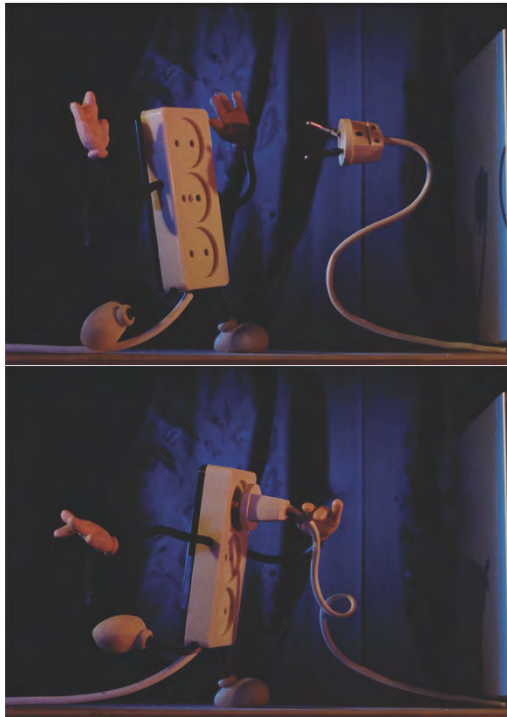

HOLLAND TUNNEL:

LOCKDOWN IN THE ARTHOUSE FROM AMSTERDAM TO NYC

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If the unique film cultures of New York City and Amsterdam, with their indefatigable arthouse cinemas and dedicated audiences, have managed to resist the total takeover of video-on-demand streaming services in recent years, social distancing guidelines imposed last March have made the shift as inescapable in these cities as anywhere. Netflix hit record stock price during the early months of the pandemic, when viewership was expected to rise during quarantine, and their stock has since continued to

grow overall (Bary). In a May 2020 study, 70% of participants responded they would rather stream content at home than go to the cinema (Vary), and the timing of HBO Max's launch seems uncannily well-timed in hindsight. While business is clearly booming for these and other major streaming platforms, smaller film venues around the world are likewise finding innovative ways to connect users to online content during the pandemic.

The Eye Film Institute in Amsterdam is a “museum, archive, national film institute, art house, and commercial cinema complex” representing a new focus on film culture in the Netherlands (A New Dutch Focus on Film). Founded in 1946 as the Dutch Historical Film Archive, and renamed in 1975 as the Netherlands Filmmuseum, Eye Film Institute was given its current name when relocated to newly-constructed facilities in 2012. The Eye is one of only a handful of European film museums that offer evolving, temporary exhibits, and has been compared to the Cinematek in Brussels, the German Film Institute in Frankfurt, the Museo Nazionale del Cinema in Turin, and the Cinematheque Francaise in Paris. Eye operates four state-of-the-art screening rooms, built around a 13,000 sq. ft. gallery space, where movie exhibits and visual arts are showcased (A New Dutch Focus on Film). Since lockdown measures were imposed last year, the Institute's physical location has been temporarily shuttered, and all remaining programs have been moved online.

At the top of the Eye Film [website](#) is a rotating banner of images and text, with the first image explaining their closure. A full explanation is given in Dutch only, and a quick translation reveals that no definite reopening date has been planned. Next in the rotation is publicity for an online film program entitled *Waiting for the Time to Pass*, followed by an announcement for the new *Eye Film Player*, and a link to watch new releases on a streaming service called *Picl*.

¹ Image Credit: Koopman, Maarten. “A Little Night Music.” *Eye Film Player*, 2021.

Below the banner is a series of thumbnail links for online offerings. Clicking on *Watch: at home:* redirects to a new page listing *Eye Film Player*, *Picl*, *Collection Filmdatabase*, and *Our Collection on YouTube*.

“*Eye Film Player* is a new streaming platform where you can watch a growing selection of titles from Eye’s collection on demand” (Frequently Asked). Films range in date from the early 1920s through the early 2000s. Currently there are 87 films available for streaming on the player, 39 of which are free, with the other 48 being subject to a rental fee. Accounts must be created to access paid content, but free offerings are available without login. Accounts are free to create, and enable pay-per-view rental at the rate of € 3.50 per title for 48 hours. Videos are available in a variety of resolutions, up to and including high-definition 1080p.

Thumbnail links for individual titles redirect to a dedicated page for each clip or compilation; each dedicated webpage is bannered with a still image from the clip, and includes a description of the film, the movement to which it belongs, and/or the filmmaker’s oeuvre more broadly. Also included are basic metadata, such as director’s name, year of release, country of origin, duration, sound, language, subtitles, genre and topic, and content rating. The website’s interface allows users to filter search results based on genre, topic, spoken language, and subtitles.

I watched a number of the Eye Film Player’s [free films](#), and to be sure, there are some gems here. A 1988 stop-motion animation, *de Kast* (The Cabinet), the English title of which has been changed to *A Little Night Music*, tells the story of some unruly household objects and figurines who live together in the cabinet, and, unbeknownst to their human owner, play music together under cover of darkness. The nocturnal characters cause havoc for which the resident cat (a real one) is blamed, throttled, and ejected from the window by its unnamed and faceless master. As the cat plummets towards the pavement

below, a dreamy dissolve reveals that the animal was only having a nightmare. The audience breathes a collective sigh of relief, then shudders at the realization that the miniature ne’er-dowells are indeed up to something, and will soon be back to their old tricks. I predict that, should a sequel be made, the cat’s relief at waking from its dream will ultimately prove transient.

Streamed using the player’s highest quality setting (6 Mbps/1080p) this film-to-digital transfer looks excellent. Though the information is not listed in the clip’s metadata section, this film was likely transferred from a 16mm reel in almost pristine condition. Scratches to the film base and emulsion, if present on the source roll, have been very successfully remedied, either by traditional photochemical means prior to transfer, or by digital means after. Most likely, given the film’s relatively young age, there was little to no damage to begin with. Colors have remained vivid, with vibrant reds, and enchanting gradations of pink, purple, and green.

Another noteworthy clip among the Institute’s free film offerings is a compilation entitled *Amsterdam on Film*, which consists of four individual shorts filmed between 1914 and 1927. The films, in order of appearance, are *Beautiful Amsterdam* (Alex Bonno, 1927); *Amsterdam – Water Festivities and Rowing Races* (1917); *Visit of the Royal Couple to Amsterdam* (1921); and *Amsterdam: In and Around the Harbour* (1914). Overall, these selections exhibit more of a sightseeing than a city-symphony gaze: edits are infrequent, and serve not as artistic devices, but simply communicate the various changes in location as the camera moves through the neighborhoods of Amsterdam.

No musical accompaniment has been added to these silent pictures, and little if any image correction has been performed. Scratches, jumps in the gate, and other defects have been left in the video, and the first film in the compilation shows significant nitrate decay and/or water damage. This is only natural, considering the age

of the films, and, much like the transfer of *A Little Night Music*, the quality of these digital images is superb, even on a mediocre display. The Eye collaborates with many film organizations worldwide, and hosts many events, including, last year, our beloved Orphan Film Symposium. Currently, they have partnered with Anthology Film Archives in New York to screen a number of recently-restored Dutch avant-garde films.

Anthology Film Archives was established in 1970 to showcase the Essential Cinema Repertory, a selection of films that would screen continuously and “encourage the study of the medium’s masterworks as works of art rather than disposable entertainment” (cite). This project was never completed, but has remained a key component of Anthology’s programming since the archive opened. In the decades since, Anthology’s mission has expanded to include film and video preservation, as well as a reference library of stills and paper materials related to avant-garde cinema. Anthology is in the midst of a renovation and expansion project, while their cinemas plan a gradual reopening. Like Eye Film Institute, Anthology has made its programming available online until then.

Anthology’s [homepage](#), like Eye’s, explains that their physical location is closed until further notice. A slideshow banner shows current exhibitions, and links out to online offerings. Anthology is currently celebrating its 50th anniversary, and has thus been streaming a number of films by, or about, one of the archive’s founding members, Jonas Mekas. This program concluded earlier in March, and Anthology is now streaming [There Are No Rules!](#) a series of film-to-digital restorations of Dutch post-war experimental films. *There Are No Rules!* was co-curated by the Eye Filmmuseum’s Simona Monizza (restorer and curator of artist’s films); Mark-Paul Meyer (senior curator); and Marius Hrdy (former curator-in-residence at the Eye in 2018). The program is presented by Dutch Culture USA, the Stadsarchief Rotterdam, the Frans Zwartjes Foundation, and the Fonds Henri

Storck. It has been extended through Tuesday, March 23rd, for \$1.00 per program. Monizza, Meyer, and Hrdy participated in an online discussion on the subject of this series, which is available to view free of charge on Anthology’s Vimeo page [here](#).

Among the programs featured in the *No Rules!* Series are a number of experimental works by Dutch artist and filmmaker Henri Plaat. The second program, *The Poetics of Memory and Decay*, is comprised of 7 shorts totaling 75 minutes, and is available, like the other programs in the series, for a rental fee of \$1.00. “From the absurd to the surreal, Plaat playfully examines the theatrical quality of wonder, often through associative improvisation, contrasted with the crude reality of the haunting wars that ravaged Europe” (Hrdy; Meyer). Plaat’s works are eerily vaudevillian (is vaudeville ever *not* eerie?) with notes of ugly hallucination and violence. Rhythm and montage are central, and the Dutch artist’s look at the city in *Fashion From New York* (1980), seems an especially perfect fit in this marriage of Amsterdam and New York film cultures.

The only other film currently available through Anthology’s website is called *The Shape of Things to Come* (Malloy and Sniadecki 2020). This 77-minute neo-western, hosted on the virtual cinema platform *Projectr*, profiles a reclusive survivalist named Sundog, and “puts precedence on the sensory materiality of the desert” (*A Shape of Things to Come*). Sundog prepares to defend his desert kingdom as border patrol agents encroach further into his realm, suggesting “a post-collapse reality of off-the-grid existence” (*A Shape of Things to Come*). Anthology has not published plans for their upcoming online programming – with any luck, it won’t be online at all.

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