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Peter Delpout and His “Cinema of Loss”

Thesis for BA in Film Studies

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Introduction

The era of television pushed film towards a slow death that has become more apparent in today's visual culture. Private collections of cinema rarely uphold any footage in the same form as it was invented more than one-hundred years ago. The problem of changing archival formats has led many films to complete disappearance since archival politics cannot protect every single image created by every single visual artist in the world. Early cinema has went through another "death" of cinema with crucial and fast narrativisation of image, tying up this art sphere with literature - running away from unique and the only genre of "cinema of attractions"¹ towards screenplay and a more complex structure of already well established culture of visual representation.

The end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century introduced a popularization of the remixing of film archives and visual art based on looping and re-editing short episodes and scenes of old documented footage, long forgotten films and especially of well known cult films or blockbusters². Such an artistic technology of editing could be considered as the following of a very long tradition of the Russian montage school, which developed into a much more free and uncontrolled form of using any available visual material.

In this work I will try to concentrate on three films made by Peter Delpet during the last decade of the twentieth century. His *Lyrical Nitrate* (1990), *The Forbidden Quest* (1992) and *Diva Dolorosa* (1999) are mostly made of archival found footage from early silent cinema. Comparing him with other directors working with re-editing of archival footage³, Delpet seems to be trying to keep the balance between the original meaning of footage and the adaptation for modern audiences. In these works Delpet "re-narrativizes" the original films, creating the gap between the filmic

¹ Term created by Tom Gunning, meaning all the cinema made until the first film based on screenplay.

² E. Horwott, 'A Taxonomy of Digital Video Remixing: Contemporary Found Footage Practice on the Internet', *Cultural Borrowings: Appropriation, Reworking, Transformation*, 2009, pp. 79-81, retrieved July 31 2013, <http://www.scope.nottingham.ac.uk/cultborr/chapter.php?id=8>

³ Bill Morrison, Gustav Deutch, Peter Forgacz, Matthias Mueller, etc.

“reality” - so much defended and praised by André Bazin⁴ - and the usage of “reality effect”⁵ to create so called “mockumentaries”. Even if such a recycling of long forgotten cinema does not bring the original purpose back it still does revive the films which would most possibly have been forgotten or even destroyed in casual archive re-management.

Furthermore, in following parts of this thesis I will try to get the reader familiar with the situation of orphan films in different film archives where damaged or partly lost films are facing disappearance due to it’s politics. To get familiar with the idea of recycling cinema I will also try to describe and introduce the phenomena of “archive effect”⁶ in comparison with “reality effect” used in most of the mockumentary genre films.

Delpeut’s works are perfect examples of digitalization and the contemporary death of film as material as described by D. N. Rodowick. These films try to recapture the audience’s attention through the same techniques as it was used in the silent “cinema of attractions” era (and diva films in *Diva Dolorosa*). Each of these three examples do it quite differently so I am hoping to analyze it separately and compare them with each other and with similar techniques which were used in making original films and classical techniques as the ones Delpeut used, including Soviet montage, early mockumentary styles, avant-garde film, etc.

1 Montage against reality

Lev Kuleshov has proved a spectacular effect on the viewer by showing the same shot edited together with different ones. Since then, editing has become one of the most important and powerful tools to create the meaning of image. Montage, or

⁴ A. Bazin, *What is Cinema*, Vol. 2, trans. H.Gray, University of California Press, pp. 23-27 & *What is Cinema*, Vol. 1, pp. 9 - 16

⁵ Term created by Roland Barthes and further analyzed by Joel Black in his book *The Reality Effect: Film Culture and the Graphic Imperative*, Routledge, 2002 and Jonathan Crary in *Techniques of the Observer*, The MIT Press, 1992

⁶ Term suggested by J. Baron in his essay ‘The Archive Effect: Archival Footage as an Experience of Reception’, *Projections*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2012, pp. 102-120

simply “connecting of various scenes”⁷, could already be tracked back to the cinematographic era where selection of short films were screened one after another showing considerably different scenes but combining them in one cluster or genre. Otherwise, montage school and in general the editing of footage itself has dragged cinema further from what André Bazin has defended as reality in cinema and the best representation of the real world. Reality for him is the best technically possible mirror of our own eyesight. In such a concrete concept he gathers ideas against montage (as the cut of real time), against close-ups or even acting. The most important factor here stands within time and it’s passing on one side of the screen in comparison with another. Realism, and time-wise reality on the screen, has very little to do with the early “cinema of attractions” style where their purpose radically collides with each other. Sergei Eisenstein – one of the main montage school theorists and directors – does not present montage as opposing to the concept of reality in cinema. He defends montage as a conflict, which is “the basis of every art”⁸. In that sense André Bazin and Sergei Eisenstein defend the same reality that is seen through different eyes. One sees it as a much more chaotic and dialectic world of conflict presented in a similar way as the human mind is thinking while the other puts “faith in reality”⁹ seeing it in more objectively and disconnected from the human perception point of view.

Furthermore, not only the length of the shots describes the perception of filmic reality. In addition, we could mention any type of editing technique. One of the oldest is slow (and fast) motion shot. Usage of slow motion – the effect of romanticizing and dramatizing the event – has been used since the invention of the editing room. Fast motion, on the other hand, could be described as unintentional editing tool for early cinema, shot sixteen frames per second and in some occasions screened twenty-four frames per second. The fast paced reality presented in cinemas created the image of a separate world similar to the real one, but also with some differences. At the time it was only one of the differing aspects of technological inabilities to mirror the vision of the eye. Without incorrect speed, it was black and white negatives without any true sound effects. However, by the time of the invention of cinema, audiences reacted more emotionally to a form of art that resembled reality

⁷ T. Elsaesser, *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*. BFI Publishing, 1990, pp. 247

⁸ S. Eisenstein. *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, trans. J.Leyda, Harcourt, 1969, pp.38

⁹ A. Bazin. *What is Cinema? Volume 2*. pp.24

rather than anything that they saw before. That is why audiences ran out of the cinema hall seeing black and white soundless train¹⁰ coming towards them. This sort of thing would never happen in present times.

Work done with colors, especially before the invention of color negatives, had a very special impact on drawing the line between poetic and lyrical two color films leaving the audience open for imagination and colorized films – mostly or partly painted films by hand. Two color films left the audience open to see their imagination in ways that multi-color films could not. Furthermore, there were two very different techniques to put a color layer on black and white film. In the silent era, most films were tinted. Without any accurate work the whole scenes were soaked in different color paint, so the white part of the film turns into any decided color. The technique turned into another internationally understandable cinematic language and by the year 1920 the majority of film studios were using it¹¹. However, film tinting did not intend to create the image of more realistic life. On the contrary, it pushed cinema even further into the development as a field of art. Similarly, as using pantomime in opposition to sound, tinted (and black and white) cinema opposed color and colorized films. Tradition has developed different meanings for differently tinted scenes which could be compared with the visual tradition of the montage school or even differences between qualities of various film genres. The other technique, hand colorizing, required much more accuracy, money and time to generate. As a result of this, hand colorizing appeared much later. It was not popular either due to the enormous budget and time requirements. In opposition with tinting, colorizing devoted itself to create a closeness to the reality effect. As André Bazin would say, it tried to take cinema “nearer and nearer to its origins”¹² – that is to say, to the complete representation of reality. However, from the technical side, before color negatives were used, pure black and white presented the most objective reality possible at the time since hand colorizing was the result of editors imagination and his/her accuracy with a brush.

¹⁰ Widely known event, when Lumière brothers showed their film *L'arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* (1896) for the first time in Paris and the audience ran off the hall scared of a train coming towards them on the screen

¹¹ R. Koszarski, *An Evening's Entertainment : The Age of the Silent Feature Picture, 1915-1928*, University of California Press. 1994 pp. 127.

¹² A. Bazin, *What is Cinema*, Vol. 2, pp. 26

Meanwhile, cinematic reality, in the sense of André Bazin's radical way, developed into the sound and color film which revolutionized the language of cinema and the "old" ways. Although technical developments advanced cinema from what it was in the early years, the purely technical inabilities of creating an unreal world established early cinema as the most undoubtedly real. Tinting, chaotic montage, hand colorizing, hyperbolized acting and incorrect speed did not damage the credibility of cinema's realness.

2 Orphan film and Orphan film symposium

Every national archive contains some part of the films which are protected from any public usage because of their status with unknown or unrecognized authorship. Every major film archive has different film preservation laws but most of the biggest ones have very unfavorable laws concerning films which are not chosen as the ones worth to preserve. Considering that the majority of pre-1950s films are made on cellulose nitrate¹³, a highly flammable and very needy material for preservation purposes, these films are in danger of extinction if nothing is to be done.

Many surviving films of that era have already been protected by the law and have gained a place in filmic history. What is most concerning though is the status and future of film "orphans", which in some cases cannot be protected by any laws and since they do not win the "seat" in an archive; the only possible outcome is destruction or natural deterioration of these reels¹⁴. However, not all of the forgotten films are meant to be ephemeral since even some of those which are ephemeral still contain some historically valuable knowledge. Even though "orphan film" formally stands for films which lack authorship, now "orphanistas"¹⁵ classify orphan as „any film whose future is in jeopardy – due to its diminished status in film history or its low priority in the usual operations of the archive“¹⁶. The early 1980's brought more attention to the preservation problem. This caused the establishment of several

¹³ 'Management of Cellulose Nitrate and Cellulose Ester Film', *NPS Museum Handbook*, Part 1, 1999, pp. 13

¹⁴ L. Goldsmith, *Adventures in Preservation*, Moving Image Source, 2010, retrieved 31 July 2013, <http://www.movingimagesource.us/articles/adventures-in-preservation-20100610>

¹⁵ Members of Orphan film annual symposium

¹⁶ L. Goldsmith

private film archives (Prelinger Archives) and the changing of preservation laws in national film archives. The term “orphan film” came into usage about the same time, as the problem of ephemeral films were raised in passage of *The National Preservation Act* in 1992. It was the first piece of US Federal legislation which had something to do with actual problem of film preservation¹⁷. The 1990’s saw even more attention towards the “orphan film” from academicians, film archivists and filmmakers. Filmmakers like Bill Morrison, Rick Prelinger, Gregorio Rocha, Matthias Müller, Peter Delpout and others took this considerably new revival of forgotten or damaged films to another level. Their work is based mostly on going around the respected authorship law towards the usage of forgotten media as the major part of their films. The most common genres to use orphan films are video art, music-video, “mockumentaries” and documentaries¹⁸.

The orphanista’s movement does everything they can to preserve found footage or recycle damaged and partially lost films. The latter has already lost their original looks and meaning and their preservation as it is at the present time can not be treated the same as fully restorable films. The status of some films also depends on the genre and the possibility of public usage. Even though most of the public attention towards orphanista’s work goes to lost features, they themselves consider other media as more culturally (and historically) valuable. This include “newsreels, documentaries, experimental or avant-garde films, anthropological and regional films, advertisements and corporate shorts, dance documentation, and even amateur home videos”¹⁹. The unique effect of real footage could not be underrated. It is not uncommon to use archival footage even in fictional Hollywood blockbusters, where archives and recognizable real people in them makes the created fictional world more believable.

¹⁷ G. Lukow, *The Politics of Orphanage: The Rise and Impact of the 'Orphan Film' Metaphor on Contemporary Preservation Practice*, University of South Carolina, 1999, retrieved 31 July 2013, <http://www.sc.edu/filmsymposium/archive/orphans2001/lukow.html>

¹⁸ S. D. Branco, ‘Music Videos and Reused Footage’, *Cultural Borrowings: Appropriation, Reworking, Transformation*, 2009, pp.111-112, retrieved July 31 2013, <http://www.scope.nottingham.ac.uk/cultborr/chapter.php?id=10>

¹⁹ Duke Center for the study of Public Domain, *Access to Orphan Films*, Duke Law School, 2005, pp.3

3 Archive and Reality effect

The status of film footage certainly affects the way that the spectator sees it. The least noticeable difference is from the visual perspective, as well as from the terminological distinction between “found” footage, and “archival” footage. Relatively recent problems in organizing archives had to clarify the differences between these two terms. Firstly, an archive is an “official institution that separates historical record from the outtake”²⁰ even though the term “found” could also apply to be found in the archive.

As “orphanistas” usually do, they find damaged or forgotten footage in the same archives which, at least theoretically, are preserved and archived. However, talking about archive as an institution, its contents are automatically of a higher value than “found” footage “on the street”. Some amateur documents are usually excluded from official archives for its’ lack of historical or social value²¹.

Even though both of these types of films are quite different politically and artistically, what does matter the most is the viewer’s experience. Since most of the film audience does not know the origin of the films that they are watching, the visuals usually based on stereotypes becomes the source to predict a film’s age and its reliability. “Archive effect” (as described by Jaimie Baron in his own article) analyzes the visual effect of older footage in comparison with another footage containing visual representation of a more modern time. The appearance of different times could be presented by the visible changes of the same characters/actors, visible change of space, or visible change of visual qualities and techniques. The last representation stands as the most subjective one, since some of the older film making techniques could be used even in present times. The best example of archival affect is showing two films of the same location which relates each other with objects but differs in picture quality or the showing of one in color while the other in black and white. Even though earlier film theoretics like D.N. Rodowick or even André Bazin looked into the future development of cinema as coming closer to the representation of reality, in some sense it got further from what was expected.

²⁰ J. Baron, The Archive Effect: Archival Footage as an Experience of Reception’, *Projections*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2012, pp. 103

²¹ J. Baron, pp.103

Digitalization and invention of computer animated graphics and special effects introduced the virtual reality while leaving older cinema as a more reliable mirror of historical documentation. The so called “Reality effect”²² explains a purer representation of the reality resembling the nineteenth century photographs and stereoscopes as “equivalent for a natural vision”. Steroscope, as the earliest tool to watch 3D pictures, completely revolutionized the representation of reality as the human eye sees it since printed picture could not reproduce such an effect. However, “Reality effect” has developed, as it develops all the time, adopting to people’s habits and their tendency to get used to the optical representation. From the first projection of *Train Arrival* by Lumiere brothers to the present time’s highly animated vivid 3D images, people still tend to fool themselves to get as deep to the fake reality as possible. However, even cinema has technologically always developed towards mirroring human senses better, the “mockumentary”²³ genre curved the image of reality on the screen to other directions. The conceptual and visual difference between popular cinema and TV news reports drew similar line as the line between fiction and reality. In comparison, the archive effect comes closer to the reality effect created in TV newsreels or archive footage based documentaries. Even though newsreels are not being archived in national film archives and institutes, it’s historical reliability is the same as articles in newspapers. Similarly, feature film archives of early cinema has the historical importance and reliability inside the history of cinema, being part of film theory and already documented and established pattern – genre, film era or representative of a specific film school. Both the age of footage and its status as real footage has established visual tradition of depicting (historical) reality in an internationally recognized format and visual/audial looks. On the other hand, commercial feature films have developed to better mirror audiovisual reality to create the subconscious belief in the film which the audience is watching. Mockumentary, as it is understood now, started in early 1960’s under the name of “direct cinema”²⁴, surprisingly late considering the invention of television (late 1940s).

²² J. Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the 19th Century*, The MIT Press, 1992, pp.124

²³ J. Rascoe & C. Hight, *Faking it: Mock-documentary and the Subversion of Factuality*, Manchester University Press, 2002, pp. 1-3

²⁴ if not considering early films by John Grierson or Robert J. Flaherty – directors of documentary films *Drifters* (1929), *Nanook of the North* (1922) etc. which were partly directed to dramatize events.

4 Death of film stock and digitalization

The invention of the digital medium (or at least light weight tape recording) has divided the filmic world into two very distant forms – on the one hand film is reels for film projector screenings and on the other various types of tapes, discs and digital formats. As D.N. Rodowick²⁵ describes “cinema” it is “the projection of a photographically recorded filmstrip in a theatrical setting”, which originally was the only way to see film until 1970s when the VHS recording system gave a choice for an alternative way²⁶. Furthermore, the very fast development of digital encoding and digital cameras has simplified film production and distribution and also made film making much more open budget-wise to create video arts and low budget films. However, the quality difference between new tape-recording cameras, early digital cameras and expensive cinema studio cameras has always been so vast that film studios and their production was not really in competition for audiences. The 1990s and early 2000s have already presented possibilities for filmmakers to abandon filmstrip and choose digital cameras instead.

However, digital technology has also presented the cinematic world with some problems. Firstly, digital technology, especially editing, has changed the image of reality in the filmic world since digital editing and animation recently became as realistic (or at least extremely close) as any real footage. Even some usage of film archive restorations have included digital reediting, though primarily mostly for quality and color correction purposes. There is no doubt that imperfect storing conditions can change the original looks of a film strip which could only be corrected in the digital way and reprinted from an already corrected version. Such an example shows how often digital intervention is applied to store original filmstrip information. Furthermore, even some films shot on film are partly digitalized to add effects which would be impossible in the manual way. For example, *Forrest Gump* (1994) is the first film where archival footage was successfully digitally combined with newly filmed

²⁵ D.N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film*, Harvard University Press, 2007, pp. 26

²⁶ A. Abramson, *The History of Television, 1942 to 2000*, McFarland & Company, 2003, pp. 169

footage, creating the connection between the fictional world and the world familiar to audience²⁷.

Digital cameras have also broken the rules of film cutting and the natural technical force to have separate shots and separate scenes. Naturally, film reels have a very limited amount of time on one reel, running 24 frames per second. New digital technology breaks the classical flow measurements from frames per seconds to data weight per second and shot (or scene) length only depends on battery consumption and the size of hard drive²⁸.

Another, and probably the most important problem caused by digitalization of cinema, is the already mentioned unclear future of film archives. Since the quality of digital image has almost reached the quality of 35 mm film, some archives are considering transforming to digital archives, radically reconsidering the concept of archive as the place to keep arts in its original and unchanged format. Possibilities to cut the costs of archiving and opening the archived materials for much wider audiences through a digital format on the internet are the main reasons to create considerations to break a more than one-hundred years old tradition. However, if there were no consequences it would have already been done decades ago. The simplicity and universality of the way to screen films printed on film has proven it as the most stable and unchanged way. However, the problems caused by the collision of archival preservation opinions has caused an always growing movement of orphanistas and hundreds of individuals working on alternative ways of preservation or recycling the important cinema left on the edge of its time.

Delpeut, as one of many modern film directors and artists, lives in modern times working with digitized images and creating his films on already untouchable medias. However, he chooses not to forget the nitrate film format and digs deep in the mountains of boxes filled in various archives and collections. Being only one of few who does it, he uses his films to emphasize the history being lost in cinema archives at the present time.

In the last decade of twentieth century he made three films closely connected with his manual work with early cinema. Each of these films digs historically different

²⁷ *Forrest Gump-(Seeing is Believing: The Visual Effects of Forrest Gump-Vietnam)*, DVD, Paramount Pictures, 2001.

²⁸ D.N. Rodowick, pp. 147-148

valuable footage for early European cinema. Here in the further pages I will analyze each of these three films in connection with all the theories described above.

5 ANALYSIS

5.1 Lyrical Nitrate

Lyrical Nitrate (Lyrisch Nitraat) (1990) is the first full length film that was released by Delpout. It is also his first attempt of using only found-footage films leading film into poetic remembrance of early cinema. This film is using only editing and combining of early silent cinema strips to produce aesthetic visuals of early cinema compilations and modern experimental films based on aesthetic visuals of the oldest cinematic traditions. The film was part of the revival of “rediscovered films” celebrated by starting classical (and silent) cinema festivals all over the world and much more active usage of found-footage by film directors like Bill Morrison, Artavazd Pelechian, Gustav Deutsch, Peter Delpout, Craig Baldwin, etc.²⁹

Delpout in this case worked only with films made in 1905 – 1915, all made on nitrate film, which by the time of making *Lyrical Nitrate* was already in its last surviving years and most of the films have been at least partly molded and decomposed. Even though the majority of all nitrate films have been destroyed by the film archives, the rest properly stored could only last over hundred years. *Lyrical Nitrate* could be described as a quite chaotic collage of partly lost, partly damaged or unknown early orphan films. From the first sight this chaotic structure could also be analyzed as consciously structured montage with symbolic and lyrical meanings. Damaged film material brings us back to the reality effect presented through the image of the ruined film strip. As real as human beings, film (especially in medium of nitrate stock) is also living and dying “species” whose ruined, dying body still speaks about its lost parts as part of history. From the audiences perspective, ruined material detaches film from modern digital cinema world. Even though *Lyrical Nitrate* itself was released on DVD and VHS formats and these medium formats oppose the

²⁹ A. Habib, ‘Ruin, Archive, and the Time of Cinema: Peter Delpout's *Lyrical Nitrate*’, *SubStance* #110, Vol. 35, no. 2, 2006, pp. 121, 128

originality of nitrate film which is presented in it: the visual looks of highly scratched, moving and ruined film brings the audience to more believable sense of truth. “Truth” is more from the sense of archive-memory³⁰ which society has come to from history-memory. In such a case, highly damaged film (even shown on VHS) seems much more real (archive effect) than any of the modern visually rich documentary footage. Additionally, mold spots and lost reels create aesthetic characteristics of the ruined cinema – effect of nostalgic lyricism for traces of forever lost images. The nitrate film medium, as in comparison with polyester film or furthermore the digital film format, has quite similar capabilities to be archived as f.e. human body. Paolo Cherchi Usai in his book “The Death of Cinema” disagrees that mortal images can contain history by exemplifying destruction of old moving images as part of what he calls “cinema”.³¹ The revival of filmic archives has led to many, very different reactions from archivists, film-makers and historians. One of the most nostalgic and pro-preservation stances holds a group with Delpaut in it and his first work clearly describes it.

Early pre-narrative cinema has developed the tradition of lyrical montage of very different scenes containing its own individual spectacles. Delpaut in his *Lyrical Nitrate* uses this technique to keep the original alternative to narrative cinema as the main purpose of his montage. Even though early silent cinema screening was casually accompanied with a live narrator³², the archived material has no real traces of that. Found (orphan) footage of early silent cinema can hardly be traced to its original screening traditions, leaving only an image as its representation. However, different from other experimental film directors working with found film, he tried to keep the collage of partly lost film reels in its un-narrated shape within technical chapters, leaving the whole film plot-less (see figure 1). The so-called “cinema of attractions”³³ used film medium to interact with audience and more likely to show the images, which must be seen (similar to photography), rather than to tell some story. We could see *Lyrical Nitrate* from the cinema of attraction perspective, of images which were close to being lost. The main romanticism of this film hides inside the

³⁰ P. Norra, ‘Between Memory and History: Les lieux de la mémoire’, *Representations*, No.26, 1989, pp. 16

³¹ P. C. Usai, *The Death of Cinema*, British Film Institute, 2008, pp. 7, 41

³² A. Gaudreault. *From Plato to Lumiere: Narration and Monstration in Literature and Cinema*, trans. T.Barnard, University of Toronto Press, 2009, pp. 143

³³ T. Gunning, ‘The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, its Spectator and the Avant-Garde’, *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, BFI publishing, 1990, pp. 56

external meaning of ruined cinema, keeping the images in it as the object of the issue.

The film is divided into six chapters – “Looking”, “Mise en scène”, “The body”, “Passion”, “Dying” and “Forgetting” (figure 2). Each of these chapters shows the traditional way of subject matter in filmed scenes but at the same time does not leave the theme of death – from the perspective of the death of filmic image, from the perspective of already unused cinematic techniques of filmmaking, and from perspective of death of the characters in the footage shown. “Looking” refers to the already forgotten traditions of “ways of seeing” in early cinema such as the iris, direct eye contact with characters, peephole and binocular imitations (figure 3). All of those cinematic traditions have only the status in cinema history when modern film editing has taken over and killed them. The “Mise en scène” part shows us the looks of the background and the artistic looks of the settings itself, which is already long lost and dead: even the actors and extras cannot be attached with the present time when *Lyrical Nitrate* was made. Considering the status of some of the footage as orphans, we can call people captured in them as dead and untraceable orphans remaining only on these celluloid strips. “The body”, “Passion” and “Dying” again concentrates on actors and actresses whose young bodies as well as their exaggerated pantomime acting did not survive the lifetime of nitrate films. The expression of each emotion on screen has radically changed and a hundred years showed how flexible and developing this field of art is. “Forgetting” contains much more ruined film scenes than all the chapters before. The aesthetics of it makes it an even more romanticized and nostalgic input when in part of the last chapter we see Adam and Eve sharing the forbidden apple. Symbolically biblical ruin of eternal life is shown together with highly destroyed and ruined leftovers of that early religious feature film (figure 4).

The haunted bodies on the haunted molding filmstrip connect each of the scenes with sharp jump cuts. In comparison with the present time's continuous editing style, scenes in *Lyrical Nitrate* connected with long forgotten (again) “organic” montage, mostly practiced by early Soviet directors. In some cases Delpeut seems to purposely leave the gap in between shots unfilled, creating chaos in continuous sequence. It's more likely that lost footage of the film has never been changed by at least aesthetically similar image that it used to be. Delpeut stands on the side of originality, hoping to be as little of a director of the film as possible. However, he forces the audience to watch all these unconnected scenes and sequences in one

run, different from the intended way to watch these films. In other words, the meaning of the film is aesthetical beauty of combination, and cutting film in original pieces would just send it to the past and disappearance of *Lyrical Nitrate*.

This unified story set together by Delpeut has already lasted at least a fifth of what the original material has. Simply recycling the material has saved the purely historical images and bodies filmed with early cinematic cameras. The used film stock is most possibly destroyed and without the radical intrusion by Delpeut it would have been lost forever. In *Lyrical Nitrate*, forgotten (orphaned) films found their next generation throughout a bit changed looks and meanings but in the same bodies and times. It does build the historical path between past and present, in the meaning of many very different perspectives.

5.2 The Forbidden Quest

André Bazin has given “Exploration cinema”³⁴ a very important role in the history of early cinema. As the cameras were still shooting un-narrated “cinema of attractions”, explorers of south and north poles started bringing film cameras and cameramen with them on their adventures. Sometimes the footage from the expedition was put together in a short documentary films, greatly influencing a new-born genre of ethnographic films based on the footage from those documentaries. Two types of exploration and ethnographic cinema has a very clear border of reality and fiction between them even though they contain and develop the same cultural topics. The exploration cinema itself, considering André Bazin's opinion, does not affect the audience by its visuals. More importantly, it is the knowledge of it being real. All the danger presented on the filmstrip was once experienced by the cameraman³⁵. If one was to watch the footage of the earliest filmed expeditions to the south and north poles the real filmmakers danger is unseen but unconsciously felt in the audience's assimilation with the eyesight and the extreme rarity of naturally hard filmic conditions. On the other side of such a real documentary, feelings of danger stand with the reconstructions and re-enactments of already documented

³⁴ A. Bazin, *What Is Cinema*, vol. 1, pp. 154

³⁵ A. Bazin, *What Is Cinema*, vol. 1, pp. 161

experiences. The experience of watching real footage in comparison with simulated ones is incomparable.

Delpeut in his *The Forbidden Quest* (1992) has challenged the conflict of reality depicted in “Exploration films” and the lack of reality in every other media trying to repeat the one and only archival film. Delpeut has used several known expedition films like *The Great White Silence* (1924) or *South* (1916), but he did as well use many anonymous expedition film reels found in Netherlands Film Museum³⁶. Editing a lot of different film footage together he succeeds in creating one continuous plot narrated by the only actor of the film Joseph O’Conor as the only survivor of expedition. Playing with time perception of present time (as in *The Forbidden Quest* (1992)), Delpeut drags us back from colorful TV sets to deep black and white world of 1931, where O’Conor’s character shows us deteriorated tinted colorful footage of 1905 (figure 5). The difference of visual quality uses the archival affect of aesthetics of deterioration to put real footage in the right perception of documentary. However two different times and two different worlds depicted in the film also stands for two sides of reality. Delpeut migrates between authentic footage of early expeditions and his own written narrative which during the film sounds more and more impossible creating gap that audience have to climb over to catch up with this uniquely mocking film. Even though *The Forbidden Quest* cannot fit to any other genre but mockumentary, the fact of real archival footage as the main visual context does not connect with other most representative mockumentaries made. The genre itself is understood as fictional text which takes various documentary modes (looks and sounds) to be viewed as a documentary³⁷. It plays with audiences assimilation with documentary as accurate and truthful way to present reality – knowledge and fact. In that case, all the technical tools unique for documentary genre can be similarly used against it. Since mockumentary is concentrated on using visual/audial filters and in general looks of documentary-like footage, the re-textualisation (re-narrativization) of actually real film has quite a different concept. However, looking simply at the main purpose of genre as mocking by using the reality effect, *The Forbidden Quest* could not be categorized better.

³⁶ R. Galt, ‘It’s so cold in Alaska: Evoking Exploration Between Bazin and *The Forbidden Quest*’, *Dicourse*, vol.28, no.1, pp. 55

³⁷ J. Rascoe & C. Hight, pp. 6

Delpeut does not make the mocking so serious that audience would be totally lost in a fictional world. In several scenes he seems to purposely include artificial self-joke affects to play with the authentic footage he uses. One of the most unusual ways seen is near the middle of the film (figure 6) where there is a usage of drawn, animated flags in only one single shot. The surprising appearance of colors in an only two-colored film drags the image towards the stereotypical genre of comedy cartoons, establishing the loss of authenticity of the footage even though the footage is actually real. Despite the issue of authenticity of footage itself, it is pressured only in this one shot; the storyline narrated by Joseph O'Connor's voice presents us the story as trustless as the cartoonish flag depicts. Excluding geographical displacement of polar bears and Inuits, which we can treat as part of mysticism of expedition (similar to the existence of the discovered "other side"), Delpeut uses several self-mocking jokes pressing the audience towards disbelief. Firstly, he shows the cameraman shooting in the film, even though the plotline is based on having only one "following person" in the expedition (figure 7). Furthermore, his appearance in the film could be very systematic. Delpeut, as Bazin, stresses the danger and experience of the filmmaker. The cameraman's appearance does not stand only as a self-reflexive joke of the story but it does create the image of the person behind the camera, which is very important from the perspective of respect to dangerous "exploration cinema" filmmakers. Secondly, but not less importantly, we get film with sound from the beginning of the usage of archive footage. Even though it does not appear throughout all of the film but logically it does collide with the time of the film's creation – from an assumingly 1905 expedition. However, similar to the appearance of the cameraman, the existence of sound does not really drag much attention away from the video.

Counter wise, the disappearance of sound does drag away some attention. To balance out the damage Delpeut makes for the authenticity of the footage, he inserts proofs of the real archive. In the episode of the film where the crew is sailing throughout the calm waters, the sound does indeed cease. For the modern noise-addicted ear, silence hyperbolizes the mysticism of events, additionally tying up the viewer to her knowledge about the silent cinema. Furthermore, continuously changing colors (as the mistakes of development or result of classical film tinting) and often popping up signs of deterioration helps to weigh out the impossible fictional scenario. Talking about the changing of colors throughout the film, *The Forbidden*

Quest does not forget the usage of color tinting as a tool for classical cinematic manipulation. The most exemplary change appears in the end of the film when O'Connor's character reaches the "other side" and from that moment everything turns dark red, symbolizing heat and fire (figure 8). With such a balance between long forgotten cinematic techniques and a myth-like story, Delpeut creates two different worlds, one with the mystical plot and one with the techniques he uses, which are both very gripping and interesting.

The world in *The Forbidden Quest* is neither geographically nor culturally accurate to our real world. The crucial start³⁸ from authentic documentary footage towards completely fictional myth starts with shooting a bear by the Antarctic shore (figure 9). Such a mystical moment starts the long parade of death in this film. From the geopolitical encounter, the expedition created by Delpeut mirrors colonizers or conquistadors who uses the weakness of far away land for their own purposes.³⁹ Cruelty does not stop with shooting a bear, and Italian ship captain shows his own devastating power by eating all the inhabitants of Inuit village. Western civilized man in this case presented in reverse cannibalism scenario with him eating the ones of primitive culture.

From the perspective of preservation and archiving, Delpeut has done quite a controversial work by creating *The Forbidden Quest*. Nevertheless, some of the screened footage is from early films which are available in the original format and it is still mostly possible that this modern result of re-editing (re-narrativization) is and will reach wider audiences than the original ones. Furthermore, some of the footage is from unknown single reels, which cannot be traced or screened with fully understandable background. In this case Delpeut is partly repeating the process of loss represented in the film. Similarly to *Lyrical Nitrate*, *The Forbidden Quest* shows the tragic story of haunted death and the process of slow disappearance from the surface of the earth. In addition, both of these films tell the stories in very expressive "dying" way – showing throughout the old (dead) traditions of cinema and simply reminding the viewer about the mortality of film footage itself (figure 10). However, re-narrativization and creating fictional story on top of rarely presented footage changes its image. The loss, as the main subject floating around Delpeut's films, in *The*

³⁸ R. Galt, pp. 68 ("decisive moment")

³⁹ A. Bazin, *What Is Cinema*, vol. 1, pp. 154-155

Forbidden Quest mainly appears as a loss of the trustworthy status of the real document. After all, even Delpeut with *The Forbidden Quest* – in comparison with other two analyzed films – has went furthest away from the original footage's meaning, his re-thinking of forgotten film reels and adaptation for the modern audience should not be underrated. This particular film just once more underlines the importance of recycling cinema to give the knowledge of what cinema once was and what cinematic traditions have been abandoned, yet in his own unique and modern way.

5.3 Diva Dolorosa

Delpeut made another nostalgic montage of found-footage in 1999. In *Diva Dolorosa*, he analyses another filmic style, from long forgotten silent film era. It is the Italian “diva” films, concentrated on tens of young actresses working in very similar dramatic films in the times between 1913 and 1920. Diva films had flourished at approximately the same time as “femme fatale” character in American film-noir films. From the first look, both of these characters dealt with the same theme of killing darkness in femininity. However, Italian Divas and their surprising boom in late teens have a very different story.

The Diva period started just before the World War I, when Italian bourgeoisie did not have any financial or social problems. Even though women in upper-class families were becoming much more socially active – playing tennis, enjoying cycling, driving⁴⁰ – their role in patriarchal society did not change and was led by the ideas of conservatism. The time has come when world cinemas captured the style of Black Romanticism and twisted their own national cinemas towards it – German expressionism, American femme-fatale figure. Likewise, Italian cinema industry created a passionate, self-destructive figure of the Diva. Never recognized, nor liked in the circles of intellectuals and artists, it became a phenomenon of a seven year lasting fashion without any positive opinions from Italy's elite.⁴¹

⁴⁰ A. D. Vacche, *Diva: Defiance and Passion in Early Italian Cinema*, University of Texas Press, 2008, pp. 46

⁴¹ A. D. Vacche, pp.41

The title of *Diva Dolorosa* describes the extremity of Diva films, as the filmic style standing in between two radically different times and worlds. Firstly, Diva, which stands for the modern Italian woman, adapting herself in fast paced passionate society, is combined together with the matter of Dolorosa – a sorrowful mother of grief – reminding us about the traditions of religion and it's social stability in Italian culture. Image of women in national cinema was living on the bridge between the “old” and “new” (figure 11). Some divas represented the bridge even through their physical appearance. Physical disproportions represented both pure youth and erotic adulthood in one body.

Delpeut uses scenes from 14 different diva films, and successfully combines into one storyline, not much different from any of them separately. Sometimes even cutting between movies in the middle of the scene, he shows what the standardized diva film is. Not considering different actors and the place of the settings, rough storyline and even body language expressing hysterical passion for love and death did not differ much. Delpeut used that similarity to detach the storyline from one concrete film so he could present the genre in one film.

Likewise, the already mentioned clash of two different images of women, the divas presented in *Diva Dolorosa* also clash in their dominative perspective. Their role in films as the main character and the main body to-be-looked-at-ness⁴², divas dominates the audience leaving all the other characters less important. However, their acting style had very strict rules framing diva's freedom into narrow edges. Furthermore, most of the films had very tragic endings of suffering women choosing death after unsuccessful passion for eternal love. In other words, diva has represented the unsuccessful search for independence, passion and love in lives of Italian women of the time.

As in *Lyrical Nitrate* in *Diva Dolorosa* Delpeut shows different lost techniques of early cinema. Here, we can clearly see sharp cuts between different movies through the wide spectrum of colors used in tinting technique. He does not even try to fade the sharp contrasts between cuts, keeping the audience aware of the story being part of various other stories from the past. Throughout the film it is shifting from various tinted colors, black and white and even partly colorized footage. Aesthetically

⁴² term used by Laura Mulvey in 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, vol.16, no.3, pp.11

it combines many found and not-found footage using different cinematic techniques and even different main actresses into one plot – one poetic structure.

The Diva passion for eternal love comes together with passion for eternity in general. Cinema as a quite a new invention at least partly offers it. If not eternity for a young and beautiful human body then at least long lasting moving image of it. The most popular actresses that became divas were the models of beauty, the stars that every Italian woman wanted to be. The lucky ones were trying to fight with time and biological aging of their own bodies. In every film Delpeut made, he showed the fake timelessness of a moving image including natural deterioration of nitrate film or simply eventual loss of image. *Diva Dolorosa* is not an exception. Even though it has less deteriorated scenes than *Lyrical Nitrate* or *The Forbidden Quest* it does not hide it.

By mentioning time and it's pace, diva films mirrored the tradition of faced paced movements in early comic films. It did not affect the audience the same way as unnatural comic short stories. Counter wise, diva films were associated with hyperactive, hysteric and dramatic acting by the main actresses, creating assimilations of unusually fast paced action with shocking and dramatic convulsions. Fast paced motion did not allow the audience to capture the deep drama in divas face during the hysterical act. Therefore, Delpeut used a slow-motion effect, most likely to exaggerate the drama of the moment (figure 12), but as well as to drag attention to the unseen.

However, divas and their cinematic language are long forgotten and most of the films (together with all the rest of pre-1950's cinema) are lost. As for now, *Diva Dolorosa* turned to be the best representative of the genre, since the majority of the surviving films have never been re-released for public use. The same as the tradition presented in this film, divas that tried to get the "eternal life" on film are not alive at the present time. So once again Delpeut reminds us about death, which reflects in the last scenes of *Diva Dolorosa*, where the diva is disappointed with her own life hysterically runs out of eternal safety to a dark and dangerous forest (figure 13).

6 CONCLUSION

From all the directors and video-artists working with found-footage and using nostalgic poetics of forgotten generations, Delpeut shows the most historic importance for the audience. Neither forgetting lost cinematic traditions, nor the long forgotten way of spectatorship, he reminds us about cinema as the object of (cinematic) history and its reiterative death.

Delpeut, in the three films analyzed here, concentrates on the time before the era of sound and color in film. His concentration gets even deeper when each of these films recreate the cinematic experience of forgotten genres and styles. No matter how young film is as an art, it has already developed so much that films from the first decades can not be understood the way they were understood then. *Lyrical Nitrate* reminds us of the beginning of cinema and shows us many unconnected scenes in the “cinema of attractions” mode, showing us that the image itself has a great value even without the narrative. *The Forbidden Quest* re-narrativize the footage of “cinema of exploration” – the earliest predecessors of present time travel documentaries. *Diva Dolorosa* presents us the most typical scenario of the forgotten Italian genre of “diva film” through the compilation of many different films of the genre.

Delpeut never abandons the aesthetic looks of decomposed film. Long ago, all of the footage used in presented films were archived or kept as an eternal document. However, all of these films give us the impression that they will one day pass away. The risk of losing this valuable information is well known by orphanistas of cinema or well seen in every scratch and spot of mold on the last copy of film.

Mold and film deterioration of nitrate film stock directs us to the time of the beginning of cinema, which from the perspective of technological possibilities strongly differs from cinema in the current era. If the beginning of the last century could not offer directors the ability to create virtual realities, then eventually those films from that time will become the most authentic moving documents of early world and early cinema. Delpeut uses the credibility created by visual looks of early cinema, to question cinema as a representation of reality, so much defended by André Bazin, and especially early cinema’s usage today. At the same time he questions the edges of the mockumentary genre. Whence the genre was suggesting

using fake footage covered in “reality looks”, Delpeut uses real footage pushing his works deeper to questionable reality in the cinematic world.

Even though his work concentrates on keeping the meaning of the original footage the same, each of his films have a manipulative path on the archival footage he uses. The extreme example can be seen in his *The Forbidden Quest*, where he even destroys the credibility of real footage. Every film is balancing between the path of recycling and restoration. In such a way, his input as a film director clashes with original meaning of discovered footage. That was Delpeut’s way of building the bridge between the “old” and the “new” ways of seeing.

Whatever the path Delpeut took, all of the films we analyzed resurrected almost dead films to life again. In some cases not really in their original purposes but more importantly that the visuals which were about to be lost can be seen again. It is not a surprise that every theme captured circulates around the matter of death – death of film, death of characters, death of tradition. And that is the way Peter Delpeut reminds us about the mortality of cinema – by making a few more films to retell the stories of loss.

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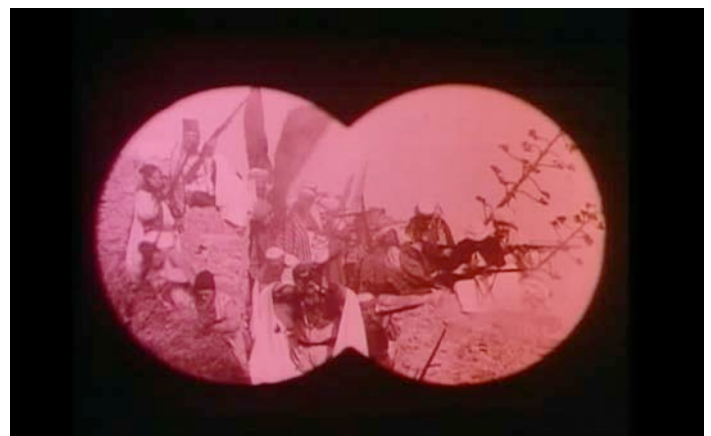
Appendix



Figure 1: Examples of two unconnected shots. Left – short moving portrait; Right – shot from a train



Left: Figure 2: Last and First shot of two chapters, separated by intertitle



Above: Figure 3: Example of binocular view

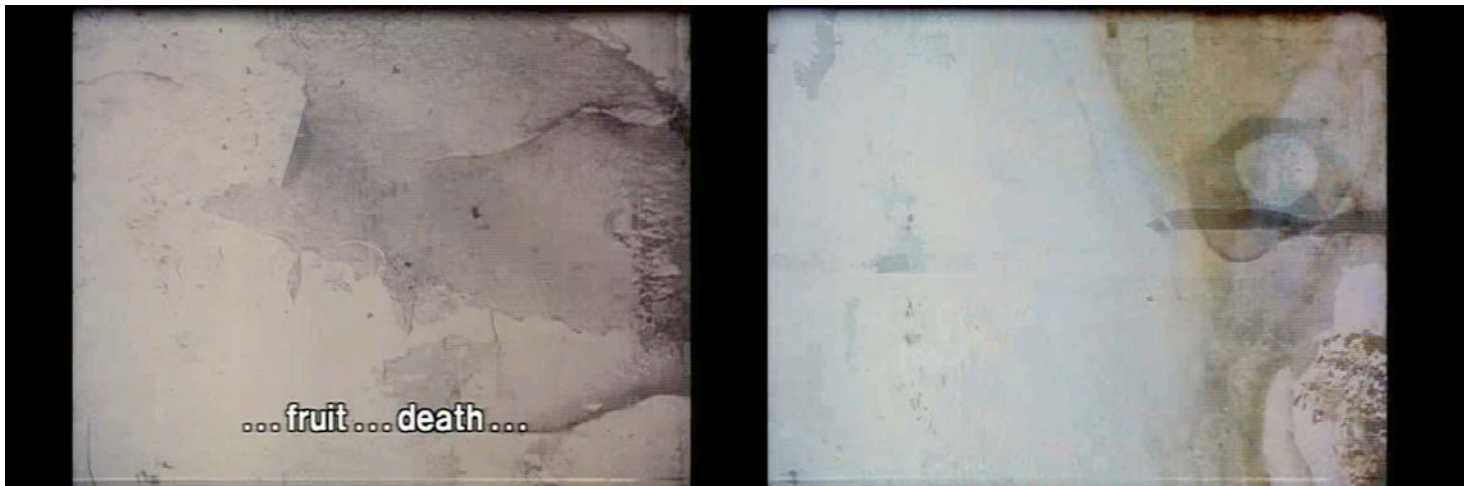


Figure 4: Highly deteriorated images of Original sin

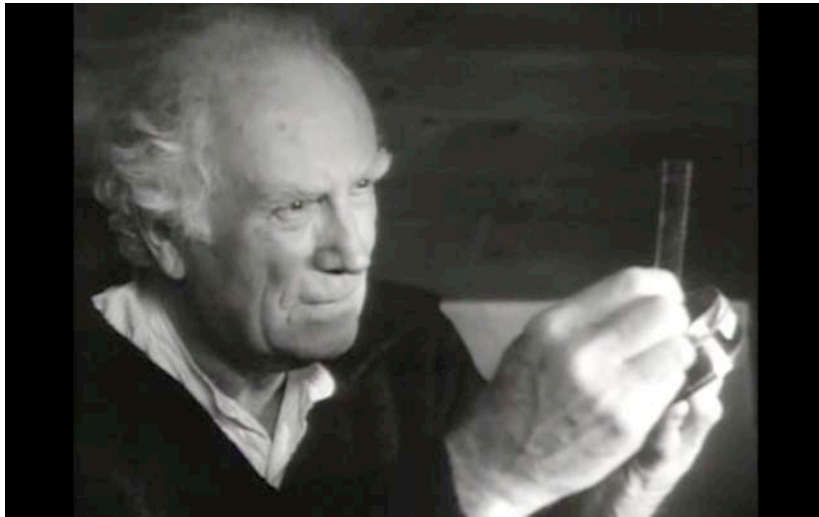


Figure 5: O'Connor's character presents us his moving images



Figure 6: Animated flag



Figure 7: Cameraman working



Figure 8: The color of heat



Figure 9: The crucial moment for the story



Figure 10: Deteriorated footage



Figure 11: Two faces of "Diva"



Figure 12: Dramatic moments uses slow-motion and zoom-in



Figure 13: Dramatic end in a forest