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Cinematic Rotterdam: the times and tides of a modern city

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CHAPTER 1. THE EMERGENCE OF CINEMA IN ROTTERDAM

§ 1. early cinema in Rotterdam

The beginning of cinema in Rotterdam was characterised by a clustering of small enterprises. Clustering reduces the costs of transactions, transportation, research and so on, while it enables standardisation, regulation, trust and knowledge spillover (Scott, 2000, 2005). Clustering relies, to an important degree, upon the socialisation of employees who share certain values; the industry is part of a local culture. Within economic geography this is called ‘Marshallian atmosphere’, after British economist Alfred Marshall (1842-1924)⁸¹. He gave his name also to the ‘Marshall externalities’. These are inter-firm linkages within the cluster, through which concentration and specialisation occur⁸². They are different from ‘Jacobs externalities’, called after Jane Jacobs (1969), who has pointed to connections with external economies that imply economic and urban diversification. Her thesis states that interaction with other branches leads to creativity and innovation and thus growth. However, these poles of externalities do not exclude each other: spillover can occur between firms within a sector, but also between sectors⁸³. Of a relatively small calibre, we can observe such processes in Rotterdam too.

On the 8th of August 1896, the French entrepreneurs Alexis Werner and his son Michel were the first to present film in Rotterdam⁸⁴. In the next year, films became a regular part of the Circus-Variété of the former German opera singer Carl Pfläging⁸⁵. The Casino Variété of Samuel Soesman followed, which was the first to show film images of Rotterdam: WATERPARTIJ OP DEN KRALINGSCHEN PLAS (1898)⁸⁶. More recordings followed, which were all made by the Austrian operator Stefan Hofbauer (1867-1914), who worked for Casino for about fifteen years, until his early death⁸⁷. He can be considered as the first important filmmaker in Rotterdam. His work includes street views and panoramas and entertaining images of fairs and parties, but he also set off to shoot, for example, an accident, a visit of a prominent guest, the launching of a ship, or a memorial that got unveiled⁸⁸. Such subjects became typical for newsreels later on, and these reports can thus be considered as their precursors.

It is notable that foreigners and Jews were among the first cinema entrepreneurs in Rotterdam, but this was not exclusively the case. In 1900, the Christian preacher A. Weltevreden organised evangelic film screenings⁸⁹. The young Dutch film pioneer Willy Mullens (•1880-†1953) came with a travelling film show, while he also made images of Rotterdam⁹⁰. Soon afterwards, in October 1903, the first permanent cinema in the Netherlands was opened by Frans

⁸¹ I.e. *Principles of Economics* (1890); *Industry and Trade* (1919). His ideas influenced many (Fan & Scott, 2003).

⁸² See: Fan, C. Cindy & Scott, Allen, J.; ‘Industrial agglomeration and development: A survey of spatial economic issues in East Asia and a statistical analysis of Chinese regions’, *Economic Geography*, Vol 79/3 (July 2003), pp. 295-319. www.sscnet.ucla.edu/geog/downloads/597/208.pdf

⁸³ Cf. Brouwer e.a., 2006.

⁸⁴ See: Berg (1996: 37). For further information on the Werner company, see: www.victorian-cinema.net/werner.htm (visited 2005). Herbert, Stephen, ‘Alexis, Michel and Eugène Werner’, in: *Who’s Who of Victorian Cinema*, BFI, 1996.

⁸⁵ The first programme was shown 1897-11-17, called the American Bioscope (Berg, 1996: 37). Pfläging also showed the first film images recorded in Rotterdam, which was a cinematic self-portrait: HET WELGELIJKENDE CONTERFEITSSEL VAN DEN DIRECTEUR – CARL PFLÄGING – DOOR DEN BIOSCOPE (1897-12-17). An example of another film recorded in Rotterdam and shown at the Circus-Variété is FEESTELIJK BEZOEK VAN H.M. DE KONINGIN WILHELMINA AAN ROTTERDAM (1899, Emile Lauste). See: Donaldson, 1980; for information on Pfläging: Berg, 1996: 38-39.

⁸⁶ First programme on the 14th of October 1898, called the Royal Bioscope (Berg, 1996: 173). Soesman was the stage name; Suisman was the actual family name (www.cinemacontext.nl 2007-08-29)

⁸⁷ Early recordings by Hofbauer include KIIKJE OP DE ROTTERDAMSCH BEURS OP VRIJDAG 19 MEI 1899, and LEVEND DRAAIEND PANORAMA VAN DE MAASBRUG EN DE MAASKADE (june 1899). See: Donaldson, 1980: 36-41. See also: www.nfdb.nl > Hofbauer, Stefan (2007-08-29)

⁸⁸ E.g. SPOORWEGONGELUK STATION DELFTSCHEPOORT, 1899; INTOCHT PAUL KRUGER TE ROTTERDAM, 1901; HET VAN STAPEL LOOPEN VAN HET VIERMAST BARKSCHIP ‘GEERTRUIDA GERARDA’ GEBOUWD OP DE WERF V/D. HEEREN J. & K. SMIT, KRIMPEN A/D. LEK, 1904, ONTHULLING CALAND-MONUMENT ROTTERDAM, 1907 – all by Stefan Hofbauer.

⁸⁹ Berg, 1996: 173.

⁹⁰ E.g. PAUL KRUGER TE ROTTERDAM OP HET VREDENOORDPLEIN, and DE MAASBRUG TE ROTTERDAM (1901, Mullens)

Goeman in the *Tivoli-Wintertuin* at the Coolingsingel⁹¹. After 1908, cinema became a booming business. It was also the time that the first fiction film was made in Rotterdam: EEN ROTTERDAMSCH HEERTJE, VOOR 'T EERST OP DEN PLAS, produced by the Moderne Bioscope Theater Transvalia.

The rapidly developing business of cinema in Rotterdam and the first film productions that came along with it are manifestations of an agglomeration economy.

The propensity of firms in cultural-products sectors to converge together in distinctive spatial clusters within the city is above all a reflection of an organizational structure in which each individual unit of production is organically caught up in a wider system of socioeconomic interactions, on which it depends for survival. Above all, firms have a strong incentive to come together in communities or ecologies within the city because mutual proximity often greatly enhances the availability of agglomeration economies and increasing-returns effects (...). (Scott, 2005: 6)

Scott is interested how new economic models and structures develop in this process. This is not a description of events, but a sort of 'natural history', an evolutionary movement (Scott, 2005: 1).

During the next ten years, between 1908 and 1918, about twenty-five cinemas were established in the city, with J.F. Strengholt as one of the key players, who established the Apollo Bioscope (1909) and various others⁹². But he faced strong competition, especially from the Belgian Jean Desmet⁹³. When Desmet opened Cinéma Parisien, in 1909, he distributed 100,000 free tickets, hence free screenings for about three months⁹⁴. Since Desmet had noticed the enthusiasm for the fiction film EEN ROTTERDAMSCH HEERTJE, he produced another one himself (HET ORAKEL, 1910), which again attracted substantial attention. He quickly extended his business to Amsterdam⁹⁵, and reinforced his position in Rotterdam, by establishing *Cinéma Royal* (1913). Again he knew how to attract visitors, by producing another feature film shot in Rotterdam: DER GEHEIMNISVOLLE KLUB (1913), directed by the Austrian Joseph Delmont⁹⁶. In the mean time, other cinemas started to produce fiction films as well, like Casino-Variété, with the comedy ROTTERDAM OP HOL! ("Rotterdam runaway!", 1912, Leon Boedels)⁹⁷.

Within a year after its opening, Desmet sold Cinéma Royal to another cinema pioneer in the Netherlands: Abraham Tuschinski (•1886-†1942), a Jewish immigrant from Poland. He went to Rotterdam in 1904 with the intention to go to America, but he stayed and started to work as a tailor. Tuschinski saved money and established a small guesthouse for migrants like himself. He subsequently started a cinema, called Thalia (1911)⁹⁸. After less than a year he had to sell it to the municipality, since a new town hall was planned there (1912-1920, arch. Henri Evers). Tuschinski made a good deal⁹⁹ and with the money purchased not only the Cinéma Royal of Desmet, but also the Scala Theater from Emanuel Korozinsky, another Jewish immigrant from Poland. More take-overs would follow, while he extended his business to Amsterdam as well. This was the beginning of the prosperous Tuschinski enterprise.

⁹¹ It was called the Royal American Bioscope. The first programme was on the 10th of October 1903 (Berg, 1996: 174).

⁹² His firm was called Strengholt & Co., encompassing the Apollo Bioscope (1909), Hollandia Bioscope (1910), Bioscope Américain (1911), zie: Berg, 1996: 174.

⁹³ For more information on Desmet, see: Blom, 2003.

⁹⁴ Berg, 1996: 39. There was especially a strong competition between J. Desmet and F. Strengholt.

⁹⁵ By establishing Cinéma Parisien (1910); Blom, 2003.

⁹⁶ For more information about this film: Donaldson, 1997: 110. Previously, Desmet had also produced the film HET ORAKEL (1910), which was shown in Cinema Parisien. Next to that, he also showed registrations of events taking place in the city, e.g. ONAFHANKELIJKHEIDSFESTEN TE ROTTERDAM, OP MAANDAG 17 NOVEMBER 1913 – for more information on this film, see: Albers, 2004: 260.

⁹⁷ It was produced by Philip Soesman, who succeeded his brother Samuel as the director of Casino-Variété. He asked Leon Boedels to direct the film, who had already made fiction films for Filmfabriek F. A. Nöggerath in Amsterdam.

⁹⁸ See: André van der Velden (2004: 93-96) for a more detailed description and analysis of this history.

⁹⁹ Berg, 1996: 22.

Although Tuschinski was the most successful, his history is similar to those of other East-European Jews¹⁰⁰. It was part of a larger immigration trend, since Rotterdam used to be a ‘transitopolis’¹⁰¹. Especially after 1880, many people came to Rotterdam on their way to the booming cities of America. During WWI, people from various countries came to Rotterdam as refugees¹⁰². This explains the presence of Tuschinski and his colleagues, among them his brothers-in-law Hermann Gerschtanowitz and Hermann Ehrlich. Furthermore of interest is the case of Karl Weisbard (1877-1943), who came also from Poland and who also started to work as a tailor¹⁰³. He gradually extended his firm to have a fur workshop, which in turn brought him enough money to have some savings. In 1917, he established the Prinses Theater, together with Aron Chermoeck, who had left Russia in 1907, and who had begun as a tailor too. This theatre became a success, and Weisbard sold his tailor’s firm. Differently from the others, he wanted to build an entirely new theatre, especially designed for cinema. To that end he established the real estate company *Het Westen NV*¹⁰⁴. Through the tightly-knit Jewish community, he became acquainted with the architect Jacob van Gelderen (•1888-†1944)¹⁰⁵, who designed the ‘Wester Bioscoop’ (W.B. Theatre)¹⁰⁶. Van Gelderen designed a modern cinema, with 1200 seats and a large, free suspended balcony. When it had been finished, in 1919, he immediately established his name as an architect within the cinema business in Rotterdam, and as a result he was asked to design the Ooster Theater (1919-1921)¹⁰⁷.

city news

Fiction films made up the main part of the cinema programmes¹⁰⁸. But there was also an interest in local issues, which was already demonstrated by Casino Variété. They became the subject of well-made documentary shorts and newsreels, which were shown as part of the regular programmes. Early examples include reports by Pathé Frères, from the early 1910s, on events like aviation shows and football matches¹⁰⁹. Following Soesman, some cinema entrepreneurs started

¹⁰⁰ André van der Velden, 2004.

¹⁰¹ For general information on the Jewish community in Rotterdam vis-à-vis Jewish immigrants: Van de Laar, 2000: 194.

¹⁰² See: Van de Laar, 2000: 189-196. He mentions, for example, that in the year before WWI (1913), 80,000 people left from Rotterdam to the USA, mainly coming from Russia and Austria-Hungary. Besides that, there existed in Rotterdam a significant German minority already for a long time. Among the people coming to Rotterdam during WWI were many Belgians, as well as Russians (especially in the years 1917-1919).

¹⁰³ www.cinemacontext.nl/id/P001809 > personen > Weisbard > bioscopen (2007-09-19). For information on Chermoeck: Berg, 1996: 43. According to Van de Laar (p194), Tuschinski and his colleagues did not escape pogroms.

¹⁰⁴ See: www.cinemacontext.nl/id/P001809 > personen > Weisbard (visited: 2007-09-19), with a reference to the newspaper advertisement: ‘Wegens opheffing van mijn zaak – totale uitverkoop’, in: NRC, 1918-01-14. Weisbard sold his stock and supplies of his tailor’s firm and fur workshop.

¹⁰⁵ Jacob van Gelderen was born in Schiedam. He grew up in Schiedam and Vlaardingen within a Jewish milieu. His father was a butcher. He got married in London when he was twenty five years old, which might be an indication that he studied there as well. His work, at least, reflected international developments – based upon the data provided by: Muntjewerff, Henk A., *Descendants of Mozes Salomon van Emden*, Breda, Nov. 2003 www.home.zonnet.nl/h.muntjewerff/genealogy/mozesvanemden/mozes.htm.

Van Gelderen was one of the four partners of Weisbard, see: André van der Velden, 2004: 97.

¹⁰⁶ On its façade was written ‘W.B. Theatre’, but it has also been written as ‘WB-Theater’. It was located at Nieuwe Binnenweg 326. It was rebuilt in 1962, and is now an evangelic centre. Berg, 1996: 171.

¹⁰⁷ Berg, 1996: 25. The commissioner and owner of the cinema was Frans Berkhout. Its architecture received a positive critique in the NRC; see: Blok, 1985: 27. The theatre was located at the St.Janstraat 21; destroyed during WWII.

¹⁰⁸ All the cinemas mentioned here showed commercial feature films, both from the Netherlands and abroad. Since 1913 they got subjected to the municipal censor, which had been installed after a report by a committee that concluded that most of the films were morally inferior. In the meantime the municipality carried out a ‘civilisation offensive’. In 1913 a report was published by the municipal cinema committee, which concluded that most of the presented films were morally inferior. As a result it installed, as the first city in the Netherlands, a municipal censor (until 1928, when it became a national concern). See: De Wit, 1991.

¹⁰⁹ I.e. SENSATIONEELE VliegDemonstratie door den Franschen Luchtacrobaat PÉGOUD (1912) and DE FOOTBALLMATCH ROTTERDAM – ARNHEM (1913). For more examples, see filmography: Pathé Frères.

to produce such reports and documentary shorts themselves, particularly Tuschinski, from 1916¹¹⁰. He also showed football matches, as well as demonstrations by the army, aviation shows, and reports on accidents, such as the ravage after a ship had collided into the old 'Koningsbrug' (1918)¹¹¹. Such reports provided feedback to the city, as the latter illustrates. It amplified the problem of the bridge that was too low, which contributed to the decision to build a new bridge, which would become *De Hef* (1924-1927, Pieter Joosting)¹¹².

The reports began by being made irregularly; only exceptional events were reported. Around 1920, Tuschinski increased the numbers of reports, which were shown under the heading of *Stadsnieuws* ("City News")¹¹³. One of them is about 'the first marriage in the new town hall' (1920), as the title says. The report is not without wit, if one recalls the fact that the construction of the town hall had actually enabled Tuschinski to build his empire. While other reports covered issues like fire in the port (1920) or the visit of the queen mother to Rotterdam (1921), some of them also promoted the Tuschinski-concern, such as a report on the visit of the German movie star Lil Dagover to the Grand Théâtre¹¹⁴. Next to that, Tuschinski also premiered exceptional images of the city; in 1921, for example, shortly after Airport Waalhaven had been opened, he took the opportunity to have the city shot from the air, which was a real novelty at the time (with views of Rotterdam, Schiedam, Vlaardingengen and Maassluis). In addition, Tuschinski also produced other kinds of films, which were not necessarily related to Rotterdam, like travelogues and fiction shorts. Yet, film production remained merely an additional concern to him.

Like Tuschinski, Weisbard also started to produce shorts. An early example, made when the W.B. Theatre was ready, is a report on the zoo (DIERGAARDE, 1919, Karl Weisbard). At the beginning of the film we briefly see Weisbard himself, feeding birds. The film shows various animals and the different sections of the zoo. Special attention is paid to its architecture, including the 'grand rock' with a watch tower, glass-houses with exotic plants, the spacious and stylish club house (*sociëteitsgebouw*), the birdhouse, and the musical chapel. Besides such films, Weisbard began to produce newsreels for his so-called *W.B. revue*¹¹⁵. The first one (1920) also dealt with the new town hall; it reported on a race between just married couples from the town hall to *Café de Witte Ballons* about one kilometre away.

The reports were made by either Weisbard himself or the operators of the W.B. Theatre, among them Max Vis, who became responsible for it after 1925¹¹⁶. Once the recordings were made, they were immediately developed, and shown in the evening programmes of the W.B. Theatre as well as cinema Luxor¹¹⁷. Most of the reports concerned celebrations and sports events, like a motor tour, a *concours hippique*, and football matches (all 1921). A remarkable report is about, as the title says, 'the largest cinema of Rotterdam under construction' (1921). It was the Grand Théâtre Pompenburg (1922), which was also designed by Van Gelderen and

¹¹⁰ See filmography > Tuschinski.

¹¹¹ I.e. VOETBALWEDSTRIJD 'SPARTA' OP 16 SEPTEMBER (1917), DE LEGERDAG TE ROTTERDAM (1916), GROOTE VLIEGDEMONSTRATIE OP WOUDENSTEIN (1919), HET ONGELUK MET DEN SPOORBRUG OVER DE KONINGSHAVEN (1918).

¹¹² On the accident causing the awareness of the need to build a new bridge, see also: Van de Laar, 2000: 281.

¹¹³ Most likely, these reports were made by Tuschinski's chief operator John Meulkens, see filmography: Tuschinski (DE GEHEELEN TRIOMFTOCHT VAN CARPENTIER IN ROTTERDAM, 1921).

¹¹⁴ See: www.nfdb.nl > Tuschinski (2007-08-29)

¹¹⁵ The newsreels are lost. Information about them is found in *Kunst en Amusement* (1920-1921), see filmography > Weisbard. The *W.B. revue* existed for more than ten years (cf. Eric van der Velden, 1983 > this article includes the cover of a booklet: *Jubileumuitgave van de W.B. Revue 1919-1929*, published by Polygoon).

¹¹⁶ Max Vis in: De Vries, 1983. When the W.B. Theatre opened, Max Vis became assistant operator, at the age of thirteen, since his father worked as manager of the W.B. Theatre. Vis was trained by August Fick, chief operator at the W.B. Theatre (in: De Vries, 1983, cf. Berg, 1996: 49-50).

¹¹⁷ Max Vis in: De Vries (1983), and in a radio programme of Radio Rijnmond, 1991-10-23 (cf. Romer, 2004: 77). The screenings in the Luxor is mentioned, for example in the case of VEE- EN LANDBOUW TONTOONSTELLING TE ROTTERDAM, in *Kunst en Amusement* 1921/12, section 'De Films van de week'; 'Rotterdam'; 'W.B.-Theater' and 'Luxor'.

commissioned by Weisbard himself¹¹⁸. This film on architecture for film, could be considered as a self-reflexive instance within the urban cultural ecology. In the meantime, Polygoon from Haarlem had started its production and national distribution of newsreels, which were first shown in Rotterdam at the Ooster Theater and Transvalia¹¹⁹. It meant a competition to the local reports, but Tuschinski and Polygoon soon started to collaborate (see also Ch. 3.1).

externalities

Weisbard was as much a real estate developer as he was a cinema entrepreneur, which were in fact the two branches of his firm Het Westen¹²⁰. This practice is confirmed by the fact that in 1923, he sold the Grand Théâtre Pompenburg to Tuschinski. The competition between the two was at the same time a kind of collaboration, which is characteristic for ‘agglomeration economies’. However, when Tuschinski bought the Grand Théâtre he had the interior rebuilt, to make it ‘the nicest and most comfortable cinema of Europe’. It was carried out by the designers Pieter den Besten and Jaap Gidding, in a mixture of Jugendstil and art-deco¹²¹. As such they embodied the connection between cinema and design.

Pieter den Besten studied at the Academy of Visual Arts in Rotterdam. After his studies he worked for the decoration firm of his father¹²². He created various interior designs for Tuschinski, next to art works for many other buildings in the city¹²³. Gidding studied at the Academy of Visual Arts in Rotterdam as well. When he finished there, he worked for several years in Paris and Munich (with director Max Reinhardt a.o.¹²⁴). When he returned to Rotterdam he joined his father who ran a decoration firm too, while he became also part of the architects’ association Opbouw. The work of Den Besten and Gidding offers a clear example of Jacobs externalities, which has not only an economic significance within the development of the city, but also a sociocultural one, since their involvement drew cinema into the world of arts.

The Grand Théâtre was the most distinguished cinema of Rotterdam. Besides an exclusive café, it included a bowling-alley and the chic *cabaret-dansant* La Gaîté¹²⁵. Tuschinski’s idea of going to the movies was based on a formula that included different kinds of entertainment. People did not only see a film, they also went out for drinking and dancing afterwards. Tuschinski had already seen that at Café Pschorr, where he himself had organised shows in the summer of 1912.

As André van der Velden has pointed out in detail (2001: 106-108), Tuschinski also invited special guests and groups. While the low profile cinema Asta managed to contract the American cowboy superstar Tom Mix to pay a visit¹²⁶ (see: Polygoon, 1925-wk13), Tuschinski invited many: the pioneering modern dancer Loie Fuller, with her ballet of ‘light and shadow’, Sid Phillips and The Melodians, the Dutch jazz formation The Ramblers, Marlene Dietrich, Lil Dagover, Olympic Boxing champion Bep van Klaveren, and Josephine Baker, to mention some famous names¹²⁷. Josephine Baker especially, who came in August 1928, left a major impression

¹¹⁸ Original title: DE GROOTSTE ROTTERDAMSCH BIOSCOOP IN AANBOUW. It was located at the Pompenburgsingel 9; destroyed during WW II., see: Berg, 1996: 164. The report is mentioned in: *Cinema en Theater* 1921/ nr. 29, p9.

¹¹⁹ De Haan, 1995: 42 (according to information of Polygoon, September 1924).

¹²⁰ Cf. Berg, 1996: 42. The Westerbioscoop was developed by Het Westen.

¹²¹ They also created the interior design of the Tuschinski Theater in Amsterdam (1918-1921, architect H.L. de Jong).

¹²² Berg, 1996: 52.

¹²³ E.g. the *Economische Hogeschool*, a bank at the Westersingel, the Blijdorp Zoo, and the *Beurs*, a.o. He and Gidding, also created murals for the Dutch Pavilion at the World Exhibition in Antwerp (1930). Halbertsma, 2001: 215-216.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Berg, 1996: 164. Its conferencier was Alex de Haas, Alexander: 1974: 154.

¹²⁶ See: Berg, 1996: 28; for the film report, see: ROTTERDAM, COUPURES (1926, anonymous).

¹²⁷ Van der Velden, 2001: 107-108), Berg, 1996: 28; Halbertsma & Van Ulzen, 2001: 178 (on Leo Ott). For Lil Dagover, see: HET BEZOEK VAN DE BEROEMDE DUITSCHE FILMARTISTE LIL DAGOVER AAN HET GRAND THEATER TE ROTTERDAM (1928, Tuschinski).

on her public, including artists from the avant-garde¹²⁸. Such performances were musically accompanied by Tuschinski's organ virtuoso Leo Ott, similar to the way he accompanied silent films (from 1924 until 1929)¹²⁹.

Since Tuschinski offered top entertainment, the Grand Théâtre was a respected cinema. However, it was not the only one; it competed, for example, with the large 'Theater Soesman', with 1200 seats, built in 1922 by architect Leen van der Vlugt. It became one of the most modern cinemas in the Netherlands at that time. Also for this theatre, although at a later stage, Pieter den Besten created the interior design¹³⁰.

All these theatres were located in the city centre, near each another. Moreover, they were part of the urban fabric that also encompassed bars and dance halls (cf. Van der Velden, 2001). It can be considered as a variant of the externalities that Scott has described for cultural industries. 'Industrial districts are made up not only of the units of production from which they draw their principal identity (...) but also of the myriad firms in adjunct sectors that provide critical physical inputs and services needed to keep the entire system operating' (2005: 9). Framing the situation in Rotterdam through the ideas of Scott, we might say that different economic sectors in and around the cinemas were connected 'through complex webs of spatial and functional relationships' (ibid). Cinema was linked to cultural disciplines like architecture, design, dance and music, among others. In the midst of these developments, film production grew too.

§ 2. specialisation

People like Tuschinski and Weisbard produced film recordings primarily for their own theatres. That also counts for their educational counterpart, the Schoolbioscoop, by A.M. van der Wel. Next to them, specialised production companies were established in Rotterdam. In 1925, Filmatelier F.H. van Dijk became the first commercial studio. François van Dijk had run a photography studio since 1910¹³¹. He started to make film recordings of family affairs¹³². This was followed by newsreels for local screenings, for example about the steamship 'Stuart-Star' that ran ashore at Hook of Holland (1923-10-04)¹³³. As a photographer, Van Dijk was known for his 'recordings of ships, factories, machines and the like'¹³⁴. As a filmmaker, he advertised his studio for 'films for all purposes'¹³⁵. The connection with photography remained to exist, also in terms of a professional network. It is especially manifest in a hilarious and experimental film he made about fellow photographers in Rotterdam, playing a theatrical game of billiards (BILLARD CLUB RFPV, 1930, Van Dijk). While Filmatelier F.H. van Dijk was a small studio, it is significant in that it paved the way for bigger companies.

In 1927, the company Transfilma was established in Rotterdam¹³⁶. It made itself a name for industrial films, due to the excellent work of its cinematographer Andor von Barsy, who was also responsible for the success of the feature length city symphony THE CITY THAT NEVER RESTS (1928). Besides that, Transfilma began to produce fiction films like EEN LIED VAN DEN

¹²⁸ Already she had inspired the photographer Jan Kamman to make the well-known photomontage 'Charleston' that showed her in different poses (cf. Struyvenberg, 2001: 89 and 288). The Filmliga Rotterdam quoted her in its founding manifest by way of conclusion: "Later I will go to the cinema everyday" (Josephine Baker). 'You too?' (Filmliga magazine, 1927, first editions, last page). See also the Tuschinski newsreel: BEZOEK VAN JOSEPHINE BAKER AAN VOLENDAM (1928).

¹²⁹ Halbertsma & Van Ulzen, 2001: 178 (on Leo Ott); Berg, 1996: 48.

¹³⁰ The building was sold the next year (1923), to become cinema *Scala*.

¹³¹ See: Gemeente Archief Rotterdam (GAR), 1988: 6.

¹³² Among them are well made, partly staged films with his children, e.g. HERINNERINGEN AAN DE KINDERJAREN (1922).

¹³³ I.e. STRANDING VAN SS STUART-STAR TE HOEK V. HOLLAND (1923).

¹³⁴ Advertisement of *Fotoatelier F.H. van Dijk* in the Rotterdam telephone guide, edition 1920 and following years.

¹³⁵ Advertisement of *Filmatelier F.H. van Dijk* in the Rotterdam telephone guide, edition 1925 and following years.

¹³⁶ Other companies that established themselves in Rotterdam, often as distribution companies in the first place, were a.o. Internationale Filmindustrie and Filmbureau Daguerre, as mentioned in the Rotterdam telephone guide, editions 1925-1934, and the address books of the Municipality of Rotterdam, Gemeentearchief Rotterdam (GAR).

ARBEID (“A song of labour”, 1929, Walter Janssen). Like the former, it was distributed by Monopole, a company that had been established shortly before by Jacob Mühlrad, another immigrant from Polish origin who had previously run a number of cinemas¹³⁷. In a period that various distribution companies established themselves in Rotterdam, Mühlrad saw opportunities too¹³⁸. Moreover, distribution also allowed him to escape competition with Tuschinski, who dominated the business. Therefore he sold his Imperial Bioscope to the German UFA, and with the money he established Monopole. The practices of exhibition, distribution and production, became gradually specialised concerns, but they remained interdependent.

Cinema in Rotterdam got a stimulus with the appearance of the Dutch Filmliga, which was founded in Amsterdam in 1927, by the young literary critics Henrik Scholte and Menno Ter Braak. A critical mass was needed to cover the expenses of acquisition, and therefore branches were established in other cities, including Rotterdam. The aim of the Filmliga was to show films of artistic quality that found no distribution in regular cinemas, among them productions from Germany, France and the Soviet Union. Moreover, it caused several filmmakers to produce films to be shown at its programme, among them THE BRIDGE (1928, Joris Ivens), HOOGSTRAAT (1929, Andor von Barsy), THE BUILDINGS OF VAN NELLE (1930, Jan Teunissen) and DE STEEG (1932, Jan Koelinga).

Johan Huijts, the foreign news editor of the NRC, was the chairman of the Filmliga Rotterdam for about six years. Various other journalists of the NRC became members of the Filmliga. In 1929, the NRC got its own film section, edited by Coen Graadt van Roggen¹³⁹. Because of negative reviews of popular films, and positive reviews of Filmliga films, the *Nederlandsche Bioscoopbond* (“Dutch Union of Cinema Theatres”) proclaimed an advertisement boycott against the NRC at the end of 1929¹⁴⁰. Abraham Tuschinski, as the ‘big man’ of Dutch cinema, intervened and negotiated with Huijts. He was well aware of the fact that in Amsterdam, at that moment, the Filmliga opened its own cinema De Uitkijk (1929-11-08)¹⁴¹. Tuschinski realised that the same would be possible in Rotterdam. Until then, the Filmliga showed its films at Corso¹⁴². In the conversation with Huijts, Tuschinski explained the plan to rebuild his *cabaret-dansant* La Gaîté, in order to establish the avant-garde cinema Studio 32¹⁴³. It would also include a gallery for avant-garde art, supervised by Pieter den Besten¹⁴⁴. The Filmliga agreed. Until the new cinema would be a fact, special Filmliga previews and other events were organised at the Grand Théâtre, next to its programme at Corso. Among these events were a late night show with the novelty of sound films, and presentations by special guests, like László Moholy-Nagy¹⁴⁵.

The collaboration with Tuschinski caused a conflict between the branches in Rotterdam and Amsterdam, since the latter was against commercial exploitation, while Rotterdam favoured the idea of bringing avant-garde films to the attention of the masses¹⁴⁶. In 1931, the branch in

¹³⁷ www.cinemacontext.nl/id/P001759Algemeen (2007-10-20)

¹³⁸ A.o. Monopole, General Vertretung, Daguerre, DLS, De Globe and Puvabi N.V. Source: Rotterdam telephone guide 1933 and 1934, and Berg, 1996: 30-34.

¹³⁹ For additional information on Graadt van Roggen, see e.g. Smit, 2005: 39.

¹⁴⁰ See the article: ‘De Nieuwe Rotterdammer, De Nederlandsche Bioscoopbond en de Filmliga’, pp1-4 in Filmliga 1929, vol 3/1 (November). See also: Huijts, 1975: 274.

¹⁴¹ Linssen, 1999: 100.

¹⁴² The directors of Corso and advisers to the Filmliga Rotterdam were S.F. van Lier, and Cees Roem, the goal-keeper of football club Sparta, who would later become director of film company Profilti (The Hague), and one of the directors of Polygon-Profilti and Cinecentrum after WWII. www.cinemacontext.nl/id/P001141#target3 (2008-04-01). See: *Filmliga*, 1927/1 (p11). Cf. Berg, 1996: 28.

¹⁴³ Huijts, 1975: 275.

¹⁴⁴ Struyvenberg, 2001: 89. The first exhibition that would take place in Studio 32 encompassed work of the etcher Antoon Derkzen van Angeren and of interior designer Pieter den Besten. Many others would follow, e.g. Hermann Bieling (cf. Van de Laar, 2000: 377), as well as Wally Elenbaas and Dick Elffers, October 1935 (cf. Halberstma & Van Ulzen, 2001: 82).

¹⁴⁵ Resp. 1930-11-20, see: Van der Velden, 2001: 118, and Moholy-Nagy in 1931, see e.g. Rietbergen, 2001: 50.

¹⁴⁶ By consequence, the *Filmliga* magazine, published in Amsterdam, was not issued between May 1930 – Sept. 1931.

Amsterdam was dissolved (but re-established later on), and Rotterdam became the seat for the general Dutch Filmliga for two more years, with Johan Huijts as the overall chairman¹⁴⁷.

Whatever the intentions of the avant-garde might have been, the Filmliga served above all a particular section of the urban population, a socio-cultural subgroup in terms of Julian Steward (1955). Rather than changing the system, the avant-garde became a subsystem, as a consequence of increasing complexity¹⁴⁸. Similar to Scott's take on the film industry, the Filmliga was an 'independent', made possible by a 'major' (i.e. Tuschinski)¹⁴⁹. In the same way we could mention another 'Filmliga' that was established in Rotterdam, in 1932: the *Rotterdamsche Smalfilmliga* (RSL), an association for amateur filmmakers. There was actually a direct link with the Filmliga, as Mannus Franken was one of the founders of the overarching *Nederlandsche Smalfilmliga* (while it also collaborated with Multifilm in Haarlem)¹⁵⁰. The RSL became very active, with a high output of film productions. Among them were the highly appreciated 'absolute films' DE STRAAT (1932, A. Carré & S.M. Scheffer), and WONDEREN VAN SCHADUW EN LIJN (1936, J.L. Clement), made in the spirit of the avant-garde¹⁵¹. In 1934, the RSL established its own film studio (i.e. Schoonderloo Studio), where all kinds of films were made, including fiction shorts¹⁵². Besides its activities in Rotterdam, the RSL became part of a well-organised national and international network of kindred associations¹⁵³.

Such a process of increasing complexity was characterised by increasing levels of integration of the system as a whole, which happened with the take-overs by Strengholt and Tuschinski¹⁵⁴. Next to them was the rapidly growing City concern of Bartel Wilton, from The Hague. In Rotterdam he bought the Imperial Bioscope, demolished it, and commissioned the architect Jacob van Gelderen to build the large and very modern 'City' (1927-1928)¹⁵⁵, designed in the spirit of *Het Nieuwe Bouwen*¹⁵⁶. At the same time, the formation of large concerns had

¹⁴⁷ Brederoo, 1986: 191.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Steward, 1976 [1955]: 211 a.o.

¹⁴⁹ Next to that, cinema Corso, where the Filmliga began to show its films, took the initiative to build another avant-garde cinema, which was never used as it was destroyed during the bombardment of 1940.

¹⁵⁰ Smits, 2002: 5. One of RSL's most active members, Albert Stam, was largely inspired by Jordaan's film course at the Volksuniversiteit (Smit, 2002: 82). One of Stam's films was a report on tug-boats in the port.

¹⁵¹ Both films won prizes at festivals for amateur films (Smits, 2002: 6). Prior to the establishment of the RSL, Carré had also made the film ARBEID (1932), which had been shown in De Uitkijk in Amsterdam (September 1932). Clement made also the absolute films ZEEPBELLEN and STUDIE 3-33 (1933), see: Smits: 2002: 7/10.

¹⁵² e.g. EPISODE (1933, R. van der Leeuw & J. Derksen), see: Smits, 2002: 11-12. The studio was established in the former Rienks Machine Fabriek; Rienks had also produced films, and he would continue to do so under the name 'Electra'.

¹⁵³ Already before the establishment of the RSL, amateur films were made in Rotterdam, such as ROTTERDAM, EEN FILM VAN DE STAD EN DE HAVENS (1926) by Jos A. Huygen, who was a construction draughtsman working for an architecture studio. He developed and edited his own films. His hobby, according to Aasman (2004: 139, 145 e.a.), was mostly a family affair; he regularly organised home screenings on Sunday afternoons. In this way he showed professional (Pathé 9.5mm) films next to his own, and in this case (Aasman, p146), he imitated the Pathé film ROTTERDAM, LA VENISE DU NORD (1923). Of interest are also the films by Ed Millecum, who joined the RSL after WWII, who made, for example, ROTTERDAM 1925-1938 and ROTTERDAM 1939. Besides amateurs film clubs and amateurs making films on their own, there were also people who made films related to particular organisations, e.g. J.A. van Pelt, who made films for sailing clubs (in particular WSV Schieland [?], see: filmography). A remarkable title concerns Van Pelt's own film facilities: ONZE FILMWERKKAMER EN NAAR DE ROTTEMEREN (1939). Besides sailing, Van Pelt made also a number of films on other subjects (e.g. ROTTERDAM, 1938). For a brief general note on amateur filmmaking in the Netherlands, see: Albers, 2004: 19.

¹⁵⁴ Tuschinski played also an important role in the union of cinema theatres (NBB); the position of Rotterdam within this union is illustrated by the Polygoon newsreel: JAARVERGADERING VAN DE NEDERLANDSE BIOSCOOP BOND (1938-05-05), in which members visit the port and gather for a meeting at the town hall.

¹⁵⁵ Since March 1923, Weisbard owned the Imperial Bioscope (www.cinemacontext.nl/id/P000125 > personen > Weisbard > bioscopen (visited: 2007-09-19)). So it seems likely that Weisbard either developed or mediated the development of the new cinema building for Wilton.

¹⁵⁶ The directors of the City theatre were Jac. & L. Mühlrad. It had a capacity of 1000 seats and it was located at Hoogstraat 136 (destroyed during WWII), see: Berg, 1996: 28 and 162. In 1934, the City-concern also established cinema *Lumière*, in the former *Casino-Variété* (Berg, 1996: 166).

already entered an international stage, which is exemplified by the German UFA taking over the Luxor, in 1926 – which in turn enabled its previous owner, Carel van Zwanenburg, to build a new cinema in the suburb Hillesluis (‘Colosseum’, 1927, arch. Ten Bosch & Le Grand). The old Luxor was broken down, to make place for the new Luxor Palast, bigger than any other cinema in town, with 1600 seats (1928, arch. J. van Wijngaarden). It was also built in a modern style, characterised by a light-tower that served as a landmark¹⁵⁷. It had the largest cinema organ of Europe, but it was already old-fashioned when it was put to use, as sound film would conquer the cinema.

§ 3. changing sounds

Before the introduction of sound film, live musical accompaniment made every show a unique event, with Karl Weisbard being one of the frontrunners. His W.B. Theatre had an orchestra pit for no less than forty musicians¹⁵⁸. Weisbard made all efforts to improve the cinema experience. In the summer of 1921, he approached A. Standaart, a well-known organ maker in Schiedam. Weisbard wanted an organ that would be able to perform the sounds of virtually all musical instruments that one could imagine, as well as other sounds, like those of birds, car horns, whistles of trains and ships, thunder, rain and so on. Standaart and his assistants worked for one-and-a-half year on it, and it was ready early 1923¹⁵⁹. It received much attention, and those who listened to it were truly amazed. The German *Zeitschrift für Instrumentenbau*, for example, wrote: ‘What a wonder of technical perfection and artistic refinement is this cinema organ (...) It is actually not an organ anymore, in the usual sense. It is a new musical instrument, which one should still give a name to’¹⁶⁰. According to the same review, this organ brought life, colour and suspense to the films that it accompanied, and would thus leave a profound impression on the audience.

Whereas Weisbard attracted substantial attention with the Standaart organ, six years later he was also the first in the Netherlands to show a sound feature film, again at his W.B. Theatre (May 1929)¹⁶¹. In order to get it work, Weisbard asked Philips engineer Frits Prinsen, who had developed his own sound system¹⁶². This collaboration resulted in an ambitious joint-venture.

Karl Weisbard decided to have a new theatre built for an optimal performance of sound film. Once more he approached architect Van Gelderen, to make the design for what would be called the ‘Roxy’ (1930)¹⁶³. With one thousand seats, it became a large and highly modern cinema. In the meantime Prinsen fine-tuned the so-called *Loetafoon*. It was enabled through a partnership with William Rienks, under the flag of the latter’s engineering company Electra,

¹⁵⁷ Berg, 1996: 166. Luxor is located at Kruiskade 30. It has been altered after WWII. It is now a (comedy) theatre.

¹⁵⁸ The W.B. Theatre opened on the 21st of November 1919 with the Austrian film *TIEFLAND* (1918, Hans Rhoden), which was based on the opera (1903) by Eugen d’Albert. The film was accompanied by an orchestra of forty people, directed by Anton Peers, with Tine Zadelhof as soprano and Frans Willemsse as baritone, next to a choir, see: www.cinemacontext.nl (2008-11-13); cf. Max Vis in: De Vries, 1983.

¹⁵⁹ ‘Een orgel voor het W.B. Theater’, *Nieuw Weekblad voor de Cinematografie*, nr. 6, 1923.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, after a quote in this article. Original German quote: ‘Welch ein Wunderwerk technischer Volkommenheiten und künstlerischer Feinheiten ist doch diese Kinoorgel. (...) Das ist eigentlich schon gar keine Orgel mehr im landläufigen Sinne. Es ist ein neues Musikinstrument, dem man noch einen Namen geben musz....’

¹⁶¹ Berg (1996: 29, 42) mentions the film *ELAINE* (cf. Max Vis, in: Eric van der Velden, 1983; and in: De Vries, 1983). It is presumably the American film *TIMES SQUARE* (1929, Joseph C. Boyle), which was released in the Netherlands as *ELAINE*. According to www.imdb.com (2008-10-22) this film was released in the USA in September 1929. At www.cinemacontext.nl (2008-10-22) it is said that it was shown at Weisbard’s Roxy theatre at 1930-08-01. It was distributed, however, by Loet Barnstijn, whose gramophone sound system, *Loetafoon*, was used indeed by Weisbard, (see Berg, Van der Velden, De Vries). According to www.cinemacontext.nl the first sound film at the W.B. Theatre was *LILAC TIME* (1928, USA, George Fitzmaurice), shown at 1929-09-06. Tuschinski would then screen *THE SINGING FOOL* (1928, USA, Lloyd Bacon) at his Grand Théâtre, at 1929-09-13.

¹⁶² See Berg, 1996: 29 and Dibbets, 1986: 263.

¹⁶³ Berg, 1996: 169. Roxy was located at West-Kruiskade 26. It was rebuilt in 1967 (now known as ‘Nighttown’). Although altered, it is the only building by Van Gelderen that remained a stage for popular culture, incl. film shows.

which traded in electrical machines. This company was a remarkable hybrid, since it was first of all aimed at the building industry, for which purpose a film had already been made before: HUIZEN BOUWEN DOOR ELECTRICITEIT (“Building Houses through Electricity”, 1928). The film itself has been lost, but the title suggests that it was a promotional film for new building methods. Rather than waiting for a response from the industry to apply these methods, Rienks and Prinsen converted the company into a building enterprise itself, in June 1930 (*Bouwmaatschappij Electra N.V.*¹⁶⁴). Moreover, they decided to register the firm as a film production company as well (*Filmmaatschappij Electra N.V.*), in February 1931¹⁶⁵. It produced non-fiction films, for which the camera work was done by the artist Wout van Heusden and the architect Joris Uyterlinde. As a spin-off, the two of them founded their own facilitating Studio 2000¹⁶⁶.

Electra, in its turn, became the first company in the Netherlands for sound film; it produced the talking newsreel NU EN DAN – HIER EN DAAR. It was enabled by Karl Weisbard, who presented it on the 23rd of May 1931, at his brand-new Roxy, and at the W.B. Theatre. Electra made great efforts to promote the new sound system, and the best way to do so, they thought, was by showing its quality through a feature film that would attract international attention. In this way they produced the first Dutch sound film, TERRA NOVA (1931, Gerard Rutten). Although it was completed, it was finally not released, due to an argument between the producer and the director. Their newsreels instead did fulfil their promotional function for Electra’s equipment.

Because of sound, the production companies Orion and Profilti from The Hague, saw opportunities to compete with Polygoon. In March 1931 they announced a collaboration and bought the system of Electra¹⁶⁷. During their first months, Electra collaborated on making the recordings¹⁶⁸. In the meantime, Electra received a commission for a documentary film on the recent history of the socialist radio broadcasting station VARA, even though it had already been promised to Polygoon¹⁶⁹. It resulted in the aesthetically and politically challenging film STUWING (1932, Co van der Wal¹⁷⁰). Polygoon, in its turn, started *Polygoontoon*. Although it had lost its

¹⁶⁴ Berg, 1996: 30.

¹⁶⁵ According to the data at www.cinemacontext.nl/id/R001532 (visited: 2007-09-19), it was preceded by another firm: *Electro Kino Technisch Bureau NV* (Schoonderloostraat 85, Rotterdam), since 1923, with Rienks and Prinsen as their directors (mentioned for the period 1928-1931). Electra was established 1931-02-24, and finally dissolved two-and-a-half years later (1933-09) www.cinemacontext.nl/id/R000685

¹⁶⁶ No film titles are known, and little information about this studio is available. Flora Stiemer (1992: 48-49) mentions it in her monograph on Wout van Heusden. She quotes Van Heusden in an interview by Ischa Meijer; he said that they received a commission from Electra, while he had never held a film camera in his hands before. Electra was thus the first enterprise for which he made recordings. Stiemer suggests that the Filmliga has been the link, through Jef Last and Joris Ivens, for their shared political engagement. This could be, but it is also likely to draw a link to the building industry, due to the business of Electra. While Van Heusden (1896-1982) has become known as a graphic artist, Uyterlinde has been left out of focus altogether. Joris Uyterlinde (1899-1952) was the son of the contractor and engineer Johannes Dirk Uyterlinde, who owned a construction firm in IJsselmonde, Rotterdam-South (genealogy Volker: <http://members.home.nl/ctvolker/Volker.htm> – 2007-10-20; cf.: <http://de-wit.net/bronnen/tel1915/pag/627.htm> > 341, Uyterlinde, J.D.). In 1927, Joris Uyterlinde married Steventina Volker, daughter of another contractor. Before he became president of the Volker Bouwmaatschappij, he and his brother built private housing at the Randweg and Hollandschestraat, Rotterdam South (see: Kramer, 1929). They subsequently made, as constructors, a modern house for elderly people, *Emmahuis* (1929-1930, arch. P. Hooykaas & M. Lockhorst). An important project that would follow became the pioneering modernist *Flatgebouw Parklaan* (1931-1933, Van Tijen, Van den Broek, Uyterlinde – see: Van Tijen, 1933: 140-146). It was during these years that Uyterlinde became involved with Studio 2000. So Van Tijen and Van der Broek, frequenting the Filmliga, might also have played a role here. Finally, both Van Heusden and Uyterlinde lived and worked in Rotterdam-South, and this might have enabled their collaboration too.

¹⁶⁷ Hogenkamp, 1988: 40.

¹⁶⁸ I.e. From Electra: Frits Prinsen (managing the equipment in the car) and Kees Tuyn (camera); from Orion-Profilti: W.P. Schefer and Ab van Wely. Dibbets, 1993: 247-249.

¹⁶⁹ Hogenkamp, 1988: 41.

¹⁷⁰ Who previously made the film GROOT ROTTERDAM (1929), for a magazine with that title.

near-monopoly, it nevertheless managed to secure a prime position. Moreover, in 1933 it would officially, but secretly, become the owner of Profilti¹⁷¹.

While the collaboration between Orion-Profilti and Electra was unsuccessful¹⁷², Electra also entered into a conflict with Weisbard, since the investments in the Roxy had simply been too high. In 1933 Electra was dissolved, and along with it Studio 2000; Van Heusden continued his work as an artist, while Uytendinck was asked by his father-in-law to become a director of his construction company Volker. In the end Weisbard's enterprise could not survive either. His firm *Het Westen* went bankrupt and he had to sell the Westerbioscoop, and finally the Roxy too (1934)¹⁷³.

After 1934, when the problems with sound film were definitively settled, Dutch cinema rapidly developed, in particular the production of fiction films¹⁷⁴. Also in Rotterdam new production companies appeared, among them Monopole-DLS, which was a collaboration between Jacob Mühlrad (Monopole) and Max A. Sprecher (DLS)¹⁷⁵. Its films did not deal with Rotterdam as such, but it helped to reinforce the city's development as *Standort*, next to *Tatort*¹⁷⁶.

¹⁷¹ De Haan, 1995:105-106.

¹⁷² Dibbets, 1993: 262-263.

¹⁷³ www.cinemacontext.nl/id/P001809 > personen > Weisbard (visited: 2007-09-19). The Westerbioscoop became 'Capitol', owned by Salomon de Hartog. He started his programming with a cinematographic retrospective of Rotterdam (1934), which was made for him by André de Jong / Polygoon.

¹⁷⁴ It was mainly due to the influx of professionals that had escaped Nazi-Germany, as explained by film historian Kathinka Dittrich (1987).

¹⁷⁵ Monopole produced fiction films like BLEEKE BET (1934, Richard Oswald). In 1934 Mühlrad suddenly died; Sprecher continued the enterprise, and more films were made, a.o. DE BIG VAN HET REGIMENT (1935, Max Nosseck), and ORANJE HEIN (1936, Max Nosseck).

¹⁷⁶ Cinema had become a serious concern in Rotterdam, after it had reached a degree of specialisation, which is also exemplified by a company such as Puvabi (Publiciteitsbureau NV), for the production and distribution of commercials (1929-1936); www.cinemacontext.nl/id/R000445 (visited: 2007-09-19).