Hagener, ed., *The Emergence of Film Culture: Knowledge Production, Institution Building and the Fate of the Avant-garde in Europe, 1919–1945* (New York: Berghahn, 2014).

15 Iris Barry, *Let's Go to the Pictures* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1926).

16 Robert Sitton, *Lady in the Dark: Iris Barry and the Art of Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 131.

Dreams," 21–34; "Art," 35–50), social problems ("Conventions and Morals," 141–60) or national schools ("Speaking of International," 237–54). Yet, it presents one topic in each chapter (theory, social issues, national history) rather than following one of those consequently through. Therefore, film history was present in the book, yet again as one aspect of several. At the time, Barry was working as a film critic in London, where she had just been involved in the founding of the London Film Society, a key institution for establishing a canon of silent film. Later, after she moved to New York in 1930, she became the curator of the Museum of Modern Art Film Library and a key force in establishing and consolidating a certain version of film history.[17]

It was in the decade following the publication of Iris Barry's book that a consensus formed and a discourse emerged which could be described as an early form of film history. Of course, this period was characterized by the introduction of sound with its many direct and indirect effects. In what is still one of the most concise overviews of film historiography, David Bordwell has argued that at this time a "Basic story" of the process of film history was established which exhibited considerable influence and longevity. Bordwell writes: "[B]efore 1940 very few book-length histories of cinema were published. Instead, institutions created by international film culture served to maintain and update the Basic story."[18] The Basic story is a film historical discourse that relies on a logic of national characteristics, stylistic progress, and a gradual maturation—"schools" compete with one another and exhibit recognizable characteristics. These schools have mostly national roots (this is why some people still speak of a "typical French film" today) and individual proponents, usually called "auteurs." There is a clear element of scalability here, as individual films belong to the oeuvre of an individual person (the "auteur") who, in turn, can be attributed to a school which, again, is part of a national style.

One important publication from the midpoint of the decade in which film history was established is Paul Rotha's *The Film till Now*, which first came out in 1930.[19] The young author (born in 1907) underlined the precarious nature of knowledge about film:

17 See Haidee Wasson, *Museum Movies: The Museum of Modern Art and the Birth of Art Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

18 Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style*, 22.

19 Paul Rotha, *The Film till Now: A Survey of the Cinema* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1930). Rotha, with the help of Richard Griffith, published an updated edition in 1949, followed by another (final) edition in 1960. Both editions still very visibly exhibit the original structure of the book, as well as the signs of expansion, but remained influential.

> It must be remembered that the life of a film is short. It fades into the past with rapidity and is only to be seen again with difficulty. Moreover, reliable data about even quite well-known films is scarce and sometimes unprocurable. Secondly, I have attempted to investigate the film as a means of expression; to catalogue its attributes as evidenced till now; and to speculate upon its potentialities as suggested by its course of development.[20]

Evidently, Rotha wrote at a time when access to film was difficult, as no archives or established reference works existed. Yet again, the quoted passage demonstrates a clear sense of historicity, as it also projects film into the time to come. Rotha's book—and the future editions (in 1949 and 1960, respectively)—proved to be very influential for many decades.

If Barry opened the decade with her publication and Rotha's book marked the midpoint, then Maurice Bardèche and Robert Brasillach's *Histoire du cinéma*, which first came out in French in 1935, is the conclusion to this ten-year period.[21] The book was translated into English by Iris Barry, who worked at the time for the recently founded Museum of Modern Art Film Library. According to Bordwell, its value lies in the specific position from which it is written: looking back at the silent cinema, while the sound film was not altogether new, the authors formulated a "truly transnational stylistic history."[22] It became an influential work by its overview character which led to many re-editions and also translations. The English version came with a word of caution by John E. Abbott, the director of the Film Library:

> The tale which Messieurs Bardèche and Brasillach have to tell is a fascinating one. […] Only after a prolonged and complete re-examination of the film of the past will a wholly authoritative analysis of the film come to be recorded; in the meantime this animated (if often controversial) account is most welcome.[23]

20 Ibid., 10.

21 We do not have the space here to go into the political ramifications of these film histories, but it should at least be mentioned that Brasillach held Fascist beliefs and sympathies; he was executed in 1945 as a collaborator with the German occupiers after the liberation of France. Bardèche, his brother-in-law, attempted to clear his name and reinstate him as an important writer in the following years. For this political context, see Alice Yaeger Kaplan, *Reproductions of Banality: Fascism, Literature, and French Intellectual Life* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 142–60 ("The Movies").

22 Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style*, 40.

23 Maurice Bardèche and Robert Brasillach, *The History of Motion Pictures*, trans. and ed. by Iris Barry (New York: W. W. Norton/The Museum of Modern Art, 1938), xii.

The structure of the book makes clear that it is organized by national cinemas and by phases which are either delineated by political events or by technological developments. The major parts divide the forty years of cinema that it covers into six specific periods which are still being evoked today: birth (1895–1908), pre-war (1908–1914), World War I (1914–1918), emergence of art (1919–1923), classic silent film (1923–1929), and talking film (1929–1935). Within these short time windows, subchapters address the American, French, German, Russian, Scandinavian, and Italian film, effectively synchronizing the development in the different national sections according to political events or transformations of an economic and technological nature.

Of course, concentrating on books means to ignore newspapers and journals, exhibitions and film programmes, lectures and radio broadcasts which dealt with the history of the cinema, too. Yet again, books stood unrivalled as authoritative sources of knowledge and as encyclopaedic registers of fact. Rotha himself acknowledges this in the second edition of his book when he points to the appendices: "Knowing that perhaps the most used section of the book has been the Appendix of Production Units of some Outstanding Films, this list has been revised, expanded and brought up-to-date."[24] In this sense, the publication of a book requires a certain amount of work from author and publisher, but also from reader and user, so that a book with an authoritative aspiration to cover a field can be seen as a sediment of a larger discourse. It is in this sense that we speak of an emergent film history which becomes visible in the years around the introduction of sound.

## What Do Algorithms Know? Data-Driven Film Historiography

In order to test the common assumption that film history as a discourse emerged some time in the 1920s and 1930s and had found a relatively stable form by the beginning of World War II, we turned to digital methods. We wanted to see if we could find evidence—or at least hints and tendencies—in the available data that speak for or against the general proposition.[25] To

24 Paul Rotha (in collaboration with Richard Griffith), *The Film till Now: A Survey of World Cinema*, rev. ed. (New York: Twayne, 1949), 16.

25 This digital research was done as part of the Digital Cinema-Hub project, funded by the Volkswagen Foundation (http://dicihub.net). We thank data scientist Marcel Förster and project coordinator Josephine Diecke for their productive collaboration and input on this data module.

accomplish this, we built a corpus from the books available in digital form at the Media History Digital Library[26] that were published before 1940. Since our chosen method was text mining and topic modelling we removed all titles in languages other than English and also those volumes that were just catalogues or lists of film titles. These volumes would have required a very different approach that is not easily combinable with our perspective. Also deleted were titles that were present in multiple forms in the collection, mostly new editions or differently titled US/UK editions.

The question that guided the steps in the process of data preparation was whether the emergence of a film historiographic discourse could be traced through the development of the prose used in the published books. Or rather: if the data on word frequencies and topic modelling would give us new insights into the historiography of the medium. We quickly came to realize that evidence from data, at least in the humanities (but we suspect: also in other disciplines), has to be constructed and argued, rather than "discovered" and "displayed." The metaphors used for the preparation of data mostly originate from the primary sector of the economy, dealing with the production of raw materials—mining, harvesting, fishing—and imply an extractive process. Hence, this is a highly labour-intensive process that produces the basic material for all further steps, and it is important to make these steps transparent in detail.[27] We found that several titles on specific topics skewed the results in such a way that they made it difficult to get differentiated results on the rest of the corpus. We therefore removed several titles of a highly specialized nature, namely an authoritative book on the topic of law[28] and one on the history of three-colour photography.[29] Both titles generated topics of their own to which no other book belonged, thereby diluting the topics without giving any additional insight.

The basic corpus that we then worked on in more detail consisted of seventy-seven full texts of books, published in the years from 1911 to 1939. Since we considered it such an important title, we added—to the titles found in the Media History Digital Library—the English translation of Bardèche and Brasillach's book as a crucial publication in the field. The smallest

26 https://mediahistoryproject.org/.

27 Flawed input produces flawed results—therefore, it is important to make sure that the data is of high quality and not GIGO (as data scientists say, "Garbage in, garbage out"). For reasons of transparency, it is crucial to lay open the steps of data gathering, cleaning, and preparation.

28 Louis D. Frohlich and Charles Schwartz, *The Law of Motion Pictures: Including the Law of the Theatre* (New York: Baker, Vorhis and Company, 1918).

29 E. J. Wall, *The History of Three-Color Photography* (Boston: American Photographic Publishing Company, 1925).

portion of books came out in the 1910s (fourteen titles), some more titles were published in the 1920s (twenty-one titles), while the largest percentage of books came out in the 1930s (forty-two titles)—here our corpus reflects the realities of publishing, we believe. The number of books on the cinema published increased over the course of three decades. Using a standard tool in topic modelling (DARIAH Topics Explorer[30]), we let the algorithms divide the corpus into distinct semantic categories. Topic modelling is a relatively established method from machine learning and natural language processing which searches for clusters and atypical frequencies of words in larger corpora. In digital humanities this text-mining tool is often used to classify larger data sets which are compiled with specific research questions in mind. Cases in which topic modelling has been used successfully include studies into the genre of novels in the eighteenth and nineteenth century or the examination of trends in scholarly publications.[31] In our case, we experimented a bit with the number of topics, until we settled on eight topics that appeared distinct enough to be distinguishable, while also reflecting the semantic variety of the books in the data set. Some of the eight topics were easily recognizable because they fit into established categories; volumes on "education" listed key words such as *school*, *child*, *teacher*, *instruction*, while another topic which we called "film technology" had frequent words such as *light*, *lens*, *exposure*, *lamp*, and *projection*. We identified the following four topics easily and named them accordingly—"technology," "education," "screenwriting," and "sound film"—with "education" probably being the most distinctive topic since it showed up as a topic regardless of the number of topics we experimented with. This we think reflects the importance of education in historical film practice and discourse, which is a fact that was largely overlooked for a long time given "classical" film historiography's focus on art and entertainment films and that has only been "uncovered" in recent years by research into the history of useful cinema.

The rest of the topics proved to be more difficult to discern. Two topics dealt with questions of production—one appeared to be rather oriented towards studios and actual work on studio stages, while another one included

30 Severin Simmler, Thorsten Vitt, and Steffen Pielström, "Topic Modeling with Interactive Visualizations in a GUI Tool," paper presented at the Digital Humanities Conference 2019 (DH2019), Utrecht, the Netherlands, July 9–12, 2019, https://dataverse.nl/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.34894/ENV3TX.

31 See, for example, Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* (London: Verso, 2007), and Elijah Meeks and Scott B. Weingart, eds., *The Digital Humanities Contribution to Topic Modeling*, special issue of the *Journal of Digital Humanities* 2, no. 1 (2012), https://journalofdigitalhumanities.org/2-1/.

more significant terms with a focus on the industry in general, also referring to exhibition and censorship. Of the two remaining topics, one included several words referring to nation states (*French*, *English*, *British*, *German*, *American*, *Russian*, *Soviet*), as well as *Chaplin*, one of the few cases of a name of an individual coming up more frequently within the sample. The other one appeared to be a bit more poetic and romantic as the most significant words were *movie*, *girl*, *life*, *child*, *like*, and *boy*. The first topic, we concluded, can be seen as a nascent historical discourse which focused on national styles and prominent individuals, as Bordwell has argued about the structure of the Basic story. We termed this topic "world film history," the other "romantic/personal (hi)story."

Next, we turned to the books that the algorithm assigned to the specific topics, thus changing our scale from the whole data set to individual items. This shift of focus is crucial when working with digital methods and tools because results from data computations, at least in the humanities, always require interpretation and hermeneutic forms of understanding. By using the results from the algorithms as a specific way into the material, a constant movement between algorithmic computation and hermeneutic interpretation is necessary. It turned out to be significant that the titles in our "world film history" section were all published around or after the introduction of sound, mostly in the 1930s, some in the late 1920s. Thus, this topic only emerged after sound film had rendered film to be historical, as it showed the obsolescence of silent film in the new age of sound film. In the other topic—"romantic and personal (hi)story"—the years of publication are spread out wider across the period, even though we can also observe in this case a tendency towards the later decade.

The nascent topic of "world film history" contained the following books,[32] listed according to the degree to which the algorithm found them belonging to the category[33]: Paul Rotha's *The Film till Now* (1930) which we have discussed above and Allardyce Nicoll's bibliography on *Film and Theatre* (1936). The next title, *Plan for Cinema* (1936), was written by Dallas Bower,

32 Rotha, *The Film till Now* (1930); Allardyce Nicoll, *Film and Theatre* (New York: Crowell, 1936); Dallas Bower, *Plan for Cinema* (London: Dent, 1936); Ernest Betts, *Heraclitus; or, The Future of Films* (London: Kegan Paul, 1928); Huntly Carter, *The New Spirit in the Cinema: An Analysis and Interpretation of the Parallel Paths of the Cinema, Which Have Led to the Present Revolutionary Crisis Forming a Study of the Cinema as an Instrument of Sociological Humanism* (London: Howard Shaylor, 1930; E. W. Robson and M. M. Robson, *The Film Answers Back: An Historical Appreciation of the Cinema* (London: The Bodley Head, 1939).

33 The topic modelling algorithm assigns each text in the sample to one or (usually) more topics with a corresponding percentage which gives the relative weight of this attribution.

who was appointed as one of the first two senior producers at the BBC in 1936 after having worked in the film industry as a sound expert and director. In a study of his life (he turned out to be an important figure in the BBC), it is argued that this volume is "in many ways a visionary book foreseeing how colour, widescreen and 3D might be used to create a new form of filmic poetic drama."[34] Ernest Betts' *Heraclitus* (1928) is, in his own words, an "attempt to survey the position in the film world in 1928,"[35] as it presents an argument that is partly theoretical, partly historical. Huntly Carter's *The New Spirit in the Cinema* (1930) flaunts a long-winded subtitle: "An Analysis and Interpretation of the Parallel Paths of the Cinema, Which Have Led to the Present Revolutionary Crisis Forming a Study of the Cinema as an Instrument of Sociological Humanism." The book presents an idiosyncratic argument in which the cinema contains both "the good and evil seed," i.e. commercialism and humanism. Both paths are laid out in historical terms before Carter turns towards impeding developments. Finally, Emanuel W. and Mary M. Robson's *The Film Answers Back* (1939) is a serious non-fiction book from the end of the decade which already announces in its subtitle that it is "An Historical Appreciation of the Cinema." It consists of two parts, "The Cinema: Europe and America" and "The American Cinema," and it opens with the "invention" of the cinema (with well-known proponents such as Friese-Greene, Edison, and the Lumières as protagonists), as it goes on to tell the standard story which had been well-established by the end of the 1930s.

The topic "romantic/personal (hi)story" on the other hand, contained the following books which we briefly characterize here: a theatre and movie critic reminiscences about his life (Mark Hellinger, *Moon over Broadway*, 1931), an anecdotal history of early cinema focusing D. W. Griffith, written by his wife (Linda Arvidson, *When the Movies Were Young*, 1925), the autobiography of a well-known Scottish singer, named after his most successful song (Harry Lauder, *Roamin' in the Gloamin'*, 1928), a famous Payne Fund study on the movie-going of young people based on their own accounts (Herbert Blumer, *Movies and Conduct*, 1933), a collection of anecdotes around film production (Charles Ray, *Hollywood Shorts*, 1933), a study aimed at middle-class mothers and religious groups from the same series of Payne Fund studies as Blumer's (Henry James Forman, *Our Movie Made Children*, 1933) and a popular book on movie appreciation (Ira Price, *A Hundred Million*,

34 John Wyver, "Dallas Bower: A Producer for Television's Early Years, 1936–39," *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 9, no. 1 (2012): 26–39.

35 Betts, *Heraclitus*, 18.

1938).[36] On first sight, the studies of Blumer and Forman do not seem to fit this topic because they are sociological analyses of movie-going, but also of film content. They consist to a certain extent of retellings of movie plots, just as of the statements of teenagers and adolescents. In this sense, the books fit into this topic, which is more fascinated with criminality and sexuality, with emotions and affects, than with the nascent film historiography that we discussed above. We have to remember how the algorithm works and divides the string of words that have no semantic dimension to a computer into distinct categories.

With this in mind, we need to critically revaluate not only the results, but also the steps that led us there. The process of analysis in itself is hermeneutical, even though the data is generated by an algorithm that is purely interested in frequencies and patterns of words, not in meaning and understanding. Nevertheless, the results of the disinterested algorithm need to be interpreted semantically in order to make sense. And this process of meaning-making does not start with the results; but the whole process of building a data set, of choosing a method, and of setting parameters (establishment of corpus, list of stopwords, number of topics) is highly contingent and therefore already a part of the interpretative process. In fact, the process itself is iterative and algorithmically based, as much as interpretative because we went back and forth between larger patterns which the algorithm interpreted stochastically and closer looks as to which books fell into what category. In a way, this is a different kind of hermeneutical circle that does not only shift from text to context and back again, but that includes the statistical logic of the computer which remains elusive to historical facts and frameworks.

The topics that topic modelling as a method works with are dependent upon the corpus because they are generated from the material that is fed into the algorithm—the computer extracts the topics from the words. Therefore, the results are not only dependent upon the pre-existing knowledge since our assumptions always form the questions we have. The results are also contingent in relation to the corpus because what we feed into the machine

36 Mark Hellinger, *Moon over Broadway* (New York: William Faro, 1931); Linda Arvidson, *When the Movies Were Young* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1925); Harry Lauder, *Roamin' in the Gloamin'* (Philadelphia and London: J. B. Lippincott, 1928); Herbert Blumer, *Movies and Conduct* (New York: Macmillan, 1933); Charles Ray, *Hollywood Shorts: Compiled from Incidents in the Everyday Life of Men and Women Who Entertain in Pictures* (Los Angeles: California Graphic Press, 1935); Henry James Forman, *Our Movie Made Children* (New York: Macmillan, 1933); Ira Price, *A Hundred Million Movie Goers Must Be Right: An Aid to Movie Appreciation* (Cleveland: Movie Appreciation Press, 1938).

constructs the categories. Our exploratory study into the early phases of film historiography is based on digitized books in English that are available via open access. The choice of books predicates a publishing industry (with writers, readers and a market) and also an infrastructure which makes them available a hundred years later (libraries, digitization projects, digital infrastructure for access and computation). In a way, this highlights our own situatedness as researchers with specific assumptions, skills (language, computer), and knowledge. One could go on tweaking the corpus and add such titles as Terry Ramsaye's *A Million and One Nights*,[37] Georges Michel Coissac's *Histoire du cinématographe de ses origines à nos jours*,[38] or other contemporary titles by Lewis Jacobs and Léon Moussinac. Yet again, we believe that the results would not be much different.

What is more crucial here, as we discuss the methods and assumptions of (digital) film historiography, is to stay wary of the idea that data somehow speaks for itself, that the answer is already there and needs only to be found. These processes are selections at heart that do not aim at teasing out any pre-existing truth, but rather highly contingent constructions of probabilities. As Bernhard Rieder has recently argued (and as it is quoted in the essay by Schneider and Hediger in this volume):

> [F]or any sufficiently complex data set, the idea that "the data speak for themselves" is implausible; developers and analysts select from a wide variety of mathematical and visual methods to *make* the data speak, to filter, arrange, and summarize them from different angles, following questions that orient how they look at them. Rather than ideas of a natural order, there are guiding interests that drive how data are made meaningful.[39]

Our small case study using digital methods has shown that a specific film historical discourse emerged in the 1930s that was built on a relatively stable set of ideas, such as national cinema, individual greatness, and aesthetic value. Especially the works by Paul Rotha and Maurice Bardèche and Robert Brasillach proved to be influential trailblazers for a larger post-war interest in film history. Of course, the results of the topic modelling that we

37 Terry Ramsaye, *A Million and One Nights: A History of the Motion Picture* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1926).

38 Georges Michel Coissac, *Histoire du cinématographe de ses origines à nos jours* (Paris: Gauthier-Villars, 1925).

39 Bernhard Rieder, *Engines of Order: A Mecanology of Algorithimic Techniques* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020), 32.

present here are neither groundbreaking nor radically new. But they give us pause to reconsider some more general aspects of doing film history. First of all, such digital tools allow us a different access to the data that we rely on in film history. Before the digital, the amount of data was mostly limited to what we as individual scholars could take in. Now, the capacity of computers to find patterns in large data sets makes it much easier to find outliers, typicalities, and structures we were not able to see before. Since a digital investigation forces us to constantly shift scale from close to distant reading, it often foregrounds aspects that we would not have been aware of otherwise. Therefore, our pilot study could be used to look at those titles that are largely forgotten today.

Second, this topic modelling has also intensified our reflexive orientation towards the methods that we have used. A mixed-methods approach with digital and hermeneutical elements, a scalable reading that shifts focus from close to distant reading, necessarily forces us to ask questions about the way we do our business. Mixing digital methods and hermeneutic interpretation, as we have done, privileges a research process that is modular, reflexive, and iterative. This process takes critically into account our own situatedness as well as the process of data gathering, corpus building, and tool use. At least in these two respects, the investigation reaches beyond the concrete results and brings in a more general consideration of approaches and methods. In this sense, the digital can act as a catalyst for a methodological turn.

## What Is in This Book? The Volume

*How Film Histories Were Made: Materials, Methods, Discourses* engages with questions of film history and film historiography and in this sense stands in a longer tradition. Doing and writing film history is a topic that has also been addressed recurrently since the establishment of film as a field of academic study in the late 1960s. Without attempting to map the terrain systematically here, we want to mention Michèle Lagny's seminal 1992 book *De l'histoire du cinéma* in which she details the methodologies of film historiography informed by "traditional," hermeneutical and archive-informed film historiographical methods.[40] Another milestone we do not want to let go unmentioned is the famous book by Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice*, which came out in 1985 in the aftermath of the 1978 FIAF conference in Brighton and in the

40 See Michèle Lagny, *De l'histoire du cinema* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1992).

spirit of the New Film History.[41] The subject of their book is to a certain extent similar to the topic of this volume, namely "the historical study of film, not film itself."[42] But unlike the present volume, the authors wish to systematically discuss film history in relation to history and to equally systematically discern and describe traditional approaches to film history, of which they consider aesthetic film history, technological film history, economic film history and social film history. The third part of the book is devoted to exemplary cases of "doing film history." Allen and Gomery's book is widely known for the—to some, provocative—statement that films can be studied without the need to see them: "For certain investigations, film viewing is really an inappropriate research method."[43] Colleagues engaged in New Cinema History would certainly agree.

Most recently, Dimitrios Latsis has pursued a similar concern as this anthology in his 2023 book *How the Movies Got a Past*, which looks into the ways the movies' past was constructed, discussed, and preserved in American cinema from 1894 to 1930.[44] While we see our volume in a tradition of critically engaging with the materials, methods and discourses of writing film history in our field of film studies, the present volume wishes neither to propose a systematic discussion of the subject matter nor to delve into a certain industry and period in detail. We also do not want to give an overview of the state of the art of film historiography today. Our approach is deliberately eclectic but still exemplary to a certain extent in its casting spotlights on selective actors, networks, infrastructures, and geographies that at a certain moment in time were involved in doing film history. This rationale is partly owed to the fact that the volume is not a single- or double-authored book but an edited collection of original essays written by established film historians and younger voices in the field. The collection is based in part on a conference on "Histories of Film History" held in Marburg, Germany, in December 2018, which was generously funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG). Other contributions were added to complement the picture, especially in regard to the potential, if not possible, futures of film history in the digital present. Still, there are some lacunae, for example, a consideration of film collectors' contributions to film historiography based on their own film collections. Compared to

41 See Allen and Gomery, *Film History*.

42 Ibid., iii.

43 Ibid., 38.

44 Dimitrios Latsis, *How the Movies Got a Past: A Historiography of American Cinema, 1894–1930* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2023).

previous contributions to film historiography from the field of film studies, the present volume differs in that it is specifically concerned with film history's own history, understood as a diverse set of dominant, divergent, contradicting, future, and forgotten (hi)stories that this volume wishes to make visible.

The volume is divided into five sections which we are introducing on the following pages. The first section of the book, entitled "Models of Film Historiography: Philosophy and Time" is concerned with theoretical and conceptual issues that are at stake when writing film history. For the longest time, film history behaved as if professional historiography had not yet taken its linguistic, narrative, and culturalist turn, as if one could still talk of great men bringing forth single-handedly great films. Largely modelled on art historical ideas of cyclical progress and decay, traditional film historiography was interested in how national characteristics played out in different schools which again broke up into distinct personal styles. The strong interrelation between nation, wave, and auteur led to such triads as Soviet/montage/Eisenstein or German/Expressionism/Lang. Despite the enduring lack of engagement with theories of history within film studies, there is a different tradition in which the question of temporality has been crucial. From its beginnings, cinema held a special relation to time, as projected filmic images presented a view of past events and persons, yet one that appeared to be dialectically present and absent at the same time. From Bergson to Deleuze, from Münsterberg to Cavell, this relation between (perceptual) presence and (ontological) absence has been frequently discussed in film theory. At the same time, some voices in film history took up the question of how historical events were depicted in movies,[45] but seldom asked reflexively about the nature of film historiography.

Chapter 1 is a wide-ranging essay by Thomas Elsaesser entitled "The Aporias of Cinema History," which we publish posthumously. In it Elsaesser poses important questions about the scale and scope of film history, when considered in relation to much larger temporal frames such as the Anthropocene or the co-evolution of humans and tools. Such an "archeo-topological model" of the cinema, as he calls it, thwarts traditional distinctions that are held dearly in cultural histories: nature/culture, movement/stillness,

45 Important classical studies of the relationship between historical events and their cinematic representation are Pierre Sorlin, *The Film in History: Restaging the Past* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980); Robert A. Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); Vivian Sobchack, ed., *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television and the Modern Event* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

analogue/digital. In its second century, film historiography faces the challenge that everything appears to be turning into data—and data is open to many different forms of access and processing, the algorithmic operations most often remain opaque to human understanding. Thus, the long-held truth that film is made for humans to behold and understand has at least been shaken because more and more operational images are produced which are intended to steer vehicles, operate machines, and put populations under surveillance. Elsaesser poses the crucial question: What kind of a film and cinema history is needed for this radically transformed situation?

In chapter 2, "What Next? The *Historical Time* Theory of Film History," Jane Gaines also starts from the observation that the long transformation process that film and cinema are undergoing from analogue to digital requires film studies to rethink its position vis-à-vis history. For this task, Gaines turns to German historian Reinhart Koselleck and his conception of "*historical time*." The long history of copying, pirating, and legal interference provides her with the material "to develop a theory of history as it relates to technological change." Proposing that Koselleck is more important for this undertaking than Kittler, the essay dissects the various layers of temporality at play in any given historical situation. The paradoxical result of employing Koselleck is not only that every new time is both new and not so new, but also that we need to consider the perspectives, speaking positions, and historical assumptions that such claims imply.

In chapter 3, "Relativist Perspectivism: *Caligari* and the Crisis of Historicism," Nicholas Baer takes a fresh look at German historicist tradition by revisiting one of the flagships of Expressionist cinema, Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920). Baer argues that Albert Einstein's relativist perspectivism, which fostered a more decentred, spatiotemporal dynamic and a non-absolute relationship between subject and object, found expression both in modernist films and in the historical-philosophical debates of the Weimar era. Diverging from Thomas Elsaesser's reading of *Caligari*,[46] Baer's analysis positions the work as a metahistorical intervention into the period's philosophical debates, arguing that the film, under the influence of relativist perspectivism, adopts an ironic stance regarding issues of historical ontology, epistemology, and narration. Baer's close reading of *Caligari* within the context of film-theoretical and philosophical debates demonstrates the medium's capacity to engage with fundamental questions of the philosophy of history.

46 Thomas Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany's Historical Imaginary* (London: Routledge, 2000).

In chapter 4, "The Discovery of Early Cinema: The Moment of 'Silence,'" Heide Schlüpmann revisits the emergence of a feminist perspective on film historiography and theory that, in the context of West Germany, emerged within the domain of film criticism before film studies gained a foothold within academia in the 1980s. Herself an important figure in feminist film theory and historiography since its inception, Schlüpmann describes the rediscovery of early cinema as a way out of the dilemma of loving cinema but wanting the screen to emancipate from male views about women and the world. In particular, the subversive moment of silence, the freedom from the spoken word, meant an attachment to visuality and was a motivation to rescue films that had been lost from memory. Schlüpmann's retrospection and outlook reveals and reflects the film historian's own subject position, thus calling attention to the film historian's stance towards her object of historiography between critical distance, immersion, and activism.

The essays in the second section of the book examine "Film History in the Making: Processes and Agendas," with Schlüpmann's consideration of the film historian's own position regarding her object just outlined providing a smooth transition. This section focuses on the making of film history in the historical past and examines the agendas and tactics, institutions, materials and power relations involved in the processes of constructing narratives. The essays look at different geographical regions (Italy, Russia, and the United States) and the transnational trajectories of film histories and their makers. Film histories in the making are situated, historically specific, and contingent, as the contributions in this section show: some came timely and persisted, others were forgotten the moment they had seen the light of day, and some were lost in translation.

In chapter 5, "Consistency, Explosion, and the Writing of Film History: On Different Ways to Approach Film History at Different Times," Francesco Pitassio takes a close look at early attempts in film historiography which were written in Italy between the mid-1930s and the early 1950s. Whereas most of these efforts took place under a Fascist regime and mirrored some of its nationalist policies, it is surprising to see how many transnational connections become visible nevertheless. Despite obvious echoes of Fascist policies in the works that Pitassio discusses, cinema emerges as an international art form and cultural force from the very start. Yet, the essay moreover demonstrates that film history was expansive and border-crossing not only in terms of geography, but also regarding the situatedness of early film historiography within a wider film culture. Pitassio discusses exhibitions, archives, journals, film schools, and other elements that show that film

history did not appear out of nowhere, but rather emerged from a rich and fledging ecosystem that we have now come to call "film culture."

The next three contributions look at specific film historians who were practitioners in the first place, who made, collected and/or taught film: Jay Leyda, Peter Kubelka, and Hans Richter. These essays show that making film, collecting material, and writing about it not only went hand in hand, but that these activities were interdependent and influenced each other. In chapter 6, "Defeats That Were Almost Victories: Jay Leyda's (Soviet) Archives," a study of the prolific film-maker, writer, archivist, and teacher Jay Leyda, Masha Salazkina argues for the significance of the experience that Leyda made in the 1930s, when he studied in Moscow under Sergei Eisenstein. When he came back to work in the US (in archives and universities, as a teacher and as a writer), many of the ideas and practices that proved to be influential for future generations can be traced back to the experimental and open model developed within the Soviet film school in the early 1930s. Salazkina thus proposes to "historicize a historian whose own work relied so clearly on the power of personal experiences, anecdotes, and broader intellectual conjunctures." Beyond his fascinating personal trajectory, Leyda as a film historian and archivist, as a teacher and writer, proved to be a key influence on the shaping of North American film culture and scholarship.

In chapter 7, "A Film-maker's Film Histories: Adjacency Historiography and the Art of the Anthology," Benoît Turquety argues that film artists produce specific kinds of histories, ones that rely less on history writing (in a literal sense) and more on paratactic forms of discourse and non-literary practices such as film programming. To illustrate this claim, Turquety looks at Peter Kubelka and Anthology Film Archives' practice of collecting and programming film as a form of history writing which is based on the modernist conceptions of collecting and curating as historiographical projects. With *Essential Cinema*, a cycle of 110 programmes screened on a regular basis, Anthology Film Archives, according to Turquety re-enacted in the film world the model of the anthology and its tactics that had proven their efficiency in modernist poetry and art. The *Essential Cinema* programmes represent an interventionist mode of history writing that refuses linearity and endorses adjacency historiography instead.

Chapter 8, "Hans Richter and the 'Struggle for the Film History'" by Yvonne Zimmermann, focuses on a proponent of a linear film historiography and an advocate for the "progress" of film towards art—Hans Richter. Zimmermann's contribution illustrates Richter's "struggle for the film history" (in reference to Richter's only posthumously published film history book, *The Struggle for the Film*) and his own place in it. Richter's preoccupation

with film and art history is mostly attributed to Richter's experience of exile, but can be traced back to the early 1920s and the German crisis of historicism. Richter was a practitioner of various forms of history making, besides writing also teaching and film-making. His philosophy of history was partly in line with the ideas of his compatriots Siegfried Kracauer and Walter Benjamin, who shared the fate of exile, but diverged also in significant ways. Richter's efforts were highly situated, some were successful, others came untimely. The contribution also sheds light on a ramified network of institutions and actors involved in building the/a canon of film (history) across the Atlantic.

The third section of the book is entitled "Revisiting Film History: Institutions, Knowledge, and Circulation" and is devoted to constellations in which institutional arrangements play a key role. The essays gathered herein take a diverse set of subjects—the early development of cinema in the Arab peninsula, British cultural studies, Indian documentary, film societies and ciné-clubs—and read them against the grain of conceived wisdom. Institutions refer to a wide variety of objects in the essays: colonial administrations, chartered associations, transnational corporations, a loose group of individuals gathering around an idea, political parties, and production houses. At the same time, the essays do not follow one institution as a kind of protagonist and do not present institutional histories in the conventional sense, but rather consider complex networks that dynamically change over time. In particular, they are interested in arrangements that have to do with two factors: on the one hand, they look at the production of knowledge; on the other hand, they take an active interest in the circulation of material and immaterial things.

In chapter 9, "Historicizing the Gulf Moving Image Archives," Firat Oruc focuses on the "social, historical, and cultural role [of the cinema] in the early formations of hydrocarbon modernity in the Gulf." Whereas the contemporary situation in the Arab peninsula with its festivals and biennales, importing talent and accessing significant levels of funding, draws much attention, the prehistory of the current boom is basically unknown. Oruc begins to fill this gap by arguing that "the history of the moving image in the Gulf followed a transcolonial, transregional, and transnational set of directions." More than that—as petromodernity shaped the way of our global economic interdependencies and trade flows, the argument that Oruc unfolds also casts into doubt the received truths and stereotypes of film history in which a modern Western invention was adapted, albeit at different speeds, globally. In contrast, the history of visual culture and the cinema in the Gulf is one of uneven and even contradictory developments between

the colonial powers, economic interdependencies, and local interests. It is also a history of its material traces, such as administrative files and scarce newspaper reports, that are the sole sources available today to reconstruct the past.

In chapter 10, "British Cultural Studies, Film History, and Forgotten Horizons of Cultural Analysis," Charles R. Acland redirects attention to British cultural studies and its—largely forgotten—close connections with film studies and film history, in particular. Acland recalls British cultural studies' focal points of film historical analysis, which included technology and its material uses as well as the relation of film to popular culture, established culture, and modernist culture. Arguing that these are still highly relevant today, the essay takes a close look at the debates about the politics of cultural historiography at the History Workshop at Oxford University and its events and publications in the 1970s and 1980s where "new methods and materials of historical research were being explored and expanded to situate 'popular arts,' including film, within cultural history." It was in this context of a wider debate about radical history projects that the FIAF conference in Brighton transpired. The contribution argues for a film historiography along the lines of British cultural studies that is part of a tradition of radical cultural history and includes efforts to develop new and inclusive modes of historiography as well as theoretical engagements.

In chapter 11, "The Rise and Fall of Secular Realism: Notes on the Postcolonial Documentary Film from India," Arvind Rajagopal examines the Indian non-fiction film and argues for a film history that logically turns into a media history because films are never produced, distributed, and seen in isolation from other aspects of cultural life. He traces a genealogy for the populist video work which has supported the rise of the Hindu nationalist party since the late 1980s. This genealogy goes back to the famous documentaries of the state-supported Indian Films Division. The key task of how to address the masses in what still likes to pride itself as "the largest democracy in the world" has been a key concern all the way from post-Independence India to the rise of today's divisive politics. Rajagopal therefore also argues for a film history that is relevant to our current situation of social media and fake news that are less new than we might think.

Taking his cue both from the expansion of film studies into what has been termed "useful cinema" and from media archaeology, Michael Cowan presents a revisionist history of (early) film societies in chapter 12, "What Was a Film Society? Towards a New Archaeology of Screen Communities." Arguing that former approaches had concentrated too exclusively on film as art and avant-garde ideas of purity and independence, the research

unearths a much more diverse and pluralist variety of societies devoted to film as a topic. From political organizations to technical associations these groups not only demonstrate how varied the interest in the cinema was in the first decades of the twentieth century, but they also acted as active producers of taste and viewing dispositions. In conclusion, he pinpoints three theses—relationality, production, and ideas—that are productive not only to the study of film society but also to a film history open towards social phenomena, complex processes, and a diverse ecosystem of persons, objects, and non-tangible things (ideas, practices, etc).

Traditionally, film history in its academic form has been presented in textual form—as a book or journal article because publications have been and still are the currency within the university. As the fourth section of the book—entitled "Rewriting Film History with Images: Audiovisual Forms of Historiography"—aims to demonstrate, there is a counter-tradition of presenting film history in audiovisual form, be it in the form of documentary films, television programmes, or digital video essays. At least since the 1920s, there are examples of writing film history in the medium of film itself. The three contributions in this section present specific approaches to film history, some of which have been largely overlooked in the past. This poses a series of further questions regarding the aesthetic forms, the (material and legal) access to the film itself, the narrative strategies, and the technological challenges, to name but a few of the key issues. Yet again, such audiovisual works also pose institutional questions around their production, circulation, and appreciation.

As Volker Pantenburg argues in chapter 13, "A Televisual Cinematheque: Film Histories on West German Television," film history has traditionally focused almost exclusively on the dissemination of the relevant material through the cinema. Thus, archives, repertoire cinemas, and cinematheques, to a lesser extent books and magazines, have been seen as the organs through which knowledge about film history was distributed. They have been researched, championed, and celebrated in recent historiographic discourse. Examining the exemplary case of the West German television of the 1970s, the text argues for relevant agents and configurations elsewhere, in this case public broadcasting television of the 1970s and 1980s. In presenting three concrete examples, Pantenburg demonstrates the rich and varied approaches to film history that the regional broadcaster WDR allowed for in the decade from 1975 to 1985. It also shows links to the essay and experimental film, as film-makers such as Harun Farocki or Hartmut Bitomsky were involved, yet it does not depart from an auteurist framework around these cases.

In chapter 14, "The History of Film on Film: Some Thoughts on Reflexive Documentaries," Eleftheria Thanouli explores the "history of film on film" with a focus on reflexive documentaries and looks at how non-fiction films narrate the history of the medium with its own tools, namely sounds and images. In the first part, Thanouli argues that histories on paper and histories on film share philosophical assumptions (such as organicist ideas about the historical process) that historical documentaries are as capable of expressing—with their own means—as written histories of cinema. In the second part, Maximilian Schell's *Marlene* (1984) and Chris Marker's *The Last Bolshevik* (1992) serve as case studies to illustrate Thanouli's second argument, namely that reflexive documentaries, due to their self-consciousness, can uncover and bring to the fore explanations about cinema's past that are beyond the dominant narratives in written historiography. Reflexive documentaries are capable of producing histories of film that writing cannot, or, as Thanouli holds, they "allow us to glimpse the possibility of a more complex and contextual approach to the filmic past."

In chapter 15, "Audiovisual Film Histories for the Digital Age: From Found Footage Cinema to Online Videographic Criticism," Chiara Grizzaffi discusses audiovisual scholarship that has become very popular in the past ten to fifteen years. These are (mostly short) video works that can be produced with standard computer equipment, easily available software and accessible AV sources as a new way to generate and communicate knowledge about film, including film historical scholarship. Grizzaffi not only presents the prehistory and the emergence of this fledging form, thereby showing the genealogy of a seemingly novel form that extends into the avant-garde and the essay film, she also gives an overview of the critical terms and approaches that have been established. The horizon of such works for the future of film history is both as a new form of dissemination of historiographical knowledge, but also more experimental ways of generating insights.

The fifth and final section of the book is "Into the Digital: New Approaches and Revisions." Film historians have gone "digital" long before "the new millennium has arrived as the era of Big Data,"[47] even if their objects of study—be they films, photos, or printed material—were still in an "analogue" state. They have collected, stored, processed, and accessed data with the help of digital tools. The most common tool to collect, enter, compile, store, process, search, and access film historical (meta)data are databases, i.e. computational forms of structured data aggregation. Thus, historical knowledge has long

47 Lisa Gitelman and Virginia Jackson, "Introduction," in *"Raw Data" Is an Oxymoron*, ed. Lisa Gitelman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), 2.

been produced and circulated digitally. The contributions in this section examine, on the one hand, the place of historical films in today's digital environment and the experience of film history they produce. On the other hand, they look at concepts such as scalability and at practices such as data visualization as methods to rethink and rewrite film history.

In chapter 16, "Future Pasts within the Dynamics of the Digital Present: Digitized Films and the Clusters of Media Historiographic Experience," Franziska Heller examines the digital reviving of "old" films in today's digital environment, which she conceptualizes as experiential spheres. Hence, her focus is on phenomenology and more specifically on the perceptual experiential effect of "historicity." Heller borrows François Niney's term "reprise" to describe the analogue reviving of films from the history of cinema in digital culture, arguing that this digital environment frames how we see and experience moving images from the past. The presentation of film restoration on the internet and Criterion Collection's editorial practice serve as two cases to illustrate how binaries such as "old" and "new," "analogue" and "digital," and the method of "comparative vision" dominate the discourse but obfuscate the plurality of *historical times* (in Koselleck's sense). Heller also draws attention to how digital film editions reformulate the canon and at times even reiterate institutional racism.

In chapter 17, "Tipping the Scales of Film History: A Note on Scalability and Film Historiography," Alexandra Schneider and Vinzenz Hediger engage with the concept of scalability, which describes the potential of a system, network, or process to change scale. In the context of film and media studies, scalability has become important in the emerging sub-field of format studies and in computational research into film and film history. Schneider and Hediger take to scalability to evaluate the concept's uses, limitations, and potential side effects when transferred to film and film historiography. The authors argue that film has always been scalable and also that the founding paradigm of film historiography, the auteur/nation approach to cinema, can be described as a scalable system—"with distinctive downsides for much of what belongs to film history but does not match the paradigms' definition of a historical fact." Hence, they call for more attention to facts that do not become data and do not compute or, in other words, for non-scalable histories of film that include "the singular, resistant, incomputable, the facts that do not count."

In chapter 18, "Representing the Unknown: A Critical Approach to Digital Data Visualizations in the Context of Feminist Film Historiography," Sarah-Mai Dang follows a twofold agenda: on the one hand, the essay aims "to reconstruct women's work in early film industries and tell their stories to today's audiences," while, on the other hand, it asks for a general

reconsideration of data-intensive visualization. Taking her cue from examples of the COVID-19 pandemic, Dang sees data not as neutral, quantitative information that is waiting out there to be discovered and exhibited, but as an entity that is always gathered, arranged, and visualized in specific ways. Data is not given, as Johanna Drucker and others have repeatedly argued, but constructed and presented in specific ways. Concerning graphs, tables, and maps, Dang argues that "[d]ue to representational conventions and epistemological premises, visualizations appear ordered, comprehensive, and structured, when in fact they often obscure ambiguities, conflicts, and contradictions." But Dang also sees potential in new forms of visualizations that she points out in the final part of her essay. Digitally based research is an open field that film historiography could—and should—embrace not in a naive way, but in a critical and reflexive stance: "[I]t is essential to understand what visualizations do but also what they *could* do."

In sum, the anthology looks both back into what film history has been about, but also forward into potential futures of the domain. The film historiographies of the past that have been the object of the essays in this collection provide a vast and rich field to explore, not only for their own sake, but also because these examinations give us insight into the methods and premises of specific approaches. Studying the histories of film history is therefore not an end in itself, but rather a way into the conceptual groundings and ramifications of doing film history. At the same time, by excavating dead ends and roads not taken we can also take inspiration for future explorations because they often contain ideas for the future. Film historiography still offers many discoveries and potentialities that might take inspiration from digital forays, but that also rely on archives and material traces, as well as hermeneutical argumentation. We hope that this collection will contribute to the shaping of film historiography as a diverse, productive, and exciting field for many years to come.[48]

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