Abstract
This article takes up the challenge of the European-US Permanent Seminar on the Histories of Film Theories to think of ‘theories’ and ‘histories’ as plural. However, it also argues that this multiplicity needs to embrace “theories of history”. This is because of the very difficulty of thinking more than one historical moment at once at the juncture in which today’s emergent technologies demand new theories. Some theorists of history are introduced with emphasis on the way they use the concept of historical time, elaborated by some, disputed by others. We return to the moment of the 1895 history of the kinetograph, but in order to learn what, I want to know. Conceived as part of a tribute to Francesco Casetti, this article takes Casetti as a model of how media theorists need to get ahead of technological developments, participating in their conceptualization rather than passively waiting to find out ‘what it is that they are’.

Keywords
Theory; history; theory of history; kinetoscope; kinetograph; cinema century; historical time; ‘death of cinema’; digital turn.

Francesco Casetti will recall the debate that took place among the members of the Permanent Seminar on the Histories of Film Theories at the dinner convened in 2011 at the Montreal Conference, the “Impact of Technological Innovations on the History and Historiography of Cinema”. The topic was the question of the wording of our title which we wanted to settle before the launch of the website at Concordia University. Were we to call ourselves the Seminar on the History of Film Theory (singular) or the Seminar on Histories of Film Theories, (plural)? As I recall, compelling arguments were made on behalf of both and we left the dinner without having resolved the issue. Perhaps we implicitly left the matter to Masha Salaskina in our gratitude to her for setting up the site. But now, looking back, after the site is up as The Permanent Seminar on Histories of Film Theories, I get to make a confession. In my secret heart of hearts, I really wanted the double plural, ‘histories’ and ‘theories’. I hoped for something that invited more histories of film theories, more theories of film and, in my case, made room for a recent obsession--theories of history. Taking Francesco’s cue, I had begun to think about the problem of historical approaches to theories of film. I liked his point that in place of the old ‘history of cinema’ we needed to see multiple ‘histories’ in which cinema was secondary rather than primary1. It was also occurring to me that before anyone could begin

to think about ‘theories’ from earlier moments in the cinema century one also had to think what was meant by ‘history’ or ‘histories’. So it was really the ‘histories’ part that originally lured me into thinking about “histories of film theories” and it was there that I eventually became stuck. This is not to say that thinking about the problem of ‘history’ was unrelated to “film and media”, to technologies at their advent and in their demise. That is the point. Those connections are multiple and fascinating.

What I argue here is that moving image machines, our object of study, themselves afford us special insight into the historical study of them. I started with the hunch that I would find special philosophical connections between the question of history and the question of the machine and later the institution, even from the beginning. This is because, as Canadians know, in 1904 there was the Historiograph Company.

1. HISTORIOGRAPHY AND THE HISTORIOGRAPH

It was the kinetograph and even the kinematograph, and later the Biograph, among other names, but it never really became the historiograph since ‘historiograph’ was only one of the possible names for the many early moving picture-making machines. In 1904, French Canadian Marie de Kerstrat and her son started the Historiograph Company in Montreal. And so, for a time, in Canada, the apparatus was the ‘historiograph’. Now there are two steps I want to take with this observation that the machine and the institution might have started with the name ‘historiograph’. The first step, as prefatory, follows Rick Altman’s insight that the identity of a technological innovation does not arrive with it; it is not immediately ‘what it is’, nor will it keep its first name. Thomas Edison may have considered calling his invention the ‘motograph’ and the “kinesigraph” before deciding on the kinetograph (the camera) and the kinetoscope (the viewing apparatus). The second step into our problem notes that the “historiograph”, the name it didn’t keep, tips us off that particular epistemological expectations attended the advent of this machine. As we know, the Lumière’s cinématographe was also received as having a privileged historical relation to an event, that event poised and ready to be mechanically collected and saved as a ‘past’ event. André Gaudreault addresses this phenomenon with his conceptual invention, “historiographicity”. In the term historiographicity, ‘historicity’ meets the historical world-making machine and the empirical machine confirms assumptions attached to the discipline called history. Here the term


3 In Altman’s ‘crisis historiography’ approach, categories of users, pushing and pulling, come to define the identity of the new technology: R. Altman, Silent Film Sound, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004, 16.


5 Gaudreault, The Cinematograph, 95.

6 What I will mean by ‘historicity’ is a combination of the definition of others. Koselleck holds that ‘historicity’ today is an “outline” of the “conditions of possibility” both “for” and “by” history, the discipline, and “history in general”; R. Koselleck, The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts, Stanford: University of California Press, 2002, 3. Rosen sees ‘historicity’ as having to do with the way that a written historiography is related to the past events it “claims to convey” as “history”; P. Rosen, Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001, 6.
‘historicity’, given its ‘metahistorical’ dimension, calls our attention to historiographic method conjoined with a world view. What, then, should be our historiographic method if the machine we study was for so long thought to have had a special relation to the ‘historiographable’ world in front of a camera? Shouldn’t film and media historiography itself be an especially knowing and self-aware historiography? A theoretically privileged historiography? We wonder if a historiography of the machine that was nearly named the ‘historiograph’ can provide methodological insight into history, the discipline.

In addition, there is the chronological convergence between modern history and the moving picture that encourages us to see shared aspirations. Vinzenz Hediger, returning us to the nineteenth century German ‘historism’, makes this connection when he says that for the historicists cinema was “The medium par excellence of the philosophy of history”. Because if we discover that the machine and the method once shared a philosophical stance, do we not also want to ask as much about the one as about the other? To parallel the philosophical with the institutional question? In the field, we have continued to study how the kinetograph became the cinématographe and then became the institution ‘cinema’ and this inquiry has been largely a historiographic one. However, in this same field we have yet to systematically ask, relative to the study of our object, how ‘history’, the discipline, became the production of ‘histories’ of the ‘historical’. In other words, although we may have sought to ‘historicize’ the historiographic machine, we also need, in Philip Rosen’s terms, to ‘historicize’ historiography. Rosen, one of the few film scholars who has considered this problem, finds shared pressures articulated in André Bazin’s theorization of motion picture film as having, like the discipline of history, a special relation to ‘reality’. As we well know, Bazin’s claims for the stunning advance of a then-new technology are assessed in terms of the cinema-reality relation. Fortunately, Rosen does not ignore the inconsistency in Bazin’s theory which holds two positions at apparent odds, espousing both the requisite “illusion of reality” and the not-at-all-illusory access to “the real”. The parallel is striking. Like Bazin, like the traditional historian. The traditional historian too creates the narrative illusion of adherence to past events, that same ‘reality’ to which he or she promises access.

Implicated here is the ‘historical turn’ in the field of film studies. How strange or more vernacular use may be satisfied with ‘historicity’ as something like the quality of being part of history, without, of course, confronting the ambiguity of the term ‘history’ as I will here. This wider usage might substitute ‘historicness’.

For the way in which ‘philosophy of history’ as well as ‘history itself’ appeared around 1770 and gradually the new term ‘historicity’ took on the ‘metahistorical’ aspect of these earlier terms, see Koselleck, The Practice of Conceptual History, 2.

While Hediger points to the nineteenth century ‘historism’ (historicism) that paralleled the invention, every reference to ‘historicism’ as well as to the ‘philosophy of history’ is not necessarily to the nineteenth century, and, as we will see, the ‘philosophy of history’ can stretch from G.W. Hegel to the followers of the contemporary Hayden White. V. Hediger, “Benjamin’s Challenge: If Art Is No Longer the Same After Cinema, then What about History?”, in F. Casetti, J. Gaines, eds., Proceedings from Dall’inizio, alla fine / In the Beginning and at the Very End , Udine International Film Studies Conference, XVI, Udine: Forum, 2010, 455-463. On ‘historism’, see H. White, Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe, Baltimore-New York: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973, 163-164.


Rosen, Change Mummified, 127.

Ibid., 11.

Ibid., 12-14.

how obvious that the ontology of motion picture film, our object of study, should itself have some bearing on our academic practices of research and writing as well as on moving image making, because this is what Rosen’s connection between Bazin and history implies. It would be as if we had come to think we could study the invention of moving pictures by means of the very frame of mind that defined that machine for its first viewers—‘living history’ achievement remarked upon by so many, including W.K.L. Dickson in his own later accounts. The idea of a living past may not have changed so very much over the cinema century if Vanessa Schwartz is right that “the dream of every historian [is] somehow to be present in the past”15. To be alive in the present of the past may be a vision of access to the full sensorium of signs in a lost time, a past time that we can only imagine. Only imagine? Yes, ‘only imagine’. Some may object to comparisons between dreaming and making historical narratives. However, the idea that the full availability of the past is ‘only in a dream’ should be liberating to the historian. Would that this historian could tell us what he or she most wants to find in the dream other than something approximating a ‘total history’ vision. For to ask what particular dreams of the past we choose to entertain today helps us to gain some critical distance on the ‘historical turn’ or, as it has also been called, the ‘empirical turn’.

Of what do historians dream today? Many historians of cinema envision precedents for the present as they look back to the turn of the twentieth century, in effect, studying the one time in order to know the other, certainly one of the motivations for the XVI Udine International Film Studies Conference titled Dall’inizio, alla fine / In the Beginning and at the Very End18. Francesco, I think, contributed to this formulation of the topic which, in retrospect, is a theorization that ‘keeps on giving’. For the conference that launched the Permanent Seminar on the Histories of Film Theories only raised the parallel moments question, a burning question that remains. What, we want to know, do we have when we look at the two historical moments, also the turns of two centuries? If the two turns are posed as “identical twins”, as Tom Gunning has suggested, we anticipate likeness, echo, recurrence. And yet if the twins “hail each other” it is not that they were somehow born alike. Of course it is that we have made them identical for our contemporary comparative purposes. So the methodological question is this: In such a comparative study, which of the two turns do we finally learn more about? As one response, to this question consider here Laura Mulvey’s assertion that the cinema today, not then, but today, holds the crucial philosophical key. As she puts it, “The cinema, refracted through the new technology […] suggests a metaphor for reflecting on the difficulty of understanding time and history”. Let us note first, however, what she hasn’t

16 See Rosen, Change Mummified, 66-67, on “total history” and “total cinema”.
17 A. Butler, “Feminist Perspectives in Film Studies”, in Donald, Renov, eds., The Sage Handbook of Film Studies, 397-398.
18 F. Casetti, J. Gaines, “Introduction: In the Beginning and At the Very End”, in Casetti, Gaines, eds., Proceedings from Dall’inizio, alla fine / In the Beginning and at the Very End , 17-18.
said as opposed to what she has said here. First, she hasn’t said that cinema as seen through the twenty-first century’s technologically newer media yields scientific knowledge or historical insights. Neither has she said that cinema, thus seen, stands for either ‘time’ or ‘history’ or the relation between the two. What she has said is that cinema seen anew is a useful metaphor for thinking about the “difficulty of understanding time and history”. Cinema thus ‘refracted’ is only a metaphor? Yes. But Mulvey’s most important point, I think, is not that cinema ‘refracted’ through technologically new media can be considered metaphorically. Rather it is that “understanding time and history” is a “difficulty”. Difficulty? How difficult? So difficult that such reflection on the metaphor might yield ‘nothing’? Yes, cinema seen through new technologies may tell us nothing at all about ‘time and history’. Then again, pushed in the present to think about events of the past relative to an unknown future, we inevitably come up against ‘time and history’ or what German Reinhart Koselleck, who sees himself as a theorist of history, takes up as historical time. To simplify this term, let us just say that it has to do with the relatedness of the three modes of time: past, present, future, the human invention we use to try to make sense of epic as well as small events.

In order to get a better grip on the problem of historical time it’s useful to start with the doubleness of ‘history’, the word and its concepts. I have observed before how theorists of history, from Martin Heidegger to Roland Barthes, Paul Ricoeur, Jacques Rancière, and Hayden White have scrutinized the ambiguities of the term ‘history’. I would go a step further here to call the political question. The confusion of ‘history’ as object of study with ‘history’ as the study of its object tells us flat out that this is the most ideological of concepts. Here is also the effacement of signs with a vengeance, a denial of the linguistic and literary aspects of written ‘history’ as well as the motion photographic or digital video rendering of ‘history’ by the moving image work, whether documentary recording or fictionalization of past events. Here in the double meaning of “history” as written or recorded events and their referent is the ultimate conflation of the world with the mimetic representation of it, a tendency that the field was well aware of when we took the ‘historical turn’. At that time, contemporary film theory had already critiqued the idea that motion photographic mimesis would “bring us the world” (because what we actually got was not really the world and what was brought to us was not so very much of it at all). If we thought that the Lumière’s claim to “bring us the world” was audacious, then what of the claim that historical narratives are themselves ‘history’? And what of the companion idea that the world in its totality could be “re-
stored to us” by cinema or contained in a written historical narrative? That idea, too, was put in check philosophically by film theorist Siegfried Kracauer. We can see now how Bazinian “total cinema” shares an expectation with ‘total history’ made especially vivid in Kracauer’s reference to the “giant film”, which, we recall, was his metaphor not for ‘history’ but for the way that historicism imagined the historic world25. Readers who recall that 1970s film theory was built on a foundation highly critical of historicism will correctly sense that I am revisiting the ‘anti-historicism’ that defined the 1970s position of the journal Screen26. To see the ‘crisis of historicism’ lingering as the “critique of representation” that became the ‘critique of realism’ brings the old historicism’s demise closer to home theoretically, revealing shared legacies starting with the Frankfurt School’s criticism and structuralism’s antipathy27.

We should wonder how ‘history’ could have come back into the study of motion pictures after such a thorough critique of it in the 1970s. To be fair, ‘history’ is not the only concept that has resisted the critique of it, stubbornly holding its place in the academy as well as in common parlance. Let us add to ‘history’ the conceptual stalwarts ‘time’ and ‘man’. By now, many academics are well schooled in the understanding of ‘time’ as a relatively new invention28. Likewise, the concept ‘man’, which could not be found before the eighteenth century, is “quite a recent creature”, as Michel Foucault asserted in his challenge to humanism29. Yet philosophy has not had much success in making the case for the relative newness of either ‘man’ or ‘time’ either, especially considering the resilience of academic humanism and the tyranny of the artificial temporalities that rule our lives. If scholars have had so little success getting critical distance on ‘man’ and ‘time’ they have had even less success with “history,” just as much a recent invention.

For the historical critique of history, I have relied on Koselleck whose work formulates for us the relative modern era newness as well as the enormous appetite of what he calls “history in general”30. History, thought in general, may be easier to pin down if we see it as the product of a late eighteenth century reversal, concentrated around 1760-


25 S. Kracauer, “Photography” [1963], in The Mass Ornament, Cambridge, Mass.-London: Harvard University Press 1995, 50. Bazin refers to “total cinema”, but see Rosen, Change Mummified, 66. Kracauer’s translator Thomas Levin (Kracauer, “Photography”, 354) believes that Kracauer was thinking of Wilhelm Dilthey as exemplifying the kind of historicist thought that subscribes to the possibility that historical reality can be understood «by reconstructing the course of events in their temporal succession without any gap» (ibid., 49). It is well known that Kracauer in History: The Last Things Before the Last, Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 1969, 3, written after A Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997, as well as the “Photography” essay, says that he had forgotten the comparison between photography and historicism that he had made before: «I realized in a flash the many existing parallels between history and photographic media, historical reality and camera-reality».

26 For a more complete discussion of anti-historicism in 1970s film theory, see Gaines, “Why We Took the ‘Historical Turn’”, 183.


28 Often cited to support this is S. Kern, The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918, Cambridge: Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985, also a history of inventions.


30 Koselleck insists that his work should not be considered ‘philosophy of history’ as the work of Hegel or Marx, but instead as making its contribution to the ‘theory of history’. Koselleck, The Practice of Conceptual History. On Koselleck’s conservativism and relation to Carl Schmidt who inspired his dissertation.
1780. Here, events would no longer be ordered relative to the astronomical chronology of the stars or the succession of divinely appointed rulers. Thinking of the separation of the Ancient World from the Middle Ages and the Middle Ages from the Modern World, we can follow the transformation from the plural Historie to Geschichte (an account), from Historie to what Koselleck calls the “collective singular” form of ‘history’ into which individual histories flow to become one, making all histories into ‘history’. All histories are ‘history’, and it is the ‘collective singular’ form of history that underwrites the hope of yesterday and today, supports the legacy of family and nation, the order of world cultures, that sustains so much. But sustains too much, really. This form, both “all and one”, shared as “our history”, easily takes hold in the nation state as “its history”. And what does “history” then confirm? “History”, as Hayden White observes, “would show that things are exactly the way they are supposed to be”. Think how much of ‘our history’ is contained in the wide swath of human affairs that falls under its ageis. It is a plan, the plan, as Koselleck explains, and as that plan it achieves its all-everythingness over all times. Thus to ‘history’, he says, we have attributed “the latent power of human events and suffering, a power that connected and motivated everything in accordance with a secret and evident plan to which one could feel responsible, or in whose name one could be acting”. No longer are past events important merely as lessons or examples to follow; now, in the relatively new notion of ‘history’, the point is to measure the “uniqueness” of events relative to something else with which ‘history’ had become nearly synonymous – none other than the “processes of progress”. We are already aware of the highly ideological understanding of “history as progress”. But the power to “connect and motivate” absolutely everything? The all-encompassingness of this concept – ‘history’ – is astonishing. It would seem to be the mother of all modern humanist concepts, for of course it is human history that is so enveloping. Again, the collectively singular ambiguity allows ‘history’ to be both unique events ‘swallowed up’ in ‘history’ and the sum of those events. It would seem from this achieved ubiquity that there is nothing that is not ‘history’. Aware of the tendency to ubiquity, theorists of history are interested in formulations that put old habits in check. This then is also the place to raise the worry found in technological history circles about the tendency to teleological thought. Our question about what ‘old’ media tells us about ‘new’ media is implicated here as because ‘old to new’ is so often critiqued as a teleological exercise in explaining where things came from by looking at how they end up. On this issue Koselleck is agnostic. He asks us to rethink the problem of teleological arguments, in our case, the kind of case in which earlier inventions add up to cinema, their culmination, at which point a pattern becomes clear. Each device has made its incremental contribution to “what cinema is” which is but from whom he also set himself apart, see N. Olsen, History in the Plural: An Introduction to the Work of Reinhart Koselleck, New York-Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012, 23-26.

Ibid., 33-34.  
33 Koselleck, The Practice of Conceptual History, 35.  
Ibid., 36.  
34 Ibid., 36.  
35 Koselleck has given more precision to Heidegger who in his third and fourth meanings of “history,” the expression, finds that it connects the «past», «present», and «future», and then, more momentously, encompasses the «whole of beings that change». M. Heidegger, Being and Time [1927], Albany: SUNY Press, 1996, 347.
how we know that it is, after all, ‘cinema’. Koselleck wants to know what the problem is with this. What else would we do? Teleology, he thinks, is unavoidable for the historian for whom everything is always ex post facto anyway. Today, then, following recent research, the kinetograph-kinetoscope invention is retrospectively understood as the prototype for the cinématographe. But it may be argued as well that new moving image machines like the iPhone are the end point of the kinetograph-kinetoscope. But, as we know, new hand held moving image machines of today may no longer be considered a part of ‘cinema’ and its predecessor components at all. Now these viewing machines can even start to part company. For the present ‘death of cinema’ moment can be read as the opposite of openness to the future – a restriction of the possibilities for ‘cinema’. Or, in contrast, the ‘death of cinema’ moment may be interpreted as open to a future for ‘cinema’ as opposed to some other technological apparatus although perhaps, to return to Altman where we started, whatever apparatus will go by another name. Or the later apparatus will reconceptualize and even ‘re-name’ the earlier. And here is where Francesco Casetti’s conceptualization of, for instance, the “relocation of cinema to the iPhone”, comes in. Because as historians who are also theorists know, “whatever it is” is never just a matter of “what it is”. Francesco Casetti is one of the few theorists engaged in the ‘death of cinema’ debates to get out in front of the “what is it” issue. He has not waited to see “what it is”, knowing as he does, that it will never be “what it is”, but that it will be what we say that it is, that is, what we theorize it to be. Or at least he will be remembered as having been there at the inception of ‘whatever’, and he will be read by theorists of communications technologies as having weighed in, having offered as he has such powerful conceptualizations.

Why am I giving the advantage in the ‘death of cinema’ debates to the theoretical approach? For one thing, the elasticity of critique in the realm of theory stretches to encompass the problem of historiographic practice. If one follows Foucault’s invocation to think of discourses as not just concepts but as ‘practices’ that “form the objects of which they speak”, this puts another set of teeth into critique. While Foucault’s notion...
of discourses as “practices” may have initially served to counter institutional power, it is not only that his work puts institutions in check. Discourse analysis is much more than that and hits closer to home, so to speak, because we are also implicated – that is, the scholar’s academic practice is taken to task. Or so the thinking goes from within fields now transformed by post-structuralism. And from within those transformed fields, one might ask, for instance, how anyone could miss the redundancy in the concept ‘narrative history’. One marvels at the synonymity of the conventions of detailed telling that work to make readers think that ‘history’ isn’t ‘history’ if it isn’t doesn’t take a narrative form. But my goal here is not to offer yet another critique of narrative history, concurring as I do with Vivian Sobchack who maintains that this criticism is now “common knowledge”.

If anti-historicism in the 1970s meant devaluing empirical research, then turning to empiricism and away from film theory meant disassociation from the philosophy of history with which, as it turns out, film theory shares a legacy. The easiest intellectual strategy for reintroducing this legacy is to say that film theory’s critique of realism was heir to the nineteenth century crisis of historicism played out over the first decades of the European twentieth century and surfacing in Screen theory’s ‘anti-historicism’. But many intellectual currents flowed into the 1970s film theory renunciation of realism(s) from the French structuralist critique of the nouveau roman to Brechtian political avant-gardeism. I want to return, however, to the stream of Althusserian Marxism, and the ‘anti-historicism’ that was so influential in 1970s film theory. For Louis Althusser offered two theoretical options, approaches to the problem of history in his Outline of a Concept of Historical Time. Familiar may be his attack on the “ideological obviousness of the continuity of time” and the “continuum of time that only needed to be punctuated and divided”. It was ‘linearity’ that the field focused on, inspiring David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson to ask: “What would a non-linear history of American silent film look like?”.

Against linearity, however, Althusser poses a “complex and peculiar temporality” which he contrasts with the “simplicity” of the “ideological continuum”. And to

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46 R. Sklar, “Oh! Althusser!: Historiography and the Rise of Cinema” [1988], in C. Musser, R. Sklar, eds., Resisting Images Essays on Cinema and History, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990, 12-35 (22), argued that within the field the notion of ‘history’ came not from any practicing historian but from Louis Althusser’s critique in the Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses essay. While Sklar’s point that the prohibition against ‘history’ meant that models of historiographic method were not studied may be valid, we can also take his point in the other direction. With the ‘historical turn’ (away) the field lost connection with theories of history. Sklar was not alone in making this point about the need for more historiographic rigor. For an overview of the “new film history” and its emphasis on verifiable data and the inclusion of new kinds of evidence (beyond films) see T. Elsaesser, “The New Film History”, Sight and Sound, 55, 4 (1984): 246-251, and Id., “General Introduction: Early Cinema: From Linear History to Mass Media Archaeology”, in T. Elsaesser, A. Barker, eds., Early Cinema: Space/Frame/Narrative, London: British Film Institute, 1990, 1-8 (3).


Althusser that “peculiar temporality” is “utterly paradoxical”\(^{49}\). Where have we heard something like this before? Well, it sounds rather like Heidegger, thirty years earlier in *Being and Time*, like Heidegger but of course with the addition of the concept of ideology\(^{50}\). So what I want to suggest, in case my reader hasn’t already guessed, is that 1970s film theory picked up Althusser’s critique of linearity but not his metaphor of the ‘peculiar’ construction of historical time. And just acknowledging this very peculiarity in which past, present, and future trade places, refusing to line up, helps us to address more than two times at once. This would be to think comparative historical moments not as one following the other, but as ‘in’ and ‘out’, ‘back again’, and ‘all at once’. I’ve always thought that Francesco Casetti was acknowledging something of this sort when he concludes his essay on the question of film theory relative to the transformation of its object with this provocation: “Theory has not vanished: it is in disguise. It plays hide and seek”\(^{51}\).

In closing, let me repeat Antonia Dickson’s question on the final page of *History of the Kinetograph, Kinetoscope, and Kineto-phonograph*: “What is the future of the kinetograph?”\(^{52}\). Now try to think the Dickson’s relation to the cinema century ahead, their much anticipated future, relative to our reception of digital cinema and networked technologies. Think, as a parallel, what expectations today accompany the ‘digital turn’. Are we asking ourselves the question: “What is the future of the digital?” Or not. Yet if we compare these two turns, a whole century apart, something about them is definitely not the same. With a gesture towards Koselleck on *historical time*, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht now diagnoses in a shift from the future as highly expected to the future as effectively out of reach. Furthermore, and quite strangely, Gumbrecht’s now ‘inaccessible’ future is accompanied by an obsession with the artifacts of the past\(^{53}\).

For a moment we might be tempted to think we have in this theory of *historical time* (Koselleck) and its critic (Gumbrecht), a more objective measure of changing times. But no. Koselleck actually makes things more complicated since he holds that there will always be more than one historical time and that therefore we now live or have lived according to different temporal structures at one and the same time\(^{54}\). That is, while at any one time some continue to live according to a sense that time is eternal, unchanged since antiquity, others may be facing towards a future\(^{55}\). No, we are not handed a key in either Koselleck or in Gumbrecht’s update of him that will help us to resolve the tension between ‘technoutopianism’ and the ‘death of cinema’ nostalgia of our times. But at least we should be emboldened not only to research historical events and inventions but to concurrently develop as many theories of such histories and histories of these theories as we can.

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\(^{49}\) Althusser, *Reading Capital*, 103.

\(^{50}\) Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 101.

\(^{51}\) Casetti, “Theory, Post-theory, Neo-theories”, 44.

\(^{52}\) Dickson, Dickson, “History of the Kinetograph, Kinetoscope, and Kineto-phonograph”, 52.


\(^{54}\) This capacity to live according to more than one configuration of historical time would be Koselleck’s answer to Gumbrecht who thinks that historical time is part of an old construct and who, borrowing both Danto and Koselleck, argues that the “asymmetry” between the “horizon of expectations” (the future) and the “space of experience” (the past) sets the present up to learn from the past (ibid., 120). While I concur with Gumbrecht’s wariness of “lessons” from history, I would argue that he has read Koselleck selectively.

\(^{55}\) Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 3-4.