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### Cinematic Rotterdam: the times and tides of a modern city

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## CHAPTER 5. SHARED AGENDA

### § 1. improving conditions

In 1865, Rotterdam counted about 100,000 inhabitants. Fifty years later it was already about half a million, due to the rapid growth of its port. While the department of “Public Works” (Gemeentewerken) took care of the infrastructure and public facilities, private companies developed housing projects, mostly jerry-building. Besides that, there were highly deteriorated parts of downtown Rotterdam. Along with the problem of housing came social problems, and various socially engaged individuals and organisations took initiatives to address the issues and to improve the situation. This became a matter of a broader movement to change, modernise and to develop society, which was accelerated as a result of the events that took place during the first World War.

Although the Netherlands remained neutral during World War I, the country also suffered from it, especially Rotterdam, for its dependency on international trade<sup>556</sup>. According to Paul van de Laar (2000: 323), it was the collapse of the ‘transito’ economy and the end of Rotterdam as a ‘transitopolis’. World War I greatly affected, in ecological terms, the ‘biotic’ and ‘abiotic’ parameters of Rotterdam. Due to this crisis, unemployment rapidly increased, while there was also a shortage of food and fuel. At the same time there was a growing lack of appropriate housing; public health decreased and epidemic diseases proliferated. It caused protests, strikes and riots, which were countered by the army<sup>557</sup>. In this period general suffrage was introduced in the Netherlands (1917). As a consequence, the 1918 elections for the national parliament were won by the SDAP (socialists).

Besides that, prominent members of the SDAP in Rotterdam, Johan Brautigam and Arie Heijkoop, founded an overall and powerful union for transportation workers (CBTA). Together with the Rotterdam SDAP leader Arie de Zeeuw, and the general SDAP leader P.J. Troelstra, they proclaimed the revolution in the Netherlands, and first of all in Rotterdam, in November 1918. As Van de Laar has made clear (2000: 319), the conservative Mayor Zimmerman and the spokesman of the employers, SVZ-chairman H. Paul Nijgh, counted already on the assumption of power, after secret discussions had taken place with the SDAP-leaders. The idea of a revolution, however, was thwarted through military intervention<sup>558</sup>.

Shortly afterwards, when women’s suffrage was introduced too, the SDAP won the municipal elections in Rotterdam (1919), although they had to share power with others. Arie Heijkoop and Arie de Zeeuw were appointed as aldermen, for social interests and education respectively<sup>559</sup>.

### housing models

While the problems of the old quarters in Rotterdam were addressed, various initiatives were taken to develop new residential areas. In 1913 the banker Karel Paul van der Mandele took the initiative for the development of garden village ‘Vreewijk’. He asked Hendrik Berlage, who drew ‘Plan Zuid’ in Amsterdam, to design the masterplan, which was elaborated by Marinus Granpré Molière<sup>560</sup>. The latter started on it while he was still an architect of the department of public works, and continued to work on it when he established his own studio. The project would subsequently be recorded on film by Willy Mullens (1919-1920). At the same time the garden village ‘Heijplaat’ (1913-1918, arch. H.A.J. Baanders) was built for the workers of the

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<sup>556</sup> In the period 1913-1917 the number of ships visiting the port of Rotterdam had dropped by 70% – Van de Laar, 2000: 315.

<sup>557</sup> Van de Laar, 2000: 318.

<sup>558</sup> Van de Laar, 2000: 319-320.

<sup>559</sup> Besides the conservative mayor Zimmerman, the college counted five aldermen, with two of them representing confessional parties, and one being a progressive liberal; Van de Laar, 2000: 323.

<sup>560</sup> Halbertsma & Van Ulzen (eds.), 2001: 98.

‘Rotterdam Dockyard Company’ (RDM)<sup>561</sup>. These privately developed garden villages offered a blue-print for the ‘model projects’ that would be created by the municipality.

Being the Alderman for Social Interests, Arie Heijkoop became responsible for the municipal housing department (*Gemeentelijke Woningdienst*), which was directed by Auguste Plate (1917-1923). An early achievement of the department became the district ‘Spangen’, including the famous ‘Justus van Effencomplex’ (1919-1922, Michiel Brinkman)<sup>562</sup>. It is a housing complex with public yards inside, from where one enters staircases to elevated walkways all around at the second floor. They offer access to the houses, enable door-to-door services, and facilitate contact between neighbours that stimulates community development. Next to that, the complex included public facilities such as a common laundry and a bathing house. When Brinkman worked on it, he and Willem Kromhout founded the architects association *Opbouw* (1920)<sup>563</sup>.

*Opbouw* was closely related to De Stijl. It included various artists and architects, among them Theo van Doesburg and J.J.P. Oud. They attempted to connect different artistic realms, largely based on the ideas of Berlage. It was Berlage, in his turn, who recommended Oud to the municipal housing department. Oud began to work on a project in Spangen as well, for which he invited Van Doesburg as an artistic collaborator. Unfortunately it resulted into a serious conflict between them, and the collaboration came to an end, but the principles of De Stijl would still inform the work of Oud. This was first reflected by his design for ‘Oud-Mathenesse’ (1922-1924). This modern residential quarter, built as a village outside the city, offered a new home to 350 families from the city centre, whose deteriorated houses were broken down. It was a social experiment, since socially troubled families were housed amidst well-doing neighbours<sup>564</sup>. Oud prepared the plans in collaboration with Th. Van Lohuizen, who came to work as a researcher for the housing department in 1921, where he developed a survey combining economic and demographic data. It marked the beginning of the rational, scientific city planning practice in Rotterdam<sup>565</sup>. Besides *Het Witte Dorp*, as the quarter was also called, Oud designed ‘Hoek van Holland’ (1924-1927) and the ‘Kieffhoek’ (1925-1930), which received international acclaim as models for social housing. They are also highlighted by the film *ROTTERDAM EN HOE HET BOUWDE* (1940, Wim ten Bosch)<sup>566</sup>.

These projects were built with the purpose to increase the so called *Existenzminimum*, to improve the living conditions of the working class. Oud did so through rationalizing the organisation of the dwellings and the allotment. He was assisted by Ida Liefrinck, who developed new concepts for the interior, including furniture, based on her conviction that planning and housing required a reorientation of society<sup>567</sup>. Cost-effectiveness and efficiency was, at the same time, combined with public facilities<sup>568</sup>.

Besides the projects that were carried out by the municipality itself, Heijkoop got involved with projects of external companies and architects. Among them are experiments of building in concrete, especially the housing quarters ‘Stulemeijer I’ (1921-1923, arch. J. van Hardeveld, J. Pauw) and ‘De Kossel I & II’ (1921-1924, arch. J. Hulsbosch)<sup>569</sup>. However, these innovative projects, with their cubist forms, raised resistance among the conservative members of the city council. For Heijkoop and the SDAP it became a matter of principle, which meant that he

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<sup>561</sup> See: Groenendijk & Vollaard, 2007: 225.

<sup>562</sup> Wagenaar & Steenhuis, 2001; Van de Laar, 2000: 362.

<sup>563</sup> As an alternative for the more traditional *Vereeniging Bouwkunst en Vriendschap*, cf. Van de Laar, 2000: 360.

<sup>564</sup> Van de Laar, 2000: 363. This quarter was initially built for a period of 25 years.

<sup>565</sup> Wagenaar, 1992: 53-58.

<sup>566</sup> Extensive literature exists on these projects. An important entry to this literature is provided by a monograph on Oud, edited by Taverne (e.a.), 2001.

<sup>567</sup> Holsappel, 2000: 3.

<sup>568</sup> Taverne e.a., 2001: 274, 277.

<sup>569</sup> Groenendijk & Vollaard, 2007: 254.

and De Zeeuw eventually withdrew as aldermen in 1921, in order to return two years later, when the SDAP won the elections once again<sup>570</sup>. The projects were continued, and more would follow. Among them was the project ‘Lange Hilleweg’ (1928-1929). It was developed by the private housing company *N.V. Volkswoningbouw*, which was established by Auguste Plate, the former director of the *Woningdienst*, together with the architect Willem van Tijen and with the support of Van Nelle director Kees van der Leeuw. Van Tijen researched the possibilities of different pre-fabricated construction systems, and chose for *Korrelbeton*, based on casting grinded slags. It had been developed by W. Greve, who had applied it in ‘Betondorp’ in Amsterdam, which is to be seen in the film *BETON EN WONINGBOUWFILM* (1923, Cor Aafjes). Such developments would inspire the author Ferdinand Bordewijk, who worked in Rotterdam, to write his science-fiction novel *Blokken* (“blocks”, 1931)<sup>571</sup>. He imagined a rectangular, rational world, a socialist state that would be as much utopian as dystopian.

However, Heijkoop also supported, for example, ‘Het Colosseum’ in the working class neighbourhood Hillesluis, close to the projects just mentioned. Its plan (1927-1929, arch. Wim ten Bosch & Henri Le Grand) combined a large cinema with housing, shops and a café with a public library<sup>572</sup>. Rather than separating functions, it united various facilities to increase the attractiveness and service level of the district.

Notwithstanding the success of the municipality regarding housing, the depression of the 1930s turned the tide. It also implied a change of ideals, which is expressed, for example, by the film *KENT U HILLEGERSBERG?* (1932, Icrofilm), which promotes living in the wealthy suburb Hillegersberg, with its traditionalist villas. While such environments became the ideal, less money was available for innovation and socially motivated projects. The Rotterdam City Council voted for a radical cutback of municipal expenditure, which caused socialist Aldermen Arie de Zeeuw and Johan Brautigam (who succeeded Heijkoop) to withdraw in 1932. In the next year Oud also left the *Woningdienst*, which was reorganised<sup>573</sup>. Private developers, particularly Auguste Plate, continued to build socially motivated housing projects. One of his most famous projects became the ‘Bergpolderflat’ (1932-1934), designed by Van Tijen and, not by coincidence, Brinkman & Van der Vlugt. With nine floors, it was the first high-rise housing block in Rotterdam built with a steel framework. It became a model for future developments.

### Schoolbioscoop

While housing could improve the daily circumstances of the masses, education could do so by providing means to understand the world in which one lived. The educational film was thought to serve this purpose in an effective, innovative and entertaining way. Following the example of the Schoolbioscoop in The Hague, which was established in 1918, and directed by SDAP-member David van Staveren<sup>574</sup>, Alderman De Zeeuw founded the *Gemeentelijke Schoolbioscoop* in

<sup>570</sup> The conflict became known as the *anti-beton campagne* (or *alkoofstrijd*), since the other parties preferred private developers to create social housing projects according to traditional principles (Van de Laar, 2000: 325).

<sup>571</sup> It was published by *De Gemeenschap* (Utrecht) that also published writings on architecture and film, by people like Van Ravesteyn and Ter Braak, a.o.

<sup>572</sup> This cinema, with more than 1000 seats, was an initiative of Carel Zwanenburg, after he had sold his Luxor cinema to the German UFA, in 1926 (see: [www.bonas.nl](http://www.bonas.nl) > Wim ten Bosch, visited: August 2007).

<sup>573</sup> See: Taverne e.a., 2001: 197. In 1936, the *Gemeentelijke Woningdienst*, the departments of *Stadsontwikkeling* and *Gemeentewerken* became the new *Gemeentelijke Technische Dienst*, see: De Klerk & Moscoviter, 1992: 5.

<sup>574</sup> Its precursor was established in 1915, by Herman van Capelle, the director of the *Museum ten bate van het Onderwijs* in The Hague, of which it became a part, see: [http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herman\\_van\\_Cappelle\\_\(geoloog\)](http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herman_van_Cappelle_(geoloog)) (2008-11-02). In 1918 it became a separate institution. Van Staveren was appointed by Johan Albarda, SDAP-alderman in The Hague for finance (1917-1923) – for Albarda see: Knegtman, 2002; for Van Staveren see: Hogenkamp, 1995, for the schoolbioscoop in general, see: Hogenkamp, 1985; De Haan, 1995: 29-31. *Schoolbioscopen* and related institutions were established in Alkmaar, Amsterdam, Arnhem, Delft, Krommenie, Leeuwarden, Leiden, Rotterdam, The Hague and Zutphen. In some other cities portable projectors were used, which were promoted and traded by Polygoon (De Haan, 1995: 29-31). Polygoon organised also a travelling school cinema, across the Netherlands, since 1921 until at least 1927 (De Haan, 1995: 47).

Rotterdam, in July 1920<sup>575</sup>. Its director became Abraham Melis van der Wel (•1879-†1961), who had been a teacher of drawing before<sup>576</sup>. The institute made use of a theatre, with eighty seats, in the *Scheepvaartkundig Instituut en Museum* (“Naval Institute and Museum”)<sup>577</sup>. The films covered geography and biology above all, and furthermore physics, economics and history. They were shown to children from the last two grades of elementary school (age 10-12), and explained by Van der Wel, every school day, in four programmes, from 9 am to 4.15 pm. In this way, each school class attended three programmes per year.

Teachers were invited to attend a screening before, and to prepare the lessons with their pupils at school. To that end, Van der Wel provided detailed descriptions of the films in advance, which turned out to be an effective method, according to reactions of the teachers. Soon there were requests from secondary schools to attend screenings as well, but the *Schoolbioscoop* did not have the capacity to help them too<sup>578</sup>. Van der Wel tried nevertheless to find opportunities during the evening, and as such he started to organise screenings for adolescents (*rijpere jeugd*), next to a number of interested professional organisations<sup>579</sup>.

Due to the success, the accommodation was soon too small. This was also remarked by the Rotterdam branch of the “Dutch Fellowship of Teachers”, in a letter to the Mayor and Aldermen<sup>580</sup>. It even argued for *five* school cinemas, one in every part of the city, so that pupils did not have to travel across the whole city, and that they could attend film programmes more frequently. The municipal department of education received offers from various organisations to use their accommodation, among them the theatre of the progressive community centre ‘Ons Huis’, and a catholic community centre at Afrikaanderplein in the south of Rotterdam<sup>581</sup>. The latter would become an auxiliary branch. ‘Ons Huis’, with 400 seats, was a serious option, but in order to control the pupils, and for Van der Wel to explain the films, it was too big. Eventually the main theatre was established in the building of the “Union of Dutch Teachers” (*Bond Nederlandsche Onderwijzers*), which could host 160 pupils<sup>582</sup>.

The programmes depended on the available titles, which were distributed by a few film production companies, the school museum in The Hague and occasionally by industrial enterprises, such as Van Nelle (i.e. THEEFILM [Java], 1919, Dick van der Leeuw). Although there was an increasing demand for educational films, there were a few companies involved with producing them, among them IWA, Haghe Film and Polygoon. Van der Wel got actively

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<sup>575</sup> Cf. De Ruyter-De Zeeuw, 1990b. Westhoff (1995: 78)

<sup>576</sup> Van der Wel worked as a teacher of drawing since 1903 (Westhoff, 1995: 78). See also the letter of 1922-06-23/27 of Mayor and Aldermen to the city council, on the conditions of the appointment of Van der Wel, coll. GAR, archive ‘Gemeentesecretarie Rotterdam, afd. Onderwijs’, toegangsnr. 351.01/1061-76 (*Schoolbioscoop*), volgnr. 3a.

<sup>577</sup> This museum was located at Haringvliet 68. A visit to the museum before or after the screening was highly recommended (as mentioned on the visiting schedules that were sent to the schools, see 351.01/1061-76 (*Schoolbioscoop*), volgnr. 1). Extensive documentation about the programmes, and the classes that visited them, can be found in the collection of the GAR, archive ‘Gemeentesecretarie Rotterdam, afd. Onderwijs’, toegangsnr. 351.01, inv. nr. 1061 (1922: dossier 76), 1079 (1923: dossier 82), 1093 (1924: dossier 114), 1111 (1925: dossier 111), 1126 (1926: dossier 110), 1138 (1927: dossier 64), 1157 (1928: dossier 64), 1177 (1922: dossier 64), 1196 (1930: dossier 65).

<sup>578</sup> *Verslag van den Gem. Schoolbioscoop, dienstjaar 1921, 1922-06-19*, coll. GAR, archive ‘Gemeentesecretarie Rotterdam, afd. Onderwijs’, toegangsnr. 351.01/1061-76 (*Schoolbioscoop*), volgnr. 8.

<sup>579</sup> E.g. an association for the graphical industry (*Nederlandsche Vereeniging van Chefs in het Grafisch Bedrijf*).

<sup>580</sup> Letter of the *Nederlandsch Onderwijzers-Genootschap, afd. Rotterdam*, coll. GAR, archive ‘Gemeentesecretarie Rotterdam, afd. Onderwijs’, toegangsnr. 351.01/1079-82 (*Schoolbioscoop*), volgnr. 1.

<sup>581</sup> Letter by ‘Ons Huis’ (Mr. W. Drucker) to Alderman A. van der Hoeven, 1923-05-08, and letter by the ‘R.K. Vereenigingsgebouw’, Afrikaanderplein, to the ‘Referendaris Bureau Onderwijs’, 1923-11-22, coll. GAR, archive ‘Gemeentesecretarie Rotterdam, afd. Onderwijs’, toegangsnr. 351.01/1079-82 (1923, *Schoolbioscoop*), respectively volgnr. 9 and volgnr. 6.

<sup>582</sup> The decision was made by the city council on 1925-12-17. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of April 1926 the new accommodation was opened, at Goudsche straat 26 (ref. *Rotterdams Jaarboekje*, 1927: XXIV). *Gemeentewerken* had rebuilt it (a map is part of the documentation). Much of the correspondence of the *Schoolbioscoop* in 1924 concerns the creation of this theatre, see: GAR, archive Gemeentesecretarie Rotterdam, afd. Onderwijs’, toegangsnr. 351.01/1093-114 (1924, *Schoolbioscoop*).

involved with them<sup>583</sup>. Most famous is the feature length Polygoon production DE RIJN VAN LOBITH TOT AAN ZEE (1922, A.M. van der Wel, I.A. Ochse) about the Dutch part of the river Rhine. This geographical film has been praised for its aesthetic qualities, which was the work of Polygoon cameraman Iep Ochse<sup>584</sup>. From a boat on the river, one sees the landscape and towns along the Rhine, from Lobith, where it enters the Netherlands, to the port of Rotterdam and the sea. In this way the film shows the position of the city, that is, how it is connected to different places<sup>585</sup>. There is hence a direct relationship between the sequences of the film (2,572m) and the course of the river (170 km in NL), with a ‘scale’ of 1:65. In the meantime Van der Wel started to make films himself, from February 1922. This engagement with production was still before the association of Dutch municipalities (VNG) put the issue of the production of educational films on the agenda for a special meeting in June 1922<sup>586</sup>. This was a call to come to a frequent production output, which the film industry was yet to meet. Van der Wel partly filled this gap. In September 1922, the programme of the Schoolbioscoop included the first film made by Van der Wel, about mounted police in Rotterdam. Various films followed<sup>587</sup>. Within eleven years, Van der Wel, assisted by an operator, would make more than forty films in total, from about ten minutes to more than an hour<sup>588</sup>.

The production of these films finally caused Van der Wel to establish the *Gemeentelijke Filmfabriek*, in 1925<sup>589</sup>. The films were first of all made for the youth of Rotterdam, but several of them were distributed too, while others were shown to groups of adults as well. An example is

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<sup>583</sup> According to the NFM, Van der Wel collaborated on the film MAAN (“Moon”, 1921), together with Otto van Neijenhoff (IWA) and George Debels (who did the animation). With Mullens, Van der Wel made VELUWE (1922). Most important, however, has been the connection with Polygoon. This company was founded in 1920, by Jules Stoop, who had previously made educational films with Hollandia, which he wanted to continue with his new company. Polygoon started to make a series on Northsea fishing: DE NEDERLANDSCHE NOORDZEEVISSCHERIJ (“The Dutch North Sea Fishing”, 1921-1923, Polygoon). While the images were recorded by I.A. Ochse and C. Aafjes, it was directed by Dr. Jan Metzelaar, a lecturer on fishing, and A.C.P.E. Vermeulen, director of the *Visscherijschool* in Vlaardingen. Van der Wel, who had already included films by Polygoon in his programmes before, would play the role of an intermediary (Hogenkamp, 1988: 30); the Schoolbioscoop was based in the naval institute, while Van der Wel had also contacts with other educational organisations in the region. The first part of the series was about trawler fishing that operated from the port of IJmuiden (released in 1921, when it was also included in the programme of the Schoolbioscoop). The second part would be about herring fishing, mainly from Vlaardingen (released in 1922, also part of the Schoolbioscoop program), while the third part was about *beugvisscherij* (static fishing), which operated from Vlaardingen too.

<sup>584</sup> Hogenkamp, 1986: 154.

<sup>585</sup> A similar view on Rotterdam would later be expressed at the world exhibition in Antwerp in 1930, where a panoramic mural was presented that was called “The hinterland of Rotterdam” (desig: Jaap Gidding), which showed the river Rhine from Rotterdam to Basel, see: Halberstma, 2001: 216.

<sup>586</sup> Letter of the *Vereeniging van Nederlandsche Gemeenten*, 1922-06-14, coll. GAR, archive ‘Gemeentesecretarie Rotterdam, afd. Onderwijs’, toegangsnr. 351.01/1061-76 (Schoolbioscoop), volgnr. 4.

<sup>587</sup> The films were first presented to education authorities, see: ‘Schoolfilms’, p6 in: *Nieuw Weekblad voor de Cinematografie*, nr. 6, 1923. Mentioned are: VELUWE, MELK EN MELKPRODUCTEN, LANGS DUIN EN STRAND (all 1922).

<sup>588</sup> This number corresponds approximately to the titles mentioned in the filmography. The number of forty is also mentioned by J.E. van der Pot (letter of 1934-10-04 to Stichting ‘Bevordering van Volkskracht’ – collection: GAR, toegangsnr. 618, inventarisnr. 904, Schoolbioscoop 1934-1935). Next to that, a collaboration was established with H.K.J. van den Bussche, a teacher at the Prinses Juliana School in Djokjakarta (Java), who made educational films about subjects in Java. He had approached Van der Wel after reading an article in the NRC about DE RIJN VAN LOBITH TOT AAN ZEE, letter of 1923-01-21, coll. GAR, archive ‘Gemeentesecretarie Rotterdam, afd. Onderwijs’, toegangsnr. 351.01/1079-82 (1923, Schoolbioscoop), volgnr. 10. For a confirmation of this collaboration, see a letter by the alderman for education to Van der Wel, 1924-05-06, toegangsnr. 351.01/1093-114 (1924, Schoolbioscoop).

<sup>589</sup> The first request as such was expressed in a letter by Van der Wel to the alderman for education, 1923-02-26, coll. GAR, archive ‘Gemeentesecretarie Rotterdam, afd. Onderwijs’, toegangsnr. 351.01/1079-82 (1923, Schoolbioscoop), volgnr. 10. For further preparations, see various documents at the GAR, archive ‘Gemeentesecretarie Rotterdam, afd. Onderwijs’, toegangsnr. 351.01/1093-114 (1924, Schoolbioscoop). This includes a plan by *Gemeentewerken* (accompanying a letter by M. de Roode to alderman A. de Jong for *Plaatselijke Werken*) to rebuild the space (6 x 12m) for this purpose. The *Filmfabriek* would be located at the C.P. Tielestraat 12; it was opened on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August 1925 – ref. *Rotterdams Jaarboekje*, 1926: XXXV.

MET DE PAARDENTRAM NAAR OVERSCHIE (1925). It is about the phenomenon of the horsetram, with the cameraman being a passenger. As the film shows, the tram runs from the city to the village of Overschie, just outside Rotterdam. It was made as a historical document, since the horse tram was about to be substituted by an electric tram<sup>590</sup>. Like the boat at the Rhine, the tram itself is the cinematic vehicle. The film offers the viewer a mobile perspective, and an ongoing change of scenes, with contrasting images of busy and quiet places. Like this film, as a historical document, Van der Wel also made DE VISCHMARKT TE ROTTERDAM, 1881-1930, which showed the delivery and trade of fish as it used to be for many decades. Historical recordings of yet another kind were those of the severe winter of 1928-1929, with exceptional images of cars driving at the frozen river Nieuwe Maas.

Van der Wel often collaborated with specialists in the fields at issue. In 1927, for example, he made the film ELECTRICITEIT EN HAAR TOEPASSINGEN in collaboration with electrical engineer H.H. Ehrenburg, head of the municipal electricity works (GEB)<sup>591</sup>. In a similar way he collaborated with B.G. Meyer, head of the municipal traffic department, on the film VEILIG VERKEER (“Safe Traffic”, 1930). The latter, of about half an hour, is one of the most remarkable films by Van der Wel. At the beginning, it is explicitly mentioned that it is not just meant for a youth audience. It is a quasi slap-stick, about things that go wrong in traffic, followed by a teaching what one should do instead. There are images how one should enter a tram, or how to cross a street when you are with a school class. Several times one sees a school class crossing the street, in rows and fronts. In another scene one sees a busy street, with children playing on the sidewalks and a hand cart that bumps into a pedestrian. The image that follows shows a playground for children. It corresponds to the ideas of modern urbanism advocating zoning. According to the CIAM principles, traffic and leisure should be separated, just like working and living, which are the other main functions of the city.

VEILIG VERKEER smoothly integrates traffic rules with ideas of how a modern city should function. This is emphasised by an image of a big traffic square that functions as a roundabout. An intertitle says: ‘modern traffic in a big city: Circulation System’. The film creates an awareness of and an engagement with urban development, which was considered a precondition for social development. The main purpose of the Schoolbioscoop was to educate the city youth and to develop their ideas concerning their environments. This links up with a remark on CIAM and Le Corbusier by political anthropologist James C. Scott.

The original manifesto of CIAM called for primary school students to be taught the elementary principles of scientific housing: the importance of sunlight and fresh air to health, the rudiments of electricity, heat, lighting, and sound; the right principles of furniture design; and so on. These were matters of science, not of taste; instruction would create, in time, a clientele worthy of the scientific architect. Whereas the scientific forester could, as it were, go right to work in the forest and shape it to his plan, the scientific architect was obliged to first train a new clientele that would “freely” choose the urban life that Le Corbusier had planned for them. (Scott, 1998: 114)

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<sup>590</sup> Whereas the horse tram itself had come instead of a steam tram, in 1890, which had been too dangerous.

<sup>591</sup> Van der Wel and Ehrenburg, who established his name through the construction of the power stations at the Galileïstraat (i.c.w. city architect V.A. Van der Steur) and the extended one of the Schiehaven (a.o.), had previously already discussed the idea of an educational film, for national distribution, which resulted in a film that was shot in Amsterdam and produced by another production company (names unknown). Teachers who attended its first screening were unsatisfied, since it did not suit educational purposes. This opinion was shared by Van der Wel and schools inspector Kreiken, and one decided, together with Ehrenburg, to make a new film. ‘Een film over electriciteit’, p4 in: *Nieuw Weekblad voor de Cinematografie*, nr. 23, 1927. For Ehrenburg, see: Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis > Ehrenburg, Hillebrand Hendrik; [www.iisg.nl/ondernemers/pdf/pers-0423-01.pdf](http://www.iisg.nl/ondernemers/pdf/pers-0423-01.pdf) (2008-11-04)

The manifesto was 'Die Erklärung von La Sarraz', which was the result of the first CIAM congress, held in La Sarraz, Switzerland (1928). One of the four headings concerned 'architecture and public opinion', which was a statement to educate people in the way Scott explained it.

The link to CIAM might have been a direct one. At the CICI conference in La Sarraz one year later, filmmaker and Filmliga member Mannus Franken was the Dutch representative<sup>592</sup>. He was also the chairman of an association for educational films (*Vereeniging voor Onderwijs- en Ontwikkelingsfilms*), which was a collaboration of school cinemas from different cities<sup>593</sup>. As a member of the Filmliga he established also a link with educational cinema<sup>594</sup>. This completes the circle, since the architects within the Filmliga had direct links with CIAM, among them Cornelis van Eesteren, who was its chairman (1930-1947). Mannus Franken, in his turn, concretised the shared agenda by his film *MODERNE NEDERLANDSCHE ARCHITECTUUR* (1930).

In the case of Van der Wel, however, the films were not *about* modernity, but *for* modernity – to paraphrase Elizabeth Lebas (2000: 141). Besides the film on traffic being an early example of its kind, one can detect other programmatic links with architecture and urbanism. Many of the films by Van der Wel concern nature and agriculture<sup>595</sup>. In the *SLOOT EN PLAS* (1925), for example, children go out in the fields to discover the treasures of nature<sup>596</sup>. Other films are detailed records of the life of various plants and animals. A remarkable example is a film about birds in and around Rotterdam (1930), in the city centre, in parks and in nature areas close to the city (e.g. *De Beer*). This film, of almost an hour, was coloured through green, blue and yellow tinting. Like some other films by Van der Wel, it was accompanied by a text book, written by schools inspector H.G.C. Kreiken. The film starts, as explained by the book (p3), with a critical note on modern poultry farming, since chicken had become 'food machines'; the film shows instead how birds actually live their lives in nature. The film was based on the idea that modern human beings should respect nature, and that the connection with it should be revitalised.

Similar ideas underlay the modern movement within architecture and planning, which became manifest in Rotterdam through garden villages, Witteveen's idea of parkways, and various plans for city parks, like 'Vroesenpark' (1921, Willem Kromhout), and most important, the 'Kralingse Bos- en Parkplan' (1921-1927, Klijnen, Granpré Molière, Verhagen, Kok)<sup>597</sup>. The latter was a forestry plan for the 'Kralingerhout' to create woods in direct connection to the city. Van der Wel also paid attention to it, through the film *BOOMPLANTDAG IN DEN KRALINGERHOUT TE ROTTERDAM* (1928). In this film we see masses of school children planting trees. This film, as well as others in which school children appeared themselves, actively engaged them with their surroundings, especially since they could subsequently see themselves in the film.

Whereas such films addressed the importance of nature, modern architecture had to make space for open and green cities, to integrate nature and the built environment. In that perspective we can also view Van der Wel's films about the countryside and various provinces of the Netherlands<sup>598</sup>. One should realise here that they were first of all made for the youth of the city,

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<sup>592</sup> The *Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne* (CIAM) was organised by Hélène de Mandrot at her castle in La Sarraz. The next year she organised the *Congrès International de Cinéma Indépendant* (CICI). Among its participants were Alberto Cavalcanti, Walter Ruttmann, Hans Richter, Béla Balázs, Sergei Eisenstein and Mannus Franken (see: Heijs, 1982: 439). CIAM got a follow up in Frankfurt (1929). It was organised by Ernst May, who himself related film and architecture in an overall media concept under the banner of *Das Neue Frankfurt*, as addressed by Elsaesser (2005b). After this occasion, a series of congresses followed, so that it began to function as a permanent international platform.

<sup>593</sup> Hogenkamp, 1985.

<sup>594</sup> On the 4<sup>th</sup> of November 1927, a conference was organised in The Hague for representatives of the Filmliga, the *Vereeniging voor Onderwijs- en Ontwikkelingsfilms* and the *Volkshogeschoolen* (VU), in order to look for possibilities to collaborate, see: *Filmliga* 1927/3, p13.

<sup>595</sup> e.g. *MELK EN MELKPRODUCTEN*, 1922; *KAASVERVAARDIGING*, 1925, *LANDBOUWBEDRIJVEN*, 1927.

<sup>596</sup> Other examples are *DE LIBELLE* (1922), *DE STINKZWAM* (1925), *VOORJAAR* (1927) a.o.

<sup>597</sup> For the history of these plans, see e.g. Van de Laar, 2000: resp. 307, 359, 355/368.

<sup>598</sup> This includes films about the Veluwe (1922), Zuid-Limburg (1925), Drente (1927), Zeeland (1932), among others.



and a part of this youth came hardly ever outside it<sup>599</sup>. If we take both the cinematic countryside and the real city together, we have the ideal image of the films: an environment that is both urban and green, which propels the trinity of fresh air, and an abundance of light and space.

A case that exemplifies yet another dimension of the programmatic links is the film *SCHOOL VOOR VROUWENARBEID* ("School for Women's Labour", 1933). It was made because of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the school, to which it was presented by the municipality during the official celebrations (1933-10-24)<sup>600</sup>. The purpose of the film, however, was to stimulate girls to continue their education at one of the five schools of the association<sup>601</sup>. It was a progressive institution, which was founded to offer chances to working class girls<sup>602</sup>. The first part of the film consists of acted scenes. A mother and daughter see an advertisement for a job as a housekeeper, the daughter applies, but she makes mistakes. Training at the *School voor Vrouwenarbeid* offers the solution. The film shows, in a straightforward way, how the girls learn writing and things like sewing, washing, first aid, baby-care, and cooking, which happens in a large and spacious kitchen, and afterwards they enjoy their meal. Besides practical experience, the school was also important to create a sense of community, which the film emphasizes through a school camp (at *Huis ter Heide*).

Considering the film's purpose, there is a direct link to housing issues. While this film was being made, the architect Han van Loghem was asked to build a new *School voor Vrouwenarbeid* (1934-1935), or actually to rebuild two existing schools and to make extensions<sup>603</sup>. Although this 'renovation' might not seem to be an important architectural project at first, it was well received by critic W. van Gelderen in the magazine *De 8 & Opbouw* (1935: 95-97). He even considered it to be exemplary for modern school accommodation. The exterior is of little interest here, but the interior is all the more important. It contained two complete model dwellings, each with two floors and a staircase. Van Loghem also designed the furniture, which was made of steel and wood. The furnishing of the rooms in general was of 'the greatest possible simplicity and effectivity [*zakelijkheid*]'. In that way the dwellings truly functioned as templates, and as such they were of educational value themselves, as Van Gelderen pointed out. This counted for all other classrooms too, like the kitchens and laundries, which were described as 'open, liberated spaces, where the future housewives work and learn in an atmosphere that they will later consider as a precondition for their dwellings'<sup>604</sup>. The girls were not only trained in housekeeping, but they were also taught what modern living is about.

The article by Van Gelderen in *De 8 & Opbouw* was followed by a printed version of a radio lecture held by D. Oppenheimer-Belinfante (1935), from the Dutch Association of Housewives. She advocated that modern living, and the development of modern housing as its consequence, is first of all a matter of training housewives. They, in turn, set their standards, which is a major power for the development of housing design. This statement, which was endorsed by the editorial board of *De 8 & Opbouw*, followed about ten years after the publication of Bruno Taut's influential book *Die Neue Wohnung. Die Frau als Schöpferin* (1924), which, in its turn, was based on the famous American book *Household Engineering; Scientific*

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<sup>599</sup> See, for example, the documentary *EENE WONING VOOR DEN WERKMAN* (1972, Leo Akkermans), with explanations by residents of garden village 'Vreewijk'.

<sup>600</sup> It followed after speeches by Chairman J. Drost, Minister of Education H. Marchant, Alderman of Education F. Nivard and others. See: 'Zilveren jubileum School voor Vrouwenarbeid', in: *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 1933-10-25 and 'School voor Vrouwenarbeid', *NRC*, 1933-10-25.

<sup>601</sup> I.e. Jonker Fransstraat, Drievriendenstraat, Schinkelstraat, Dillenburgstraat, Lange Torenstraat.

<sup>602</sup> It was founded (1908), as a private initiative, by Willem Baartz, director of the Oranjeboom beer brewery, and his wife Baartz-Van Hall (GAR: archive 'Familie Baartz-Van Hall, entry nr. 935). Due to their efforts, the school would also be supported by the municipality, the province of Zuid-Holland, and the state. See: 'Zilveren jubileum School voor Vrouwenarbeid', in: *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 1933-10-25.

<sup>603</sup> i.e. at the Koningsveldstraat.

<sup>604</sup> W. van Gelderen, 1935: 97.

*Management in the Home* (1919), by Christine Frederick. The architects of the modern movement, first of all in Germany, where the book was published in 1922, realised that the woman, as a housewife, was crucial for the development of modern housing. According to Mark Peach (1995: 458; cf. Heynen, 2001: 718), the modernists tried to improve the conditions for women, but in general they did not question social institutions themselves. He argues that most architects still saw the modern woman as a housewife, for whom they sought to make day-to-day tasks less burdensome, by making her work more efficient. The kitchen, as the place of intensive home labour, was therefore considered to be the main focus for functionalist reform. This is not only reflected by the school design of Van Loghem, but also by the famous Bruynzeel kitchen designs of Piet Zwart, a couple of years later.

However, the conclusion of Peach, that the modernists did not question the role of women, is a problematic one. Architecture was indeed a male dominated profession, and it might also be true that most of them followed middle-class values. But as Peach himself points out, in order to change social roles and institutions, alternatives must be elaborate enough to be interesting for the masses. And indeed, the great majority of the women at that time, in the Netherlands even more than in Germany, were housewives. In order to make change possible, gradual developments were most likely to be successful. In the case of Rotterdam, it was not so much a case of moderate ideas, on the contrary – consider for example the ideas of Ida Liefrinck – but still a matter of exploring real possibilities. Politicians, architects and filmmakers, among other, contributed to social reform. The example of the *School voor Vrouwenarbeid* shows that Van der Wel with his film, and Van Loghem with his design mobilised the girls, in order to develop new living standards and individual prospects.

The film SCHOOL VOOR VROUWENARBEID was the last film that Van der Wel would produce. The Schoolbioscoop came to an end in December 1933, when new aldermen had been installed – no socialists – and government expenses were cut, which had similarly affected the municipal housing department<sup>605</sup>. There were attempts to continue the Schoolbioscoop as part of the *Maatschappij tot nut van 't Algemeen* in Rotterdam, a privately funded organisation that was concerned with people's development through education. The idea to integrate the Schoolbioscoop in its activities was proposed by its secretary Johannes van der Pot, the director (librarian) of the influential *Rotterdamsch Lees kabinet*, who had previously been the vice-chairman of the Filmliga Rotterdam (which was also dissolved in 1933). In this way, it was argued, the children from the highest grades of 210 schools could still attend film screenings, three times a year, and this service would be for free since the organisation worked with volunteers. Moreover, films by Van der Wel were still available, and additional titles would be rented for a small amount of money from the Schoolbioscoop in The Hague. To cover additional costs Van der Pot applied for funds from the private foundation *Bevordering van Volkskracht* ("Promotion of People's Power"). Within two days the application was rejected, but without a clear motivation<sup>606</sup>. Exactly one year later, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of October 1935, Van der Pot wrote another letter to ask once more for support, since the conditions had changed. The municipal electricity works (GEB), in its new high-rise office tower, was now in charge of the films and organised screenings. The link with the GEB had already been established with the production of the film

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<sup>605</sup> Mentioned in the letter by J.E. van der Pot (see below). In the meantime, a prominent figure in the field of youth work in Rotterdam, dr. W.E. van Wijk (former director of *De Arend*, see: Selten, 2005: 65), was appointed director of the school museum and the related *Schoolbioscoop* in The Hague shortly before (*Rotterdams Jaarboekje*, 1934: XXVIII). He was in favour of continuing the Schoolbioscoop in Rotterdam, as well as former schools inspector H.G.C. Kreiken, with whom Van der Wel had closely collaborated before, and J.C.J. van Schagen, municipal administrator of education, next to librarian J.E. van der Pot who wrote a letter (1934-10-04) to the board of Stichting 'Bevordering van Volkskracht' to ask for funding – collection: GAR, Stichting 'Bevordering van Volkskracht', toegangsnr. 618, inventarisnr. 904, Schoolbioscoop 1934-1935.

<sup>606</sup> Reply (letter) of 6 October 1934 of the stichting *Bevordering van Volkskracht* to the board of 'het Departement Rotterdam der Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen', collection: GAR, 'Stichting Bevordering van Volkskracht', toegangsnr. 618, inventarisnr. 904, Schoolbioscoop 1934-1935.

ELECTRICITEIT EN HAAR TOEPASSINGEN (1927), in collaboration with H. Ehrenburg, who was also a photography enthusiast<sup>607</sup>. Van der Pot then asked for support to organise screenings in the south of Rotterdam as well. This was rejected again<sup>608</sup>. The Schoolbioscoop continued in some form, but no production would be carried out anymore. Van der Wel, in his turn, left Rotterdam and would make no more films<sup>609</sup>.

Taken together the Schoolbioscoop in Rotterdam exemplifies a process of collective learning and communication within and through a particular environment, in which places are marked by buildings and films, as references or ‘stigmas’, in order to appropriate and develop the environment subsequently. This suggests a correspondence to ‘stigmergy’, which is a concept that was first coined to explain the emergence of complex structures among social insects, and more recently it has been applied to human communication systems as well as human cognition and culture (Bonabeau, 1999; Susi & Ziemke, 2001)<sup>610</sup>. Stigmergy is a notion to address the environment as a medium of communication<sup>611</sup>. Agents encounter stimuli that provide local information, in order to add to, or to change the configuration that subsequently provides information again, and so on. Stigmergy applies to the environment and information about it, which in this case concerns film, as part of, and augmenting the environment.

## § 2. social engagement

Over the course of the 1920s, social movements in Rotterdam became well organised and they were supported by various media. This included the publication of magazines and newspapers, such as the locally published socialist newspaper *Voorwaarts*<sup>612</sup>. Film was also frequently applied, for example by HAKA, an association of cooperatives for consumption products. It commissioned films to promote a socialist way of producing and trading. An early example is PROPAGANDAFILM VERBRUIKSCOÖPERATIE IN NEDERLAND (1924), which was produced by Polygoon that came to the fore as an innovative and progressive film company, especially through its young and talented cameraman and vice-president Cor Aafjes. More films followed in the next years, among them OP VOOR DE COÖPERATIEVE PRODUCTIE (1928, Polygoon)<sup>613</sup>. It not only shows the HAKA companies and their production processes, but it also addresses its social programme, for example by showing the HAKA youth library. Remarkable is a futuristic drawing that presents an imagined HAKA complex, like a tower of Babel. It is highly suggestive, especially because of the next shots of Rotterdam, and particularly the place where a new factory is planned. This would be the subject of the already mentioned construction film DE COÖPERATIEVE PRODUCTIE GROEIT (1932, Polygoon). And still more films followed<sup>614</sup>.

A related and highly remarkable production, commissioned by the *Centrale Bond van Nederlandsche Verbruikscoöperaties*, was the feature fiction film DE MAARSCHALKSTAF (“The Marshal’s Baton”, 1929), which was produced by Transfilma, directed by Luc Willink and shot by Andor von Barys, who were both members of the Filmliga. However, this film is now missing

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<sup>607</sup> Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis > Ehrenburg, Hillebrand Hendrik; [www.iisg.nl/ondernemers/pdf/pers-0423-01.pdf](http://www.iisg.nl/ondernemers/pdf/pers-0423-01.pdf) (2008-11-04).

<sup>608</sup> Letter of 1935-10-04 by Van der Pot to St. ‘Bevordering van Volkskracht’, and a reply of 1935-10-10, collection: GAR, Stichting ‘Bevordering van Volkskracht’, toegangsnr. 618, inventarisnr. 904, Schoolbioscoop 1934-1935.

<sup>609</sup> Westhoff, 1995: 78.

<sup>610</sup> cf. CALResCo, 2008: §6.12; Bonabeau, Dorigo, Theraulaz, 1999: 14; the term was coined by the French biologist Pierre-Paul Grassé in the 1950s. It is derived from the Greek words *stigma* (sting, mark) and *ergon* (work, action).

<sup>611</sup> Bonabeau, Dorigo, Theraulaz, 1999: 16. For the conception of the environment as a medium in respect of urban complexity, see also e.g. Salingaros, 2005: 230.

<sup>612</sup> Van Vree, 2001: 142.

<sup>613</sup> See also: WAAROM JUFFROUW PIETERSE LID VAN DE COÖPERATIE WERD (1925) and the fictional RECLAME FILM HAKA. EEN AVONTUURLIJKE WASDAG (1925).

<sup>614</sup> DAT IS VAN ONS (1934, Polygoon), to promote HAKA products and their production process (at a time of crisis); NEDERLAND BOUWT AAN ZIJN TOEKOMST (1937, Polygoon), on HAKA and progress in the Netherlands; DOOR EENDRACHT STERK! COÖPERATIEF AAN 'T WERK! (1937, Polygoon), like the previous, but focused on Rotterdam.

and forgotten, except for a reference in the filmography of Dutch silent fiction films compiled by Geoffrey Donaldson (1997: 273). According to him, it tells the story of the owner of three large stores, and a young ambitious owner of a cooperative shop. The first believes in the free market, the other in cooperative trade. When the daughter of the first wants to marry the second a problem arises, which escalates, but when a grandchild is born things come to change, and finally the older man joins the union of cooperations, and the son-in-law becomes the new manager. The film seems to be an immediate reaction upon a fiction film made shortly before, called *KLASSENSTRIJD* (“Class Struggle”, 1928, Willy Mullens), which expressed the opposite message, favouring liberalism<sup>615</sup>. Since *DE MAARSCHALKSTAF* was not a regular feature film, its distribution must have been different from the usual cinema circuit too<sup>616</sup>.

Although it is not clear where this film was shown, we might draw a link to the *Instituut voor Arbeidersontwikkeling* (IvAO, “Institute for Workers Development”). It was an educational institution, established by the socialist party SDAP and the general union NVV, with its own film department (*Filmdienst*, 1925-1935). It was initially headed by Jef Last, who drove all over the Netherlands with the “Red Car” (*Roode Auto*): an ambulant cinema for the masses, showing socialist films to various organisations<sup>617</sup>. Through the IvAO some films were made too, like in 1926 when Polygoon’s Cor Aafjes made a film for the *Arbeiders Jeugd Centrale* (PINKSTERFEEST AJC).

The IvAO had also connections with ‘Ons Huis’, a cultural institution to educate the working class. In its centre at the Gouvernestraat (later Lantaren/Venster), it had a theatre with 400 seats for performances, lectures and film screenings, while it also held exhibitions, organised by people like Piet Zwart and Paul Schuitema<sup>618</sup>. They, as well as Jef Last and Joris Ivens, among others, were not only members of the Filmliga, but also of the politically motivated *Links Richten* (“Left Direction”), a Rotterdam based organisation of writers, artists and filmmakers, which published a magazine and organised activities like demonstrations<sup>619</sup>. Many cross-connections existed between different social organisations in Rotterdam, which were all largely inspired by the Soviet Union. Whereas Schuitema visited the country and made his film *RUSLAND* (1931), Joris Ivens went there as well, to visit its film industry. Back in the Netherlands, Ivens gave a lecture about it in Rotterdam, as a special event that marked the start of a new season of the *Volksuniversiteit*<sup>620</sup>.

Ivens would return to the Soviet Union to make *SONG OF HEROES* (1932), about the emergence of this new industrial society, illustrated by the construction of the industrial city Magnitogorsk that was built after a masterplan by Mart Stam<sup>621</sup>. The latter, in his turn, had previously been the chairman of *Opbouw*, while he worked on the design for the new Van Nelle factory – which was in itself a major attempt to improve the conditions of the workers, based upon theosophical motivations, as conceived by Van der Leeuw, which had also informed *Opbouw*<sup>622</sup>. As chairman, Stam was succeeded by Han van Loghem who had already gone to the

<sup>615</sup> This film is also described by Donaldson (1997: 272). Although the film is preserved (NFM), still little is known about it. It is not clear if it was commissioned or Mullens’s own initiative (to attract commissions from large enterprises?).

<sup>616</sup> Something similar counts for another fiction film produced by Transfilma, *EEN LIED VAN DEN ARBEID* (1929), directed by Walter Janssen and shot by Von Barsy as well, which left even less traces today. An advertisement was published in: *Nieuw Weekblad voor de Cinematografie*, 1929-08-30.

<sup>617</sup> Wester, 2001; Van der Steen, 2007. Last was in charge from 1925 to 1928.

<sup>618</sup> Struyvenberg, 2001: 87. They showed for example posters from the Soviet Union.

<sup>619</sup> Struyvenberg, 2001: 87; Stierner, 1992: 22-25.

<sup>620</sup> This took place on 1930-10-02 at De Doelen, ref.: correspondence between Van Dugteren (VU) and Ivens, June and July 1930, coll. GAR, archive ‘Volksuniversiteit’, toegangsnummer 75, inv. nr. 275.

<sup>621</sup> The link between Ivens and Stam has not become fully clear. It is known, however, that Stam and Ivens lived in Rotterdam at the same time, and both went to Berlin in 1922. Both of them were in contact with Arthur Lehning, who would publish the magazine *Internationale Revue / i10*, to which both Stam and Ivens contributed.

<sup>622</sup> Van der Leeuw was a member of Krishnamurti’s theosophical movement, the ‘Order of the Star in the East’, just like the architect Michiel Brinkman, one of the founders of *Opbouw*. The latter received also the commission to design

Soviet Union before, to build, among others, the industrial colony of Kemerovo (1926-1927)<sup>623</sup>. These connections with the Soviet Union, and the cross-connections that existed between various organisations, supported an international network and an exchange of ideas. The Filmliga was an important node in it. Besides the publication of articles on Soviet cinema, it often showed Soviet films in their monthly programmes that circulated in the different cities. Moreover, together with the architects' association Opbouw, it invited several prominent Soviet directors<sup>624</sup>.

In 1929, Vsevolod Pudovkin came to the Netherlands to give lectures in Amsterdam and Rotterdam, but due to objections by the authorities the latter was finally cancelled. Less problematic was the visit of Sergei Eisenstein the next year. He arrived by train in Rotterdam, and one of his hosts was the architect Han van Loghem. The next day he visited the Van Nelle factory as well as Van der Leeuw's private house (1927-1929, Brinkman & Van der Vlugt). Eisenstein's presence was recorded on film, by Polygoon, and by Henk Alsem, who was probably asked by Van der Leeuw, since he had also made recordings of the factory<sup>625</sup>. One year later Dziga Vertov gave presentations in both Rotterdam and Amsterdam.

Important too is the fact that the chairman of the Filmliga Rotterdam, Johan Huijts, was a foreign news editor of the NRC specialised in the Soviet Union. Whereas the Filmliga Amsterdam was mostly interested in cinema as autonomous art, Huijts was much more interested in the social potential of film, just like the founding chairman Oud<sup>626</sup>. According to them (Schoots, 1999: 184), cinema, like architecture, was a technological achievement that needed to be appropriated for daily use by the masses and to be improved to serve society at large. From that perspective, the Filmliga Rotterdam was not against commercial cinemas, they just had to change their programming. Contrary to the Filmliga Amsterdam, Rotterdam was also not opposed to commercial feature films that were meant for entertainment. It just had to be good entertainment. This opposition caused tensions within the Dutch Filmliga. It was also one of the reasons why the Filmliga Amsterdam wanted to dissolve the organisation in 1931. Rotterdam continued for two more years, and, as Celine Linssen has pointed out (1999: 136), its chairman Johan Huijts managed to make the Filmliga accessible to a broader public.

### **En Gij, Kameraad?**

Due to the connections with socialist organisations, Polygoon's Cor Aafjes was approached by the "Central Union of Transport Workers" (CBTA) to produce the feature length propaganda film EN GIJ, KAMERAAD? ("And You, Comrade?", 1928, Joannes Ratté)<sup>627</sup>. It became an important production for Polygoon, since it turned out to be highly successful. A critic from the NRC, for example, compared the film to the work of Dziga Vertov, saying that it actualised his theories in practice<sup>628</sup>. However, the film has remained largely underexposed afterwards, although film historian Bert Hogenkamp (1988: 34) has pointed to its innovative style and the role it has played within the course of Dutch cinema as the first major union film<sup>629</sup>. He, however, left the connection to Rotterdam unnoticed. I will explore this by following Elsaesser's AAA, through which a network appears of people, functions and ideas related to the city. At the same time it will be clear that the *auteur* paradigm does not apply to this film, nor the classification of *avant-garde* as it is usually understood.

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the factory, but he suddenly died in 1925, and his son Jan took over, together with Leen van der Vlugt. See: Lambla, 1999; Livesey, 1999.

<sup>623</sup> See: Abrahams, 1994.

<sup>624</sup> Hogenkamp, 1985.

<sup>625</sup> i.e. HET BEZOEK VAN EISENSTEIN AAN HOLLAND (1930, Henk Alsem); RUSSISCHE REGISSEUR BEZOEKT ONS LAND (1930, Polygoon).

<sup>626</sup> For Huijts' take on film, see his article about *gemeenschapskunst* in the magazine *Filmliga* 1928/6, p11. For the interest of Oud, see Schoots, 1999: 184.

<sup>627</sup> Hogenkamp, 1988: 30.

<sup>628</sup> NRC, quoted in: 'Wat de Pers Zegt', p6 in: *Tweede Blad van De Transportarbeider*, 1928-12-08.

<sup>629</sup> The film is also briefly mentioned by De Haan, 1995: 53.

The commissioning CBTA had its headquarters in Rotterdam, where it was established in December 1917, the year of the Russian revolution, and a time of social upheaval in Rotterdam since it suffered from the international crisis<sup>630</sup>. Moreover, the union had played a major role in the attempt to proclaim the revolution in the Netherlands one year later – with its leader Johan Brautigam as one of the key figures<sup>631</sup>. Next to that it took an active share in the harbour strike of 1920, when 18,000 workers put down work for a period of ten weeks<sup>632</sup>. Notwithstanding these events, the union chose a different strategy in the end. It decided to increase its number of members and to propagate its ideas in different ways. Therefore the board also commissioned this film. It was motivated by at least two reasons.

Firstly, the film had to show the achievements of the union during its first ten years, and to explain the work of the organisation to its own members. The workers had to pay their monthly subscription fee, and some of them began to complain about the size of it. At that time, unions took care of things that became later part of the welfare state, including social securities like unemployment wages, disability wages, health insurances and so on. The film thus had to communicate the need of the union. To that end the wives of the workers were invited too. In fact, the union had also a women's brigade, the *vrouwen brigade*, which is present in the film as well, for example in shots of demonstrations where they carry large banners.

Secondly, and most important, had been the idea to raise the number of members from 15,000 to 20,000. To that end the members were asked to invite their colleagues and friends who were, as they called it, 'unorganised'. They succeeded, and even more so, within two years the union counted 30,000 members. It was made possible by arranging special screenings in normal cinema theatres, with regular entrance fees, in more than eighty towns all over the Netherlands – in a period of about four months. Before the screening of the film, or during a break, a speech was given by one of the union leaders. The film itself was usually accompanied by the socialist folk singer Dumont (= Gerrit van den Berg), who played the guitar. At the end of the film, the audience joined him singing 'The International', the anthem of the international socialist movement and the Soviet Union.

The story of the film is told in four acts. The first one gives a general impression of transportation work, in the harbour and in the city of Rotterdam, showing various modes of traffic. There are dockworkers, stokers of steam engines, as well as bus and taxi drivers, among others. This part is of a documentary nature, in the style of the city symphony, to emphasise that the film is about 'reality', rather than fiction, to make its message more convincing. The next act is about the need for workers to organise themselves. We see, among others, the hardships of what they called the 'capitalist' WWI. This is illustrated by alimentation coupons, which had become symbols for crisis and especially hunger. The third act shows how the union functions, with images of the offices, a telegram that is sent by workers calling for immediate support, and images of the union newspaper *De Transportarbeider* being printed – with its editor and director of the film, Joannes Ratté, watching it. The film also shows other means of expressing the ideas of the union, through the production and distribution of pamphlets, booklets and papers. There is also a family reading *De Transportarbeider*, as well as progressive newspapers like *Het Volk* and *Voorwaarts*. Altogether it exemplifies Elsaesser's idea of *Medienverbund*. The final act is about the ideals and possibilities of the union, like living in garden villages, which is illustrated by

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<sup>630</sup> Cf. Van de Laar, 2000: 317.

<sup>631</sup> Brautigam had been one of the founders of the CBTA (1918), together with Arie Heijkoop (see: De Ruyter-De Zeeuw, 1990a and 1990b). Both of them were also members of the socialist party SDAP, which Brautigam represented in the Rotterdam city council, while Heijkoop became alderman for social interests. Next to him was Arie de Zeeuw, as alderman for education. Since the latter had enabled the establishment of the *Schoolbioscoop*, which had already collaborated with Polygoon, the film for the CBTA followed these connections. Moreover, it had been Cor Aafjes who had been the cinematographer of *DE NEDERLANDSCHE NOORDZEEVISSCHERIJ* (1923), an educational film, whose initiators had come into contact with Polygoon through *Schoolbioscoop* director A.M. van der Wel.

<sup>632</sup> Van de Laar, 2000: 324.

images of 'Vreewijk', leisure activities, safety at work, and international cooperation between workers.

This story is interwoven by the repetition of various images. Among them are shots of the transport work itself, speeches of the leaders, and most important, the portraits of individual workers, interchanged by shots of collective demonstrations, to say that the individual needs to support the collective organisation, in order to support the individual worker. This repetition is typical for the film, and it also occurs within single sequences. An activity is often shown twice, through a total shot and a close-up, to emphasise the action. This was something new at that time, and also the fact that the film tried to explain things just visually, without intertitles. When text was needed, it was shown by way of papers, flags and signs. The film even does not show its own title, neither the names of its makers. Instead, it shows the portraits of its director, Joannes Ratté, and cameraman Jan Jansen, at the very beginning.

The most important feature of the film, according to Hogenkamp (1988: 34), is the fact that Jan Jansen showed the faces of the workers, addressing them as individuals, and masses of workers together, as a social class. The two different kinds of images were combined into a dynamic montage. Elaborating on the argument of *Medienverbund*, we can draw a connection to a famous graphic design by Paul Schuitema. In 1930, he made a poster for the CBTA which expressed exactly the same idea, both in form and content. In this photo-montage, a man calls the workers to join the union. His body is made of another photo, showing a mass of people. On it is written the figure 30,000 (union members). Behind the head of the man is a picture of a ship in the docks. In the exhibition and the book *Interbellum Rotterdam* (2001, Halbertsma & Van Ulzen, eds.), the poster is presented as one of the hallmarks of the culture of Rotterdam in this era. In the accompanying text, Schuitema's own explanation of his work is quoted<sup>633</sup>: 'The mass [is] synthesised into a calling body. The individual is called, who must choose the same direction as the mass....'

To ascertain the requested content of the film, Polygoon closely collaborated with the CBTA. The union put much time and effort in it, and its leaders were also committed to make the film artistically valuable. Therefore Cor Aafjes wrote the script together with CBTA-chairman Johan Brautigam and Joannes Ratté, who had just become the chief editor of the union magazine *De Transportarbeider*. Ratté was also appointed as the director of the film – since it is the only film he ever made, he missed the attention of most film historians.

For the cinematography Aafjes worked together with the young cameraman Jan Jansen. The shooting of *EN GIJ, KAMERAAD?* started in June 1928, during the biannual congress of the union. Towards the end of the production, in October, Cor Aafjes suddenly died at the age of thirty-two. Cameraman Jan Jansen, only twenty-four years old, finished the film one month later. The premiere took place in Rotterdam at the City Theater, on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November 1928. Besides journalists, who were all enthusiastic, it was attended by leaders of various unions. They were very enthusiastic too, and immediately wanted to have films to promote their organisations as well. In the next years there was a lot of work to do for Polygoon and Jan Jansen. The latter was, furthermore, also asked to record the funerals of CBTA-leader and SDAP politician Arie Heijkoop and in the same year (1930) that of SDAP-leader Troelstra<sup>634</sup>.

### **more union films**

Despite the success of *EN GIJ, KAMERAAD?*, it was almost deemed to oblivion afterwards, except for the attention paid to it by Bert Hogenkamp (1988: 33-34). It might be telling though that instead of its director Ratté, or Brautigam or even Aafjes, Hogenkamp, notwithstanding his concern with social issues, has given Jansen most of the credit. Ratté and Brautigam were above

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<sup>633</sup> Original quote: 'De massa als een roepend lichaam gesynthetiseerd. De roep gaat uit naar de individu, die dezelfde richting moet kiezen als de massa.' Schuitema quoted by Eefke van Nuenen in: Halbertsma & Van Ulzen, 2001: 313.

<sup>634</sup> i.e. BEGRAFENIS W.A. HEIJKOOP (1930, Jan Jansen); BEGRAFENIS P.J. TROELSTRA (1930, B.D. Ochse).

all union leaders, not filmmakers, and therefore it is hard to see what their roles were, besides (academic) difficulties that may play a role regarding professionalism. Aafjes passed away, and although Hogenkamp has paid special attention to various of his films, his fame died along with him. Jansen, finally, remained unknown to the wider public, working his whole life as an anonymous cameraman for Polygoon, but he received appraisal from colleagues and critics. This, however, was especially the case regarding his next union film, TRIOMF (1931), for the NVV, which was indeed directed by himself, and it which was shown by the Filmliga, albeit partly<sup>635</sup>.

It is exactly for the screening at the Filmliga that TRIOMF, and Jansen along with it, is mentioned in the context of the Dutch avant-garde. The same counts for STALEN KNUISTEN (1930), which his colleague Jo de Haas made for the union of metal workers (ANMB)<sup>636</sup>. Even though these films were a direct result of the success of EN GIJ, KAMERAAD?, they have attracted much more attention from film historians. Their screenings at the Filmliga were crucial for that, even though these shows were merely additional; they were above all intended to recruit members through special screenings, which have hardly been documented as such.

The argument can be continued, since the success of EN GIJ, KAMERAAD? affected other filmmakers, among them Ivens<sup>637</sup>. In May 1929, the union of construction workers (ANBB) approached him, since THE BRIDGE had shown his interest in construction. It resulted in the feature length WE ARE BUILDING (1930), which showed various aspects of building and how it was supported by the union. Related to the project was a short on a congress of the 'union of unions', the NVV (9-12 September 1929)<sup>638</sup>. The status of this film, which has been lost, is not clear. It must have been the first part to be finished, issued separately, and probably used for the NVV only; it was finally not used in WIJ BOUWEN. It is nevertheless of interest to understand Ivens's ideas.

For this film, Ivens asked Von Barsy to collaborate. The two of them recorded the discussions simultaneously, from all possible angles, in order to make them visually expressive and to present the union leaders as heroic figures. According to Jef Last, however, in a review for the revolutionary socialist magazine *De Nieuwe Weg* (1931/2), these images were hollow, inflated amplifications, since one did not get to know the things discussed. Last criticised Ivens for not being politically educated enough to understand the difference between enthusiasm for the Russian revolution and the spirit of Dutch unionism. Such a criticism is remarkable, for the fact that Jef Last was a member of the Filmliga (in Rotterdam)<sup>639</sup>, and also the author of the story of Ivens previous film, BRANDING (1929) – on which Von Barsy had collaborated too. Last recognised Von Barsy's 'technical mastery' in shots of the union members visiting the port<sup>640</sup>, but he was also critical on him. 'It appears, however, that he is already corroded too, for his tendency to make out of nothing something enormous, and so he uses all the time high-sensitive stock, creating striking cloud effects, but therefore the images get an exaggerated, unpleasant harsh tone.' Von Barsy also made various shots of Ivens recording Alderman De Zeeuw, who received the union members at the town hall. However, according to Jef Last, this was all too much about

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<sup>635</sup> In Rotterdam they were shown on the 11<sup>th</sup> of April 1931, see: Gunning, Linssen, Schoots, 1999: 294.

<sup>636</sup> By the Filmliga Rotterdam at 1931-04-11, for other cities see: Beusekom & Chamuleau, 1999: 294.

<sup>637</sup> Ivens worked for the photography shop of his father, CAPI, which was for Polygoon the local agent for film commissions in Amsterdam, The Hague, Groningen and Nijmegen in the 1920s (De Haan, 1995: 23). Next to Ivens one might also mention Jan Hin, who first worked for Ivens, and then established Hinfilm. Hin made the Catholic union film KENTERING (1932). Afterwards he moved to Rotterdam, where he made HET LICHT INWENDIG (1933, Jan Hin), for the catholic union of the blind, St. Odilia – see: Hogenkamp, 2004: 36 and 77.

<sup>638</sup> [www.iven.nl/NL/ChronologieVakbondsfilms.htm](http://www.iven.nl/NL/ChronologieVakbondsfilms.htm) (below) 2007-10-21.

<sup>639</sup> Schoots, 1999: 189. See also: Smit, 2005: 40.

<sup>640</sup> Original quote: 'Alleen blijkt hij ook al aangetast door de neiging om van niets iets geweldigs te maken en hij gebruikt dus voortdurend een overgevoelige film waarmee wel zeer treffende wolkeffekten bereikt worden maar waardoor het beeld tevens een overdreven onaangenaam harden toon krijgt.' In: Last, Jef; 'Het Rotterdamsche kongres van het N.V.V. door Joris Ivens en A. von Barsy', in: *De Nieuwe Weg*, vol. 6/2 (1931). For background information on Last and his connection to *De Nieuwe Weg*, see: [www.jeflast.nl/biografie.html](http://www.jeflast.nl/biografie.html) (visited: 2007-10-01).



the leaders, instead of the workers, who were not to be seen at all. Since Last was in close contact to Ivens, it seems he had already told him his opinion before publishing this review.

In any case, the other parts of *WE ARE BUILDING* do not show exaggerations and visual expressionism, while the workers became prominently present. Considering the constructivist formal perspective of *THE BRIDGE*, this marks a turn in the work of Ivens to social engagement. In a review for the *Filmliga* magazine, *Algemeen Handelsblad* journalist Chris de Graaff compared *WE ARE BUILDING* to Eisenstein's *THE GENERAL LINE* (1929).

If one compares the method of this great Russian to that of our young fellow-Dutchman, then it turns out (to the surprise of many of course), that Ivens, who simply kept himself to his task and who tried to make the best of it, has achieved a much more honest result than Eisenstein, who let a whole calculation of psychological effects precede his work. // That *THE GENERAL LINE* makes such a doubtful impression and that *WE ARE BUILDING*, notwithstanding its weak and lengthy middle part, remained pure from the beginning to the end, reinforces my opinion, that Eisenstein is a great individual artist, and Ivens a primitive-social one<sup>641</sup>.

De Graaf advocated the documentary film as 'a pure medium' to propagate a vision of reality, and not as an artistic expression that is used for aesthetical or formal purposes. This applies to a few other union films too, but some were aesthetically challenging as well.

Among them is another one for the union of transport workers, the sound-film *VOOR ONZE KAMERADEN* (1937, Max de Haas), which was produced by Visie Film, a company that had been established by former Polygoon filmmakers. Bert Hogenkamp (1988: 91) has especially pointed to the first of its three parts, which he called a 'symphony of labour'. Characterised by its whirling montage, it is a tribute to the labour in the port. It was the work of Emiel van Moerkerken, who elaborated on his experience as an assistant cameraman of the feature film *LENTELIED* (1936, Simon Koster). Notwithstanding the aesthetic qualities of the first part, the most striking aspect of the film as a whole, I would argue, is the fact that three entirely different parts make up one film. The second one was a staged performance that presented the life of a transportation worker, while the third part was a registration of a mass meeting of the union: three parts, combining avant-garde, drama and journalism, which presented three different approaches with their own merits. The film became a cross-over that made the message legible to various audiences.

The union films are of special interest, as instruments of social relevance, with their own aesthetic qualities, which are related to their aims. Moreover, these films are not the work of *auteurs*, but the result of a 'scenius', to use the term coined by Brian Eno (see: De Jong & Schuilenburg, 2006: 119-120). It is the genius of the scene that enables such productions. In this way, the efforts of the unionists are particularly important, which, in turn, establishes direct links to Rotterdam – to such a degree that we can link the 'ideal images' of garden village 'Vreewijk', for example, to Ratté and Brautigam, who lived there themselves. It shows an alternative film practice that seems characteristic for Rotterdam.

Since there was a proliferation of union films after 1928, the scenius can be considered in yet an even broader perspective, and be related to a general development that Julian Steward has drawn concerning industrialisation and urbanisation. Towns became, as Steward had it (1976 [1955]: 211), centres for marketing, public facilities, commercial services, political and religious organisations, and the distribution of mass media. At the same time, these functions changed the

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<sup>641</sup> Original quote: 'Vergelijkt men de methode van den grooten Rus met die van onzen jongen landgenoot, dan blijkt (natuurlijk tot veler verbazing) dat Ivens, die zich eenvoudig aan zijn opdracht heeft gehouden en getracht heeft "to make the best of it" een veel eerlijker resultaat heeft bereikt dan Eisenstein, die een geheele berekening van psychologische effecten aan de uitvoering van zijn werk liet voorafgaan. // Dat "De Generale Linie" zulk een twijfelachtigen indruk maakt en dat "Wij Bouwen", ondanks het zwakke en veel te uitvoerige middengedeelte, van het eerste tot het laatste beeld zuiver blijft, versterkt mij in de overtuiging, dat Eisenstein een groot individualistisch artiest is, en Ivens een primitief-sociaal kunstenaar.' De Graaff, 1930: 42-43.

internal composition of towns, they ‘differentiate the population into special segments, classes, or sociocultural groups: wealthy commercial and professional personnel; civil servants, transportation workers, and servicing and building trades groups; and skilled and unskilled laborers’ (ibid.). Steward’s observations might be recognised through various kinds of media practices. Since professional specialisation was accompanied by social-economic differentiation, all kinds of professional and social-economic groups (subcultures or ‘scenes’) articulated their own interests. Union films make that particularly clear, since they define groups, stress differences and address tensions that highlight the emerging complexity. This, however, was not limited to union films only, which can be illustrated by a range of other socially engaged productions.

### § 3. slums, crisis, renewal

Already in 1903, the writer M.J. Brusse published the youth novel *Boeffje*, in which he addressed the problems of the slums in the old city centre. It tells the story of a boy that has a fight with his parents, leaves home and becomes a petty thief. A clergyman takes care of him, and he is subsequently brought to a Catholic boarding school. The book became a bestseller, which was subsequently made into a theatre play (1922, dir. Cor van der Lugt Melsert), and due to its success it was finally turned into a film (1939, dir. Detlef Sierck). On the basis of location studies by Sierck, the architect Henk Wegerif built the studio sets. In this way the film shows the life in the dirty and dark alleys and the worn-out houses that are packed upon one another.

Whereas the Catholic Church played a prominent role in this film, already many years earlier it had commissioned a film about its charity work for youths in these problematic quarters: *HET ST.FRANCISCUS-LIEFDEWERK TE ROTTERDAM* (1925). This documentary was made by the Rotterdam based photographer and filmmaker Frans van Dijk, who received various commissions from the Catholic milieu. The film includes various street shots and gives some general impressions of the activities organised there, such as boys playing games. It was part of a larger campaign of the charity organisation, after it had moved to a new accommodation and started a new program<sup>642</sup>.

Various other recordings would be made in the slums. Polygoon news, for example, also reported on charity in the area, with adults and children coming out of the houses with cans, pans and buckets to collect soup (Polygoon, 1929-02-27). The social problems of the old city were addressed in various ways, from different perspectives. Filmliga member Henk Alsem, for example, subtly addressed it in his intentionally controversial commercial *DROOMEN* (1931) for *De Bijenkorf*, which was located in the vicinity of the slums. In four minutes it tells the story of a poor girl, who sells flowers in front of a window of the department store. She falls asleep and dreams of a fashion show especially organised for her, of a life that she cannot afford. In the end a guard wakes her up. There are two versions of the story: one that respects the narrative order, and one that is edited in an expressive, experimental manner, in which the story completely dissolves, and association comes to the fore instead, with some additional abstract images. *De Bijenkorf* showed both of them to different audiences.

A similar contrast between rich and poor is drawn at the beginning of Jan Koelinga’s cine-poème *DE STEEG* (“The Alley”, 1932). It shows first of all the wealthy modern city, including an image of *De Bijenkorf*. It is opposed to the poverty and social life of the inhabitants of an alley (*Schoorsteenvegerssteeg*). With diagonally framed shots, many close-ups and a fast montage, *DE STEEG* shows the street life of the inhabitants and the bad conditions of the quarter, yet with a strong community life.

Koelinga’s production, which was the initiative of the filmmaker itself, and distributed by *De Uitkijk* in Amsterdam, also shows the turn within the avant-garde towards explicit social

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<sup>642</sup> Shortly before, *Sint Franciscus Liefdewerk* established itself in a new accommodation at the *Schiedamschen Singel* – advertisement in the magazine *Katholieke Illustratie*, October 1924.

engagement, which was extra motivated by the international financial crisis that started in October 1929. It is a shift of focus that is also recognizable in the work of people like László Moholy-Nagy, who had been a guest of the Filmliga Rotterdam shortly before<sup>643</sup>. Already earlier such a tendency developed, in the case of *Links Richten*. It even organised a solidarity action to raise money in order to support residents of the slums in their struggle against the landlords<sup>644</sup>.

In 1932, when the international crisis reached rock bottom, Polygoon reported on the “crisis committee” in Rotterdam that collected money for the poor (Polygoon, 1932-01-15). As the report shows, attention was raised in different ways, for example by a camel with a driver passing on the sidewalk and a boat that was put on wheels and driven through the streets. Next to that, Polygoon reported on measures proposed by Mayor Droogleeveer-Fortuyn, to invest in the port in order to beat the recession<sup>645</sup>. At the same time, money was collected at the cinemas, for which publicity was made by slides<sup>646</sup>. In this way the reports by Polygoon helped to raise funds to relieve the pain<sup>647</sup>.

The crisis, however, also affected the company itself, which was reinforced by problems within the film industry after the introduction of sound film. As a result it became much more pragmatic. Its most idealist filmmakers, Ab Keyzer, Jo de Haas and Max de Haas, decided to leave the company and to start Visie Film. Its first production was FAKKELGANG (1932, Max de Haas), about alcohol abuse, made for the leftist “Dutch Association for the Abolition of Alcoholic Drinks”<sup>648</sup>. Due to unemployment and the lack of good perspective, especially in the slums, alcohol abuse became a serious problem<sup>649</sup>. This film followed the ideas of Soviet cinema, both in form and content. It shows alcohol consumption in deteriorated neighbourhoods in both Rotterdam and Amsterdam, which is opposed to healthy people in modern environments. The film was part of one of the last central shows of the Filmliga (in Rotterdam at Corso, 1932-12-10). Early in 1933, the Filmliga was dissolved<sup>650</sup>.

The disappearance of the Filmliga meant the end of an organised film avant-garde. Some filmmakers continued individually and focused on social concerns, although it is unknown if this social engagement ever found a public release. Jan Koelinga, for example, documented the crisis by filming boats at anchor (OPGELEGDE SCHEPEN IN CRISISTIJD, 1934). The recordings are almost still images that, as motion pictures, emphasise the problems at issue; also because they make a contrast regarding the highly dynamic images of the various harbour films that had been made before. Next to that, Koelinga also shot general impressions of the crisis, of poverty and people queuing (CRISISJAREN 1934-1936). Paul Schuitema made the short film BETOGINGEN

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<sup>643</sup> In 1931, see e.g. Rietbergen, 2001: 50. This shift in the work of Moholy-Nagy is exemplified by the differences between, on the one hand, his film LICHTSPIEL: SCHWARTZ-WEIß-GRAU (1930), and, on the other, the films GROBSTADT ZIGEUNER and IMPRESSIONEN VON ALTER MARSEILLE HAFEN (both released in 1932).

<sup>644</sup> Stiemer, 1992: 23. Cf. Van de Laar, 2000: 328 – about large demonstrations against malpractices of landlords (1930-11-27), and strikes by residents (*huurstaking*, July 1931).

<sup>645</sup> BURGEMEESTER MR. P. DROOGLEEVER FORTUIN OVER DE ROTTERDAMSE HAVENS (Polygoon, 1932-11-03)

<sup>646</sup> [www.cinemacontext.nl](http://www.cinemacontext.nl) > Samson Reclame Rotterdam, 1934.

<sup>647</sup> It is a different picture from the one drawn by Gold and Ward (1997: 64) in the case of Great Britain, where ‘[n]ewsreels had often contained positive images of poor housing conditions being briskly solved by slum clearance since 1930’, and where fuller-length documentaries addressed the other side, of planning.

<sup>648</sup> i.e. *Nederlandsche Vereeniging tot Afschaffing van Alcoholhoudende Dranken*

<sup>649</sup> This problem was also addressed through various other means, e.g. drawings by the artist (and filmmaker) Wout van Heusden (Stiemer, 1992: 18).

<sup>650</sup> The Filmliga ended in 1933, officially because of a conflict that arose when several members, first of all Jo Otten, protested against the screening of the German film MORGENROT (1933, Vernon Sewell & Gustav Ucicky), which was produced before, but released after Hitler came to power, and turned into Nazi propaganda. According to Céline Linssen (1999: 133-136), the exact reasons have remained somewhat vague. Under influence of the developments in Germany, opposed tendencies developed within the Filmliga itself. On the one hand it showed communist sympathies, on the other hand a growing number of students in Rotterdam, who visited the Filmliga screenings, sympathised with national-socialism and asked for German and Italian films. According to Chairman Huijts this was the immediate reason to dissolve the Filmliga (cf. Hogenkamp, 1986: 172).

(“Demonstrations”, 1935). Through an expressive framing it shows a political demonstration against the government policy, with banners saying ‘Do we have to starve?’ At the same time Schuitema wrote a rhetoric questionnaire in the magazine *De 8 & Opbouw* (1935: p229).

1. which task had the original avant-garde? 2. is there now not even a greater need of avant-gardists? 3. or does one expect that the cinema will purify itself within the industry? 4. is the mediocrity of the contemporary film not a consequence of its defective content? 5. is the form not a direct consequence of the content and the technical means? 6. is the content a consequence of the more or less cunning scripts, or is it the reflection of the problems of the age? 7. is there a relation between the spirit of the age and the spirit of the film? 8. thus is the new film a consequence of the new content? 9. thus is the renewal of the film not a matter of social renewal?<sup>651</sup>

More questions followed, which similarly addressed the idea that film should be a matter of social engagement. By publishing this ‘manifesto’ in *De 8 & Opbouw*, Schuitema directly appealed to the architects and designers that had actively supported the Filmliga before.

At the same time (1935), the SDAP won the municipal elections again. It was even the first time that Rotterdam got an administration with only socialist aldermen, which offered new perspectives<sup>652</sup>. Unionist and SDAP prominent Johan Brautigam became the Alderman for “Public Works” and “Social Housing” and reorganised the departments. He abolished the practice of building alcove-dwellings, and gave direction to a renovation plan regarding the slums of downtown Rotterdam. Therefore, Brautigam closely collaborated with city planner Witteveen. The latter drew plans for the breakthrough of the slums near the town hall, to build the Meent, a major new east – west connection<sup>653</sup>. As an antipode to slum clearance, Witteveen also drew the extension of the city, for the actualisation of the residential quarters Bergpolder and Blijdorp<sup>654</sup>. These plans were carried out by private developers, but supervised by and with financial support of the municipality<sup>655</sup>. A great number of the houses here, as well as parts of the Meent, were designed by Wim ten Bosch, who had gradually come to embrace modernism. He also showed these projects in his film *ROTTERDAM EN HOE HET BOUWDE* (1940), while highlighting the role of Brautigam and Witteveen too, among several other big men.

Notwithstanding such developments, the architects Oud and Van Ravesteyn, who had been pioneers of the modern movement and actively involved with the Filmliga, advocated a new direction that favoured a much more individualised, disciplinary and monumental approach. The modernist project, however, was still fiercely defended by people like Mart Stam, Han van Loghem and Ida Lieftrinck<sup>656</sup>. Within such a divergent movement, however, there was hardly a common direction anymore, let alone a shared agenda between architecture and cinema.

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<sup>651</sup> Schuitema, 1935: 229; original quote: ‘1. welke taak had de oorspronkelijke avant-garde? 2 is er nu nog niet meer behoefte aan avant-gardisten? 3. of verwacht men dat de film zich binnen de industrie vanzelf zal zuiveren? 4. is de middelmatigheid van de hedendaagse film geen gevolg van de gebrekkige inhoud? 5. is de vorm niet een direct gevolg van de inhoud en de technische middelen? 6. is de inhoud een gevolg van de min of meer listige scenario’s of is ze de weerspiegeling der tijdproblemen? 7. is er verband tusschen de tijdgeest en de geest der film? 8. is dus de nieuwe film een gevolg van de nieuwe inhoud? 9. ligt dus de vernieuwing van de film niet in de maatschappelijke vernieuwing?’

<sup>652</sup> i.e. Brautigam, De Zeeuw, R.J. van Dijk and J.B.J. Ratté (who had directed the film *EN GIJ, KAMERAAD?*, 1928).

Due to the crisis of the early 1930s, much of the expenses had been cut by the previous college, but that was still not enough, according to the central government in The Hague. In 1936, the Dutch Minister of Finance, P.J. Oud, was therefore appointed to sanitise the municipal expenses of Rotterdam. In 1938 he would become the city’s Mayor.

<sup>653</sup> Cf. Van de Laar (2000: 295).

<sup>654</sup> The plan for Blijdorp was a modification of an earlier plan, by Kromhout (1921), now taking into account the Maastunnel-tracé, see: Van de Laar, 2000: 355.

<sup>655</sup> De Ruyter-De Zeeuw, 1990a.

<sup>656</sup> Cf. Holsappel, 2000: 9-10.

#### § 4. towards the end of an era

Polygoon continued to make films with a social agenda, but in different ways. Since 1933, it also produced films for the national-socialist party NSB, among them *HOU ZEE!* (1936)<sup>657</sup>. It showed a proud country with a glorious past. The film starts with images of nature, like dunes and the sea, the Dutch landscape with mills, the beautiful cityscape of Amsterdam, and the powerful one of Rotterdam with constructions like the Willemsbrug and the industry. The next sequence shows the crisis: ships at anchor in the port, closed factories and still cranes, unemployed workers and kids in slums. The film argues that it is due to the democratic system, and especially class struggle, which has torn the people apart and caused the country's downfall. To resolve it the country needs a strong leader, in order to unify the people and to achieve great achievements again. NSB leader Mussert is the elected one, and comparisons are made to Hitler and Mussolini. Workers, however, did not choose for the NSB. Those who were dissatisfied with the SDAP, which had become more moderate, rather chose for the communist party or for related groups<sup>658</sup>.

Whatever the pragmatism of Polygoon may have done to the company, it subsequently made productions such as that for HAKA, *DOOR EENDRACHT STERK! COÖPERATIEF AAN 'T WERK!* (1937). This film too addressed the need to unite, as the title says, but in a totally different way. The film begins with a procession in Rotterdam at the 'International Co-operatives Day'; people carry banners with texts like "Profit trade brings war, co-operation brings peace"<sup>659</sup>. It highlights the need for class-struggle as a reply to internationally increasing political tensions. The solution to the hardship of the crisis is to support cooperative production, which everyone can do, which is exemplified by housewives buying products at HAKA shops<sup>660</sup>. The film addresses labour agreements between HAKA and the unions; the importance of leisure is emphasised through shots of people cycling, with kids in a sidecar, next to images of swimming and canoeing.

Next to that, Polygoon's *Hollands Nieuws*, reported on social events like the annual "Women's Peace March" (Polygoon, 1939-05-17), addressing the danger of the rise of national-socialism and its militarism that caused the international tensions<sup>661</sup>. In the case of Rotterdam and the Netherlands, the issue of armament was also shown by Polygoon, as it reported on a military parade at the Coolingsel Boulevard and in front of the town hall<sup>662</sup>. Whereas this was still a newsreel, it made a recruitment film for the Dutch Royal Navy as well<sup>663</sup>. Mobilisation had become an important issue, which was eventually also reflected by the feature film *ERGENS IN NEDERLAND* (1940, Ludwig Berger).

One case is of particular interest here. In the autumn of 1939, Profilti made the film *BESCHERM UW STAD* ("Protect your City", 1939). After the German occupation of Poland in September 1939, the municipality established a foundation for anti-aircraft defence (*Stichting Luchtafweer Rotterdam en Omstreken*). It tried to raise funds for armament, and therefore it commissioned this film, to ask for donations from movie goers. In about three minutes, a rapid montage-sequence is presented with images of Rotterdam, drawing an overview of old and new buildings, such as a constructivist white villa (1938-1939, G.W. Baas) and the new functionalist 'Beurs' ("WTC", 1925-1940, J.F. Staal). It is necessary to protect dwellings, shops, offices, schools and, above all, 'our women and children'. In a staged sequence, a class of school children seeks protection after the alarm is raised. This is followed by people putting on gas masks, and

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<sup>657</sup> Cf. Vermeer, 1987: 95. Instead of 1936 as the production year (source: B&G), Vermeer mentions that the premiere of the film took place on 1935-05-16 in The Hague. If this is correct, the film cannot have served, however, as she mentions, the provincial elections, since they took place in April 1935.

<sup>658</sup> Van de Laar, 2000: 331. For the 'reconciliation policy' of the SDAP, see p333.

<sup>659</sup> On 1937-07-03. Original quote: 'Winsthandel brengt oorlog, coöperatie brengt vrede'.

<sup>660</sup> Shown are the HAKA shops: *Samenwerking, De Eendracht, De Volharding*.

<sup>661</sup> See also: *VROUWEN VREDESGANG* (1938-1939, Henk Hos).

<sup>662</sup> This was attended by Mayor P.J. Oud and the military authorities (*MILITAIR DÉFILÉ*, Polygoon, 1939-10-19).

<sup>663</sup> I.e. *ONZE KONINKLIJKE MARINE* (1939, Polygoon), for its schools in Vlissingen, Rotterdam and Den Helder.

arranging shelters, as well as archival footage (from elsewhere) of fighter planes dropping bombs. A map of Rotterdam is shown with twenty-six circles across the agglomeration, corresponding to the positions of anti-aircraft arms. Following Grusin (2003), this might be called ‘premediation’, as an attempt to report things before they have actually happened, in order to direct them: this is a matter of pre-emptive warfare<sup>664</sup>. The montage-sequence finishes therefore with a text saying that the Dutch state spends millions on defence, but that it is not enough. The citizens of Rotterdam, Schiedam and Vlaardingen are asked to donate money, and a bank account number is shown. In another three minutes, Mayor P.J. Oud explains the passive defence measures taken so far, like the organisation of shelters and first aid services, but there is still the need to acquire a battery of anti-aircraft weapons, for which he asks support. “Protect Your City”, the last title says. It is a different kind of social engagement than that of the previous films, but one that turned out to be highly important.

That became painfully clear in the amateur film 77-BT LUA (1939-1940) of the reserve officer candidate M.H.H. Koenig. Still a student, he served the 77<sup>th</sup> battery, which was one of the units that operated the anti-aircraft weapons. Koenig filmed the preparations, from December 1939 up until the moment of fighting. The fighting itself is missing, since Koenig had no time to handle the camera, but in vain. Illegally, at last, Koenig filmed his unit being imprisoned in a garden. He ended with images, filmed through a window, of the nervous movements surrounding the negotiations between the Dutch and the Germans<sup>665</sup>. It resulted in the catastrophic event that awaited Rotterdam. Half a year after its call for help, the doom scenario of BESCHERM UW STAD became reality. Koenig himself would be killed in 1943<sup>666</sup>.

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<sup>664</sup> Richard Grusin, in reference to the war in Iraq, 2003: ‘First, where remediation entailed the refashioning of prior media forms, I claim that premediation entails the desire to remediate future media forms and technologies. In addition, I argue that premediation entails the desire to remediate the future before it happens, the desire that the future be always already pre-mediated. Finally, I suggest that this desire to premeditate the future before it happens is accompanied by the desire to insure that the future is so fully mediated by new media forms and technologies that it is unable to emerge into the present without having already been remediated in the past.’ From: ‘Premediation: Media Logics in Times of War’ – part of *The News about Networks*, organised by Richard Rogers and Noortje Marres, at De Balie, Amsterdam, 2003-11-12. [www.debalie.nl/artikel.jsp?articleid=4473&podiumid=media](http://www.debalie.nl/artikel.jsp?articleid=4473&podiumid=media) (visited, 2007-09-25)

<sup>665</sup> See also the Polygon report 1940-wk23, for the commemoration of the fallen soldiers. For information on the film, see: B&G, catalogue, file of the film (visited 2009-04-09).

<sup>666</sup> See: [www.luchtdoelartillerie.nl/oud/gesneuvelden.htm](http://www.luchtdoelartillerie.nl/oud/gesneuvelden.htm) (visited 2009-04-09).