V

Into the Digital: New Approaches and Revisions

16   Future Pasts within the Dynamics of the Digital Present

Digitized Films and the Clusters of Media Historiographic Experience

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Abstract

Nowadays, digital media frame how we experience our physical "presence" and the temporal category of "the present." At the same time it seems that it has never been easier to access the "past" of moving images: This comprises the films but also film historic knowledge about restorations, etc. This chapter sheds a light on the *experiential* historiographic effects. A first case study discusses the representation of film restorations on the internet. It demonstrates "comparative vision" to be a pivotal element within the context of an *aisthetic historiography* which operates in *digital dispositifs*. The term "*dispositif*" reflects the institutional structures as well as digital spatial arrangements that establish "*the politics of time*": A public debate in 2020 serves as a second case study. The *politics of time* turn into methodological questions that emerge when working with digitized historic material. The spatiotemporal dynamics point towards the necessity of a performative notion of film history.

Keywords: digital media, Reinhart Koselleck, phenomenology, film restoration, Criterion Collection, digital hermeneutics

Digital media have become an integral part of our day-to-day lives. Not only are they omnipresent, they have become so habitual, that they define—often subconsciously—how we experience our (physical) "presence" and the temporal category of "the present." In such an entropic media environment, it seems that it has never been easier to access the "past" of moving images,

the history of film, and to share film history with others. This comprises the films themselves but also (popular) film historic knowledge (about restorations, historical contexts, etc.), which often comes in the form of bits and pieces (images, written or aural quotations, clips, documentaries, and video essays on film history) that circulate in various *dispositifs*[1] and thus enter specific discourses.

This chapter aims to shed a light on the specific experiential historiographic effects that emerge when we are accessing, watching, and experiencing moving images in a digital environment. The main objective is to analyse the medial practices that convey moving images as being "historic." The approach conceptualizes phenomena of digitized moving image history as experiential *spheres*. The methodological framework thus takes into account the complex spatiotemporality which entails the historiographic effect as sensual and bodily experience.

The contribution follows the volume's general approach that highlights the epistemological and methodological shift that started with the proclamation of New Film History in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s when, among others, the *preconceptions* of *writing*, *doing*, and *making* film history moved into the centre of interest. The approach introduced here picks up on that perspective by investigating the spatiotemporal (pre)conceptions which come into play when digital moving images are referenced as stemming from an "older" (often associated with the vague label "analogue") production and distribution context.

One theoretical term that has been popular since the end of the 1990s is Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin's *remediation*. It describes phenomena where older media are situated in relation to newer ones: How can the relation between quotation, embracement, adaption, and remix be systemized? Bolter and Grusin offer a double perspective that identifies two coexistent layers

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1   Following Frank Kessler, the French term *dispositif* is deliberately and consequently used here. Kessler reflects on the history of the term as well as the differences of meaning deriving from translations into other languages. In the context of this chapter, it is important to note that Kessler understands *dispositif* as a specific mode of address. Methodologically, Kessler's approach combines several analytic dimensions: an interconnected analysis of a film's content, the aesthetic structure as well as the perceptual dimension is situated in close relation to the performative aspects of watching moving images in a specific spatial arrangement. See Frank Kessler, "The Cinema of Attractions as *Dispositif*," in *The Cinema of Attraction Reloaded*, ed. Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 57–69; Frank Kessler, "Notes on *Dispositif*: Work in Progress" (2007), http://www.let.uu.nl/~frank.Benjamin/personal/dispositifs.html; Frank Kessler, "Programming and Performing Early Cinema Today: Strategies and *Dispositifs*," in *Early Cinema Today: The Art of Programming and Live Performance*, ed. Martin Loiperdinger (New Barnet: Indiana University Press, 2011), 137–46.

at work in the perceptual process between *hypermediacy* and *immediacy*: The ostentative demonstration (hence conscious realization by the user) of the opportunities for the usage of the current "newer" medium of access (*hypermediacy*), on the one side, and, on the other side, the effects of the older medium which is re-mediated in such a framework. The remediated medium still conveys its *immediate* perceptual effects (*immediacy*, as, for example, archival moving images from the period of the early cinema of attractions whose content still can create immersive effects by the specific aesthetics although they are presented on a YouTube channel[2]).

In order to incorporate this double logic methodologically, I propose the concept of analytical *clusters*.[3] It addresses the specific challenge to systemize the contradictory and layered interplay of perceptual, experiential effects of "historicity"; a problematic that is already present in Bolter and Grusin's reflections. But in view of today's digital media the tension becomes even more obvious when such a dynamic media environment as the digital frames how we *see* and *experience* moving images that originated in analogue production contexts. Within the digital environment the former analogue materiality becomes in many cases a rhetorical means that serves specific contextual interests, often affirming the logic of (commercial) circulation and the teleological idea of technological progress. The aesthetic practices of digital media referencing the temporal dimension of a media historic "before"—often vaguely identified as the "analogue qualities" of moving images—entail historiographic effects in particular. These effects interact with the paratextual and perceptual implications of the framing digital *dispositif* which presents the images as being "historic" by contextualizing them in a specific way.

From a more general, methodological point of view the perspective could also be understood as a critical approach to digital audiovisual culture and the conveyed politics of temporalities: What notions of "history" are conveyed by such modes of contemporary media historiographic experience?

In order to systemize the dimensions of the historiographic experience, I focus on two key aspects: Firstly, on the critical role of the perceptual

2   See, among others, Joost Broeren, "Digital Attractions. Reloading Early Cinema in Online Video Collections," in *The YouTube Reader*, ed. Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau (Stockholm: Wallflower Press, 2009), 154–65.

3   The idea of clusters is used as a model in order to describe the simultaneously coexisting layers of temporalities that are implied and come into play as perceptual affordances through digitized moving images. Spielmann uses the model of clusters as analytical tool to characterize the layered quality of intermedial art forms. See Yvonne Spielmann, *Intermedialität. Das System Peter Greenaway* (München: Fink, 1998).

mode termed "comparative vision" or respectively "comparative perception"; secondly, on the performative, situational aspect of the filmic work.

In the following, I detail the methodological challenges and the understanding of digitized films as spatiotemporal clusters.[4] The theoretical claims are subsequently illustrated with the case study of a specific mode of representing film restoration on the internet. The findings are situated within the broader context of an *aisthetic historiography* which operates in digital *dispositifs*. The term "*dispositif*" implies critical reflections on the institutional and political structures of power as well as on technological spatial arrangements that establish specific *politics of time*. The latter are further discussed using the example of a public debate in 2020 that relates digital edition practices to the current sociopolitical climate.

I end my argument with turning *the politics of time* into concrete methodological questions that emerge when working with digitized historic material within a digital media environment. The spatiotemporal dynamics analysed point towards the discussion whether we need a much more performative notion of film history; even more so, if we consider the fast-changing *futures* of digital media environments which will also frame our experience of future digitized moving images, our future access to media historic pasts.

Methodological Challenges: Spatiotemporal and Perceptual *Clusters*

The crux and the complexity of film digitization and its historiographic impact derive from the many layers of perception and from the *flexible* (because *digital*) remediation of a time-based audiovisual medium. The term "digital" implies here different selective and interpretative, technological as well as sociocultural processes such as the actual digitization process which entails the quantization of analogue information into digital code, the (mathematical as well as aesthetic) interpretation of the code as (moving) images, which is framed by sociocultural norms and specific (distributional) interests.

I expand the idea of *remediation* towards the term "reprise" in order to focus on the perceptual layers of the complex "digitized analogue film." François Niney uses "reprise" to describe *effects* of authenticity and historicity in found footage films.[5] The term is adapted here to characterize the effects

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4   See also footnote 3.
5   See François Niney, *Die Wirklichkeit des Dokumentarfilms. 50 Fragen zur Theorie und Praxis des Dokumentarischen*, trans. and ed. Heinz-B. Heller and Matthias Steinle (Marburg: Schüren, 2012).

of reviving pre-existing moving images. Niney's term implies that by reusing and recontextualizing archival moving images there is always a testing, probing dimension to it, a trial for possible meanings and tentative modes of experiences. The perception of images is shaped by the specific framing of current discourses and cultural imaginaries. In the context of analogue *reprises* in the digital realm, the categories of "analogue" and "digital" are not to be understood as ontological nor technological oppositions. They rather form a ratio of difference that manifests itself through different mediated practices. The relation *analogue/digital* as a rhetoric figure serves always a specific purpose—e.g. within the context of economic interests in form of (not yet standardized) labels such as "remastered" or "new" digital version. Thus, the promotional labels contrive a temporal logic in media history—most often "before" = analogue and "after" = digital. But it is quite difficult to determine what the "digital" in the *digitized*, former analogue film actually means. One probably won't *see* the real extent of the digital "quality" of a remastered film version—unless one can somehow compare it to an analogue element (or an older digitized version). The problem needs to be understood as a perceptual effect. Digital editions of archival films offer plenty of examples in the so-called bonus features of how comparisons to the former analogue materiality are established: they present images *before* and *after* the digital remastering. And although such audiovisual paratexts that, for example, illustrate film restoration processes do not always explicitly refer to the analogue originals, they often use signs of decay and patina associated with analogue film to connote "older" practices of film production and projection. They re-narrate and literally re-arrange film history in a popular and mediated manner—via the specific spatial arrangement of the images. Similar practices can be observed on the internet.

Comparative Perception and the Co-presence of Past and Future: Digital Performances

The official website of the Bologna film festival Il Cinema Ritrovato has a category devoted to the history of film restoration that is titled "A New Life." Frames taken from film restorations are positioned below an explanatory, introductory text. The first still stems from the silent movie *Rapsodia Satanica* (1914/1917). The image functions as a symbolic illustration of the general process of film restoration: the user is invited to move back and forth along a line over the film still with the cursor which is firstly positioned in the middle of the image. The vertical line splits the image into two parts

of the same size. With the gestural execution of a wipe over the image the user can cover the damaged part of the image with the restored image (see fig. 16.1). The prevalent suggestion to the user is to compare the different states of the image—by executing the gesture and thus experiencing a change in the image. The connoted message is that the user is performing the restoration him/herself if the cursor is moved to the right side. However, one can also playfully move the cursor to the left, thus *unrestoring* the film image. By experiencing the (reversible and repeatable) process of change between "old" and "new" of a historic image with this gesture, the user is discerning time differences that can be interpreted as different historic layers ascribed to the film still. The isolated film frame becomes a symbol for the whole film and its historicity. Through the montage of the headline ("A New Life"), the accompanying text and the suggested interaction with the image, the website conflates the idea of the probing reviving of a film by digital restoration—with the possibility of interactive modulation of the (digital) film image by the internet user. (Another example from the website with the same principle is shown in figs. 16.2 and 16.3.) From this perspective, the paratext of the website carries special significance as it hints at the temporal and historic relativity of digital restorations and digital imaging which always depend on individual, subjective interpretations and decisions of the executing individuals: "Every restoration is a child of its time. It is subject to the limitations and possibilities of the technologies employed, but also to the interpretation of the work by those individuals carrying out the restoration."[6] The way film restoration is presented here implies a specific historiographic concept where the interactive gestural execution—limited as it might be—implements the physical presence of the user. Within the playful process of covering and uncovering the image, temporal categories of past, present, and future (the constant possibility of changing the image again) conflate.

The Film Foundation introduces the topic of film preservation and restoration in a similar way—using film stills "before and after preservation" where the user can move the cursor and thus experience the history of the image back and forth—wiping out damages in the image, refreshing and sharpening the colours (see fig. 16.4). Interestingly, the website also offers advice for so-called *do-it-yourself* (DIY) film restorations. The wording seems to be an apt description of the historiographic concept that lies beneath the wipe-images of film restorations: the co-presence of past and present where, with a movement, the promise of future improvement is implied. The effect

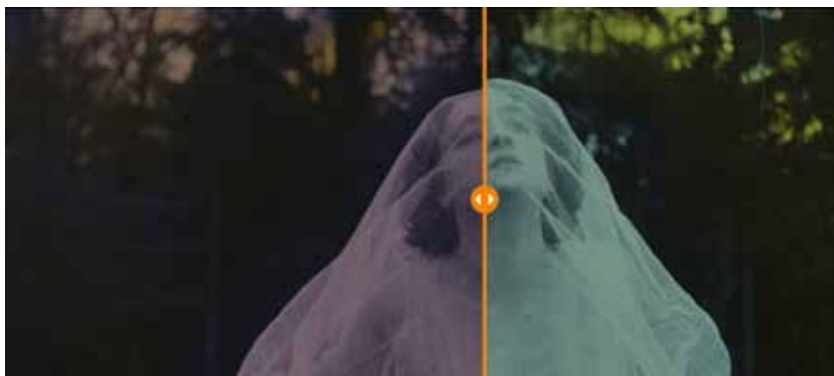6   Il Cinema Ritrovato, "A New Life," https://festival.ilcinemaritrovato.it/en/restauro/.

Fig. 16.1. Screenshot of an interactive restoration of a still from the silent movie *Rapsodia Satanica* (1914/1917).

Fig. 16.2. Screenshot of a digital restoration with the possibility of interactive modulation of the (digital) film image.

Fig. 16.3. Screenshot of a digital restoration with the possibility of interactive modulation of the (digital) film image.

Fig. 16.4. Screenshot of an interactive film still from Michael Curtiz' film *Mystery of the Wax Museum* (1933) "before and after preservation."

of the image being historic, albeit openly shown in its digital modifiability, lies between the relational experience of "old" and "new." The effect results from the specific clustered temporality which is integrally related to the actual physical gesture. The executing subject becomes physically part of the historiographic perceptual effect. It is the experiential paradox of the term "do-it-*yourself* history" as the notion of *history* also always connotes an objective, collective temporal reference beyond the individual.

One crucial element in the aesthetic organization of the images that is displayed (and subsequently set in motion) is the split screen. Split screens are often used in documentaries about film restorations to convey knowledge about film restoration practices and decision-making. The method of purposely positioning two images next to each other and thus encouraging a specific way of comparison has long been discussed in art history[7]: art historian Heinrich Dilly conceptualized, with reference to Heinrich Wölfflin, the implication of this method also on the perceptual level and

7   See Lena Bader, Martin Gaier, and Falk Wolf, eds., *Vergleichendes Sehen* (Munich: Fink, 2010), 14. Film scholar Malte Hagener has worked on the media historic significance and aesthetic potentials of the split screen; for further reading, see Malte Hagener, "The Aesthetics of Displays: How the Split Screen Remediates Other Media," *Refractory: A Journal of Entertainment Media* (2008).

introduced the term "comparative vision" ("*vergleichendes Sehen*"). The approach questions the perceptual and hence methodological implications of creating an analytic viewing option based on the juxtaposition, thus staging a comparison. The specific comparative constellation of two or more images entails meaning making within the viewing process. Within the film historic context, the arrangement of the images, e.g. their organization along the reading direction from left to right, implies a temporal organization from "older" to "later." In brief, this organization establishes a temporal succession in the perception that can be already understood as historiographic, especially within the framework of the website that hints at the temporalities of "old" images getting a "new life."

In the context of digitally mediated film history, it is not only important to question the implications of the "comparative vision" at hand, but also to take into account the medially spatialized as well as temporalized experience that it produces. When it comes to relating archival moving images within digital realms, there are multiple elements involved—aesthetically and on the level of the *dispositif*—which constitute our distinction of temporal differences between past, present, and future. The effect is based on the individual experience where one is relating one image to another by comparing them. This—as already mentioned above—constitutes a paradox: The experiential sphere is established by the suggestion of actively *re-doing* film history. This paradox culminates in the impression of *doing-it-yourself*, even involving a bodily gesture of the *presently* active user.

Screen Spheres: Aisthetic Historiography and the Plurality of Time

The focus on the implications of perceptual modes and preconditions of spatiotemporal arrangement is linked to tendencies in film theory that conceptualize audiovisual phenomena in specific relations to our sensory experience. Such approaches place a particular emphasis on spatiotemporal dynamics and analyse moving images and the conditions of their appearance as lived experience—with the focus on the spatial organization of the encounter. The methodology results from the use of phenomenological concepts to describe filmic perception processes. Somatic and bodily experience is deemed to be central to the way we experience moving images. Filmic perception is thus understood as an interactive, intertwined reciprocal process between body and moving images. The notion of the *body* becomes the key figure of thought in order to grasp the tactile and haptic qualities of moving image experience. The cinematic body touches the spectator's body

and vice versa. The intertwined somatic process creates a form of meaning making in its own right. Therefore, spatiotemporal dynamics become pivotal as they orchestrate the processes of sensual contact. In such a perspective, comprehending moving images is primarily understood as happening before and beyond cognitive comprehension. Especially publications in the fields of queer and gender studies have shown how the concepts—although they deal with a precognitive dimension of film comprehension—can inhere sociocultural and sociopolitical meaning.[8] Vivian Sobchack took her by now canonical phenomenological approach to filmic perception further when she applied the phenomenological viewpoint to digital media. She factored in the habitual omnipresence of such media and the mediatization of everyday life. Sobchack put an even bigger emphasis on the spatial dimension as she used the term "screen-*spheres*." She thus placed a focus on the spatiotemporal dimension of the digital preconditions of the appearances of moving images in relation to the lived, experienced, and moving body.[9] Sobchack's reflections can be productively applied to phenomena like the one discussed above where the user's body plays an important part in the comparative and performative arrangement of temporal relations connoted with film historic significance. This constitutes one element of what might be called a form of *aisthetic historiography* within digital cultures.

The specific understanding of the term "*aisthetic*" refers to the German philosopher of technology Gernot Böhme, who applies modalities of aesthetic perception to environments in the real world.[10] In the sense used here, *aisthetic* historiography designates the experiential dimension of media phenomena in which popular culture, perceptual modalities, and digital spheres coincide in a cluster conveying temporal differences that can

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8   See, for example, Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006); Katharina Lindner, "Questions of Embodied Difference—Film and Queer Phenomenology," *NECSUS* 1, no. 2 (2012): 199–217.

9   Vivian Sobchack, "From Screen-scape to Screen-sphere: A Meditation in Medias Res," in *Screens*, ed. Dominique Chateau and José Moure (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), 157–75. Such a perspective of social critique via modes of mediated sensual perception can also be applied to phenomena of the remediation of film history and mediated film memory culture within the context of digital media; all the more as the topic has already provoked various reflections on the specific modes of experiences related to the body within the concept of (post-) modernity and the mediatization of our everyday life (Thomas Morsch, "Filmische Erfahrung im Spannungsfeld zwischen Körper, Sinnlichkeit und Ästhetik," *montage AV* 19, no. 1 (2010): 55–77; Eugenie Brinkema, *The Forms of the Affects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Thomas Elsaesser, and Malte Hagener, *Filmtheorie zur Einführung*, 4th ed. (Hamburg: Junius, 2013), 217–218.

10   See Gernot Böhme, *Aisthetik. Vorlesungen über Ästhetik als allgemeine Wahrnehmungslehre* (München: Fink, 2001).

develop historiographic significance and meaning. With such a focus on the experiential dimension of filmic reception, it is worth noting that the terms "history" and "historiography" are not used in the strict disciplinary sense of historical scholarship,[11] but rather as the concept of a specific form of *aisthetic* historiography.

On a conceptual level, a second element of *aisthetic historiography* centres on the phenomenon of temporal clusters. The idea that temporal clusters can be understood in their historiographic effect leads to the seminal reflections of German historian Reinhart Koselleck, who refers to traditions of the philosophy of time as well as to the philosophy of history. Within the media studies contexts my approach can be characterized as a media theoretical modification of Koselleck's reflections on the semantics of historical time: Koselleck investigates the preconceptions of temporal differences such as *past—present—future* which he comprehends as historically contingent.[12] Similar to the idea of the temporal clusters, Koselleck does not operate with the concept of *one* historical time but with a *plurality* of historical times where different times overlap.[13] Within a methodological perspective, this leads to a pragmatic approach towards temporal relations. Specific analytical questions Koselleck asks in his book *Future Pasts* can be productively adapted:

– How is the temporal dimension of *a* past construed within a present which is dominated by media with specific dynamics?
– How do the temporal dimensions relate to each other?[14]

11 For the discussion of the relationship between academic historical scholarship, the theoretization of historical knowledge production and film analysis, see Simon Rothöhler, *Amateur der Weltgeschichte. Historiographische Praktiken im Kino der Gegenwart* (Zurich: diaphanes, 2011), 9ff., and André Wendler, *Anachronismen. Historiografie und Kino* (Munich: Fink, 2014), 17ff., 85ff.

12 Reinhart Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989), 9–11; for an English translation, see Reinhart Koselleck, *Future Pasts: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. and with an introduction by Keith Tribe. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

13 Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft*, 11.

14 Ibid. In the context of this chapter, the English edition of *Future Pasts* (2004) summarizes aptly in its blurb: "History, Koselleck asserts, emerged in this crucial moment [of the rise of modernity], as a new temporality providing distinctly new ways of assimilating experience. In the present context of globalisation [sic] and its resulting crises, the modern world once again faces a crisis in aligning the experience of past and present. To realise that each present was once an imagined future may help us once again place ourselves within a temporality organised by human thought." The perspective can be extended as a critical question to our concrete field of study: How do we place ourselves within complex temporalities organized by already ephemeral practices within digital cultures that embrace "older" media which—for their part such as film—*also* re-organize temporalities.

Koselleck links the distinction *past* and *future* to the notions of *experiences* and *expectations* (towards *a* future). With *experiences* and *expectations* interplaying, ideas of historical time realize themselves. Such a pragmatic perspective allows a focus on the preconditions of the *impressions* of history and historicity.[15] Applied to the case study outlined above, this means that the analytical perspective is directed towards the way the gestural performance of changes in the images imply (on a micro-level) the experience and the expectation of past, immediate present, and future—within the changing process of the image between "before" (vaguely connoted as "analogue" with typical signs of material decay and damages) and "(digital) after" (connoted with the "cleanness" and "sharpness" expected from digital images). The paratextual information of digital *dispositifs*—in this case the website—open up further discursive dimensions: the *reviving* of the film through the restoration process, thus the possibility of the lived experience of the moving images within the present media culture. On a metalevel, the connotation of lived experience is translated into a comparative gestural performance on the digital *dispositif internet.*

The Historic and Discursive Dimensions of Digital *Dispositifs*

The focus on the digital conditions of the actual visibility and experiential dimensions in current media cultures can be situated alongside French film and media historian Pierre Sorlin's insightful reflections. In his observations on the possibilities of writing cinema history, Sorlin states that history does not exist outside the discourse that is enunciating said history. History thus can appear in different forms, depending on the means of its realization and expression.[16] The special twist of the approach outlined here lies in the double perspective: history depends not only on the means of the specific enunciative mode of expression but also on the perceptual and sensual dimension of the particular *dispositif* in which the enunciative is expressed.

Historically, since the late 1990s, the DVD medium has been pivotal for the digital *dispositif* connected to film and film history. In regard to the DVD's own historicity, current statements diagnosing once again the death of physical carriers (DVD and Blu-ray) illustrate the shortening of time spans of what we perceive as "older" media. The perceived obsolescence of access to films via

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15   Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft,* 351, modified by the author of this essay.
16   Pierre Sorlin, "Ist es möglich, eine Geschichte des Kinos zu schreiben?," *montage/av* 5, no. 1 (1996): 25.

DVD poses an illustrative example. In light of the rise of streaming platforms, the University of Regensburg held a conference in 2020 with the title "This Is/Was the DVD." With this telling title the organizers already situated the DVD culture within a tension between the past and the present. One of the conference's main questions focused on the (historic) influence of practices introduced with the DVD on digital cultures in general. Among others, German media scholar Jan Distelmeyer, who had already demonstrated in his book *Das flexible Kino*[17] how the DVD in the late 1990s and 2000s functioned as a specific and significant transitory *dispositif* in the early stages of *digital* film culture, reflected in his keynote on how the cultural preconceptions of the "digital" have changed since then—especially the ideas of interactivity and participation in the digital realm. Nevertheless, practices around the DVD fed strongly into the imaginary of "the digital" in regard to film and access to filmic universes. Distelmeyer emphasized the fetishist relationship between hyperlinked, networked structures (such as the DVD menu) and imaginaries of space interconnected with the idea of an immersive navigational space for the user, highlighting the potential of non-linear access to film and film's linearity. The specific form of access has become enriched by multimedia paratexts. Already in its early forms, digital access to films was linked to computer games, entailing a general tendency of gamification within a larger context of media convergence as described by Henry Jenkins.[18]

Jenkins discussed the phenomena when multimedia was still "new." Today, the current digital *dispositifs* for moving images—as well as the digital version of films themselves—have become habitual but they keep multiplying and changing. In addition to these dynamics, the ephemeral impressions of presence and immediacy of moving images on an experiential level still pose a particular challenge for the notion of pastness and historicity. Therefore, the preconditions of the experience of the images as well as the framing dispositifs have to be addressed as they form the idea of *history* at one specific media historic and sociopolitical moment.

Within the larger cultural analytic context, the challenges relate back to fundamental definitions of *film*, *art work*, *aesthetics*, *history*, and *edition,* which, in the case of film, are closely intertwined with dynamics of popular culture, media technology, and the entertainment industries. A

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17   Jan Distelmeyer, *Das flexible Kino. Ästhetik und Dispositiv der DVD & Blu-ray* (Berlin: Bertz + Fischer, 2012); update by the same author in Jan Distelmeyer, *Kritik der Digitalität* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2021).
18   Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: NYU Press, 2006).

central factor of the specific historiographic networks in digital *dispositifs* at play is the systematic correlation that has already been described in regard to edition philology and the history of literature. The practices of text publishing, editing, and mediated modes of access correlate with the logic of the (re)construction of history. The dynamic becomes most evident in the critical debate about the formation of a "classical" canon driven by publishing practices. Referring to Michel Foucault, German literary scholar Gerhard Mattenklott conceives publishing politics, as they are manifest in book editions as "dispositivs of power" (sic!).[19] Mattenklott follows a line of argument that emphasizes the aesthetic properties of editions in relation to the different aspects of editorial work including the formation of the reception process. He problematizes how to convey the materiality of the original artefact, the specific (original) carrier of the texts (and thus its material aesthetic qualities); a question which is also seminal for the digitization of analogue films and hence the edition of moving images.

While discussing the aesthetic dimension of modes of access (still in the realm of literature), Mattenklott's reasoning leads to a more fundamental statement which can be applied to questions revolving around film editions: Mattenklott highlights the particular role of the technological advancement of media in historiographic meaning-making—which challenges more than ever the notion of a stable work of art (and thus also a stable "textual structure"). He calls for a more performative understanding of the (art) work. Such an understanding situates the work of art in relation to the actual moment in time of its production and *dispositif* of reception. Within this context, *digitization* acts as an accelerant that renders the temporal aspect even more dynamic and crucial. The term "*dispositif*" also implies critical reflections on institutional and political power structures as well as technological spatial arrangements as a specific set of discourses at a certain moment in time.

Digital *Dispositifs* in 2020 and the Politics of Time

The scope can be expanded to the institutional level where the social and collective memory of film history is shaped—where specific *versions* of the past and future memory are conditioned: The following thoughts pick up on

19   Gert Mattenklott, "Ästhetische Erfahrung und Edition," in *Ästhetische Erfahrung und Edition*, ed. Rainer Falk and Gert Mattenklott (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2007), 6. Mattenklott's notion of "dispositive" (sic!) is obviously closer to Michel Foucault's concept as it is to the cinematographic *dispositif*.

the aforementioned quote by Mattenklott that describes (digital) editions as "*dispositifs* of power," which unfold their impact within a conflation of sociocultural selection processes, aesthetics of medial reproduction, of modes of access, reception, and experience within a specific historic situation.

In 2020, a discussion arose that, on the one hand, broached the issue of the shift in distribution from DVD editions to streaming platforms; on the other hand, the (not completely new) debate highlighted the cutting-edge sociopolitical dimension of building a canon by institutionalized distributors in the historic situation of the beginning 2020s. In late August 2020, Kyle Buchanan and Reggie Ugwu published a piece in the *New York Times* titled "How the Criterion Collection Crops out African-American Directors." Analysing the corpus of the Criterion Collection and the catalogue of the editions, the authors came to the conclusion that the Criterion Collection comprises more than a thousand films by more than 450 directors. But the authors found that "[t]here are just four African-American directors with feature films in the collection overall, or less than 1 percent."[20] This observation weighs heavily as Criterion is one of the most important players within digital film memory culture. Their editions define—in the words of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu—the cultural and symbolic value not only of the edited films as works of art, but also of the digital editions supplementing them with "bonus" features and thus with a specific aura. That way Criterion has set standards for how the cinephile aura is created within the realm of *digital* distribution via their famous and frequently cited film editions:

> If there is a cinematic canon even more highbrow than the Oscars, it's the Criterion Collection, where directors are treated with a level of awe usually afforded to movie stars and a film's critical reputation outweighs its box office receipts. [...] Its physical collection continues to grow by 50 to 60 new or reissued titles each year, all digitally reproduced to exacting specifications and packaged with eye-catching original artwork. [...] [The] extensive range has created the impression among some cinephiles, including many who work in the industry, of an authoritative survey.[21]

Buchanan and Ugwu highlight the aspects of Criterion's cultural authority in an interesting way as they emphasize the spatial as well the museal

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20   Kyle Buchanan and Reggie Ugwu, "How the Criterion Collection Crops out African-American Directors," *New York Times*, August 20, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/08/20/movies/criterion-collection-african-americans.html.

21   Buchanan and Ugwu, "Criterion Collection."

dimension of Criterion's editorial practices: The journalists quote a newsletter circulated by Criterion, in which the collection is called a "Louvre of movies."[22] The reference to the iconic Louvre museum is crucial. The "Louvre" has become today a household name, a synonym for a globalized franchise, for the notion of an "art museum" that assembles "art" from different historic times spanning centuries establishing their eternal value. Already the architecture and the style of exhibition of the original Louvre in Paris plays with the blend of historical layers and with the conflation of different times. It is famously situated within the building of a historic palace which has been changed multiple times over the centuries, the (ancient) archaeological exhibits such as Greek and Roman sculptures blend into the historic architecture.

The rhetorical comparison by contemporary director Wes Anderson reaffirms the image of cultural authority and historic weight. Regarding the history of digital film editions—also recapped by the *New York Times* journalists—Criterion played a key role in forming our *expectations* towards DVD editions "where the value lied, how digital editions should look like in the 90s and after the 2000s."[23] Criterion has been setting industry standards for film editions since the 1980s, starting with the laser discs and with several special features such as letterboxing, director's commentary tracks, and deleted scenes.[24]

Against this backdrop, it stands out that in the Criterion catalogue, which takes such an important role by determining what to *expect* from digital editions and how to *experience* film history in the digital present, African-American film-makers are relatively absent. The authors determine further: "Women and other people of color appeared in slightly larger numbers. About 11 percent of directors were Asian; 2 percent were Latino; and about 7 percent were women."[25]

In an interview with the writers of the *New York Times* in 2019, the co-founders of the film heritage distribution company Milestone Film & Video, Dennis Doros and Amy Heller, expressed fundamental criticisms. Amy

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22   Ibid. The original quote stems apparently from contemporary film director Wes Anderson.
23   Ibid. See Distelmeyer, *Das flexible Kino*; Matthias Christen, "Das bewegliche Archiv. DVD-Editionen als Schnittstellen von Filmwissenschaft, Philologie und Marketingstrategien," in *Orte filmischen Wissens. Filmkultur und Filmvermittlung im Zeitalter digitaler Netzwerke*, ed. Gudrun Sommer, Vinzenz Hediger, and Oliver Fahle (Marburg: Schüren, 2011), 93–108.
24   See Buchanan and Ugwu, "Criterion Collection"; Distelmeyer, *Das flexible Kino*; James Bennett, and Tom Brown, *Film and Television after DVD* (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2008).
25   Buchanan and Ugwu, "Criterion Collection."

Heller, in particular, described the politics of canonization within practices of digital film editions. She pointed out that there were several politics of time implicated which led to a monumentalization conveying *eternal* cultural value which is continuously reaffirmed by reiteration and medial reproduction. She stated that historically many film-ranking systems have been forged within echo chambers: "The overwhelming majority of the film-makers anointed, like the people who chose them, were white men." Furthermore, Heller adds: "The world they live in affirms their knowledge, acumen, taste and authority. The result [...] is a canon iterated so often that it can begin to feel 'monumental and eternal.'"[26]

Fortunately, the *New York Times* authors report that things are changing and that Peter Becker, who owns a minority stake in the company, had expressed regret about the lack of black representation in the collection: "We have to fix that."[27] It seems that the media transition becomes also the ideological, yet still limited corrective. The transition seems to build different kinds of filmic monuments: With the push towards streaming platforms, several aspects of editing film history come into play. According to Becker, *The Criterion Channel* had been at the forefront of the diversity push.[28] Such corrections within the canon are intertwined with film preservation preconditions. Buchanan and Ugwu further point to how streaming rights were available at relatively lower costs compared to DVD and Blu-ray. And because the Criterion Channel did not require the resource-intensive special features of the physical collection, the company had quickly generated a less homogeneous streaming catalogue.

In view of the line of argument of this essay, the transition of digital editorial practices and the significance for film historiography can be situated within the context of the contemporary *historic* present. It is worth noting that the debate quoted above took place in 2020. Firstly, the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent global lockdown experience intensified the cultural significance and the valuation of streaming services, thus also enhancing and reinforcing the experiential, culturally significant impact of having the "Louvre of Movies" *at home*. Secondly, "political earthquakes"

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26   Ibid.

27   Ibid. It should be noted that this debate only focuses on one aspect of the selective character of a canon. For example, exclusions or negligence in edition practices of formats other than feature films or documentary features are not addressed here.

28   Ibid. Buchanan and Ugwu quote Becker in saying that his company began trying to address the racial and gender disparities in its catalogue around five years earlier: "That had been one of the objectives of FilmStruck, the now defunct streaming service that Criterion started in partnership with Turner Classic Movies in 2016."

such as the Black Lives Matter movement had a huge (emotional) impact on the social and political awareness of institutional racism and the lack of diversity; a perspective that was mirrored in concrete digital editorial practices—and resulted in the publication of the article quoted here which critically addressed practices in digital film culture and film historiography within a specific scope of exclusion practices.

There is a need to expand the analysis of how the unexamined racial and hegemonic biases of cultural institutions can have pernicious and long-lasting effects to the dimension of medial experience.[29] This would include the analysis of the spatial intrusion into the private home via streaming affordances, which today create the sphere of auratization and cultural value in its own right—using the conflation of the individual private experiential sphere and the collective value and social memory.[30]

Future Pasts in the Digital Present: Contradictions, Paradoxes, and Politics of Comparisons—Towards a Performative Notion of Film History

The approach that I have suggested so far can be translated into the following questions to be considered (either implicitly or explicitly) when dealing with digitized moving images referenced as being historic:

–   When and under which preconditions in terms of *dispositif*, aesthetics, and effects of (technological) presence is the digital "reprise" of a film accessed and assessed in its historical significance?
–   When and how do we perceive and grasp the historic value and the value within the memory culture of said film?[31] How is the historical

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29   Boyd, quoted in ibid.

30   Buchanan and Ugwu give as an example the film *Daughters of the Dust* (Julie Dash, 1991), which never appeared in the Criterion Collection. But in 2016, it was reissued in a digitally restored special edition by another company, the Cohen Film Collection, and subsequently added to the Criterion Channel, the company's streaming service, in spring 2020. Ugwu and Buchanan describe how in June, following the global protests prompted by the police killing of George Floyd, the film was made available and then featured prominently on the home page as part of a special "Black Lives" package.

31   One might also use the terms "age-value" and "memory-value" here which stem from Alois Riegl's study "The Modern Cult of Monuments." Riegl develops a relational matrix of values that can be useful to classify decisions within the restoration process of a monument: How one approaches the restoration, how far the restorative work interferes with the current state of the artefact. Riegl's terms also help to determine which value the goal of the restoration defines.

    context conveyed within a digital spatiotemporal structure? How does the digital structure influence the gestural and tactile relationship with the user?

– In what way and how is the digital "reprise" of an archival film staged as an advancement in media history, as a manifestation of projections towards the potential of "digital technologies" or "digital media"? Is it presented as "the best possible" version within the current digital present? Is the digital quality of the source even exposed? How is the digital access naturalized and habitualized? Are (prior) processes of selection and exclusion made transparent?

– And, last but not least: Which consequences do these configurations of perceptual effects of historicity entail regarding our experience of temporal differences? What is perceived as "past" in close relation to an (implicit) future in the realm of digital media?

Koselleck's reflections on the plurality of historic times prove to be fruitful in order to describe further complications within the interrelation of the realm of digital media and the history of film. Within the context of digital media, boundaries between collective and personal spheres become increasingly blurred.[32] The forms of usage and consumption often follow the paradoxical logic of a *personal and personalised mass culture*.[33] In this regard, one of Koselleck's further assessments stands out: that impressions of historical time also develop between individual experiences and collective notions of time. Koselleck describes an interplay between experiences and expectations referencing biographical as well as extra-biographical frames of reference where also the personal (life) time span can become relative.

    Practices within digital cultures reveal specific characteristics in regard to the tension between the individual/personal/private and dimensions of collectivity. Digital media are closely linked to the imaginary that *everything* is easily and instantly available and can be accessed in an immediate, interactive, and especially *participatory* way. Already in his canonical book

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Barassi comments on the importance of the terms for contemporary analytic approaches: "The terms still provide a valid analytical framework for the study of key theoretical issues surrounding the transmission to the future of works of art" Sebastiano Barassi, "A Rieglian Analysis of Values in Replication," *Tate Papers* 8 (2007).

32   See José van Dijck, *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

33   Barbara Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex: Cinema, New Technologies and the Home* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Franziska Heller, *Update! Film- und Mediengeschichte im Zeitalter der digitalen Reproduzierbarkeit* (Munich: Brill/Fink, 2020).

on *New Media*, media scholar Lev Manovich has explicitly used the term "myth" in order to point out that the digital code allowing interactivity and its programming are firmly embedded in cultural practices and ideologies.[34] Interactivity and participation are always programmed within specific limits along specific economical and institutional interests as well as sociocultural norms. The invitation to interact and to participate means also becoming a performative and, to a certain degree, affirmative part of the medial *dispositifs*. It entails the acceptance of its logic of usage. The term "digital affordances" has been used within the critical analysis of the different forms of interaction digital media and platforms offer.[35] Among others, Bucher and Helmond discuss in detail the origin of the term which lies in ecological psychology.[36] The study of the possibilities for the individual to interact with the physical environment based on concepts of cognitive psychology has proven useful for design studies. The approach enabled to reflect on design patterns and on structures shaped by technologies as well as on their usability.

But despite the usefulness of the term, I would put less emphasis on the cognitive and psychological aspects than on the phenomenological ones where the whole body becomes part of the affirmative performance via the gesture. Thus, the approach I suggest recognizes and even emphasizes the vital role of the concrete feeling of *being present in the presence.*

On a methodological level, the perspective translates into a pragmatic approach towards temporal differences where the distinctions of temporal qualities are the results of ephemeral, situational, contextual, and performative relations. Moreover, within the context of media technologies and industries, there is an additional twist to the already complex philosophical and theoretical perspective. The performative temporal constellations are to be seen within the context of economic interests, within discourses where the logic of "updating" prevails and where filmic entertainment is primarily handled as a commodity (cf. the promise of improved aesthetic entertainment as it is expressed by the label "remastered"). The logic of updating is pivotal for the circulation in a constantly changing media environment.

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34   Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press, 2001).
35   See Janet Murray, *Inventing the Medium: Principles of Interaction Design as a Cultural Practice* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012); Catherine Grant, "The Shudder of a Cinephiliac Idea? Videographic Film Studies Practice as Material Thinking," *Aniki* 1, no. 1 (2014): 49–62; Taina Bucher, and Anne Helmond, "The Affordances of Social Media Platforms," in *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media*, ed. Jean Burgess, Alice Marwick, and Thomas Poell (London: Sage, 2018), 233–53.
36   Bucher and Helmond, "The Affordances of Social Media Platforms."

But this logic also bears severe consequences for the experience of the difference between past and present.

Distelmeyer's observations regarding the DVD and Blu-ray seem to be a forerunner of what digital historian Andreas Fickers describes in his recent "update" on the methodology of digital hermeneutics.[37] Both Distelmeyer and Fickers point to the importance of questioning the different layers of digital sources—such as the code/programming structure as well as the spatialized modes of access to digital sources. Thus, they also take into account aesthetic and structuring qualities. The digital quality of digital sources (and especially the conditions of their origins = actual digitization process, e.g. scanning[38]) has to be critically reflected in view of the different layers that have an impact on practices of historic research and hence on the historiographic effect. When *doing* history with former analogue and now digitized sources, we need not only be aware of the selective process that is the actual digitization process (which images even make it into the digital domain?), it means also to be aware of the aesthetics of the *dispositif*, the menu or the interface that allow us to access and use the digitized objects, films, and documents within navigational spaces. Hence the methodology I suggest here could be understood as a (phenomenological) complement to existing approaches within the field of digital source criticism.[39] It conceptualizes the whole ensemble of digitized film history as experiential *spheres*. The specific perspective focuses on the layered spatiotemporal qualities of digitized films which are deemed crucial for the historiographic effects—especially in their sensual, experiential dimension.

All aspects discussed point towards a much more performative notion of film history within the realm of digital media. The cluster "digitized films" has been addressed on the spatiotemporal level by differentiating three analytic layers: the experience of the images or the films themselves; the spatiotemporality of the *dispositif* closely linked to the body of the user; and the accompanying and overlapping sociocultural discourses and habitual

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37 Andreas Fickers, "Update für die Hermeneutik. Geschichtswissenschaft auf dem Weg zur digitalen Forensik?" *Zeithistorische Forschungen* 17, no. 1 (2020): 157–68.

38 Fickers refers to Gitelman and Jackson very aptly when he states: "Raw data is an oxymoron." See also Lisa Gitelman, ed., *"Raw Data" is an Oxymoron* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013).

39 See, among others, Julia Noordegraaf, Kathleen Lotze, and Jaap Boter, "Writing Cinema Histories with Digital Databases: The Case of Cinema Context," *Tijdschrift voor Mediageschiedenis* 21, no. 2 (2018): 106–26; Julia Noordegraaf, "Zooming Out: Towards Scalable Digital Film Studies," presentation and discussion at the workshop "Teaching Digital Methods for Filmhistoriography," February 18–20, 2021, Johannes-Gutenberg University Mainz, within the DFG-Network New Directions in Film Historiography.

rituals of use. "Historicity" is understood as a medial impression, a sensual (*aisthetic*) effect which is constituted by the (performative) experience of temporal differences. Often the specific effect is intertwined with expectations, the habitual forms of usage of specific digital media platforms at one specific, situational point, and current political context. The experience and the expectations are furthermore embedded in the specific dynamics of digital media: their multiple forms of remediating and emulating (historic) film culture are very short-lived, ephemeral, and transitory. As a result, the actual moment of access, of usage and, especially, the conditioning of the actual interacting (historic) subject, its own felt temporality (being physically present and sensually experiencing) gain special importance for the understanding of the historiographic effects.

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