

From Grain to Pixel

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Not only video shops are struggling with the digitisation of films. Digitisation is also giving rise to problems in a completely different area. Film archives and laboratories have built up their work around the analogue film and due to the possibilities of digitisation are now confronted with a wide range of opportunities and problems. Dutch-sponsored researcher Giovanna Fossati investigated how film scholars can provide guidance to archives and laboratories.

This is the first time that academic research has been undertaken into the possibilities for the digital preservation and restoration of [films](#). Fossati is the first to try to bring together film scholars, archivists and laboratory technicians in such a manner. She believes they can gain a lot from collaborating with each other.

The questions that film archives and film laboratories are struggling with are in effect a luxury problem; there are so many new possibilities that it is difficult to draw the line somewhere. For example, should a film archive take a conservative approach and restrict its collection to in-house use or is it wiser to make the archives accessible to the entire world? And if you are restoring a film, may you update it using your own insights or should you remain as faithful as possible to the original? Film archives and laboratories are struggling with such new questions and with questions concerning their own role.

However, on the other side of the fence, film academics are constantly devising new future scenarios whilst scarcely giving thought to the difficulties faced in everyday practice. Fossati brought the two different

parties together. Based on theories about digitisation, she formed several theoretical frameworks that could serve as a new basis for the practice of film archiving. For example, the framework 'Film as art' can help a restorer during the restoration process to decide whether the production or the idea of the filmmaker as an artist should form the focal point.

The formation of new theoretical frameworks not only brings benefits for those involved in everyday practice; more importantly it facilitates debates between film academics and film archives. The frameworks therefore provide a basis for a language that both parties speak. As a result of this, our changing film heritage can be preserved properly for the future.

Giovanna Fossati could carry out this theoretical research from the perspective of everyday practice thanks to the Replacement Subsidy in the Humanities, funded by NWO. With this grant, NWO offers researchers outside of research institutes an opportunity to complete an important scientific publication in the form of a book or a PhD thesis. The employer can use the grant to cover the costs of the secondment. 'From Grain to Pixel. The Archival Life of Film in Transition' shall be published in July by Amsterdam University Press.

Source: NWO

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