

“The titles are in Dutch - which makes it quite simple”

Intertitles as an Agent of Appropriation in the Netherlands, 1907-1916

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The Babel fish is small, yellow and leech-like, and probably the oddest thing in the Universe. It feeds on brainwave energy received not from its own carrier but from those around it. It absorbs all unconscious mental frequencies from this brainwave energy to nourish itself with. It then excretes into the mind of its carrier a telepathic matrix, formed by combining the conscious thought frequencies with nerve signals picked up from the speech centres of the brain which has supplied them. The practical upshot of all this is that if you stick a Babel fish in your ear, you can instantly understand anything said to you in any form of language.

-- Douglas Adams, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*

Introduction¹

Early in his science fiction and/or comedy novel *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, Douglas Adams deals with a familiar problem in space fiction: when we meet aliens, how can we communicate with them? Different sci-fi universes find different solutions, usually typical of their outlook on the world: the tech-savvy STAR TREK universe has its communicators; Steven Spielberg's poetic CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND (1977) finds common ground in music; Robert Zemeckis' science-oriented CONTACT (1997) sees a universal language in maths. Adams' Babel fish is a typically idiosyncratic solution as well; after all these wonderfully inventive books tell us that the way for people to learn to fly is to fall and then forget to hit the ground. While in the book (and its myriad sequels and spin-offs) the organism is merely a convenient and humorously weird way of dealing with (or rather, avoiding) the language problem, it's worth putting plainly what Adams leaves unsaid: translations are shit – literally.² And thus we come to this thesis' subject. For while it is rarely stated as bluntly as I have done here, a similarly low opinion of translation is nevertheless rampant in media studies. Only we do not have a Babel fish to help us avoid the problem; we

1 This thesis uses the Chicago Humanities style of annotation. All citations have been translated to English. Unless noted otherwise, these translations were carried out by myself. Where necessary, translator's notes have been placed in the footnotes within [square brackets].

2 How ironic, then, that the Babel fish has since lent its name to an online translation machine (<<http://babelfish.altavista.com/>>), whose translations are notoriously... well, shitty. See, among many others, *Lost in Translation* (<<http://tashian.com/multibabel/>>) for exercises in polishing these turds for comedy effect.

have subtitles, dubbing, and – for those of us studying early cinema – intertitles. It is this last category that will be the broad subject of this thesis.

Film history has mostly been studied from the viewpoint of ‘unique’ and/or ‘original’ works, be they works of art or works of entertainment. But the global day-to-day practice is infinitely more multi-faceted. Indeed, when cinema is examined from a global viewpoint the so-called original version is laid bare as the exception, as most audiences consume film (as well as most, if not all, other media) in a form that is adapted to their locality. Foreign films are *appropriated* by the receiving country through various strategies, of which translation is only one. These various versions raise the question how these relate to their ‘original.’

Unlike in subtitled or dubbed films, which I investigated in an earlier paper,³ the process of translation in intertitles is not inherently obvious to the viewer, since all the text of the intertitles is replaced by a translation. Yet this translation does not constitute a complete replacement of the original, for large parts of this ‘original’ remain: the moving images between the intertitles.⁴ In rare cases, these can make the fact of translation just as obvious to the audience as it is in a translated sound film. This is most obviously the case when a film’s diegetic world itself contains textual markers (such as street or traffic signs). Yet even if this is not the case, one cannot speak of the relatively simple substitution that is characteristic of all translations.⁵ These translations have something of the *palimpsest* in them, of a text written over another text. This term was first applied in literary criticism by Phillip Lejeune and was invoked in a more general sense by Gérard Genette.⁶ A palimpsest is a “manuscript in roll or codex form carrying a text erased, or partly erased, underneath an apparent additional text.”⁷

The difference, of course, is that in a traditional palimpsest, the two overlapping texts are not related, whereas in the case of translated silent films the overlaying text is a direct variation on the old text. On top of this, as opposed to palimpsests, which have as a defining characteristic that the original text shines through, in cinema the original text is (usually) erased completely, leaving only the images it used to accompany. In the end, we find

3 Joost Broeren, “De fictieve dominantie van ondertiteling: De komst van de geluidsfilm in Nederland en de hybride vertaalpraktijk,” unpublished article (Netherlands Filmmuseum/Utrecht University, 2008).

4 A deliberate reversal of the traditional view, which views the intertitles as being positioned in between the moving images. Of course, various other strategies of appropriation, most notably censorship, could intervene within these images as well. Nevertheless, while images could be cut or shortened, they could not be *replaced completely* as the intertitles are.

5 By which I of course mean simple in its function and structure, not in its practical execution.

6 Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests. Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. Channa Newman & Claude Doubinsky (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

7 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. “Palimpsest (manuscript)” <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/439840/palimpsest>>

ourselves at the midway point between the two extremes of translated version and palimpsest. It is precisely the subtle (or sometimes not so subtle) differences that typify translated intertitle's intermediary status which will be our main focus in the proceeding chapters.

This thesis will examine the issue of appropriation in the context of the transitional period in Dutch early cinema between 1907 and 1916, during which time the aspect of translation is concentrated in films' intertitles,⁸ an integral yet under-investigated aspect of early cinema. The thesis will look at the use of intertitles as agents of appropriation. To do so, I will investigate the Desmet-collection at the Netherlands Filmmuseum, which offers a unique source for film historical research into this period. The collection consists of the business archive of Dutch film distributor and exhibitor Jean Desmet, as well as over 900 films which constituted the backbone of his distribution catalogue.

The intertitle itself, though a central device in early cinema, has long been a severely understudied subject. Perhaps this is due to film theory's focus on cinema as a visual medium – the intertitle's perceived literary origins⁹ have not done it any favours. While there have been some articles and a scant few conferences devoted to the subject, and attention seems to be increasing over the last ten years or so, one cannot speak of a central debate or discourse on intertitles; the fact that the proceedings of the conference "Intertitle and film" held in 1999 at the Cinémathèque française are still waiting on publication is perhaps indicative of this (though there are other, more practical hindrances as well). Nevertheless, there have been a wide range of publications on or mentioning intertitles, both before this conference and (especially) in the decade since. The first chapter of this thesis will therefore constitute a preliminary attempt at laying bare a discourse, focussing on the intertitle's *history*, its *theoretical* implications, the *archival* considerations it poses, and most of all on the many intersections between these three points.

As said, this thesis will look at the intertitle through the lens of the concept of appropriation. In short, appropriation can be said to encompass all the ways that foreign cultural artefacts are adapted to a receiving society (or language community, as the concept of

8 While there are a few other strategies in play, the striking advantage of the intertitle as a subject is that it offers historical traces to work with, unlike these other, more ephemeral strategies of appropriation. Most notable among these is the lecturer, whose role in the process of appropriation can be traced only vaguely since the contents of the lectures are, in most cases, lost forever.

9 I say 'perceived' as this literary connection is only a part of the intertitle's prehistory, which for instance also includes the text-slides that were part of magic lantern shows. This prehistory will be expanded on in chapter 1.

national boundaries becomes problematic in the context of early cinema¹⁰). The issue of appropriation is a central one in our dealings with media. This is especially true in a small country such as the Netherlands, where the vast majority of media texts (films, television shows, videogames, etc.) are of foreign origin and therefore require appropriation to the Dutch market in some form or other. Despite this centrality, it has yet to be applied in media theory on a wide scale. Of course, it touches on the issues of media reception that have been central to media studies at least since Stuart Hall introduced his encoding/decoding model in the 1970s, but where these theories focus on the negotiation of meaning between producer and audience, appropriation takes place on a more institutional level, as will be elaborated in chapter 2 which will place the concept in a theoretical framework. This investigation will start out from the outline of the Filmmuseum research project on the subject, of which this thesis is a preliminary part, and will further incorporate the conceptualization of appropriation in various other fields and subjects, including cultural history, globalization, and adaptation studies.

Chapter 3 will then briefly outline the history and background of Jean Desmet, the collection he left behind, as well as his and its central position in Dutch film history and film historical research. The collection has been extensively researched by Ivo Blom, who focussed his analysis mainly on the workings of the film industry in those years and Desmet's part within this industry.¹¹ The two parts of the Desmet collection, which correspond to the two sides of appropriation (institutional and cultural), will then be investigated in the final chapter. The comprehensive paper archive, a "wall of written paper",¹² contains a wealth of business materials, such as carbon copies of incoming and outgoing correspondence, invoices, and ledgers of cash transactions, which will hopefully grant us some insight into the inner workings of the intertitle trade. This part of the collection is connected most intimately with the institutional aspects of the intertitle, placing it in the context of film distribution and exhibition. The second part of the collection consists of the more than 900 films that Desmet left to the Netherlands Filmmuseum at his death in 1956. For the most part, these are short films in Dutch distribution prints – which generally means that the titles and intertitles have been translated to Dutch (although some early prints are second-hand German copies which

10 See among others: Begoña Soto, "Rethinking Boundaries. The First Moving Images Between Spain and Portugal," in *Networks of Entertainment. Early Film Distribution 1895-1915*, ed. Frank Kessler & Nanna Verhoeff (Eastleigh: John Libbey, 2007).

11 Ivo Blom, *Jean Desmet and the Early Dutch Film Trade*, trans. James Lynn (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2003).

12 Blom, *Jean Desmet*, 11.

were exhibited unchanged in the Netherlands). Hopefully, this unequalled collection of 'native' distribution prints allows our focus to move away from the emphasis on 'originals' that has blinded so much film theory and film historical research over the years.

1. Intertitle studies: Creating a discourse

It will not do to begin this first chapter with a simple lament on the lack of attention for intertitles in film studies. Film historical research seems blighted by this tendency, perhaps due to its “obsession for discovering the new”.¹³ Stating that something has not yet received much, or any, attention is thus seen as an automatic validation of the research. But the simple truth is that, although much more remains to be said on the subject, there has been an increasing level of attention for the intertitle in recent years, related perhaps to the rise in attention to the larger field of distribution to which I will return in chapter 3. What *is* missing, however, is a sense of the intertitle as a unified field of research. The subject is studied by many different (sub)disciplines, examined from many viewpoints, looked at through various lenses and prisms, but without a centralized discourse at the core of all of this. In a most modest way, this chapter will attempt to chart or extrapolate such a discourse, examining the various ways intertitles are studied and laying bare the interrelations between these different fields and approaches.

To do this, I will take as a starting point a rare instance in which research on intertitles *was* given a central place and where researchers were given a chance to reflect on other ways of dealing with the subject: the conference “Intertitle and Film: History, Theory, Restoration”, held on March 26-27, 1999 in Paris. This conference was organized by Claire Dupré la Tour, one of the few researchers focusing predominantly on intertitles. After much delay, its proceedings will (provisionally) be published in a special double issue of *Iris* by the end of this year.¹⁴ As its title suggests, the conference was subdivided into three topics – history, theory, and restoration. While taking many of the conference contributions as points of departure into various topics, this subdivision will not be applied rigorously here, since – as shall soon become apparent – these three topics constantly intersect and overlap. Where better to start this journey through this dense wood of entangled theories than with an investigation of the term ‘intertitle’ itself.

13 Paolo Cherchi Usai to Ivo Blom, 23 December 1995, cited in Ivo Blom, *Jean Desmet*, unnumbered page.

14 The texts for the lectures from this conference that are cited in this thesis were provided to me by Claire Dupré la Tour. In most cases, the provided texts were the original lectures, which will this undoubtedly differ to varying degrees to the published versions – especially considering the long passage of time between conference and publication.

1.1 Title, subtitle, intertitle

After focussing mostly on archival issues on the first day of the conference,¹⁵ André Gaudreault opened the second, more theoretically oriented day with the observation that the term intertitle in itself is problematic. In his contribution “Titres, sous-titres et intertitres” he outlines the difficulties with the term, stemming from “the fact that we distinguish a historical phenomenon by using a term which did not exist in the era under observation.”¹⁶ According to Gaudreault, citing the *Robert* dictionary, the French term ‘intertitre’ was introduced in 1955 “at a time when the intertitle had long been out of use and when, in retrospect, it was no more than a historical object.”¹⁷ In using this “new word for an old phenomenon”, a double revision is carried out: “not only did the word ‘intertitre’ not yet exist in the age of early cinema, but the idea itself that the word entails, the notion of the ‘inter’, was not yet in use either.”¹⁸ While Gaudreault writes explicitly in the French context (thus talking of *titre*, *sous-titre*, and *intertitre*), the same is true, with slight variations in the terms used, for most other European languages. Most importantly in the context of this thesis, the English translations (title, subtitle, intertitle) correspond directly with their French equivalents,¹⁹ as do the Dutch (titel, ondertitel, tussentitel). Gaudreault’s statements also appears to hold up for the Netherlands in a historical sense; at least the term ‘tussentitel’ is not used at all by Desmet, who refers to texts on film as either ‘titels’ (titles) or ‘opschriften’ (inscriptions).²⁰

Thus, in his lecture, drawing from another lecture he gave at the 1997 Udine conference “Writing and Image: Titles in Silent Cinema”,²¹ Gaudreault proposes a tripartite subdivision of usages of intertitles – what one might call three intertitle *dispositifs* – corresponding to three eras in early cinema. The first ranges from 1895 to 1902. In this dispositif, films

15 Cf. Frank Kessler, “Intertitre et Film. Histoire, théorie, restauration. / Intertitle and film. History, Theory, Restoration. (Review)” *Iris* 28 (2000).

16 André Gaudreault, “Titres, sous-titres et intertitres: facteurs d’autonomie et facteurs de concatenation” (paper presented at the international conference “Intertitre et film. Histoire, théorie, restauration,” Cinémathèque française, March 26-27, 1999), 1.

17 Ibidem.

18 Ibidem. [The term ‘cinéma des premiers temps’ has here been translated as ‘early cinema’ – a translation which Gaudreault would undoubtedly take exception to, but which I feel is unavoidable in this context.]

19 Although it seems that the introduction of the term intertitle occurs even later in English-speaking countries than in France, judging by the fact that many scholars still use the term ‘subtitles’. Cf. Anthony Slide, *Aspects of American Film History Prior to 1920* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1978).

20 The actual etymology of the Dutch word is unclear. There is no lemma on the term in the *Van Dale* dictionary (see <http://www.vandale.nl>), and it was only added to the *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal* in the 2001 addition (see. <http://wnt.inl.nl/>).

21 André Gaudreault, “Des cris du bonimenteur aux chuchotements des intertitres...,” in *Scrittura e immagine: La didascalia nel cinema muto / Writing and Image: Titles in Silent Cinema, Proceedings of the IV International Udine Conference on Film Studies, Udine, March 1997*, ed. Francesco Pitassio & Leonardo Quaresima (Udine: Forum, 1998).

consisted of a single shot, and each shot was known by its own title. Gaudreault reminds us that “each of these views not only was autonomous, but was also *projected* in an autonomous manner: thus, the Lumière machine, for instance, did not allow one to show more than one ‘view’ at a time.”²² Sometimes the gaps between two views were filled with magic lantern slides announcing the title (and thus contents) of the view to come. In this rudimentary alternation (a title / a view / a title / a view) the text cards are not ‘sub’ or ‘inter’ anything; they are simply titles.

This alternation is seen by Gaudreault to lead up to the second dispositif, ranging from 1902 to 1908. During this period, films became longer, consisting of multiple views:

ALI BABA ET LES QUARANTE VOLEURS (Pathé, 1902) and UNCLE TOM’S CABIN (Edison, 1903), for instance, are set up as a systematic alternation of ‘a title / a view / a title / a view’, or rather ‘a *subtitle* / a view / a *subtitle* / a view’, since in effect the titles in question are subtitles, titles of parts of films, titles of scenes.²³

Gaudreault relates this to contemporary business practices, in which it was customary to sell these multi-shot films not just as a whole but also as separate views – in effect returning the subtitle to its earlier status as title.

A similar blurring of dispositifs is visible again when after 1908 the title cards truly became intertitles. Gaudreault makes explicit why the title cards of the two previous eras cannot truly be called intertitles:

To be an *intertitle*, it is not enough for a text card to simply be sandwiched in between two image segments, but it must create a point between the Before (which it completes) and the After (which it announces), it must become an element of – let us blurt out the word – *editing* in a strong sense of the word.²⁴

Thus, the intertitle in the true sense of the word does not come into existence until 1908. After this, the intertitle’s functions remain roughly the same²⁵ until its ‘extinction’ with the

22 Gaudreault, “Titres, sous-titres et intertitres”, 5; emphasis in original.

23 Ibidem; emphasis in original.

24 Ibidem, 9; emphasis in original.

25 At least as far as Gaudreault’s terminology is concerned; there are many further developments within the history of the intertitle during these two decades, most notably the introduction of the dialogue title, as shall become clear further on in this chapter.

widespread adoption of sound film during the 1930s.²⁶ But again Gaudreault points to the blurred boundaries of his own periodization, highlighting that for some years after 1908 these title cards, which effectively functioned as intertitles, were still treated, at least in some segments of the film industry, as subtitles, as titles to scenes.

Drawing this play on the word subtitle slightly further than Gaudreault does, it is interesting to note the implications of the development of the term ‘subtitle’ itself from the era of early cinema to its present use. This development is usually presented as a continuum,²⁷ but there is a marked shift in the meaning of the term. In silent film, or more specifically in the second period Gaudreault distinguishes (1902-1908), the prefix ‘sub-’ refers to the title’s position in relation to the original title – a relation that can be said to lie on the level of narrative. In the present-day use of the term, ‘sub-’ refers to the position within the frame: the words are placed *at the bottom* of the images.²⁸ This literal placement below also relates to a figural downgrading. The contemporary ‘subtitle’ is inherently subordinate to the image. This is not the case in early cinema titles, subtitles, and intertitles, which have a much more equal relation with the images; in some cases one might even say they take (narrative) precedence over the images. Thus, the shifting of this term opens up a window to the shifting importance of ‘the word’ in ‘cinema’. Similarly, Gaudreault’s primary theoretical ruminations immediately open up several interrelated avenues of investigation: the historical periodization of the intertitle; the categorization of different types of intertitles; the relation between intertitle and editing; et cetera. The linear nature of this thesis forces me to take these on in turn, inherently lessening the sense of their contingency.²⁹ Nevertheless, I shall attempt to circle back and return to their relations after each has been dealt with.

26 Of course, as is true of any ‘old’ form with the introduction of a ‘new’ one, the intertitle did not truly become extinct; indeed, it is still used to this day, albeit in different, far more marginal forms.

27 Cf. Robert Vanderplank, “Subtitles, Silent Film to Teletext,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Language and Linguistics*, ed. R.E. Asher & J.M.Y. Simpson (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1994).

28 While ‘sub’ refers to a position *beneath* the images, subtitles are usually placed within the confines of the film frame – at least in the Western dispositif. It should be noted, however, that in the present-day digital age placement of subtitles below the frame is becoming more frequent, for instance on DVD’s (where the subtitles are sometimes placed in the ‘black box’ below the widescreen frame) or digital film projection (where subtitles can be projected separately from the feature on a small screen-below-the-screen).

29 Indeed, Rommy Albers and Nico de Klerk close their internal memo outlining the Netherlands Filmmuseum’s ‘appropriation project’ (see chapter 2) with the statement that “we do not want to publish our findings in the form of a book, but as data and commentary on a website, in descriptive as well as database-form.” Rommy Albers & Nico de Klerk, “Toeëigening: achtergronden van een Filmmuseumproject” (internal memo, Amsterdam: Netherlands Filmmuseum, 2006), unnumbered page.

1.2 *The evolving intertitle*

Gaudreault periodization makes clear that we cannot think of the intertitle simply as a static part of the cinematic medium. Indeed, the Russian filmmaker and theorist Boris Eikhenbaum already noted in 1926 that “[i]ntertitles, like the problems they raise, evolve at the same time as the cinema does.”³⁰ Nevertheless, most entries on intertitles in film encyclopaedias treat them as a historically static object. The following entry from Anthony Slide’s *Historical Dictionary of the American Film Industry* can be seen as typical of this tendency, and is worth analyzing in full:

The word *subtitles* can be used to refer [...] to narrative or descriptive titles in silent films. The latter are usually described today as intertitles, but during the silent era they were always called subtitles. In an average silent feature film, one-fifth of the production consisted of subtitles. Many subtitles in silent films could be quite florid, while others were intelligently witty, and some title writers – such as Ralph Spence – became noted for their humorous titles. Very occasionally, subtitles in silent films were superimposed over the action, but this was most unusual. *THE OLD SWIMMIN’ HOLE* (1921) utilized no subtitles to tell its story but rather explained the action through entries in the diary of the leading man, Charles Ray. The best known of silent films without subtitles was F.W. Murnau’s *THE LAST LAUGH*, made in Germany in 1925, which had only one title to explain the ‘happy ending’ tacked on the end of the feature.³¹

Slide starts out his description of early cinema intertitles with a seemingly definitive statement on the quantity of titles per film – a statement which is inconsistent with at least one contemporary source, which claims that “[o]ne-half of the film footage of the average photoplay is devoted to titles.”³² Then, after a very general note on the stylistic aspects of the writing in the titles, he goes on to devote more than half of the entry to what the intertitle is *not*, and to films that *don’t* use intertitles. *THE LAST LAUGH* is questionable as an example since an original script for the film *with titles throughout* was discovered by archivist

30 Boris Eikhenbaum, “La question des intertitres,” trans. Valérie Posener, in *Les Formalistes russes et le cinéma, Poétique du film*, ed. François Albera (Paris: Nathan Université, 1996), 217.

31 “Subtitles,” in *The Historical Dictionary of the American Film Industry*, ed. Anthony Slide (Chicago/London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1998), 197.

32 Loren E. Taylor, “Art Titles,” in *Opportunities in the Motion Picture Industry, and how to qualify for positions in its many branches* (Los Angeles: Photoplay Research Society, 1922; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1970), 65.

Dorothea Gebauer in 1990.³³ But, more importantly, this overwrought attention for the exceptional cases where there are no intertitles severely misrepresents the intertitle's ubiquity and importance in early cinema.

This implicit rejection of the intertitle is, unfortunately, widespread, in some cases even bordering on hostility. Take for instance this paragraph from Robert Vanderplank's *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics* entry on subtitles:

Early subtitles were often clumsy and inept, ruining dramatic tension by announcing dramatic events before they had happened on the screen, 'A murder had been committed,' or contradicting the shots which follows, as when a 'horde of savage indians' turned out to be a dozen or so.³⁴

The rejection of these kinds of intertitles is widespread in modern approaches to silent film; David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kirstin Thompson's, for instance, in their handbook *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* call them an "extremely overt and redundant form of narration".³⁵

However, this dismissive view is only valid when we look at early cinema from our contemporary perspective. As Coby Bordewijk argues persuasively, we should "approach early film from the expectations of the audiences at the time", in which viewing mode "summary titles function as indispensable ingredients to realize a theatrical or dramatic experience."³⁶ She argues that these summary titles added to the audiences' "pleasure of anticipated rediscovery", since the *tableau-films*, for which these summary titles were most often used, were almost always based on stories that were "known universally even by illiterate audiences who had seen them in fairground theatre, magic lantern shows, ballads sung and illustrated on slides by travelling showmen, stereoscope cards, or illustrated bibles."³⁷ Thus, she places early cinema in general and the intertitle in particular within a rich intermedial space in which "[n]ot originality, but familiarity was the main attraction".³⁸

33 Cited in James Card, *Seductive Cinema: The Art of Silent Film* (New York: Knopf, 1994), 61.

34 Vanderplank, 4398-9.

35 David Bordwell, Janet Staiger & Kirstin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 183.

36 Coby Bordewijk, "... And she wept for her lost happiness'. Seeming Redundancy of Prospective and Retrospective Intertitles in Early Silent Films," in *Scrittura e imagine: La didascalia nel cinema muto / Writing and Image: Titles in Silent Cinema, Proceedings of the IV International Udine Conference on Film Studies, Udine, March 1997*, ed. Francesco Pitassio & Leonardo Quaresima (Udine: Forum, 1998), 160.

37 Ibidem.

38 Ibidem, 162.

1.3 The intertitle's many prehistories

Bordewijk expanded on this intermedial viewpoint in her contribution to the Paris conference, which compared “titles recapitulating the action or those offering moral judgements with analogous practices in theatrical melodrama or popular literature aimed at women.”³⁹ But as will become clear in the next section, she was not alone in drawing out these intermedial connections. Indeed, it is precisely this intermedial space that Tom Gunning describes in his contribution to the Paris conference. He charts the “appearance of the culture of advertising in the late Nineteenth century [...] transforming urban space into a palimpsest of images and words”.⁴⁰ In this view, the arrival of cinema is closely linked (among many other intermedial connections) to developments in advertising, from improvements in lithography in the 1870s to the increasing availability of public spaces as places for advertisements: “the cinema belongs here, nestled among these transformations in the visual environment as an epitome of a new modern sensibility.”⁴¹ In this visual environment, words become images themselves, just as images become legible to a certain extent. Thus, “[t]he word entered early cinema not simply as an inert title announcing the next scene, but as a playful entity, [...] as tricky demons taking their cue from the wit and visual dazzle of the new advertising.”⁴²

While drawing out this previously unexplored ‘origin story’ of intertitles, Gunning is careful to connect it with existing accounts of this origin. Most notably, he refers to intertitles’ function as carriers of their production companies logos, although he shifts its meaning somewhat. Eileen Bowser has explained these logos in light of copyright concerns, claiming that around 1907, in order “[t]o prevent the piracy rampant in the early days of the industry, the production companies began to place their trademark on the sets of nearly every scene, on the walls of the set, or even on trees when the scene was shot outdoors.”⁴³ As Janelle Blankenship shows, it’s a legitimate concern; in addition to piracy, she also points to a widespread practice “wherein foreign films are offered at reduced rates under names that are

39 Kessler, “Intertitre et film,” 173.

40 Tom Gunning, “The Pathé Coq meets the Cadmun Bebe, or Hieroglyphics of Modernity: The Interpenetration of Word and Image in Intertitles of the Silent Avant-Garde Film” (paper presented at the international conference “Intertitre et film. Histoire, théorie, restauration,” Cinémathèque française, March 26-27, 1999), 2-3.

41 Ibidem, 4.

42 Ibidem, 6.

43 Eileen Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema, 1907-1915* (New York: Scribner, 1990), 137.

similar to that of Lumière (Lemaire, Lumaire, etc.)”⁴⁴ – with the same tactics, of course, being used to rip off other major producers as well.

Over the next few years, these trademarks moved from the images themselves to the title cards, as “[t]itles were not considered part of the illusion; therefore trademarks could be accepted on titles more easily than within images.”⁴⁵ This usage of the company logo as a trademark is directed purely at competitors, disheartening them from plagiarising the images. Gunning, on the other hand, also sees the logos as “advertising a film’s production company”,⁴⁶ citing (via Gaudreault) Pathé’s first announcement in 1904 of the addition of titles to all their films, which claimed that they “carry its title and our factory mark opposite it.”⁴⁷ Thus, in Gunning’s view these trademark titles are not only addressing the industry, but also (and perhaps primarily) the audience.

This direct address of the audience was far from unique, and it points us to another precursor of the intertitle which is described by Livio Belloï. In the course of an examination of the *endings* of early cinema programmes, he examines the Lumière film *ECRITURE À L’ENVERS* (1896), which shows a clown figure writing backwards on a blackboard. The message reads “Mesdames et Messieurs, nos Remerciements” (Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you”). As Belloï points out, this film shows “that *writing* on the screen appears much earlier than is usually assumed, at any rate before the occurrence of familiar (encoded) forms such as inter- or subtitles – namely in the (by definition) peripheral area of the signal of the programme’s end.”⁴⁸ In fact, although Belloï does not draw this comparison explicitly, in highlighting the fact that the writing “belongs to a diegetic figure” he hints at the possibility to see the speech act in this film as a very early variant of a dialogue title.

Belloï draws connections from these films to what he calls a “straightforward dispositif of address”⁴⁹ which comes into being roughly between 1906 and 1908. A series of lantern slides carrying various texts (warning patrons not to talk loudly, or instructing ladies to take off their hats) constitutes a “guiding discourse, which accompanies the programme and

44 Janelle Blankenship, “‘Liste für gebrauchte Films zum Verkauf’: Used Films for Sale in Germany and Austro-Hungary (1911-13),” in *Networks of Entertainment: Early Film Distribution 1895-1915*, ed. Frank Kessler & Nanna Verhoeff (Eastleigh: John Libbey Publishing, 2007), 224.

45 Bowser, *Transformation of Cinema*, 139.

46 Gunning, 6.

47 *Catalogue films et cinématographes Pathé* (August 1904), 134, cited in Gaudreault, “Des cris du bonimenteur”, 59.

48 Livio Belloï, “‘Vielen Dank und auf Wiedersehen’. Mitteilungen an das Publikum in den Kinoprogrammen der Frühzeit,” trans. (to German) Frank Kessler, *KINtop 5* (1996), 120.

49 *Ibidem*, 125.

informs the audience of elementary measures of social interaction.”⁵⁰ This discourse is, of course, connected to similar strategies used in vaudeville performances and magic lantern shows, connections that have both been made with regards to the prehistory of the intertitle. Especially the text slides of the magic lantern show are often cited as direct precursors of the intertitle; as we have seen, Gaudreault implicitly draws this connection as well when describing the earliest titles as being projected by a magic lantern.

Richard Crangle provocatively refutes this “conventional view in which the lantern metaphorically ‘gives birth’ to the cinema and dies in labour,” arguing that we should study “media such as the magic lantern for ‘what they were’ rather than ‘what they gave us’.”⁵¹ His heartfelt plea for and outline of more structural scholarly attention for the magic lantern is as plausible and laudable as his call to attention for its continuing existence *since* the introduction of the cinema. But he misses the mark when he extends these arguments to claim, as he does in the subtitle of his article, that “the magic lantern is not an important part of cinema history.” The facts that the magic lantern has its own history, is not yet extinct, and is a worthy object of study in its own right do not detract from its status as a progenitor of the cinema. What Crangle perhaps more accurately could have said is that the magic lantern is not *just* an important part of cinema history.

1.4 From exposition to dialogue

Having sketched these various prehistories of the intertitle, it is important to note that these are usually seen as separate entities but should instead be seen as whole, as a continuum of intermedial relations combining into a sort of ‘primordial soup’ from which emerge intertitles. Having said this, we can thus turn to the historical development of the intertitle itself (its evolution, if you will), extending and refining the periodization given by Gaudreault. Especially Gaudreault’s third period, the period of the intertitle proper, demands closer examination. As shall become clear, these developments are intricately linked to several wider developments in cinema, and thereby also to several theoretical and archival concerns surrounding these issues. Many of these are touched on in Claire Dupré la Tour’s entry on

50 Ibidem.

51 Richard Crangle, “What Do Those Old Slides Mean? Or Why the Magic Lantern Is Not an Important Part of Cinema History,” in *Visual Delights: Essays on the Popular and Projected Image in the 19th Century*, ed. Simon Pople & Vanessa Toulmin (Trowbridge: Flicks Books, 2000), 16.

intertitles and titles in Richard Abel's *Encyclopaedia of Early Cinema*,⁵² perhaps the most comprehensive and balanced overview to date of the intertitle's backgrounds and developments.

While there are slight variations in the dates and Dupré la Tour does not explicitly make the distinction between titles, subtitles and intertitles that Gaudreault employs, the two in fact largely share the same distinction of an early build-up phase after which the intertitle 'comes into its own'. Dupré la Tour places this shift a year earlier than Gaudreault does, claiming that "[w]hen films started lengthening around 1907, a simultaneous increase in the number of shots, intertitles, and words [per intertitle, J.B.] occurred."⁵³ But whereas Gaudreault describes the proceeding decades as a single unit, Dupré la Tour adds two important shifts which take place during this period.

The first is the arrival and proliferation of *dialogue titles* between 1910 and 1914. Of course, characters' speech had been reproduced in title cards before that; indeed, Gaudreault points out the dialogue titles in such 'subtitle' films as *ALI BABA ET LES QUARANTE VOLEURS* (Pathé, 1902 – unsurprisingly, the title is the famous "Open Sesame") and *THE EX-CONVICT* (Edison, 1904 – "That man saved my life!"). But these subtitles, Gaudreault argues, in effect were not dialogue titles; in their design and placement, they remained subtitles. This is true of 'dialogue titles' in the early intertitle era as well. As Dupré la Tour asserts, only

[b]etween 1910 and 1914, as acting styles became more restrained and close shots more frequent, speech moved from discourse reported in capital letters (and always preceding the shot in which words were being spoken) to direct discourse in lower case letters and framed by quotation marks (inserted within the shot where words were being spoken).⁵⁴

Thus, not before this time does the dialogue title distinguish itself from 'regular' intertitles.

Dupré la Tour links the advent of the dialogue title and the general development of the intertitle to several broader advances in the cinematic form such as the (slow) fading away of the lecturer and the "newfound legitimacy for the cinema around 1910".⁵⁵ Barry Salt draws out this last connection more explicitly, claiming that the dialogue title "presumably arose in

52 Claire Dupré la Tour, "Intertitles and titles," in *Encyclopaedia of Early Cinema*, ed. Richard Abel (London/New York: Routledge, 2005).

53 Ibidem, 328.

54 Ibidem.

55 Ibidem, 329.

films based on literary classics of one kind or another [...] where there was an obvious compulsion to include celebrated lines of dialogue from the original.”⁵⁶ But Eileen Bowser points out another precedent for the dialogue title: inserts – that is, shots of letters, telegrams, newspapers, et cetera. These were (and are) generally not seen as intertitles in a strict sense – see, for instance, Dupré la Tour’s definition of ‘intertitles’ as “shots of texts printed on material that does not belong to the diegesis of a film and, therefore, are distinct from textual inserts”.⁵⁷

Indeed, Yuri Tsivian sees this distinction between inserts and titles as one of the roots for the intertitle’s specific graphic design, which he notes was almost universally adopted despite the “great many locations of film production, both independent and amateuristic, in the years 1900-1910”.⁵⁸ He convincingly argues that in these years, written texts on film were distinguished as either originating from a narrator or from a character. Thus when the expositional title first appeared,

it defined itself in opposition to the inserts which already existed. Since the usual style of written signs in the material world is black on white, the intertitles (presumably so as not to be mistaken with close-ups of typographical text) were represented as a negative. Thus white titles on a black background were a sign of non-written language.

Of course these expositional titles were, in fact, written. What Tsivian means is that their ‘negative’ image signals to the audience that, in opposition to the inserts, this writing is not part of the diegesis in written form. Indeed, until the appearance of the dialogue title the intertitle was not part of the diegesis at all.

It is precisely this aspect of the insert that is also pointed out by Frank Kessler. While inserts “can fulfil a similar function”⁵⁹ as the expositional intertitle, the difference is that inserts, even explanatory ones that are “addressed to both a character and the audience”,⁶⁰ are ‘diegeticized’. As Bowser puts it: “Intertitles are separate (or inorganic) to the images in the

56 Barry Salt, “The Early Development of Film Form,” in *Film Before Griffith*, ed. John Fell (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1983), 291.

57 Dupré la Tour, “Intertitles and titles,” 326.

58 Yuri Tsivian, “Aangaande de semiotiek van tussentitels in stomme films (Tussentitels en gesproken taal),” trans. (to Dutch) Olga Bos, *Trudi po znakovim systemam [Works on Sign Systems]* 22 (1988), 144.

59 Frank Kessler, “Brieven uit de verte. Een analyse van de film EEN TELEGRAM UIT MEXICO,” *Jaarboek Mediageschiedenis* 8 (1997), 203.

60 Ibidem.

film, although they have a relationship / while inserts [...] are part of the images.”⁶¹ Just as dialogue titles would later be, inserts (as their name itself indicates) were placed *within* shots. This connection in placement highlights the connection in diegetic status between the two. This connection is strengthened further by Elena Dagrada’s assertion that in inserts, characters “wrote that which could very well have been said, [...] have been communicated by live voice. In some cases, it is not rare at all for the same ‘mailer’ to hand his own message to the addressee and then wait, *in praesentia*, for the answer.”⁶² Thus, the dialogue title might be called semi-diegetic, combining the non-diegetic form of the expositional title with the diegetic contents of written inserts. This also throws new light on the advent of sound film, which in stead of the complete break they are often described as may be seen as a logical continuation of the ongoing ‘dialogization’ of the cinema, from inserts to dialogue titles to actual dialogue.

1.5 Some neglected avenues

The second shift Dupré la Tour distinguishes occurs around 1915 and concerns the growing artistry of the intertitle itself. The intertitle grew more sophisticated, both in its quality of writing (with several directors hiring famed prose writers to “attract a learned audience”⁶³) and in their design, where “the usual white lettering on a dark background [...] gave way to specific typography accompanied by symbolic backgrounds and emblematic illustrations.”⁶⁴ These ‘art titles,’ as they were known in the American industry at the time and have remained in the academic discourse, also brought forth the first writers famed simply for writing intertitles, most notably Anita Loos. Both art titles and their famous creators have received a disproportionate amount of academic attention over the years – yet another instance, perhaps, of scholars choosing the more highbrow aspects of a medium and the glamour of a few supposed ‘great creators’ over its more typical lowbrow instances and their mass of workaday artisans. Perhaps this myopic focus on a select few films, directors and title creators has also blinded researchers to other possible subjects. I will highlight two of these, the

61 Eileen Bowser, “Reconstruction of Intertitles: Some Ethical, Practical and Theoretical Considerations” (paper presented at the international conference “Intertitre et film. Histoire, théorie, restauration,” Cinémathèque française, March 26-27, 1999), 12.

62 Elena Dagrada, “Le film épistolaire,” in *Scrittura e immagine: La didascalia nel cinema muto / Writing and Image: Titles in Silent Cinema, Proceedings of the IV International Udine Conference on Film Studies, Udine, March 1997*, ed. Francesco Pitassio & Leonardo Quaresima (Udine: Forum, 1998), 257.

63 Dupré la Tour, “Intertitles and titles,” 329.

64 Ibidem.

neglect of which to me is the most surprising: the connections between dialogue titles and the human voice, and the relation between intertitles and editing.

The first of these topics is highlighted by Yuri Tsivian in the article cited above, which unfortunately has only been published in Russian and thus has not found much following. Tsivian remarks on the fact that dialogue titles were placed in the middle of shots that these “efforts towards simultaneity of a statement and its utterance caused a number of purely semiotic problems. Foremost among these were the problem of indicating who was speaking and the problem connected to the material aspects of voice.”⁶⁵ While the first problem seems easily solved by the lip movements of the speaking character, Tsivian notes two problems with this. Firstly, since the exact placement of intertitles was only decided during the editing, “lip movements would too strongly determine the future placement of intertitles.”⁶⁶ Secondly, actors could not always be trusted to say the lines that were going to appear on the intertitles – if only because these usually had not yet been written at the time of filming. This could lead to problems since, as actress Louise Brooks claimed, “[s]ilent film fans were excellent lip-readers and often complained at the box office about the cowboy cussing furiously trying to mount his horse.”⁶⁷

For these reasons, dialogue titles’ speakers were more often indicated through various other means. Tsivian mentions some of these, but a more thorough account is given in an article by Susanne Orozs – coincidentally⁶⁸ published in the same year as Tsivian’s. As part of a systematical inventory of the function of intertitles, she distinguishes six “resources for classification of sender-receiver-relations”⁶⁹: editing relations (with the speaking character alone in the shot pre- and proceeding the title); movement of characters (characters in a dialogue always move into the foreground of the shot); distance of characters (characters speaking to each other are always close and have eye contact); gestures and mimicry (of which lip movement might be a part); a vocative expression within the title text itself; and (if all else fails) context information from the frame.

65 Tsivian, “Semiotiek van tussentitels,” 146-7.

66 Ibidem, 147.

67 Louise Brooks, “Pabst and Lulu,” *Sight & Sound* (Summer 1965), 123, cited in Kevin Brownlow, “Those Maddening Subtitles” (paper presented at the international conference “Intertitre et film. Histoire, théorie, restauration,” Cinémathèque française, March 26-27, 1999), 3.

68 There is, of course, no such thing as coincidences.

69 Susanne Orozs, “Weiße Schrift auf schwarzem Grund. Die Funktion von Zwischentiteln im Stummfilm, dargestellt an Beispielen aus DER STUDENT VON PRAG (1913),” in *Der Stummfilm: Konstruktion und Rekonstruktion*, ed. Elfride Ledig (München: Diskurs, 1988), 147.

Tsivian connects this problem of address with the problem of the voice. He reminds us that while “direct address in intertitles does not have a sound-material aspect, this does not mean that there is not a relation between the two.”⁷⁰ Whereas the literary aspects of direct address are lessened in written text by their even more literary surroundings, and in the theatre by the voice and intonation of an actor, the absence of these two factors heightens the artificiality of direct address in silent film. To negate this, silent film writers strove to bring their language as close as possible to spoken language – not by “inserting real aspects of the semiotics of spoken language into intertitles [but by] forcing certain conditional elements of written text to their extreme, especially quantitatively.”⁷¹ He is talking here, primarily, of punctuation marks, referencing for instance the dashes, ellipses, and exclamation marks “of which the number and placement seem completely random.”⁷² Through the usage of these punctuation marks, intertitles sought to approach the ‘sound’ of spoken language, or more accurately its rhythms.

Thus it is connected to another subject underrepresented in research on intertitles: their relation to editing. As Claire Dupré la Tour asserts, “intertitles contributed decisively to the emergence of editing”.⁷³ We should, of course, be careful of drawing too linear a chain of cause and effect, of either explaining the intertitle as creating editing or the other way around. In stead, what should be highlighted is, as Gaudreault calls it, “the necessary coalescence between intertitles and editing.”⁷⁴ Yet while almost all literature on intertitles makes passing reference to this fact, more in-depth historical or theoretical analysis has so far been almost non-existent. Tsivian is connected to some recent promising research in this area as well, albeit in a more sideways manner, through the website *Cinematics*. *Cinematics* is a computer program developed by Tsivian and his son Gunars, created as a tool for statistical analysis of films, and more specifically to measure a movie’s average shot length (ASL). The user runs the program while watching the movie, clicking a button every time there is a cut. The resulting measurements can be published to a growing database on the website. Additionally, the program’s advanced mode allows users to distinguish various types of shots. One way to use this advanced mode, developed by researcher Torey Liepa and thus known on the site as the ‘Torey-Liepa method’, is to distinguish between pictorial shots, expository

70 Tsivian, “Semiotiek van tussentitels,” 150.

71 Ibidem.

72 Ibidem.

73 Dupré la Tour, “Intertitles and titles,” 326.

74 Gaudreault, “Titres, sous-titres et intertitres,” 10.

titles, dialogue titles and (written) inserts. In his overview of the first year of *Cinematics*' existence, Tsivian draws a preliminary conclusion from this research: "As Torey Liepa has shown on multiple examples from the 1910s, intertitles in this period are invariably shorter than shots."⁷⁵

But these promising enquiries are merely the exceptions that prove that as a rule, the relations between intertitles and editing are a neglected area in research on early cinema. While this is mainly caused by simple oversight, there is one valid argument underlying it. For a large number of reasons (on which I will elaborate both in the following paragraph and in chapter 4) it is often uncertain whether the intertitles in the prints that are currently available match up with those used when the films were first released; indeed, in many cases various different versions of a single film are available, with no way to determine which is the 'original.' This pluriformity makes it extremely difficult to make definitive quantitative statements on the usage of intertitles. In closing of this chapter, we will turn to part of the cause for this uncertainty: archival practices concerning the intertitle, both in the past and the present.

1.6 Archiving and restoring intertitles

Restoring early cinema is a tricky thing. This is true in a practical sense, since most often the archivist deals with nitrate film, an extremely fragile and volatile material. But it is also true on the level of the content of the films themselves. Restoration is usually carried out in order to be able to show the films again, and thus the newly restored films are aimed at a contemporary audience. At the same time, the films were created at a very different time, when audiences had very different expectations of what cinema was. Thus the restorer constantly has to navigate a fine line between the past and the present. While today most archives are aware of this duality, this has not always been the case in the past. Our modern-day view of early cinema is therefore coloured by archival practices of the past – or rather, discoloured, since our current view of early cinema as black and white cinema does not

75 Yuri Tsivian, "Year 2006 summary," *Cinematics* (November 2006), <<http://www.cinematics.lv/2006.php>> (accessed March 22, 2008). He goes on to point out Charles O'Brien's findings that "scenes with dialogue and singing in the early talkies are invariably longer than action-only shots." The combination of these two, Tsivian posits, "will help film historians to account for the slow-down in cutting in the early sound period."

correspond at all with the practices at the time, in which coloured film, whether by tinting or toning, was in widespread use.⁷⁶

The same observation can be made for early film sound (since, as Rick Altman has comprehensively shown, so-called ‘silent film’ was almost never silent), as well as for intertitles; film historian and occasional restorer Kevin Brownlow goes so far as to say that “[i]t is harder to restore titles sometimes than picture.”⁷⁷ For many different reasons, intertitles were often removed from archived film prints. Some of these reasons were less valid than others; early film archivists such as Henry Langlois, the famed director of the Cinémathèque française saw intertitles as unnecessary, “un-filmic aids only to an understanding of the plot, and not vital to their form, their graphic style, their musical rhythm”,⁷⁸ and therefore obsolete. While the persistent story of Langlois actively removing intertitles from silent films is invalidated by Eileen Bowser, who claims that “I suspect it was only because the films printed from the old negatives in France, too, were probably missing their intertitles, and he was faced with the same problems we all are.”⁷⁹ Nevertheless, Patalas convincingly argues that “[w]hat is certain is that he [Langlois] was not very interested in preserving or restoring them.”⁸⁰

Claire Dupré la Tour points to the intertitle’s production circumstances for several more valid reasons for the absence of intertitles in archival prints. Firstly, since “[i]ntertitles generally were produced after the negative had been edited but before positive prints were made”,⁸¹ preserved negatives contain no titles. Furthermore, in cases where a positive print was preserved the intertitles were often printed on cheaper film stock, which thus deteriorates much faster than the surrounding film. In these cases, their removal becomes necessary to prevent the ‘tainting’ of the images by this process of decay.⁸²

Archivist Guy Edmonds, one of several Netherlands Filmmuseum film restorers currently working on the re-restoration of some of the films in the Desmet collection, points out that the techniques used to reinsert these titles into the films in restoration had negative consequence of their own. “In past restorations, they often took one frame of the original and

76 Cf. Daan Hertogs & Nico de Klerk, “Introduction,” in *Disorderly Order: Colors in Silent Film*, ed. Daan Hertogs & Nico de Klerk (Amsterdam: Stichting Nederlands Filmmuseum, 1996).

77 Brownlow, 8.

78 Enno Patalas, “The Odyssey of the Battleship: On the Reconstruction of POTEMKIN at the Filmmuseum Berlin,” *Journal of Film Preservation* 70 (2005), 31.

79 Eileen Bowser, “Reconstruction of Intertitles,” 11.

80 Enno Patalas, “On the Way to NOSFERATU,” *Film History* 14.1 (2002), 26.

81 Dupré la Tour, “Intertitles and titles,” 330.

82 Cf. Brownlow, 2.

used that as a still. We're looking to avoid that this time around, where we can, to see if we can give these titles back some life." Similarly, the re-restoration attempts to use the original colours of tinting of the films, whereas earlier restorations had converted most films to black and white.⁸³

Several contributions to the Paris conference focus on this problematic of intertitle restoration. Kevin Brownlow relates his and David Gill's experiences in restoring the Buster Keaton film *HARD LUCK* (1921), including its subtitles. In doing so, he points to a further reason for distrusting the titles in current prints: some restorers add their own titles where the original is missing and no source can be found to discover its text. Creating new English titles based on the French translation of *HARD LUCK* that was available, Brownlow and Gill add a small joke where the French title had none.

When we showed the film in public for the first time, this got a laugh – to our slightly guilty delight. But I now realize that if you concoct a title, it should come with a health warning – one ought to mark it – with the R for reconstruction you sometimes get in television documentaries. [...] We would be very embarrassed if someone did a study the titles in Keaton films and discussed ours as though it were authentic.⁸⁴

Throughout his talk, Brownlow is dismissive of the translations he used to reconstruct the Keaton film in English – not just the French cited above, but also Italian, German and Swedish sources. This is most obvious in the passage where he explains his reasons for speaking at the conference: "I have seen so many Hollywood pictures recovered from Europe, and they were invariably *injured* in some way – either vital footage was missing, or the ratio of title to picture was radically altered."⁸⁵ A page before this, he even states that "as far as translation was concerned, it was open season."⁸⁶ From his viewpoint as a film restorer, this dismissal of translations diverging from the original is understandable, as they make his job a lot harder. But it is unfair to saddle the translator with these expectations, as Brownlow himself implicitly acknowledges when he says that "[n]o one was going to compare the

83 Guy Edmonds, interview by author, Utrecht, 8 August 2008.

84 Brownlow, 2.

85 Ibidem; emphasis added.

86 Ibidem, 1.

original with the new version, so the translator could do what he liked.”⁸⁷ For the foreign audience, the translated version *is* the original.

While sharing much of Brownlow’s negative view of translated prints of American films, Eileen Bowser’s contribution, also drawing from personal restoration experiences, seems more in tune with this fact, for instance in her awareness that. “[t]he integrity of the original that so concerns us now meant little to the distributor at the time. The film was simply a *commodity*.”⁸⁸ Nevertheless, this does not lead her to question this quest for the integrity of the original. Her awareness that “[s]ome companies in the silent period did their own translations before shipping films abroad”⁸⁹ does not lead her to see that, as Ansje van Beusekom puts it, “foreign language intertitles are just as original as the original language titles.”⁹⁰ It is precisely this idea that underlies the concept of appropriation in this thesis. It will be expanded upon in chapter 4, but before we turn to this, it is necessary to get a firmer grip on what, exactly, we mean by this term.

87 Ibidem.

88 Bowser, “Reconstruction of Intertitles,” 5; emphasis added.

89 Ibidem, 1.

90 Ansje van Beusekom, “Written Images/Spoken Words: Modified Images in Early Cinema Exhibition,” in *Scrittura e immagine: La didascalia nel cinema muto / Writing and Image: Titles in Silent Cinema, Proceedings of the IV International Udine Conference on Film Studies, Udine, March 1997*, ed. Francesco Pitassio & Leonardo Quaresima (Udine: Forum, 1998), 283.

2. Appropriation

Since the concept of appropriation has not yet been systematically applied in the field of film history (although there are many studies that incorporate aspects of it without using the concept itself), a definition is needed. This chapter will constitute a search for this definition, which will take in the uses of and counterpoints to the word appropriation within other disciplines and fields of research. But we will start this journey with our feet firmly on the *terra firma* of cinema studies, at the Netherlands Filmmuseum and their appropriation project, of which this thesis is a humble part.

2.1 Appropriation: A research project

In 2004, the Netherlands Filmmuseum published *Film in Nederland*, a book that as of yet comes closest to offering a ‘history of Dutch film’. That being said, the book is in fact nothing of the sort, nor does it aspire to be. It consists of a collection of descriptions of two hundred Dutch films made between 1896 and 2003. In his introduction to the book, Rien Hagen, then director of the Filmmuseum, acknowledges that the nature of the book is “inherently fragmentary” but nevertheless feels that it offers “an overview of the richness and variety of Dutch film production between 1896 and 2003 [...], as broad an outline as possible [...] of the Dutch contribution to film history.”⁹¹

Although he does not contradict his ‘employer’ in so many words, Nico de Klerk implicitly disavows this statement, and perhaps even the book’s very existence, in his essay “Volgt het voorbeeld van John Wayne” included in the closing pages of the book. Drawing from a 1956 survey of Dutch New Guinean people’s reactions to the films, De Klerk draws attention to the “the fact that the term ‘national film history’ is applied quite selectively”,⁹² in that it is applied exclusively to national film *production*. This emphasis blinds researchers to several important, perhaps even central, aspects of national film cultures. De Klerk draws attention to two of these. The first is colonial film production, which in our postcolonial times falls between the cracks; neither the former colony nor the former occupier sees these films as part of their national heritage. The second, and the most important in the context of this thesis,

91 Rien Hagen, “Introductie” in *Film in Nederland*, ed. Rommy Albers, Jan Baeke & Rob Zeeman (Gent/Amsterdam: Ludion/Filmmuseum, 2004), 7.

92 Nico de Klerk, “Volgt het voorbeeld van John Wayne: Over onze grenzeloze nationale cinema” in *Film in Nederland*, ed. Rommy Albers, Jan Baeke & Rob Zeeman (Gent/Amsterdam: Ludion/Filmmuseum, 2004), 415.

is the question of which films are *seen* in a country. Whereas most national film histories give the impression “that there is no such thing as movie theatres”,⁹³ De Klerk reminds us that “barring restrictions [by government or industry, JB] on what is on offer, the most characteristic aspect of any national film culture is the audience’s *international* theatre experience.”⁹⁴

The following statement by Swiss film historian Pierre-Emmanuel Jaques seems typical of this tendency. For him, because in Switzerland, as in The Netherlands, “local film production remained sporadic and was limited to actualities or local views before World War I, it seems particularly opportune to examine the circulation of these images and the space they were given in announcements of projections or in the press.”⁹⁵ De Klerk takes precisely the opposite stance, focussing not on what is *made* but on what is *seen*, leading him to the following question: “how are foreign influences absorbed into the national culture?”⁹⁶ Thus, he emphasises the reception of the films, the meaning ascribed to them by the audience. But he immediately acknowledges that this is an internal process which usually leaves no historical traces, forcing the researcher to do his work through “indirect or interpretive means”.⁹⁷ Perhaps this is why the emphasis in the research project on appropriation has shifted slightly away from the audience. Taking its cue from De Klerk’s 2004 article, the project is headed by himself and Rommy Albers and was first outlined publicly during the Filmmuseum seminar “Uit eigen werkplaats aangeboden: de programmering van archiefmateriaal” held on 8 and 9 December 2006. Shortly before this presentation, Albers and De Klerk had set out the objectives and approach of the project in an internal memo.⁹⁸

On the whole, both this memo and the project it describes echo much of De Klerk’s original article – sometimes doing so word for word. The lament is that the one-sidedness of national film histories is still in place, and – although it takes a less central place – so is the call for attention for colonial film production. Indeed, Albers and De Klerk highlight a further problem with film historians’ one-sided attention for film production: “[...] production itself is limited to ‘full length feature films’. Shorts – newsreels, animation, et cetera – as well as

93 Frank van der Maden, “De komst van de film” in *Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse film en bioscoop tot 1940*, ed. Karel Dibbets & Frank van der Maden (Amsterdam: Wereldvenster, 1986), 12

94 De Klerk, 415.

95 Pierre-Emmanuel Jaques, “Une diffusion ‘nationale’? De la circulation d’images locales ou nationales à Lausanne 1896-1914,” in *Networks of Entertainment. Early Film Distribution 1895-1915*, ed. Frank Kessler & Nanna Verhoeff (Eastleigh: John Libbey Publishing, 2007), 47.

96 De Klerk, 416.

97 Ibidem.

98 Albers & De Klerk.

films made for more specialised ends – such as industrial or ethnographic documentaries, home movies – are generally left out of consideration.”⁹⁹ This is especially problematic in countries that, like The Netherlands, have a limited feature film production, forcing directors to seek other outlets for their art. We can point, for instance, to the highly acclaimed Dutch directors Joris Ivens and Bert Haanstra, who both created some of their most accomplished works as work-for-hire directors.

Despite the many similarities between the 2004 article and the 2006 memo, there is one noticeable and important difference that fundamentally alters the focus of research. The 2006 memo proposes “an alternative approach to writing film history, in which national cinema is rather seen as national film heritage. That is, all things cinema-related matters that have *taken place* within a certain country’s borders.”¹⁰⁰ To make sense of this wide-ranging research field, they introduce the concept of appropriation. With this comes a shift of focus away from the level of the audience and towards an institutional level. This becomes immediately clear when one looks at how the term appropriation is defined: “We reserve that term for a number of measures taken by a certain country’s film industry, especially the distribution and exhibition branches, to make a product – a film – accessible, acceptable, and/or understandable to its audience, as well as permissible by law.”¹⁰¹ The five areas of interest named in the memo and the presentation – translation, marketing, publicity, censorship, presentation – reflect the same institutional focus.

2.2 Appropriation in adaptation studies

Sticking to the wider field of media studies for the moment, one encounters another version of the concept of appropriation in the field of adaptation studies. In this recently emerged field, which has sprung up and become institutionalised over the past decade or so, the terms ‘adaptation’ and ‘appropriation’ are predominantly seen as two sides of the same coin; appropriation is here defined as a specific form of adaptation. The field’s vocabulary and terminology was first set out in a systematical way by Julie Sanders in her 2006 book *Adaptation and Appropriation*. In the two years since its publication, the vocabulary she outlines has been rapidly taken up by the field¹⁰² – a validation, perhaps, of Sanders’

99 Ibidem, n.p..

100 Ibidem, n.p..

101 Ibidem, n.p..

102 For instance, both the recently launched journals for adaptation studies (Intellect’s *The Journal of Adaptation in Film & Performance* and Oxford’s *Adaptation: The Journal of Literature on Screen Studies*)

introductory statement that “there is a need to establish a more diverse vocabulary for discussing and describing the relationship between texts and hypertext, source and appropriation, than these labels at present enable”, moving away from conceptions wherein “the appropriation is always in the secondary, belated position.”¹⁰³

Part 1 of the book, entitled ‘Defining Terms’, takes up some 40 pages of the book, roughly a quarter of its main body. Its two chapters are devoted in turn to the questions ‘What is adaptation?’ and ‘What is appropriation?’ and work at “unpacking in some detail what we might mean by such umbrella terms”.¹⁰⁴ For Sanders, the processes of adaptation and appropriation are “a sub-section of the over-arching practice of intertextuality.”¹⁰⁵ Citing Deborah Cartmell, she distinguishes three broad categories of adaptation: transposition, commentary, and analogue. But while this categorization may be useful, there are fundamental problems with Sanders’ usage of Cartmell’s theory, as becomes clear when we look at the relevant paragraph from Cartmell in full:

Wagner [...] has suggested three categories of adaptations: ‘transposition’, in which the literary text is transferred as accurately as possible to film (Branagh’s *HAMLET*, 1996, for instance); ‘commentary’, in which the original is altered (as in Joffe’s *SCARLET LETTER*, 1995); and ‘analogy’, in which the original text is used as a point of departure (as in Amy Heckerling’s *CLUELESS*, 1995). Dudley Andrew [...] suggests adaptations be classified as ‘borrowing’, ‘intersecting’ and ‘transforming’: ‘borrowing’ makes no claims to fidelity (*CLUELESS*), ‘intersection’ attempts to recreate the distinctness of the original text (*THE SCARLET LETTER*) and ‘transformation’ reproduces the ‘essential’ text (Branagh’s *HAMLET*).¹⁰⁶

Thus, it is not actually Cartmell who argues for these categories, as Sanders claims. In stead, Cartmell cites Geoffrey Wagner’s 1975 (!) book *The Novel and the Cinema* and immediately follows up with Andrew’s categorization, drawing out the similarities between the two by using the same films as examples. Furthermore, Cartmell then uses these two categorizations

refer heavily and positively to Sanders’ theory. Cf. Joost Broeren, “Review: A New Path Through the Field,” *BLIK* 1.2 = *Vooy*s 26.3 (June 2008).

103 Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 12.

104 *Ibidem*, 19.

105 *Ibidem*, 17.

106 Deborah Cartmell, “Introduction to Part II: From Text to Screen” in *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text*, ed. Deborah Cartmell & Imelda Whelehan (London: Routledge, 1999), 24.

to reject categorization altogether, claiming that “the more we study adaptations, the more it becomes apparent that the categories are limitless.”¹⁰⁷

Furthermore, Wagner’s rather clear and succinct categorization is severely muddled up by Sanders. Her definition of ‘transpositions’, in which source texts are relocated “not just generically, but in cultural, geographical and temporal terms”,¹⁰⁸ comes closer to Wagner’s analogy, while her ‘commentary’, in which texts “move away from simple proximation into something more culturally loaded”,¹⁰⁹ has a political aspect that is absent altogether from Wagner’s book: for Sanders, these adaptations “comment on the politics of the source text, or those of the new *mise-en-scène*, or both”.¹¹⁰ Both transposition and commentary, Sanders notes, seem to be contingent on “the audience’s awareness of an explicit relationship to a source text.”¹¹¹ This is less true of the third and final category, analogue, which of the three is at the furthest remove from the source text. But Sanders’ jumbled and distorted misappropriation of Wagner’s other two categories makes this third hard to distinguish – and indeed, Sanders is unable to give a clear definition of the term, though she does give some examples – apart from CLUELESS, also noted by Cartmell, she mentions Francis Ford Coppola’s reworking of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1902) in APOCALYPSE NOW (1979) and Michael Winterbottom’s THE CLAIM (2001) which re-envision Thomas Hardy’s *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886).

In the end, in Sanders’ definitions all three categories seem to blend into each other and into her conceptualization of appropriation, which she develops in the second chapter. It is striking, though perhaps unsurprising given the emphasis of the field, that a definition of appropriation can seemingly only be given in relation to that of adaptation. Whereas “[a]n adaptation signals its relationship with an informing source text or original,” Sanders claims “appropriation frequently affects a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain.”¹¹² In other words, while adaptations offer “movements of proximation or cross-generic interpretation” appropriations develop “a wholesale rethinking of the terms of the original.”¹¹³ But this distinction remains rather vague, especially considering the book has been lauded for its clear definition of the terms. In the

107 Ibidem.

108 Sanders, 20.

109 Ibidem, 21.

110 Ibidem.

111 Ibidem, 22.

112 Ibidem, 26.

113 Ibidem, 28.

end, as Thomas Leitch asserts, it may be best to think of Sanders' book as "a cornucopia of questions, terms, ideas, readings and suggestions for further research" in stead of the defining handbook on adaptation studies that its incorporation into Routledge's New Critical Idiom series seems to suggest.¹¹⁴

2.3 Adapting oneself, appropriating the other

Among the many ideas inspiring further research is Sanders' inclination towards the political aspects of adaptation and appropriation.¹¹⁵ She notes that the processes of adaptation and appropriation "are frequently, if not inevitably, political acts",¹¹⁶ and reminds us that "the question always has to be posed 'who is appropriating who?' and 'on what terms?'"¹¹⁷ However, perhaps because she remains too much tied to a muddled view of Wagner's terms, she fails to properly incorporate this line of thought into her vocabulary. For Sanders – and by extension, for much of the field of adaptation studies – the differences between adaptation and appropriation are described only in terms of *degree* (the degree to which an adaptation or appropriation differs from its source) and in terms of *intent* (whether or not an adaptation or appropriation signals its source).

What needs to be added is a sense of *directionality* that is inherent to the two terms. Its neglect is all the more disappointing considering the differing sense of directionality inherent to the verbs 'to adapt' and 'to appropriate', as becomes clear when we turn to their dictionary definitions. According to *Dictionary.com*, 'to adapt' can mean the following:

–verb (used with object)

1. to make suitable to requirements or conditions; adjust or modify fittingly: *They adapted themselves to the change quickly. He adapted the novel for movies.*

–verb (used without object)

2. to adjust oneself to different conditions, environments, etc.: *to adapt easily to all circumstances.*¹¹⁸

114 Thomas Leitch, "Adaptation Studies at a Crossroads," *Adaptation* 1.1 (2008), 72.

115 To stress its importance, it is precisely the addition of this political aspect that undermines Sanders' usage of Wagner's categorization in the first place.

116 Sanders, 97.

117 *Ibidem*, 99.

118 "adapt," *Dictionary.com Unabridged v 1.1* (Random House, 2006) <<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/adapt>> (accessed: August 12, 2008).

In the context of media studies, as the example shows, ‘adaptation’ (i.e. a film adaptation of a book, a theatre adaptation of a film, et cetera) is usually defined in line with the first definition. But it is in the second definition, in the intransitive use of the verb, where the aspect of directionality is closer to the sense in which the word will be used throughout this thesis. Here the definitions imply a choice, a conscious change *from* oneself *towards* something other, as becomes immediately obvious in three of the four examples.

Thus, one may draw comparisons with the popular conception of the way chameleons adapt to their environments:¹¹⁹ it is a change to the self to fit in with an other. In a straight opposition to this understanding of ‘to adapt,’ the verb ‘to appropriate’ is defined as:

–verb (used with object)

3. to set apart, authorize, or legislate for some specific purpose or use: *The legislature appropriated funds for the university.*
4. to take to or for oneself; take possession of.
5. to take without permission or consent; seize; expropriate: *He appropriated the trust funds for himself.*
6. to steal, esp. to commit petty theft.¹²⁰

In most of these nine definitions, one can plainly see the directionality *from* something other *towards* oneself, and this impression is further strengthened by the fact that there simply is no possible intransitive use of the verb: one cannot appropriate oneself, only something other. Transposing this distinction to a cinematic context, one could say that *adaptation* is carried out by film producers and exporting distributors, whereas *appropriation* is the responsibility of importing distributors and audiences.

Without putting it in these terms, Yuri Tsivian has pointed out these opposite yet contingent practices in the Russian context of the 1920s.¹²¹ He describes the work of so-called ‘re-editors’, who were in charge of making imported films (most notably those coming from the United States) ideologically suitable for a Russian audience. As Tsivian asserts, this work drew from a wider set of techniques than simply re-editing the films: “Aside from re-editing

119 As ever when a Humanities researcher invokes a scientific construct, the reality is much more complicated. As an example of the way we will look at appropriation throughout this thesis, however, the analogy will do perfectly well.

120 “appropriate,” *Dictionary.com Unabridged v 1.1* (Random House, 2006) <<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/adapt>> (accessed: August 12, 2008). The first two definitions, not cited here, explain the use of ‘appropriate’ as an adjective and thus do not concern us here.

121 Yuri Tsivian, “The Wise and Wicked Game: Re-editing and Soviet Film Culture of the 1920s,” *Film History* 8 (1996).

in the proper sense of the word, this term also embraced such operations as re-titling, altering the main title, changing character names and adding new scenes to pre-existing footage.”¹²² This practice was partially motivated by the fact that some films would arrive from the exporting country already re-titled so as to meet the requirements of Soviet censors; according to Russian director and re-titler Georgii Vasiliev, “such ‘unknown re-editors’ operating abroad were regarded as the bureau’s worst enemies, whose sloppy performance not only spoil films, but also defaced the image of the profession in public eyes.”¹²³

It is a somewhat ironic statement given that Russian exporters themselves also created different export version of certain films. For instance, the ending of SOYUZ VELIKOGO DELA (UNION OF THE GREAT CAUSE; Grigori Kozintsev & Leonid Trauberg, 1927) was changed, removing a gunshot fired in a church. Tsivian reminds us that

in a country professing atheist ideology [...] the fact of changing a film to suit clerical censorship must have looked embarrassing. Yet, in the perspective of a film industry, this was a perfectly sound solution: in contrast to the re-editors of imported films, studio-based exporters were not dealing in ideologies, but exporting entertainment.¹²⁴

This final statement is problematic, since of course entertainment itself is also an ideology of sorts, and one closely related to capitalism. Thus, while the importing re-editors ‘added’ Russian ideology to foreign films (in other words *appropriating* them), the exporting re-editors on the other hand ‘removed’ ideology from Russian films (*adapting* them to a foreign environment), and in doing so inherently also added the ideology of entertainment.

2.4 Appropriation and ‘globalization’

Tsivian’s observations lead us to the question of appropriation’s relations to the processes that are usually captured under the increasingly wieldy term ‘globalization.’ As economist Herman Daly points out, globalization “is frequently confused with internationalization, but is in fact something completely different.”¹²⁵ This is especially true for the popular discourse, in which globalization has become a catch-all term for international relations of any kind –

122 Ibidem, 327.

123 Ibidem, 334-336.

124 Ibidem, 330.

125 Herman E. Daly, “Globalization versus Internationalization – Some Implications,” *Ecological Economics* 31 (1999), 31.

whether they be economical, political, or cultural. But as Daly makes clear, the terms are actually polar opposites:

Inter-national, of course, means between or among nations. The basic unit remains the nation, even as relations among nations become increasingly necessary and important. Globalization refers to global economic integration of many formerly national economies into one global economy [...]. It is the effective erasure of national boundaries for economic purposes.

This also calls into question the negative view of globalization as *Americanization*, as the homogenization of global localities to variations on American culture.

This view can extend to the film world as well, where Hollywood is often seen (or lamented) as the standard for international film production, both institutionally and aesthetically. The Desmet archive certainly does not bear this out: while the film collection has a strong American contingent (228 titles), the majority of the films are French (314 titles) and Italy (150 titles) does not trail far behind. Additionally, while I cannot confirm this statistically, my impression is that the latter half of the 1910s shows an increase in the percentage of U.S. films Desmet bought, thus giving the French an even bigger lead in the earlier years. Indeed, America's position as cinema's leading man was far from cemented in the 1910s; the French Pathé Frères were arguably the biggest film producers in the world, and had a strong presence in the U.S. as well.¹²⁶ Thus, the concept of appropriation could be useful to examine these international relations as something more and something else than just American cultural colonization.

While the title of the collection would at first glance suggest otherwise, the contributions to Sabrina Ramet and Gordana Crnković' essay collection *Kazaaam! Splat! Ploof!* in many cases offer examples of such nuanced views. In her introduction to the volume, Crnković' makes clear that she and Ramet are not necessarily interested in the one-sided impact of U.S. culture on Europe (as the subtitle of their book would suggest), but in stead have attempted to ask

the question of how much any aspect of the 'Americanization' of Europe is really that (direct influence) and how much it is a result of imminent development of

126 Richard Abel, "In the Belly of the Beast: the Early Years of Pathé Frères," *Film History* 5 (1993).

European postindustrial societies that are in some areas reaching the points that the United States had simply reached first and are now merely adopting the existing forms (which happen to be ‘made in the United States’) that fit those points.¹²⁷

Like Crnkovič, co-editor Sabrina Ramet does not explicitly mention appropriation in her introduction, but she does hint at variations of the process when she states that

the entire process of cultural diffusion is reciprocal, selective, mediated, translated, and sometimes reinterpreted (whether through conscious adaptation or unconscious assimilation of unintended possible or alternative meanings) and undergoes ongoing processes of hybridization and ‘creolization,’ so that the contents may change, even where the ‘vessel’ may appear to be the same.¹²⁸

The concept of appropriation as it will be used throughout this thesis falls somewhere between Ramet’s usage of ‘conscious adaptation’ and ‘unconscious assimilation.’ It is a process in which, as Crnkovič asserts, “[t]he response [...] is more important than the impact itself”.¹²⁹

2.5 Looking for a middle ground

These issues of globalization also connect with a legal discourse. Here we encounter ‘appropriation’ in its original cultural meaning. As art historian John Welchman asserts, “[s]een across one of its longest horizons, the term ‘appropriation’ stands for the relocation, annexation or theft of cultural properties – whether objects, ideas or notations – associated with the rise of European colonialism and global capital.”¹³⁰ Here ‘appropriation’ comes loaded with disputes on the legality of this cultural trafficking, as Welchman’s use of the word ‘theft’ makes clear. One of the most prominent such cases are the Elgin Marbles, ‘removed’ from Greece between 1799 and 1803 by Thomas Bruce, then Earl of Elgin.¹³¹

127 Gordana Crnkovič, “‘American’ Utility vs. ‘Useless’ Reflection. On Possible Futures on Both Sides of the Atlantic,” in *Kazaaam! Splat! Ploof! The American Impact on European Popular Culture since 1945*, ed. Sabrina Ramet & Gordana Crnkovič (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 4.

128 Sabrina Ramet, “Americanization, Anti-Americanism, and Commercial Aggression against Culture: An Introduction,” in *Kazaaam! Splat! Ploof! The American Impact on European Popular Culture since 1945*, ed. Sabrina Ramet & Gordana Crnkovič (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 4.

129 Crnkovič, 11.

130 John C. Welchman, *Art After Appropriation: Essays on Art in the 1990s* (Amsterdam: G+B Arts International, 2001), 1.

131 Thus, the given name of these artefacts is itself an appropriation. Referring not to their original location but their ‘thief.’ For this reason, some have argued that the artworks be referred to as the ‘Pathenon Marbles’.

While the artefacts have been in the possession of the British Government since 1816, the question who is their rightful owner still resurfaces, both internally as well as in the public debate, on a regular basis.

Of course, this discourse of illegality is far from what I set out to do in this thesis. Fortunately, some authors offer a more positive outlook on ‘appropriation’ in the field of (cultural) law. A recent example can be found in Susan Scafidi’s *Who Owns Culture?*, in which appropriation is seen in opposition to (legal) protection, an opposition she connects with that between “individual and community, independence and interdependence.”¹³² While, as Scafidi describes, cultural appropriation is central to American culture itself, “existing legal structures have focused on individual rights and on the nation as a whole at the expense of the sub-communities that constitute the American polity.”¹³³ She argues for a correction of this tendency, with a legal system that strikes a balance between the two. This would require reconceptions of the legal conceptions of terms such as ‘authorship’ and ‘original’ – concepts which are also called into question through the questions I ask in this thesis.

The term ‘appropriation’ has in recent years resurfaced in another less judgemental context as well, in the field of cultural history. As historian Willem Frijhoff makes clear, this shift is related to a changing viewpoint on culture, from seeing it as a *product*, “something that has solidified [...] and thus has a pronounced historical dimension”,¹³⁴ to (also) seeing it as a *process*, a view in which “culture is not about things but about what people do with them.”¹³⁵ In this new approach ‘cultural dynamics’ are central. These dynamics are to be found “in the appropriation of cultural forms that are offered from the past and from other territories and countries”.¹³⁶ Research investigating these processes focus on “the ways in which various actors and forms of action (*agency*), language and behavioural repertoires, codes and values converge and combine into ‘culture’.”¹³⁷

While Frijhoff asserts that “[a]ppropriation is something more than reception, and something else”,¹³⁸ he seems to have some trouble in distinguishing between the two – apart from claiming that appropriation is a more active process than reception, a claim that seems to

132 Susan Scafidi, *Who Owns Culture? Appropriation and Authenticity in American Law* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 148.

133 Ibidem.

134 Willem Frijhoff, “Toe-eigening als vorm van culturele dynamiek,” *Volkskunde* 104.1 (2003), 3.

135 Ibidem, 15.

136 Ibidem, 5.

137 Ibidem, 4.

138 Ibidem, 14-5.

severely undervalue the power those on the receiving end have. This trouble becomes clear when we look at his definition of ‘appropriation’:

It is a process of making sense through which groups or individuals load the bearers of meaning that are handed down, imposed or prescribed by others with their own significance and thus make them acceptable, liveable or humane. It is that which is *experienced* as one’s own that is determinative.¹³⁹

Terms such as ‘imposed,’ ‘prescribed,’ ‘liveable,’ and ‘humane’ speak of a severely hierarchical model. In stead of rejecting the injecting needle model, Frijhoff suggests that recipients have some sort of partial antidote which makes their indoctrination ‘liveable.’

In my view, Frijhoff’s difficulty in distinguishing between reception and appropriation stems from the fact that he only sees two components in this process: ‘supply’ and ‘use.’ Thus, while accounting for sender and receiver, Frijhoff’s model does not allow for any entity *between* the two, the intermediary of distribution – and thus the institutional focus that is central to the term ‘appropriation’ as it is defined in this thesis. It is precisely this institutional context of distribution to which I will turn my attention in the next chapter, giving a brief overview of the Desmet collection and the film entrepreneur who left it behind.

139 Ibidem, 14-5.

3. Corpus: The Desmet Collection at the Netherlands Filmmuseum

Within cinema, this institutional form of appropriation takes place primarily (though not exclusively) in the field of distribution – the field in which Jean Desmet operated.¹⁴⁰ In recent years this field, described by Ivo Blom as the “missing link”¹⁴¹ between production and reception, has seen increasing scholarly interest. This interest was first outlined in the late 1980s by scholars such as Janet Staiger, Kirstin Thompson, and Corinne Müller, and has gotten a more firm footing during the 1990s and into the 2000s. It has resulted in a number of publications focussing on distribution, such as the recent *Networks of Entertainment*, a collection of essays dealing explicitly with distribution in early cinema.¹⁴² But of the 35 essays contained in the collection, only 4 deal explicitly with inter-national distribution, and in two of these (Begoña Soto’s article dealing with Spanish-Portuguese border crossings and Charles O’Brien’s focus on US-UK relations) there is no translation involved (although there is certainly *appropriation* going on in both cases).

In fact, even though intertitles are an integral part of early cinema and their translation is one of the central requirements for international distribution, they pop up only very scarcely in the pages of the collection – as in most others like it. One can tie this neglect of the intertitle within research on film distribution to various other oversights in media studies, ranging from the general neglect of the intertitle in the whole of film studies¹⁴³ to a lack of attention for all issues of translation.¹⁴⁴ While there are many varied reasons for these omissions, an important one is the lack of sources to draw from. The Desmet collection, the legacy of Dutch film distributor and exhibitor Jean Desmet (1875-1956) housed at the

140 Like ‘intertitles’, this term has only been applied retrospectively; as Gregory Waller asserts, contemporary sources “referred to these activities simply as the selling, booking, storing, and transporting of motion pictures.” Gregory Waller, “Mapping the Moving Picture World: Distribution in the United States circa 1915,” in *Networks of Entertainment. Early Film Distribution 1895-1915*, ed. Frank Kessler & Nanna Verhoeff (Eastleigh: John Libbey, 2007), 96.

141 Ivo Blom, *Jean Desmet*, 25.

142 Frank Kessler & Nanna Verhoeff (ed.), *Networks of Entertainment. Early Film Distribution 1895-1915* (Eastleigh: John Libbey, 2007).

143 Cf. Claire Dupré la Tour, “Le intertitres réduits au silence. Aperçus et remises en perspective,” in *Scrittura e imagine: La didascalia nel cinema muto / Writing and Image: Titles in Silent Cinema, Proceedings of the IV International Udine Conference on Film Studies, Udine, March 1997*, ed. Francesco Pitassio & Leonardo Quaresima (Udine: Forum, 1998).

144 Hence Dirk Delabastita’s claim that “[t]here is a blatant discrepancy between the obvious importance of translation in the media and the limited attention it has so far been thought worthy of.” Dirk Delabastita, “Translation and the Mass Media,” in *Translation, History and Culture*, ed. Susan Bassnett & Andre Lefevre (London/New York: Pinter Publishers, 1987), 97.

Netherlands Filmmuseum since 1957,¹⁴⁵ offers a rare exception to this. I will investigate the intertitle in the Dutch context and its status as an agent of appropriation through the lens of this collection. Ivo Blom refers to Jean Baudrillard when he asserts that “when looking at collections, it is more important to focus on the collector than the collection.”¹⁴⁶ So who was this entrepreneur, and why did he keep these old films for decades after his distribution business had closed down?

3.1 Jean Desmet: Conservative pioneer

Desmet’s career in cinema started in 1907, when he bought a travelling cinema called the Imperial Bio, and ended (for the most part) in 1916 after the Great War, when Desmet opted to go into real estate. Jean Desmet’s most thorough biographer, Ivo Blom, condenses the history of Desmet’s film business to a single paragraph in his overview of the Desmet collection for the French journal *Cinémathèque*:

Jean Desmet (1875-1956), of Belgian origin, was both the owner of a chain of cinema houses and a film distributor in The Netherlands. After having run a number of foreign [fairground] attractions, he bought a travelling cinema in 1907, the Imperial Bio, before opening his first permanent cinema in Rotterdam in 1909. In April 1910 he founded his distribution office, called Internationaal Filmverkoop- en verhuurkantoor Jean Desmet (International Office of Film Sales and Rentals Jean Desmet), housed on the first floor of his Cinema Parisien in Amsterdam.¹⁴⁷

While this paragraph indeed offers a succinct history of Desmet’s activities in cinema, it is of course only the tip of the iceberg. For starters, the years from 1910 and 1914 when Desmet’s business was most strongly focussed on distribution can be further subdivided in two periods: from 1910 to 1912 Desmet purchased his films primarily from German sellers, and these were

145 The year of donation points out to us the high level of coincidence one is dependent on in historical research, as the Netherlands Filmmuseum was only founded in 1952. Had Desmet died only five years earlier than he did, it would have been far more likely that his invaluable business and film archive would have been deemed worthless by his heirs and destroyed.

146 Blom, *Jean Desmet*, 22.

147 Ivo Blom, “La Collection Desmet. Nederlands Filmmuseum,” *Cinémathèque: Revue semestrielle d’esthétique et d’histoire du cinéma* 3 (Spring/Summer 1993): 96.

most often second-hand prints; between 1912 and 1914 the focus shifted to Brussels and, to a lesser extent, London and the purchased films were generally new.¹⁴⁸

Much more remains to be said about Desmet, and indeed much more has been said already, not least by Blom himself, who more or less expanded this single paragraph to book-length for his doctoral thesis, a thorough and in-depth look at Desmet's career in film and the collection of films and papers that remains of that career.¹⁴⁹ The picture of Desmet that emerges from this investigation is that of what we might call a conservative pioneer. While Dutch film critic Charles Boost had described Desmet as "the Tuschinski of the fairground showmen" in 1961,¹⁵⁰ clearly favouring, as was the custom of film historians in those years, the pioneering aspect of this duality, Blom seeks a more nuanced view. While Desmet indeed "played his part in the internationalization of film culture, there were less modern sides to his business."¹⁵¹ Foremost among these is his tendency of hiring family members in key positions at his various companies and theatres, allowing him to stay in control; as Blom says it, Desmet was "in all respects a *pater familias*."¹⁵² Such dualities form the centre of Desmet's persona in Blom's view of him: a frugal man who kept his films for more than twenty years after his distribution career had ended, who was nevertheless able to dream big, for instance in his unrealised plans for the rebuilt Flora-Palace.¹⁵³

It was his pragmatism, too, that effectively ended Desmet's film career. Having already been hesitant in going along with the exclusive system, Desmet "drew the line at the distribution and sales practices of the Americans" in 1916, which would force him to "pay over the odds for popular films."¹⁵⁴ The rewards were apparently not worth the risks to Desmet, who opted instead to turn to a career in real estate while remaining in business as a cinema owner (although he kept his films and did sporadically rent out one or two of them). It proved a valid business decision: both Gildemeijer and Nöggerath Jr., Desmet's closest Dutch competitors at the time, were eventually also forced out of the distribution business, yet unlike Desmet failed to find success in another field. As Desmet's career progression shows, he was a businessman first and foremost. He started as a film exhibitor when this was at its most

148 Ivo Blom, "What's in a Name? Pathé and The Netherlands as Envisioned in the Pathé-Desmet Relationship," in *Le Firme Pathé Frères, 1896-1914*, ed. Michel Marie & Laurent le Forestier (Paris: AFRHC, 2004), 96.

149 Blom, *Jean Desmet*.

150 Charles Boost, *Biopioniers* (Amsterdam: Nederlands Filmmuseum, 1961), 13; cited in Blom, *Jean Desmet*, 23.

151 Ivo Blom, *Jean Desmet*, 349.

152 Ibidem.

153 See Ivo Blom & Paul van Yperen, "De droom van Jean Desmet: het nimmer gebouwde Flora-Palace," *Ons Amsterdam* 9 (2004).

154 Blom, *Jean Desmet*, 352

lucrative, he turned to distribution at the most opportune moment, and he gave up distribution when the rules of business became unfavourable to him.¹⁵⁵

3.2 National and international context

Blom opens the preface of his book with the observation that, whereas historians most often have to contend with a lack of source materials, those investigating the Desmet collection instead have to deal with the sheer size of it. Indeed, the collection's richness is amply illustrated by the number of publications drawing on it, either directly or indirectly. This is down to Blom himself to a great degree; before and after writing his dissertation he published a multitude of articles on different aspects of the collection. These range from a bare-bones description of the collection itself¹⁵⁶ to articles on specific subjects such as Desmet's relationship with the French Pathé Frères¹⁵⁷ and the German Messter-Film.¹⁵⁸ But Blom is by no means the only one drawing from the Desmet collection, as he acknowledges himself:

[T]he Desmet films played an important role in the rewriting of film history. They were of vital importance to dissertations and publications on early German and Italian cinema, forgotten or undervalued film companies such as Vitagraph and Eclair, early non-fiction films, genres such as the early western, and early colour films.¹⁵⁹

Blom describes these separate subjects as 'keyholes' through which one can look at the Desmet collection, and at film history in general. While Blom presents his book as the "full tale"¹⁶⁰ of Desmet and his business, many unexamined keyholes still remain. Indeed, the two remaining chapters of this thesis represent a look through one of these keyholes, that of translation, but before doing so I will first pick out a few of the various keyholes through which Desmet has already been looked at.

Firstly, Desmet can be placed in the context of Dutch cinema during the first decades of the 20th century. This is, of course, the main context for Blom's book, and other researchers have looked at Desmet from the same viewpoint. For instance, Ester Rutten has extrapolated

155 Ibidem.

156 Blom, "La Collection Desmet."

157 Blom, "What's in a Name?"

158 Ivo Blom, "Filmvertrieb in Europa 1910-1915. Jean Desmet und die Messter-Film GmbH," trans. (to German) Frank Kessler, *KINtop 3* (1994).

159 Blom, *Jean Desmet*, 19-20.

160 Ibidem, 12.

some general Dutch distribution practices from Desmet's business archive. She observes that Desmet predominantly worked with standard programmes, "in which each genre had its more or less predefined placement and duration."¹⁶¹ Each programme generally consisted of seven films: one or two non-fiction films, one or two drama's, and completed with comedies. Customers had some say in the genre, for instance requesting programmes without non-fiction films, or programmes suitable for exhibiting in schools or in the Catholic south of the country, where local censorship was often more strict. But this control applied only to the genres of the films: "[o]ne of Desmet's – contractual – conditions was that *he* was always the one to decide which films would be supplied."¹⁶² Customers often drew the short straw in other ways as well when in disagreement with Desmet, for instance those concerning complaints about his prices or the quality of his film prints. But judging by the fact that most of them kept renting their films from Desmet, Rutten sees fit to claim that "while Desmet's service may have been lousy, it was still just as good or even better than that which his competitors offered."¹⁶³

Secondly, Desmet's distribution office can be placed in an international context. As Ivo Blom asserts, "Desmet's story illustrates the international character of cinema around 1910 and the way in which the speed and scale of international forms of communication were laying the foundations of what can be seen as an early form of 'global culture'."¹⁶⁴ Through his regular purchases of films in Germany, Belgium, and the United Kingdom, Desmet can be placed within an international network of film distribution. The whole of this network remains to be charted, but some of Desmet's connections to it have been drawn out. Ivo Blom, while focussing on the Dutch context in his book, is responsible for charting two of these connections: these between Desmet and Pathé,¹⁶⁵ and between Desmet and Messter-Film.¹⁶⁶ In the first case, Pathé was itself a distributor on the Dutch market and thus were both a competitor and a supplier. Most of Desmet's rentals or purchases from Pathé concerned newsreels, which were often not kept, "probably because they were so quickly outdated in contrast to comedies, drama or travel films."¹⁶⁷ Other Pathé-films found their way to

161 Ester Rutten, "Film per meter. Jean Desmet en de filmdistributie in de jaren tien," *Jaarboek Mediageschiedenis* 8 (1997), 116.

162 Ibidem, 117.

163 Ibidem, 126.

164 Ivo Blom, "Infrastructure, Open System and the Take-off Phase. Jean Desmet as a Case for Early Distribution in the Netherlands," in *Networks of Entertainment: Early Film Distribution 1895-1915*, ed. Frank Kessler & Nanna Verhoeff (Eastleigh: John Libbey Publishing, 2007), 139.

165 Blom, "What's in a Name?"

166 Blom, "Filmvertrieb in Europa."

167 Blom, "What's in a Name?," 102.

Desmet's catalogue via Germany, where he purchased second-hand film prints through the Westdeutsche Filmbörse and later the Deutsche Film-Gesellschaft.

Apart from these direct connections, various indirect links can also be drawn on the basis of recent research. For instance, Gunnar Iversen outlines his research into the recently rediscovered business archive of the Norwegian cinema owner, producer and distributor Jens Christian Gundersen.¹⁶⁸ While (as far as is known) there are no direct business links between Desmet and Gundersen, Iversen does draw an explicit connection between Blom's work on Desmet and his own on Gundersen. By comparing and contrasting the two archives, and thus the two distributors, differences and similarities between the two businessmen and the national and international contexts they worked in can be drawn out. Thus, these international connections offer a fascinating "glance behind the curtains of the European film trade",¹⁶⁹ to which I will return in the conclusion. For now, though, it is time we (re)turn our attention to the Desmet archive, and the consequences these international connections had for the Dutch distributor and his audience.

168 Gunnar Iversen, "Local Distribution: The Case of Jens Christian Gundersen in Norway," in *Networks of Entertainment. Early Film Distribution 1895-1915*, ed. Frank Kessler & Nanna Verhoeff (Eastleigh: John Libbey, 2007).

169 Ibidem, 133.

4. Examining the archive: Film as business

Having laid our theoretical groundwork in the previous chapters, we can now turn to our case study: the Desmet collection, consisting of the paper archive¹⁷⁰ and the films. This investigation has focussed primarily on the period from 1910 (when Desmet started his distribution business) until roughly 1916 (the moment Desmet by and large turned away from the cinema), although as will become clear a few examples from the years immediately following will be used. These investigations started out with two separate, though related, questions. For the paper archive, the goal was to reconstruct the day-to-day practice of intertitle translation. Who was responsible for the translations? What position did the intertitle and its translation have in the distribution chain? For the film archive, the central question was how the intertitles functioned within the process of appropriation. As it turned out, neither set of questions can be answered completely, although the investigation has yielded a firmer understanding of the intertitle's status in the Dutch cinematic context of these formative years. A big part of the problem was the questionable status of the film prints themselves.

4.1 From fluid to static objects

As Frank Kessler asserts, “the status of the filmic text is anything but obvious, especially for the period in question [early cinema].”¹⁷¹ He signals three major problems in determining this status: the complete absence of the acoustic dimension (music and lecturer), the question whether the prints available today match those shown at the time, and the fact that the large percentage of films from those years that are forever lost makes it difficult, if not impossible, to determine the significance or representativeness of any given film. The second of these questions is especially relevant for the present project.

At first glance, it would seem pretty straightforward in the case of the film in the Desmet collection to say that these are indeed the versions shown in the Netherlands at the time. But closer examination of the films complicates this matter. Firstly, this is due to the fact that, while Desmet largely retreated from film distribution after 1917, he did occasionally rent or

170 A preliminary note on citations of materials from this archive: letters from Desmet's office were sometimes written and signed by one of his employees. While they have been credited in the references throughout this chapter and the literature listings, these employees always acted as proxies for their boss and Desmet remained at all times the person clients addressed their correspondence to.

171 Kessler, “Brieven uit de verte,” 211.

license out a film to another company or society. For instance, the 1908 Pathé Frères film LA PARDONNE DE GRAND-PÈRE (GROOTVADERS VERGIFFENIS) was re-released in October and November of 1927 by the Filmliga. This has left a permanent mark on the film print, in the form of a title stating that “The central bureau for Ligafilms asks your consideration for the following.” Furthermore, the complete absence of intertitles and the presence some short stretches of black film at more or less regular intervals give rise to the suspicion that the Filmliga, for whatever reason, removed the titles from the film. The fact that the film in its current state is almost completely unintelligible would certainly confirm this hypothesis.

However, these alterations after the fact are quite rare, and in most cases are also quite obvious. But the status of the current prints as ‘original’ is called into question simply by placing them in their contemporary setting, since they carry the track marks of a fluid practice. Take, for instance, the following statement by Desmet to a representative of the filmcommission for the city of Rotterdam:

I wish to point out to you that you should not always trust the trademarks that are placed at the end of a film, since when a trademark of e.g. the Gaumont factory goes missing, we are obligated, in order to achieve a tidy finish, to replace it with that of another factory, which does not make a difference to the audience since what matters to them is the contents.¹⁷²

In one fell swoop, those markers, that are so valuable to the film historian trying to determine the origin and version of a film, become worthless. It does not stop at the trademarks, either: intertitles become suspect as well when we consider titles such as THE NAVAJO’S BRIDE (DE BRUID VAN DEN NAVAJO; 1910, Kalem) in which title cards in two distinctly different designs are used (one with a serif font, one sans-serif), suggesting that one of these groups of titles was added at a later point.

Thus, we should be aware at all times that in becoming archival objects, these films have inherently gotten a different status than they had at the time. Back then, films were *fluid* objects, amenable to change and adjustments to shifting tastes. As archival objects, fretted over by researchers blinded in the glare of the so-called ‘original,’ films become static – and thus change completely, becoming something altogether different. An added complication in the case of the Desmet archive is the fact that for most of the 900+ films in the collection, the

172 Letter from Jean Desmet to Js. Verburg, Bioscoopcommissie Rotterdam, September 5, 1916. *Bioscoopklanten 1916*, item C717.

Dutch print is the only one still in existence, making impossible any form of comparison between ‘original’ and ‘derivation.’ It is therefore both for pragmatic reasons as well as more lofty academic aspirations that I will attempt in the remainder of this thesis to disregard such a comparative mode, as well as the artificiality of ‘original’ and ‘secondary’ versions (although it is unavoidable that they will crop up every now and again, since researching translation almost forces one to compare).

4.2 Endless variations

When I first started looking at the films from the Desmet collection, a slight panic struck me. Every single one of them seemed at first glance to have differently designed titles: in some there were borders around the text, in others there were not; some were in colour, some were not; some carried logos from various international studios, some did not; some were in Dutch, some in German, some (more rarely) in English or French; and there were endless different fonts and border designs. On top of these seemingly endless variations, there seemed to be neither rhyme nor reason to these with regards to the films’ country of origin or year of production.

A typically bewildering example is offered by two Italian comedies about the clown Pik Nik. A slew of films about this character, played by Armando Fineschi, in various humorous situations were filmed in 1911 and 1912 by director Mario Morais for Italian production company Aquila. Several of these can be found in the Desmet collection, among which are PIK NIK HA IL DO DE PETTO and PIK NIK EI FANATICO DEI FIORI, both from 1911. But while these two films are almost identical as far as aesthetics go and presumably followed a similar path to get from Italy to Desmet, their titles are in completely different categories. PIK NIK HA IL DO DE PETTO has German titles which carry the logo of producer Aquila (title: TEDDY HOLZBOCK ALS RITTER VOM HOREN C). PIK NIK EI FANATICO DEI FIORI has Dutch titles without any company logo (title: TEDDY HOUDT VAN BLOEMEN). A similar example can be found in the Rosalie-series, a series of comic one-reelers by Pathé Frères. The two films from the series in the Desmet collection, ROSALIE ET SES MEUBLES FIDELES (ROSALIE EN HAAR TROUWE MEUBELS) and ROSALIE EN MÉNAGE (ROSALIE, DE KNAPPE HUISBEWAARSTER), were both made in 1911. While both carry Dutch titles without the Pathé logo (implying the titles were not made by Pathé), their design and placement is completely different: the first only has a title card, no intertitles, with an ‘artsy’ border around the text; the second has both titles and intertitles, which are all surrounded by a border in a different style from the first.

However, in viewing more and more films, there started to emerge some patterns, or at least groups of films which obviously represented similar strategies of translation and appropriation. The example of the Pik Nik films shows the broadest distinction that can be made: that between titles that were translated, and those that were left untouched. While there seems to be no ‘appropriation through translation’ taking place in case where films were brought to the Dutch market with foreign titles intact, it is still necessary to spend some attention to these films – if only because they represent a surprisingly large part of the Desmet collection.

Desmet frequently received requests for information on his services and prices from those starting new movie theatres throughout the Netherlands. Although Desmet’s correspondence was all handwritten during his first years of business, and each of these was thus answered individually, their content of these letters was standardized to a fairly large degree. Without going into many specifics, which were always to be discussed in a personal meeting, Desmet boasted of his large catalogue with weekly additions, and of his competitive prices, and made sure to inform these potential clients of the possibility of receiving publicity materials with the films for a small additional charge. Somewhere in there, there usually was also a statement resembling the following, from a letter dated December 25, 1910: “The films that I supply [...] all come with German titles or inscriptions which the people can read perfectly well here in Holland.”¹⁷³

The letter cited here is one of the last such letters to include this statement. The very last is one dated September 10, 1911 in which Desmet informs the manager of the Bioscope Apollo in Enschede that “all my films have German titles, which is no problem for Holland, let alone for Enschede, so close to the border.”¹⁷⁴ But around the time that this letter was written, the first Dutch titles already started to pop up in Desmet’s collection; only two months later, Desmet (most likely answering a request on behalf of the theatre’s lecturer) informs a theatre owner in ‘s-Heerenberg that, while he does not have an explanatory text for the film DEN HVIDE SLAVENHANDELS SIDSTE OFFER,¹⁷⁵ “the titles are in Dutch – which makes

173 Letter from Jean Desmet to the manager of the Bioscoop Theater Steenstraat, Arnhem, December 25, 1910. *Copijboek, 11 november 1910 t/m 29 augustus 1911*, item 23.

174 Letter from Brinksma on behalf of Jean Desmet to D. Nienhuis, Bioscope Apollo, Enschede, September 10, 1911. *Copijboek, 29 augustus 1911 t/m 11 februari 1912*, item 26.

175 The surprisingly large number of films in the ‘white slave trade’ subgenre means that I have not been able to discover the original title for this film; the most likely candidate is the Danish DEN HVIDE SLAVENHANDELS SIDSTE OFFER (Nordisk, 1911; THE WHITE SLAVE TRADES LAST VICTIM).

it quite simple.”¹⁷⁶ By 1921, translated titles seem to have been a prerequisite, judging by the following statement by E.J. Weier concerning the possible purchase of the film DORNRÖSCHEN (1917, Union-Film): “the film is quite rainy and has German titles, but if it is not too expensive, I will buy it.” German titles have by that year become an argument for lowering a film’s price.

1911 seems to be the transition year for Desmet – but, as ever, this is not a clean break. For starters, there are some examples of films made in later years which are not translated,¹⁷⁷ although they are far rarer than untranslated films from before this point of transition. More importantly, it seems that in numerous cases, films that were bought before this change in practice and had previously been rented out with German titles were now retroactively translated to Dutch. And judging by the various different styles of intertitle design on these films (as we have for instance seen in the Rosalie-films), these ‘retro-translations’ were not all done at once but took place over a matter of months, maybe years, perhaps only as the need arose. This jumbled chronology is only aggravated by the fact that in these years Desmet bought most of his films second-hand, thus making it difficult to assess the progeny of the prints. Nevertheless, we can make some statements, based among others on these same title designs. But before we turn our attention to a closer examination of the translation of intertitles themselves, it is necessary to spend some time on the wider context of translation in Desmet’s distribution business.

4.3 Translating paratexts

While media translation is most often considered as translation *of* media texts, thus taking place at the stage of reception, it also plays an important role in the stages of production and distribution, during the creation and (inter)national dissemination of these texts. Abé Mark Nornes is probably the first theorist to have systematically drawn attention to these aspects of translation in (or rather *within*) the media. In his book *Cinema Babel* he attempts to combine several of his pre-existing essays on issues of translation with new work to come to a more

176 Letter from Brinksma on behalf of Jean Desmet to Antoon Wegkamp, 's-Heerenberg, November 11, 1911. *Copijboek, 29 augustus 1911 t/m 11 februari 1912*, item 202.

177 Such as EEN BENDE VALSEMUNTERS OPPEROLD DOOR DE PERS, despite what the Dutch title may imply. The film is one of three in the collection that have not been identified, partly due to the fact that the opening title card is missing. The given title is thus derived from Desmet’s written archive; the film carries titles in English with the logo of American production company Rex, and can thereby provisionally be dated as originating from 1915 or 1916 (Blom, *Jean Desmet*, 413-4, note 36).

complete understanding of the function and position of translation in media practice.¹⁷⁸ While not completely successful, it is nevertheless the most wide-ranging account of media translation to date, for instance drawing attention for the first time to the position of the translator in Q&A sessions during international film festivals and their position within the more and more international organisation of the film industry in general.

The Italian proverb *traduttore traditore* (translator traitor) becomes quite literal, for instance, in Nornes' extended production history of *TORA! TORA! TORA!* (Richard Fleischer, Kinji Fukasaku & Toshio Masuda, 1970). The dubious practices and powerful position of translator Tetsuro Aoyagi, who deliberately mistranslated and misrepresented both parties in order to gain creative and financial control of the production, were part of the reason director Akira Kurosawa was removed from the project, and almost meant its death altogether.¹⁷⁹ Browsing the Desmet archives, it becomes clear that translation plays an equally important, and sometimes equally dubious role that goes further than just the translation of intertitles. While a thorough examination of the translation of these paratexts falls outside the time constraints of this thesis, some preliminary observations must not go unnoted.

Of these various paratexts, the explanatory texts Desmet provided to his customers are perhaps the ones closest to the films themselves, in that they usually gave a complete synopsis of the film. These were provided both before a rental to let potential clients get an idea of the film, as well as together with each rental, presumably for use by the theater's lecturer as well as to sell to members of the audience. While Desmet only started translating the intertitles on his films to Dutch in 1911 (more on this in the next paragraph), these explanatory texts were offered in Dutch from the very start. These Dutch texts were either arrived at by translating a text provided with the film by Desmet's foreign source, or by simply watching the film and describing what happens on screen.

While most of these texts have not been preserved, Desmet's correspondence with his clients incites some intriguing observations on them. The following letter from May 1911, for instance, shows both Desmet's famed frugality as well as his pragmatic, some might even say cavalier approach to translation:

Enclosed you will find text for your second and third programme in Steenbergem.

For the second programme you will find one partially German text. Regrettably I

178 Abé Mark Nornes, *Cinema Babel: Translating Global Cinema* (Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

179 Ibidem, 37-52.

don't have this in Dutch, so that you will have to translate the German text. Please return the German text to me afterwards, and I would be much obliged if you could also send me 25 to 50 copies of your Dutch text.¹⁸⁰

This is far from an isolated case; three similar requests can be found within the next month. Thus, if necessary translation of these explanatory texts was shifted on to clients without hesitation, and the quality of the translation that was returned does not seem to matter that much.

This same somewhat careless attitude towards translation is in evidence in the translations of foreign letters as well. Although Desmet was proficient in French and German, English was a different story, as he himself acknowledged in a letter to Louis Wilson: "Since I cannot read English en do not want to have the matter handled by others, I wish to correspond in Dutch."¹⁸¹ The letter from Wilson, in English, that this comment reacts to, is accompanied in the archive by a typed translation to Dutch on Desmet stationary, evidently conducted by someone in his office. This translation is far from faultless; apparently the translator's grasp of the English language, while better than his employer's, was far from perfect. Although they never reached the levels of Nornes' TORA! TORA! TORA! example, this little mistakes could lead to problems.

This becomes evident, for instance, in a series of letters and telegrams sent back and forth between Desmet and E.J. de Caluwe of the Lionel Phillips Co. in London regarding the purchase by Desmet of the last reel of the film FORTUNE AT STAKE (HAAR GELUK OP HET SPEL, 1918, Master Films) which he needed because his print of the film had partially burned. A letter by De Caluwe informs Desmet that "We presume you require this reel without titles, and enclose pro forma invoice for same."¹⁸² The handwritten translation scrawled in the letter's margins jumbles the second part of this sentence to "we sluiten een uitgebreide verklaring er van bij in."¹⁸³ ["we enclose a comprehensive explanatory text of it."] A letter from De Caluwe to the head office of his company, of which a copy was sent to Desmet, again shows such a slight misprision: De Caluwe's "I am now writing to Holland re titles"

180 Letter from Jean Desmet to Alex Benner, Steenberg, May 25, 1911. *Copijboek 11 november 1910 t/m 29 augustus 1911*, item 167.

181 Letter from Jean Desmet to Louis Wilson, Sassen Wilson & Co., 's-Gravenhage, February 1918. *Bioscoopklanten* 1915, item C770.

182 Letter from E.J. de Caluwe, Lionel Phillips Co., London to Jean Desmet, November 1919. *Bioscoopklanten* 1919, item C788.

183 Ibidem.

becomes “Ik schrijf nu ook Hollandsche titels”.¹⁸⁴ [“I am now writing Dutch titles”] It is unclear whether the sale actually went through. While there is an agreement that De Caluwe will send the film (including Dutch titles) to Desmet on December 3, 1919, a telegram sent by Desmet on December 27 reading simply “Where is the film?” would indicate that something went awry. Either way, these careless (or, viewed more negatively, incompetent) translations require a closer look at the translation in the intertitles.

4.4 Standardized translation practices

As was outlined above, PIK NIK HA IL DO DE PETTO contains intertitles carrying the trademark of an Italian production company while the title texts are in German. These types of titles are far from a rarity in the Desmet collection, although in most cases these ‘producers titles’ are in Dutch. This is most obvious in the Pathé films that have gotten this treatment, since their trademark design is the most instantly recognisable (capital bright red letters and one or more roosters somewhere in the frame in the same colour), but there are similar examples from other companies, such as Eclair, Gaumont, Edison, Kalem, et cetera. To get a handle on how these titles came into being, it is necessary to turn our attention to the day-to-day practice of intertitle translation.

Nornes offers a rare account of this practice. Although he focuses predominantly on (relatively) recent examples throughout *Cinema Babel*, he does attempt a brief history of media translation at the outset. This includes an account of the “nuts and bolts”¹⁸⁵ of intertitle translation in the silent era, drawing on the archives of William N. Selig’s pioneering studio:

In the first decade of the new century, Selig set up distribution points abroad but prepared foreign-language prints in the United States. The foreign distributors of his films would receive a list of intertitles, which they would translate and send back to the Los Angeles studio. Selig would then produce a newly titled print for them.¹⁸⁶

As becomes clear from Claire Dupré la Tour’s encyclopedia entry on intertitles, this strategy was in practice from a very early moment: in the first Gaumont catalogue that offered their customers the option to purchase titles, these were already offered “[i]n French, in a foreign

184 Letter from E.J. de Caluwe to Lionel Phillips Co. head office, London, November 19, 1919. *Bioscoopklanten 1919*, item C788.

185 Ibidem, 97.

186 Ibidem, 97-8.

language.”¹⁸⁷ As Dupré la Tour explains, “Purchase was optional, and titles could be purchased by providing a specific text, including for international distribution.”¹⁸⁸

While this system was principally presented as a service to customers, it had one significant drawback for distributors, which became more and more apparent as intertitles became longer and, for lack of a better term, more ‘literary’: the fact that the technicians finally responsible for creating and filming the title cards were working in a language that was unfamiliar to them. This could have negative consequences for the quality of the spelling and grammar in titles, as can for instance be seen on the prints in the Desmet collection for such films as *MAKING A MAN OF HER* (1912, Nestor Film; *KOK OF KOKKIN*) where ‘si’ is printed where it should read ‘is’; a minor error, but one that is immediately noticeable as such to any Dutch audience member. Even more noticeable is the title in *A ROMANCE OF THE CLIFF DWELLERS* (1911, Edison) that states “Het hart doorboord meteenpijl” (literally “The hart pierced byanarrow”).¹⁸⁹ That this problem was already acknowledged at the time is clear from Nornes’ reference to correspondence between Selig and his Dutch distributor, Desmet’s competitor F.A. Nöggerath Jr., who in 1915

raised a complaint about rampant misspellings, and asked that the studio send prints with only one frame or two of each intertitle in place; they would use that as the basis for the translation, shooting the text in a frame with the Selig trademark and inserting these new intertitles into the print.¹⁹⁰

While misspellings may indeed have been one argument on Nöggerath’s mind, there is also an unstated economical factor to be taken into consideration: films were sold by the meter, so buying the films with only a few frames of each intertitle would undoubtedly save Nöggerath some money, while the product he would be renting or selling on would look no different.

Despite these obvious drawbacks, according to Nornes the system he sketches became the industry standard by the mid-1920s. There are certainly hints to such a standardization system in the Desmet films. One such hint are the number codes that are used on the title cards for some films. From very early in the ‘intertitle era’ practically every film’s titles were

187 Gaumont catalogue, cited in Dupré la Tour, “Intertitles and titles,” 327. No further information on the catalogue is given.

188 Dupré la Tour, “Intertitles and titles,” 327.

189 However, we cannot attribute spelling and grammar errors to foreign title makers, as becomes evident from an intertitle created by Nöggerath for Desmet in 1912, which reads “Weckoverzieht aangeboden aan de geachte bezoekers van de Cinema-Parisien Jean Desmet.”

190 Ibidem, 98

numbered in sequence, presumably to help editors and projectionists to insert them into the film, as intertitles were often produced and transported separately. But a number of titles in the Desmet collection carry a decidedly more complex sequence of numbers.

Take for instance *MAKING A MAN OF HER* (1912, Edison), a jovial drama about a woman who poses as a man to gain employment as a cook on a farm. Every title carries an eight-digit number and letter sequence, built up as follows: 1311.01.HL. In this sequence, the first four figures do not change, leading me to believe they represent some sort of identification number for this film. The next two numbers do change, and follow each other in ascending order. In opposition to the contemporary norm, these title numbers seem not to separate between titles and ‘regular’ shots – thus after the opening title 1311.01.HL there follow two filmic shots after which the next title is numbered 1311.04.HL. The last two letters of the number sequence are again unchanging, and almost certainly represent an abbreviation of the country of Holland, thus representing the country of destination. These eight small tokens in the corner of each title frame are a barcode of sorts, and signal an emerging automatization and standardization of the process of title translation.

But the full implementation of this standardization was still some ways off during Desmet’s years as a distributor. Also, while these strategies may have been common practice among the bigger distributors, especially for export to larger foreign language territories, it is questionable how widespread they were among smaller distributors and/or in distribution to smaller countries. Indeed, the Desmet collection would suggest that, at least in these early years and at least for the Dutch market, only bigger players such as Pathé, Edison, and Gaumont created their foreign-language titles themselves.

However valuable Nornes’ outline is as a first impulse to charting the day to day practice of the international distribution of intertitles, it thus leaves no room for several important aspects of international cinema during these formative years. Another such aspect is the trade in second-hand films, which especially in the early years of his career formed the backbone of Desmet’s catalogue. While, as we have seen, these would be left untranslated in the earliest years, after 1911 these films would require re-translation that would most likely not have anything to do with the original studio. It is important to note that in these cases the translation is based on an ‘original’ that is itself already a translation – and that these retranslated films therefore constitute an appropriation of an appropriation. At some points, these ‘original translations’ palimpsestuously shine through. This is most obviously visibly in the translations of film titles and of character names.

4.5 *Translating character names*

These two forms are perhaps the most frequently occurring types of translation in the Desmet films; certainly that is true for title translations. While, as we have seen, film titles were not translated on the film prints until circa 1911, these films were nevertheless always referred to by their Dutch titles, both in Desmet's correspondence with his clients and in advertising materials for the films. In most cases, these were quite literal translations of the original titles. But in the cases where the Dutch title diverts from the original, we can often see that the translation still adheres to another original: the intermediary German translation. Thus, the French COUP DE FUSIL (literally 'rifle shot'; 1909, Pathé) becomes ELTERNLEID ('parents' suffering') in German and OUDERSLEED (same as the German) in Dutch.

This process can be found, perhaps in an even stronger way, in the 'translation' of character names, especially those of comedy characters that take center stage in a number of films. As we have seen, the Italian comedy character Pik Nik becomes Teddy Houtblok in the Dutch translations; the intermediary between the two was the German Teddy Holzbock. A more complex example can be found when looking at the Italian character Cretinetti. In stead of the German variation, 'Müller,' Desmet opted to use the name the French gave to the character: 'Gribouille.' At least, he did in most cases; in some other cases, Desmet opts in stead for 'Lemke', as for instance in COME CRETINETTI PAGA I DEBITI (1909, Itala Film), which was distributed under the title HOE LEMKE ZIJN SCHULDEN BETAALD.¹⁹¹ Perhaps Desmet mistook him for the French character Patouillard, who was always known as Lemke both in Germany and in the Netherlands. This could have happened by accident or – a more suggestive thought – deliberately, for instance to take advantage of a temporary surge in the popularity of the Lemke/Patouillard character relative to that of Cretinetti/Gribouille.

'Translating' the names of characters that only appeared in a single film (which was most common in dramas) required a slightly different approach. Here the Dutch distributor had to make a choice between either 'exoticizing' (keeping the original names) or 'domesticizing' (changing them to Dutch variations) or find a middle ground between the two. An example of both these strategies can be found in the film LE PORTRAIT DE MIREILLE¹⁹² (1910, Gaumont).

191 Oddly enough, Desmet gives a French variation as the original title: GRIBOUILLE PAIE SES DETTES. In addition, the credited company is the French Lux, not Itala Film. But as we have seen, these company logo's cannot be trusted completely, and comparison of the actor (Andre Deed) with other Italian Cretinetti-films indeed confirms that this most likely is an Italian film.

192 The Dutch given title of this film is HET ONVOLTOOIDE PORTRET. Desmet gives LE PORTRAIT DE MIREILLE as the original title for this film, and this has been respected here as in the Filmmuseum's database. However, Rommy Albers noted in 2001 that Herman Birett's description of LE PORTRAIT DE MIREILLE (which was the very

The film is another love triangle: a man's whose wife dies in a hunting accident at the time that he is working on a portrait of her. The unfinished portrait is a continual reminder of her death, until he meets another woman who looks exactly like her. In the Desmet print, which has Dutch titles, the man is called Piet and the two women are called Jeanne and Madeleine. Thus, while the two female character's names are presumably the same as the original, the man's name is decidedly a Dutch appropriation. A possible explanation can be found in the fact that both Jeanne and Madeleine or valid, if uncommon, names in the Netherlands; the male character's original name may not have been. Unfortunately, this version constitutes the only known print of the film, so this explanation cannot be verified.

The film *DRAMMA AL MAROCCO* (1908, Itala Film) offers a more complex example of the web of relations and connotations these character names could contain. As the title suggests, the film is a drama situated in the Morocco desert, centring on the love triangle between three characters, which in the Dutch intertitles are called Bianca, François, and Julius Belli. While the Desmet print is the only known version of the film, and thus comparison to an 'original' is again impossible, it is reasonable to assume that these names have been retained from the original Italian titles. The Roman-sounding name of Julius Belli quite explicitly refers to the film's Italian origin. In turn, the two French names can be explained by the fact that Morocco was a French territory in those years (albeit one under heavy dispute). Thus, by retaining (or perhaps creating) these names, the Dutch titles also retain their exotic connotations. In fact, I would argue that for Dutch audiences, there are three layers of exoticism: the film is a Dutch exotification of an Italian exotification of the French exotification of Morocco.

DRAMMA AL MOROCCO is in the minority, however; most films chose a domesticating approach in stead, with character names changed to Dutch names in the great majority of films. Notable exceptions, apart from the exoticizing films and returning characters, can be found in films depicting the lives of famous people from history or renowned literary characters. For obvious reasons, the names of neither Napoleon (for instance in *NAPOLEON – THE MAN OF DESTINY* [1909, Vitagraph]) nor Agrippina (in *AGRIPPINA* [1910, Cinès], based on Handel's eponymous opera) were changed to different Dutch names (although in that last case some character names differ slightly from the original in the Dutch spelling).

Character names could, in rare cases, even be the source of disputes between Desmet and his clients regarding intertitles. For instance, J.B. Devenijns from Tilburg decides against

first film written by Abel Gance) based on the German censorship archive is inconsistent with the contents of this print.

renting the film ZIGOMAR CONTRE NICK CARTER (which he calls ZIGOMAR II) after having seen it because “the print has lost its shine. Moreover all captions have been changed; everything that used to be Paulin Broquet is now Nick Carter, which is completely incorrect etc.”¹⁹³ Nick Carter was “the most published [detective] character in American literature and the second-most published character in world literature”¹⁹⁴ according to pulp fiction expert Jess Nevins. He first appeared in written form in 1886, and was first captured on film in 1908 by the French production company Eclair serial NICK CARTER, LE ROIS DES DÉTECTIVES.¹⁹⁵ Apparently, assuming Devenijns is not mistaken, somewhere during the (re)translation process of this film two of its central characters got mixed up. This is all the stranger when we note that the names themselves have not actually been translated, presumably because these were fairly established characters.

4.6 Title correspondence

While such a complaints about (the translation of) character names may have been rare, complaints about intertitles in general are a little more frequent. Not a lot – they are sprinkled into the letters and telegrams in the archive like the proverbial needles in a haystack. Most of the complaints are in stead focussed on more ‘banal’ fare: the transportation of films (and the fact that Desmet made his customers pay for this), their length (clients often complained that films were shorter than they had paid for, as Desmet charged by the meter), and their age and quality (with remarks about scratched and damaged prints). Of course, as Ester Rutten points out, we should be careful not to draw too many conclusions about Desmet’s business practice from this abundance of complaints: happy customers would simply not write in, and “it does not seem an exaggeration to say that the majority of his customers were content – after all, most of them stayed in business with him.”¹⁹⁶

Nevertheless, there is no going around the fact that the vast majority of comments on titles found in Desmet’s correspondence are complaints of some sort. For the most parts, these

193 Letter from J.B. Devenijns, Tilburg to Jean Desmet, March 17, 1914. *Bioscoopklanten 1914*, item C588.

194 Jess Nevins, *The Nick Carter Page* (January 27, 2002), <<http://www.geocities.com/jessnevins/carter.html>> (accessed August 16, 2008).

195 The fact that this “all-American character” (Nevins) was first used in film in France may appear rather odd from our current point of view, having all grown up in a time of Hollywood dominating the global film market, but speaks volumes of the French hold on international cinema in those years. An interesting side note for those interested in Dutch film production: the character also appeared in the 1921 Dutch film HET WATERRAD DES DOODS which was written, directed, and acted by Dick Laan, who would later gain great fame in the Netherlands as the writer of the *Pinkeltje* stories.

196 Rutten, 126.

complaints can be tied to those about the age and state of the print. The following comments from the manager of the Concordia Bioscope in Rotterdam:

Oftentimes the titles are in the wrong place, and as I have informed you before [there are] many resoundingly bad edits, various tears and cracks in the films, and as he [his technician] has shown me himself terribly many places where all the sprockets are completely worn out.¹⁹⁷

Thus, the misplacement of titles is placed here in a *technical* or *utilitarian* context, not a narrative one as might be expected. The same is true even if the titles are missing altogether, as in the following complaint from the Bellamy Bioscope: “the PATHÉ COURANT was bad, but JACQ. EEN JONGENSLEVEN was far worse, so that lacking the text, which seems to have fallen out, the film is sometimes unintelligible to the audience.”¹⁹⁸ This utilitarian view to title cards is most succinctly given by the manager of the Schepel-Bioscoop in Delfzijl, who in his first request for a film programme simply states that “The films must not be too rainy and be must be fitted with *titles*.”¹⁹⁹

The same utilitarian view is applied to the design of the titles. Of course, the period under examination here falls mostly before the heydays of the art title (the advent of which is given by Dupré la Tour as circa 1916, see chapter 1), especially if we take into consideration that most new developments took a few years to reach the Netherlands. Nevertheless, it is striking that title design is exclusively talked about with a view to their use, as for instance in the following comment by A. Tuschinski, owner of the Thalia Theater in Amsterdam:

Today I projected a test-run of the film JULIUS CAESAR. I find it not at all appealing to have to show this film, for which I paid a high price, as it is rained to an

197 Letter from dhr. Van Dijk, Gebouw Concordia, Rotterdam, to Jean Desmet, March 14, 1915. *Bioscoopklanten 1915*, item C658.

198 Letter from M.A. van Boekhout, Bellamy Bioscope, to Jean Desmet, March 13, 1914. *Bioscoopklanten 1914*, item C595.

199 Letter from Schepel-Bioscoop, Delfzijl, to Jean Desmet April 6, 1915. *Bioscoopklanten 1915*, item C626; emphasis in original. [‘Rainy’ here is a literal translation of the Dutch term ‘dooregend.’ This term and variations on it are used quite often in complaints about the quality of the film images; a reference, of course, to the way that these damaged images look like it is raining. Although the term is not widely used in this sense in English-speaking countries, I have decided to translate it literally so as to keep as many of its original connotations as possible.]

aggravating level and looks hideous. The titles are too brief, printed too small and not legible due to the rain.²⁰⁰

Similarly, A. Goudsmit of the Astoria Theater in Rotterdam complained that “the first two acts of *DE GESTOLEN UITVINDING* were completely illegible”²⁰¹ which he attributes to the darkness of the print. Desmet, as was his way, lay the blame back with the complainer, stating that the titles would have been perfectly fine “if the illumination would have been sufficient, as you state yourself that your device was faulty.”²⁰²

All that being said, there are some examples of correspondence on the contents of titles, though they are few and far between. A remarkable instance is the following letter from Desmet to Alberts Frères in the Hague:

I also want to bring to your attention that the film *MARIA PANSA* can be shown in two different ways: as [Barones] Fulvia or as [Freule] Fulvia. I hereby send you the title list of the film as it was and as they are placed in the film. Furthermore I send you 9 titles separately that by taking out the other 9 and inserting these give you a film with Freule Fulvia. You can judge for yourself what you think best.²⁰³

What is remarkable about this example is the sheer randomness of the option Desmet gives his customer. The titles of ‘barones’ and ‘freule’ attributed to the character Fulvia (left untranslated in the quote above) are more or less interchangeable with regards to status and connotations: both are titles relating to female nobility. The only difference is that ‘barones’ is an official title of nobility, while ‘freule’ is only a title of address. Unfortunately, it is unclear what the original title of the film in question may have been, so we cannot find out what the original titles may have been; these might have given us a firmer understanding of the reasoning behind the choice Desmet gives his clients. It should also be noted that this letter is the only time this choice is mentioned by Desmet, which might imply that after this showing either Desmet or Albert Frères made the choice and discarded the other option (or perhaps

200 Letter from A. Tuschinski, Thalia Theater, Amsterdam to Jean Desmet, February 7, 1917. *Bioscoopklanten 1917*, item C753.

201 Letter from A. Goudsmit, Bioscope Astoria Theater, Rotterdam to Jean Desmet, September 29, 1918. *Bioscoopklanten 1921*, item C844.

202 Letter from Jean Desmet to A. Goudsmit, Bioscope Astoria Theater, Rotterdam, September 30, 1918. *Bioscoopklanten 1921*, item C844.

203 Letter from Jean Desmet to Alberts Frères, 's-Gravenhage, October 6, 1915. *Bioscoopklanten 1915*, item C636.

that Desmet added an explanatory note to the film itself, removing the need to allude to it in correspondence).

A hint to Desmet's reasoning in the above case may be found in another instance where an intertitle's contents were discussed. In a March 1917 letter, N. Blokbergen, manager of the Flora Theater in Apeldoorn, complained about a title in the film JULIUS CAESAR:

One of the titles reads 'Arrival of the conquering army *in* Rome.' Thus those who see this will expect a ceremonial parade similar to that in QUO VADIS, for which reason I request that you immediately have a title made that reads: 'The victorious army on its way to Rome.' I would gladly receive this title from you before Friday evening.²⁰⁴

While Desmet is unable (and likely also unwilling) to deliver the requested title in time, the typically pragmatic solution he offers does highlight the intertitle's prehistory in magic lantern shows: "You can write the title on a projection plate, and project it as such."²⁰⁵

Here, the requested change in the contents of the title is related to audience expectations: Blokbergen fears that the current title would lead to hopes of a spectacular scene, hopes that would apparently be disappointed by the actual picture. His solution to this problem is to accept the low quality of the picture, and attempt to lower his audience's expectations. Thus we return again to the utilitarian view on intertitles, and film form in general, that dominates the discourse that emerges from the Desmet archive.

4.7 Title stylistics

As was stated above, the intertitles of the films in the Desmet archive have a wide spectrum of different designs. As was also stated above, this diversity can partially be explained by the abundance of 'producers titles' from various different production companies. But it also extends to the films that were titled by Desmet himself (or at least on his behalf; circa 1915 the titles themselves were created by Filmfabriek Hollandia,²⁰⁶ although it is unclear whether this is the only titling company Desmet worked with). Referring back to the two films from

204 Letter from N. Blokbergen, Flora Theater, Apeldoorn to Jean Desmet, March 22, 1917. *Bioscoopklanten 1917*, item C738; emphasis in original.

205 Letter from Jean Desmet to N. Blokbergen, Flora Theater, Apeldoorn, March 23, 1917. *Bioscoopklanten 1917*, item C738.

206 See, for instance, various instructions for creation of intertitles in *Bioscoopklanten 1915*, item C638.

Pathé's Rosalie-series, we see that even two films from the same year with similar contents can have very different titles, both with regards to their number and their design.

Nevertheless, some general observations can be made on the designs. We can distinguish three basic title designs into which most of the 'Desmet produced' titles can be placed, with perhaps a dozen or so other designs which are only used in one or two films (perhaps indicating that these were bought from another Dutch distributor with Dutch titles already in place). Judging by the first film to use either of these four basic designs, we can postulate a rough chronology. There is a clear progression in these, with titles growing both more sophisticated and simpler over time.

The first design presents both title and intertitles (if any) surrounded by a border made up of intersecting lines, in turns curved and angular. The title is given in capitals; if there are any, the intertitles have no border and use regular lettering; both use a sans-serif font. The intertitle text is centred on the screen both horizontally and vertically, with the first line indented quite a lot, which makes them rather difficult to read. However, films with titles in this design very rarely have intertitles, with the notable exception of news bulletins, in which every segment is introduced by a separate intertitle.

The second design uses many of the same elements: titles are all capital, intertitles are not; the font is a sans-serif; text is centred on the screen. But the differences are significant: in this style, both the title card and the intertitles have a border, which is made up of a sequence of squares each filled with a stylized flower design, and the distracting first line indent is done away with. These films in almost all cases do have intertitles. The vast majority of news bulletins use this title design.

The third category simplifies the border design even further, bringing it in line with 'modern' sensibilities of the era (also reflected, for instance, in the abandoned plans for Desmet's Flora-Palace), consisting of a double straight line on each side with three small squares in a triangular formation in each corner. These borders are used for both titles and intertitles, with titles again in capitals and intertitles in regular font. A new feature in this design is the colouring of intertitles, which does not happen with any title in the other two categories. Whereas Pathé had its signature red capital titles, Desmet reserved the colour green for his intertitles, although we should note that coloured titles were only used in coloured films. While any progression charted here must by its nature be preliminary, it can be said that the succession of these three designs shows a consistent move towards clarity and

simplicity. Thus, we again return to the utilitarian approach of intertitles, which seems to extend to their design as well.

One of the exceptions to these three categories worth pointing out here is *LA VIE ET PASSION DE NOTRE SEIGNEUR JÉSUS-CHRIST* (*VAN DE KRIBBE TOT HET KRUIS*; 1907, Pathé). As Blom has shown, the print currently in the Desmet collection is most one of two copies Desmet purchased of the film in 1912, a full five years after its first release, most likely after a print he had previously purchased had run its course and had to be discarded.²⁰⁷ The intertitles on the print that is currently part of the Desmet collection differs significantly from all three design categories listed above, as well as the majority of the other films. The borders surrounding the text are considerably more elaborate, but the main difference is the amount of text: this print has a *lot*.

The titles constitute direct citations from the Bible, and each title carries an above-average amount of text; some are completely crammed to the edges. Furthermore, in stead of the usual alternation between one title / one or more images / one title / etc., here we find numerous instances of the opposite: several titles (up to four in a row), followed by a single shot, in turn followed by several more titles. This abundance of text is even more remarkable when we remember that the Pathé original is a prime example of the company's policy of keeping titles as brief as possible, often limiting them to a single word. Thus the title seems to show the 'textualization' of the cinema that could be said to take pace over these five years. However, a 1913 remark by Desmet calls into question when these texts were actually added to the film. In answer to a request for an explanatory text of the film, Desmet ironically replies that this is not available, as "the story is too overly familiar to make this necessary. After all, it shows the Birth, Life, Suffering and Death of Jesus. You probably own a Bible. You won't find a more beautiful or more elaborate text."²⁰⁸

4.8 News bulletin translations

In closing, I would like to turn to the intertitles in news bulletins. At the outset of this project, a preliminary expectation was that these would yield richer results than fiction films, since their inherently international outlook would require more effort to familiarize these subjects to a Dutch audience. However, this expectation is only partly supported by the films. There are indeed some instances where the Dutch intertitles unequivocally draw connections to bring a

²⁰⁷ Blom, "What's in a Name?," 103-4.

²⁰⁸ Letter from Jean Desmet to unknown recipient, July 1913; cited in Rutten, 122.

foreign subject alive for a Dutch audience. A clear and succinct example can be found in a 1916 title introducing an item on floodings in England, which reads: “In England, too, people suffer from floodings. This view of the submerged area at Windsor gives a clear image of the situation.” By the simple use of the word ‘too’ the title maker relates these English floodings with those that had taken place in the province of Noord-Holland in January of the same year. It might even be that this item was shown directly proceeding another item from the collection showing images from those Dutch floodings.

Yet these cases are clearly in the minority; more often than not, either the subtitles for news items are so vague as to require prior knowledge from its audience (“The destruction in Galicia”) or the items themselves are so general as to require no clarification whatsoever (“Heavy agricultural labour in England is these days done by women.”) In some instances, the subtitles actually *miss* opportunities for appropriation, or even clarification. Take for instance a 1915 item which carries the Dutch subtitle “Voetbalmatch te Richmond tusschen de Barbarians en de R.A.M.C.”. It seems that this subtitle is an all too literal translation of the English title, as the images we see next do not show ‘voetbal’ (soccer), but ‘football,’ the American variation on rugby. The hasty or inattentive translator thus misses a valuable opportunity to explain to the audience what they are seeing. There are many similar instances where English sentence structures or words creep into these subtitles – the use of ‘mail coaches’ in stead of ‘postkoetsen,’ for instance, or several instances which refer to a ‘meeting’ where ‘vergadering’ would be the more logical Dutch equivalent.

A more ambiguous example can be found in a 1917 bulletin whose subtitle announces a “Propaganda-speech in a flying machine for enlisting in the British army.” Yet the small airplane shown in the proceeding shots clearly reads “VOTE FOR ??EMBERTON BILL” (the first few letters oof the third word are illegible due to people or objects being in the way). Thus it seems unlikely that this is actually an army recruitment speech, and becomes even more so when we notice that the man giving the speech is dressed in a simple suit and hat, not the military uniform one would expect for such an occasion. On one level, this seeming mistranslation appears to have no bearing on the concept of appropriation, as the title (assuming its description of what we see is indeed incorrect) does nothing to help the audience understand what is actually happening. But on another level, the term appropriation *is* applicable, namely in the sense that the false image created by the subtitle appropriates an unrelated image to an audience

Yet there is one clear point where news bulletins are appropriated, albeit not on the level of content but at the level of the film itself. Most movie theatres introduced these news bulletins with a title reading “This film is brought to you by the Thalia Theater”, or a variation thereon. The Olympia in ‘s-Gravenhage even went so far, at least in one instance, to have their theatre name printed on every subtitle, roughly in the same way that other titles could carry the name of a production company. In a way, these titles thereby highlight the centrality of the distribution and exhibition context in the Dutch setting, as well as once again reminding us of the no-frills approach to titles that seems central to Dutch film culture at this time.

Conclusion

Unconscious appropriation

If there is one thing that has become clear from the preceding analysis, it is that for Desmet and his suppliers and clients, intertitles were mostly placed in a *technical* discourse, and their translations in a *utilitarian* one. In fact, we may point to this focus on business and money as a reason for the long absence of distribution in the academic discourse, which has traditionally focussed on film as art – and as we all must know, business and art simply do not mix – nor, for that matter, do business and culture. But our travels through the Desmet archive have shown us that contrary to this still widely held belief, business and art have a great many connections, and are perhaps even inherently mixed in cinema.

As was already said in chapter 3, Desmet is a businessman first and foremost. Over the course of chapter 4, we have been reminded of that time and time again, and we have seen that the same is true for the majority of the theatre owners that formed his clientele. For these entrepreneurs, film is a product, plain and simple; one is hard-pressed to find any arguments on aesthetics in their correspondence. They are all about the *Schlagers*, the German word for ‘hits’ that was common in the Dutch film trade before the Second World War for films that were expected and/or had proven to perform admirably at the box-office.²⁰⁹ Intertitle translations were thus (from 1911) simply seen as a necessity, a prerequisite for bringing a film product to the marketplace.

This apparent lack of thought and conscious decision-making going into translation and appropriation in general stands in marked contrast to for instance the high level of consciousness of these processes in 1920s Russia as described by Yuri Tsivian.²¹⁰ But this does not mean that there is no appropriation; it simply means that the process is carried out in a less aware manner, and operating on various levels. On an individual level, we can see these distributors and exhibitors as appropriating foreign (cultural) artefacts for financial gain. But there are more self-aware processes of appropriation as well, several of which have been laid bare in the preceding, for instance the translation of characters names and (somewhat at a remove) that of film titles.

209 Those with a positive outlook on the mass audience may, of course, see this as an aesthetic argument; after all, if it is to be expected that many people will find a certain film ‘pleasing’, is that not in itself a positive aesthetic judgement? But even when viewed in this way, aesthetics only figure indirectly in Desmet’s deliberations, as a precursor to or indication of financial gain.

210 Tsivian, “Wise and Wicked Game.”

In both these cases we can postulate traces of the commercial motivations for certain decisions. While the seeming mistranslation of the name of Italian clown Cretinetti to Lemke in stead of the usual Gribouille may be just that, a mistranslation. But a more interesting option is that the change is deliberate, in a shrewd move by Desmet to for instance take advantage of the growing popularity of the Lemke character. The sorts of commercial motivations came to the fore even stronger in title translations, as these are explicitly meant to draw an audience. Through both these examples, the process of translation is also connected to various other aspects of the process of appropriation – in this case for instance the advertising for these films. The time constraints on this thesis meant that these aspects could not be properly incorporated at this stage, but a more thorough look at these other features of appropriation – also including censorship, which promises perhaps the most compelling results – is certainly warranted.

Fluid conceptions of the 'original'

The thoroughly commercial outlook that practically screams out from every scrap of paper in the Desmet archive brings us to another point: the sharp contrast that can be drawn between the day-to-day practice researched in chapter 4 and the current discourse on intertitles sketched in chapter 1. The current archival and theoretical practice still seems fixated by a focus on the original, and on the new, on 'firsts'. Indicative of this are the ecstatic reactions that rippled through the film historical world when a presumably complete version of Fritz Lang's METROPOLIS (1927) was discovered in late June of this year.²¹¹

But this focus is hardly compatible with the image of the cinema practice of the 1910s that emerges from this thesis. Films were not solid, unchangeable items in those days. Intertitles were changed or cut altogether, a character's name could be adjusted at will, a film's title could be adjusted to developments in current affairs or on the film market. In short, cinema in the 1910s is fluid, changeable, malleable; there is no original because every print could be different, and thus every print was an original – or no print was. While attention for the original has its value in film historical research, the Desmet archive shows us that we should not focus on it to the exclusion of all else.

211 Of course, I am far from innocent in this respect. The retrieval of lost footage of metropolis excites me no end, and I have in a previous article looked for the first subtitled film in the Netherlands.

Closing remarks: archival perspectives

In closing this thesis, I would like to turn to a few observations that came up during my research that are not directly connected with the central subject but instead are concerned with archival work in general. First of these is the international film network in which Desmet operated, which was the background for this thesis and which was touched on briefly in chapter 3. As we saw there, many lines can be drawn from Desmet to other national and international companies and people. Of course, there are explicit connections between Desmet and those companies with which he traded: the suppliers of his films as well as his customers. But more indirect links exist as well, for instance with other companies that competed in the Dutch market (both national ones like Nöggerath and internationals like Pathé), or at a further remove those distributors in a similar position to Desmet for other (European) countries, such as the Norwegian Jens Christian Gunderson. These connections call out for an international focus that at the moment is lacking.

Based on her experiences creating a database from the Desmet archive, Rixt Jonkman calls attention to a reason for this: the fragmentation of existing databases. While most archives these days have a digital database or catalogue of the titles they house, the ID numbers used to distinguish between these titles vary from archive to archive. Thus, “[i]n order to make references to other databases, we would have to include many different numbers that all refer to the same unique title.”²¹² To make matters worse, this process is nearly impossible to automate due to the many different ways in which these various databases are structured. Jonkman proposes the establishment of a “universal standard identification number for each film title [which would] have the same function as the ISBN numbers for books”²¹³ Jonkman immediately acknowledges that there are many organisational questions to be answered before such a system can be implemented; not the least of these is “[h]ow to accommodate different versions of one film”,²¹⁴ since it is precisely these variations that an interlinked network of archives would more easily be able to investigate. Networking the current archives would allow us a better understanding of the network that existed in those days, and how the joints in this network, the ‘hot spots’, developed over time.

212 Rixt Jonkman, “Any ID? Building a Database out of the Jean Desmet Arcgive,” in *Networks of Entertainment. Early Film Distribution 1895-1915*, ed. Frank Kessler & Nanna Verhoeff (Eastleigh: John Libbey, 2007), 319.

213 Ibidem.

214 Ibidem.

Related to this question of connections between archives is the issue of archival selection. This has become a more urgent question at the Netherlands Filmmuseum over the past few years due to its imminent move to a new building in the north of Amsterdam, forcing them to reassess their collection and select which elements will be brought over and which will have to be cast off. As we have seen, our modern views on cinema's history have to a great degree been coloured (both literally and figuratively) by archival practices of the past. In a similar way, the choices being made today regarding the Desmet collection will strongly influence any future research. The carbon copies of Desmet's outgoing correspondence were a reminder for this young researcher that the CC function in e-mail is a metaphor that once had an analogue origin, one that is quickly disappearing both in practice and in its traces. The translucent pink copies bound together in volume after volume of the Desmet archive are disintegrating at an alarming rate; especially the hand-written letters from Desmet's early years are becoming less and less legible.

The digitalization of the archive, which the Filmmuseum is presently undertaking as part of the project 'Beelden voor de toekomst', offers a partial solution for this, although there are drawbacks. On a somewhat nostalgic level, digitalizing the archive diminishes some of its character, doing away with the crusty feel fragile paper in one's hand, the crackle of turning pages, the dusty smell of those rows and rows of paper – the researcher literally being on the scent of the past. More serious is the question of what will be digitized, and what will not. Limitations to (digital) space, the archivists' time, and (as always) the available funds mean that selections have to be made as to what will be preserved and what will not. Yet one of the main strengths of the Desmet collection is precisely its wide range, its abundance of nooks and crannies ever offering new surprises which cannot be foreseen today. Thus, any selection will inherently diminish the chance that someone someday will get the chance to rediscover a new aspect of Desmet's business, in the way that I have attempted to do through this thesis.

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(in alphabetical order)

[original title]

[Dutch distribution title] / [title on print, if different from first two]

[year] | [production company] | [country of origin] | director

[brief information on titles, where available]

[UNKNOWN]

BENDE VALSEMUNTERS OPGEROLD DOOR DE PERS, EEN

1915? | Rex | U.S.A.
No title; English intertitles with Rex logo.

AGRIPPINA
KEIZERIN AGRIPPINA
1910 | Cinès | Italy | Enrico Guazzoni

CAJUS JULIUS CAESAR
JULIUS CAESAR
1914 | Cinès | Italy | Enrico Guazzoni

COME CRETINETTI PAGA I DEBITI
HOE LEMKE ZIJN SCHULDEN BETAALD
1909 | Itala Film | Italy | Andre Deed
Dutch title and intertitles without logo.

COUP DE FUSIL
OUDERSLEED
1909 | Pathé | France | Georges Denola
None.

DORNRÖSCHEN
DOORNROOSJE
1917 | Union-Film | Germany | Paul Leni

DRAMMA AL MAROCCO
EEN DRAMA IN MAROKKO
1908 | Itala Film | Italy | unknown
Dutch title and intertitles without logo.

FORTUNE AT STAKE, A
HAAR GELUK OP HET SPEL
1918 | Master Films | U.K. | Walter West

HVIDE SLAVENHANDELS SIDSTE OFFER, DEN
BLANKE SLAVIN (DRIE) [title used in correspondence]
1911 | Nordisk | Denmark | August Blom

JACK
JACK, EEN JONGENSLEVEN
1913 | Eclair | France | André Liabel

MAKING A MAN OF HER
KOK OF KOKKIN (INTERTITLES ALSO GIVE KOK OF KEUKENMEID)
1912 | Nestor Film | U.S.A. | Al Christie
Dutch title and intertitles without logo.

NAPOLEON – THE MAN OF DESTINY
NAPOLEON, KEIZER VAN FRANKRIJK
1909 | Vitagraph | U.S.A. | J. Stuart Blackton

THE NAVAJO'S BRIDE

DE BRUID VAN DEN NAVAJO / PANTERKAT, DE MOEDIGE INDIAAN
1910 | Kalem | U.S.A. | Unknown.
Dutch title and intertitles (in two different designs) without logo.

PIK NIK EI FANATICO DEI FIORI

TEDDY HOUDT VAN BLOEMEN
1911 | Aquila | Italy | Mario Morais
German title and intertitles with Aquila logo.

PIK NIK HA IL DO DE PETTO

TEDDY HOUTBOK, RIDDER VAN DE HOOGHE C. / TEDDY HOLZBOCK ALS RITTER VOM HOREN C.
1911 | Aquila | Italy | Mario Morais
Dutch title and intertitles without logo.

PORTRAIT DE MIREILLE, LE

HET ONVOLTOOIDE PORTRET
1910 | Gaumont | France | Léonce Perret
Dutch title and intertitles without logo.

ROMANCE OF THE CLIFF DWELLERS, A

EEN PRIMITIEF MAN
1911 | Edison | U.S.A. | Edwin S. Porter
Dutch title and intertitles with Edison logo.

ROSALIE EN MENAGE

ROSALIE, DE KNAPPE HUISBEWAARSTER
1911 | Pathé Frères | France | Romeo Bosetti
Dutch title and intertitles without logo.

ROSALIE ET SES MEUBLES FIDELES

ROSALIE EN HAAR TROUWE MEUBELS
1911 | Pathé Frères | France | Romeo Bosetti
Dutch title without logo, no intertitles.

VIE ET PASSION DE NOTRE SEIGNEUR JÉSUS CHRIST, LA

VAN DE KRIBBE TOT HET KRUIS
1907 | Pathé | France | Ferdinand Zecca
Dutch title and intertitles without logo.

ZIGOMAR CONTRE NICK CARTER

ZIGOMAR TEGEN NICK CARTER
1912 | Eclair | France | Victorin-Hippolyte Jasset