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Chapter 1: Reframing the Historical Avant-garde – Media, Historiography and Method

[N]o other single factor has influenced the emergence of the new avantgarde art as much as technology, which not only fueled the artists' imagination [...], but penetrated to the core of the work itself. The invasion of the very fabric of the art object by technology and what one may loosely call the technological imagination can best be grasped in artistic practices such as collages, assemblages, montage and photomontage; it finds its ultimate fulfillment in photography and film, art forms which can not only be reproduced, but are in fact designed for mechanical reproducibility.
Andreas Huyssen (1980)¹

Novel technological processes like photography and film not only add new forms to the existing ensemble of the arts, but these reproductive media have far-reaching influences in reconfiguring the field at every level. For Walter Benjamin, possibly the most avid commentator on the arts and technological transformations in the 1920s and 1930s, these developments had pervasive implications. One such consequence was that the avant-garde – by (self-)definition in the forefront of artistic development – had to adopt the most advanced media in order to fulfil its mission of engendering social, political, economic and cultural transformations.² The specific idea of the avant-garde, its self-proclaimed goal was the reconfiguration of the cultural sphere – and by extension the change of the political, social and economic foundations. Breaking down the barriers between art and society, between culture and politics, between theory and practice, overcoming these (artificially erected) boundaries was *the* crucial element in the programme of the avant-garde. Thus, the self-definition of an avant-gardist was consciously not limited to that of an artist, but they were propagandists and preachers, engineers and scientists, politicians and practical jokers, magicians and muggers. Their activities were happening within an environment that was characterised by a number of media considered to be new in the 1920s. Film, radio, gramophone, illustrated press and sound film opened up new spaces and public spheres that the avant-garde attempted to claim and occupy. It is on this playing field shaped by a media-savvy public, a broken landscape of technology, and new media with new techniques that the manoeuvres and negotiations, the attacks and withdrawals of a dynamic avant-garde were taking place. The avant-garde occupied the position of a mine-sweeper in relation to the culture at large: the avant-garde tested territory, marked out dangerous spots and cleared the way for the larger cohorts of mainstream culture. The positioning of the avant-garde vis-à-vis these broader cultural trends is as interdependent as it is paradoxical: mainstream culture needs the

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avant-garde as pathfinders and scouts to explore unknown regions while the avant-garde in turn needed the mainstream simultaneously as an opposition to stand out from and as a mass to follow. To claim a position ahead of the large majority only makes sense if someone was there to follow (at least potentially). Yet, if the majority was to catch up, the avant-garde would lose its self-proclaimed status and be swallowed. The movement was trapped between two poles, either it would lose contact with the mainstream and become obscure and esoteric or it would move too slow for the culture at large and become stale and dated – both dangers would have meant the end of the movement. The danger of falling into the trap of complacency and smugness has been astutely observed by a young Lotte Eisner in 1928 who was just winning her first spurs writing for the trade magazine *Film-Kurier*:

Bleibt die Avantgarde nicht Privileg der wirklich mutigen Vorkämpfer, so besteht die Gefahr, dass sie bald ein großer Träger vorwärtskriechender Heerhaufen wird. [...] Die Avantgarde muß in ihren eigenen Reihen sondieren. Sich von Mitläufern und Konjunktursüchtigen befreien, die ihrer Sache schaden. [...] Die Avantgarde muß sehen, daß sie wirklich Avantgarde bleibt. Sie muß verstehen, wo ihre Freunde sind, und Kritik aus den eigenen Reihen annehmen. Sonst wird sie trotz ihres Namens zu einer Angelegenheit von gestern.³

As the situation was never static, but the avant-garde was operating in a dynamic environment this push-and-pull between avant-garde and mainstream almost invariably led to a cyclical rise and fall of the avant-garde.

Any production, including artistic production, is occupying a certain position in relation to the means of production that it needs and uses. This position might be affirmative, critical or negotiating in between these poles with denial as the most extreme form of affirmation. The avant-garde – if we take it to be radically different from previous artistic styles or schools that merely followed one another in a succession of changing fashions – is characterised by the way it is positioning itself differently within social, economic and cultural force fields.⁴ In his lecture »Der Autor als Produzent« Walter Benjamin has most clearly outlined the relationship between avant-garde artist and means of production. Using the example of Sergei Tretiakov as the »operating author« in contrast to the merely »informing author« Benjamin concedes that the operating author is not only avant-gardistic in his basic convictions as expressed in his work (books, paintings, films etc.), but also in his attitude towards the means of production as expressed in all of his activities, beyond the artefact of the finished work. The foremost task of the artist – Benjamin's »author« is just a shorthand notion for the artist in general – is not only to produce works that are groundbreaking and revolutionary, but also to work towards a changed relationship to the basis of production: »[...E]inen Produktionsapparat zu beliefern, ohne ihn – nach Maßgabe des Möglichen – zu verändern, [stellt] selbst dann ein höchst anfechtbares Verfahren dar [...], wenn die Stoffe, mit denen dieser Apparat beliefert wird, revolutionärer Natur scheinen.«⁵

Without the apparatus of production and distribution, even the avant-garde artist is unable to launch his/her work in the public sphere, but at the same time s/he is obliged to change that very institution that is a necessary condition for its own dissemination. The avant-garde has to aim at the restructuring of the very preconditions of its own existence – this paradox is at the centre of the cultural-aesthetic movement. For Benjamin, a critical stance alone does not suffice. As a negative example, Benjamin refers to the journalistic report. A characteristic genre of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (new sobriety), the report was boosted enormously by the rise of two new media: illustrated press and radio. In Benjamin's view it has ultimately only succeeded in producing picturesque images of poverty that soothed the antagonism and brutality inherent in social-economic relations between the rich and the poor. Benjamin's argument against these fashionable images of misery culminates in the call for the author as photographer and vice versa to break down the boundaries and specialisations erected between supposedly different activities:

[E]rst die Überwindung jener Kompetenzen im Prozeß der geistigen Produktion, welche, der bürgerlichen Auffassung zufolge, dessen Ordnung bilden, macht diese Produktion politisch tauglich; und zwar müssen die Kompetenzschranken von beiden Produktivkräften, die sie zu trennen errichtet waren, vereint gebrochen werden.⁶

The first step of avant-garde (or as Benjamin would have it: revolutionary) activity is to break down those specialisations and separations that bourgeois society has erected: between different art forms, between art and life, between theory and practice, between producer and consumer, between artist and audience. The avant-garde has to work on two fronts: it has to produce art, but, equally important, it also has to work towards a transformation within the means of production. As a model Benjamin points to Brecht's epic theatre that he characterises as a »dramatic laboratory« – the key task for artists is to determine his/her place in relation to the means of production and to integrate the resulting realisation in his/her artistic production. The idea of art as a laboratory is one key to an understanding of the avant-garde. In this perspective the artist becomes a scientist and engineer setting up parameters and experiments for testing out results: the work of art becomes a test arrangement, not unlike a scientific series of experiments.

The avant-garde has traditionally been the domain of art history and, to a lesser extent, of literary studies. If we follow Benjamin's lead and consider the avant-garde in relation to new media, another look at the film avant-garde should yield interesting results in many respects. The avant-garde has been seen as a cross-media initiative that occupied many different cultural (plat)forms. They consisted of a network of key players (André Breton, Sergei Tretyakov, Tristan Tzara, Bertolt Brecht...) who set up shop in a handful of key places (Zürich, Paris, Moscow, Berlin, London, Amsterdam/Rotterdam) and they communicated via a handful of key network nodes (little magazines, exhibitions, congresses). In film the avant-garde never achieved the same strength nor a similar purity as in its appearances in

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literature, performance, and visual arts. Yet, by moving film from a marginal position to the centre, by taking Benjamin seriously I will open up a new perspective also on the avant-garde as a larger phenomenon.

The film avant-garde, when compared with its siblings in other arts, was confronted with special problems: It had to gain access to the means of production which proved cumbersome, difficult and expensive, especially after the introduction of sound. The film avant-garde – and that is part of its special position compared to manifestations in other art forms – could neither draw a binary opposition between itself and commercial mass culture nor between itself and mainstream bourgeois art. On the one hand, it needed an established apparatus of production, distribution and exhibition in order to find a public and for that reason the film avant-garde had to compromise to a certain extent with the mainstream forces of the institution cinema. In literature or visual arts it was relatively easy to bypass the traditional ways of reaching a public by publishing a magazine or staging an exhibition whereas in film the construction of an alternative system of production, distribution and exhibition required enormous time and energy – and compared to the institutions of the film industry it always remained rudimentary.⁷ On the other hand, film was not yet established as an accepted art form and many active on the fringes of the avant-garde were rather striving to secure film a place in the pantheon of the accepted art forms than to get rid of art altogether. This »impurity« is characteristic of the film avant-garde which could never disentangle itself completely from the typical bourgeois position when hoping to elevate film to an accepted art form.

The film avant-garde had to engage with different tasks on different fronts: on one side it was confronted with technological modernisation as it was occupying a new medium while on another side it could not cut itself completely off from the social and cultural modernity of life styles and consumerism because of cinema's involvement with popular culture. Unlike the high modernism that possibly found its strongest expressions in the radical abstractions of Malevich and Mondrian, in the nonsensical attacks on reason in Dada-performances and Surrealist *écriture automatique* or in the complicated style experiments of Joyce and Pound, the film avant-garde could not escape the triangulation of modernism (artistic style), modernity (life style and consumer culture) and modernisation (technology).⁸ Whereas other arts often took the latter two as material, they nevertheless largely withdrew into intellectual realms of complexity and abstraction. The film avant-garde by contrast not only negotiated »the modern« as a topic of representation, but it also had to cope with it in terms of production, distribution and exhibition. The cinema had to find its place in a field that was thoroughly structured by modern technology. Therefore, the central problem that the film avant-garde had to confront concerns its position in the larger field of social and economic relations: what is the role of a cultural-aesthetic avant-garde in a technological media culture? This will be the central question of my study.

1.1 The temporal frame: Historiography and the coming of sound film

*The period of the transition to sound film offers
a splendid example of historical overdetermination.
Alan Williams (1992)⁹*

The time period under investigation is framed by two World Wars and these two decades are divided in the middle by the introduction of synchronised sound to the cinema. Sound film and the intricate history of its introduction between (roughly) 1927 and 1932 will provide a temporal frame for this study. This media transition has been examined from a number of perspectives: the technology, the systems of synchronisation and the film industry have been studied¹⁰, the international traffic of money, know-how and patents have been the focus of interest¹¹, the shift in Hollywood from silent to sound¹² and the introduction of sound film in different European countries have all been researched and documented.¹³ The continuities and ruptures of the avant-garde across this historical divide in contrast have occupied a marginal place in film history: what was the fate of the film avant-garde during the coming of sound, what were the governing opinions, how did production, distribution and exhibition react to the technological restructuring? These and other questions will be addressed in the following chapters.

The traditional story of the film avant-garde and the coming of sound is well-known and has been often told: The devastation of World War One were hardly over when young and progressive artists in different parts of Europe started challenging traditional norms in a project that evolved into the European film avant-garde in the course of the 1920s. Aesthetically explorative, politically confrontational and internationally minded, this group of creative individuals forged continually closer ties until suddenly the introduction of sound destroyed cosmopolitanism, aroused nationalism, and brought the hopeful bloom to a sudden end. It is along these lines that the story of the classic avant-garde in film is normally told. Let it suffice here to invoke just one examples to stand in for countless other text books and historical overviews:

[T]his experimental phase ended with the coming of sound. [...]he termination was also informed by the anti-realist agendas common to all the avant-gardes, with sound representing a decisively realist ›supplement‹ to the image. [...] The search for cinematic ›specificity‹ was polemical and separatist on the one hand – against theatrical and narrative models – synthesising and hybridising on the other, with models from painting and music.¹⁴

In this brief extract there are a number of unspoken, half-spoken and outspoken assumptions which appear questionable to me: To start with, sound is seen as

intrinsically and by definition a realist supplement to the image (does this imply that the image is non-realist? Or is the image »less realistic« than sound?). Secondly, the film avant-garde is pictured as inherently anti-realist, and ambivalently poised between drawing on other arts and defining itself in contrast to them. Thirdly, the alleged turn to realism is bound up (causally?) with the introduction of sound. The discussion around cinema as an art form, my fourth objection, is limited to an early phase in which abstraction provided the guiding concept whereas the Soviet contribution is absent as well as considerations of outside events after 1930 that took a more central position in the avant-garde's self-definition are left out. And the last point of criticism to the standard version concerns the limiting way in which the avant-garde is defined: negatively, as based on experimentation and antagonism to certain concepts of the industry (separation of the film from the life of the spectator, individual reception). Interpreting the introduction of sound as the sole, or at least the main, reason for the downfall of the avant-garde implicitly advocates a technological determinism in which a new medium is defined *a priori* as shaped by its techno-logical set-up, not by its social and cultural usage and utility. Sound film is by no means inherently realistic – even if it has often been employed that way.

The quote above which I have used metonymically for many other statements is typical of a retrospective purification of the avant-garde, of a reductionism that limits its scope to abstract moving shapes and formal experiments, to *cinéma pur* and *absoluter Film*.¹⁵ Yet, filmmakers and activists had over the course of the 1920s slowly moved towards mixed forms in which realist depictions were juxtaposed with unusual perspectives and innovative or conflicting editing patterns. In the traditional view, the influence of the Soviet montage school – which had its breakthrough in Western Europe with the celebrated presentation of Sergei Eisenstein's *BRONENOSEZ »POTEMKIN«* (SU 1925, »Battleship Potemkin«) in April 1926 in Berlin – is often absent. The Soviet Union as a shorthand for radically different cultural and artistic activities and output, but mainly the reception of their art outside the Soviet Union – which was highly selective and idiosyncratic – will form the vanishing point for many of the activities and players discussed here as the communist country offered in the 1920s a very different model of cinema culture and of society at large.¹⁶

The introduction of sound in the United States was considerably different from the transition in Europe. It has been argued that »sound as sound, as a material and as a set of technical procedures, was inserted into the already constituted system of the classical Hollywood style«¹⁷. David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson propose in their monumental *Classical Hollywood Cinema* that sound caused little trouble and even less change for an already established system. In the US studios, production methods and the industrial balance of power was not fundamentally shaken by the coming of sound. In Europe the situation was decidedly different because the market had not settled into an

oligopoly as stable as in the United States. Most certainly, a normative power was inherent in the introduction of sound in both America and Europe, leading to a greater standardisation. Therefore, the coming of sound can be seen as an important step in the shift of control from exhibitors to manufacturers of motion pictures: »The coming of synchronized recorded sound to world cinema essentially completes the mechanization of the medium. And with full mechanization comes the most pervasive, general change brought about by the conversion to sound: increased standardization.«¹⁸ Shooting practices and local exhibition specificities, projection speed and musical accompaniment – all had to yield to the overwhelming power that the introduction of sound carried with it like a gigantic tidal wave. One had to learn to swim very quickly – or one would drown. For the avant-garde this meant that it not only had to deal with the new medium of sound cinema, but it moreover had – in keeping with Benjamin's call to revolutionise the relationship to the means of production – to take account of a situation that was in turmoil and in the process of a gigantic transformation between 1928 and 1932. It is exactly this time period that I would see as the key frame in which the most fascinating experiments and the most intense efforts at building an alternative network culminated.

1.2 The geographical frame: Europe and the cities of modernism

The media is vital to the argument that modern nations are imagined communities. But contemporary media activity is also clearly one of the main ways in which transnational cultural connections are established.
Andrew Higson (2000)¹⁹

Besides the temporal frame just sketched, this study is also constituting a spatial field: geographically, it will take »Europe« as its frame of reference. Europe allows me to get away from a reliance on two traditional and narrow frames of reference: the biographical and the national. Employing the framework of »the national« in cinema studies has increasingly been questioned in the past ten to 15 years. The relationship of nation and cinema can be roughly divided into three phases. Until well into the 1970s, sometimes as late as the early 1980s, the term »national cinema« has been employed in an unproblematic manner, in accordance with »nation«, »national culture« and all other derivative thereof which were largely considered as givens. Since the 1980s a body of material has been produced in a second wave dealing with the »national« in film studies in more refined and sophisticated ways. Most studies from the second stage of the discussion dealt with questions of European national cinemas, especially with England as a focus of interest. In the 1990s in a third phase the emphasis has increasingly shifted to »minor«, »marginal« or »subaltern« national cinemas and complicated earlier

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modernist approaches to European national cinemas, pointing out the necessarily hybrid or multiple character of any national cinema culture. One could also speak of a shift of focus from a classic-realist mode in which representations were taken directly and at face value to a modernist approach complicating matters but firmly from within a European perspective using most often the theories of Benedict Anderson, Anthony Smith and Eric Hobsbawm²⁰ while the third phase coincides with the fragmenting trajectories and lines of flights elaborated in postmodern, postcolonial and poststructuralist theories discernible in the work of, amongst many others, Homi Bhabha and Edward Said.²¹

As multi-vocal as today's discussion might be, one thing seems to be a consensus: to talk of a national cinema always constructs an imaginary coherence. The problems involved in this act of boundary-drawing have been pointed out in recent work in film studies that took the historical and political studies mentioned above into account.²² Referring to European cinema is not done with the aim of substituting a »bad« object (the national) with a »good« one (Europe), but it will focus the practice at a specific historical moment which was characterised by its European scope. The film avant-garde as conceptualised in this study is characterised in the actual and factual exchange of ideas, practitioners, and films. The issue of nation is not central to these questions because the question of why and how the state (as a political and juridical entity) and the nation (as an imagined community) intervened in these exchanges is not pertinent. Rather, I am interested in how the concept »Europe« has been mobilised in different projects and to different aims. The nation-state in various political and organisational forms enters again in the 1930s when many avant-garde filmmakers turned to the state for financial and organisational support, yet most often indirectly through government agencies or political parties. In some countries, the nation-state also played a key role in the self-historicising of the avant-garde when offshoots of the movement founded the first film archives and film museums financed by governments.

The pronounced internationalism of the avant-garde movement makes a European framework all the more logical. When Louis Delluc screened *DAS CABINET DES DR. CALIGARI* (DE 1919/20, Robert Wiene, ›The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari‹) at the cinema *Colisée* in Paris on 14 November 1921 it was not only a partisan action in aesthetic terms, but it was first and foremost a political provocation. Just as Fernand Léger had consciously sought the confrontation with the anti-German establishment the year before when he insisted on including German (expressionist) artists in the reopened *Salon des Indépendents*, Delluc's internationalism saw cinema not only as a new emerging art form, but also as a social and political force with a wide-ranging impact. Under the banner of aesthetic innovation (and officially announced as a benefit screening for the Spanish Red Cross) Delluc included a film from Germany into a French cinema programme, at that time an enemy whose products were despised and prohibited. Effectively, this event broke the French boycott as the successful reception of *DAS CABINET DES*

DR. CALIGARI brought other German films into French cinemas.²³ Similarly, when Eisenstein's *POTEMKIN* hit Berlin's screens in early 1926 it was an event that immediately had European repercussions.

While Europe is the geographical frame of this work in a wider sense, the following pages focus on a number of cities as the hubs of activity. This study concentrates on events and institutions in Western Europe with Paris, Berlin, London and Amsterdam as its main centres (marginally other places such as Switzerland and Belgium will also feature) and the Soviet Union as its vanishing point. Even though comparable activities took place in Lisbon and Prague, in Stockholm and Ljubljana, in Warsaw and Rome, the most influential activities happened around the cities first mentioned – they were the major nodes in the network that made up the European avant-garde of the interwar period. To get an understanding of the interconnected nature of the avant-garde, of its internal functioning and of the wider patterns of emergence it is paramount to reconstruct this core network around which other activities wrapped themselves. Malcolm Bradbury has described these cities of modernism as »generative environments of the new arts, focal points of intellectual community, indeed of intellectual conflict and tension.«²⁴ He goes on to argue that these cities were not only cosmopolitan spaces of communication, but also the topic of artistic activity, a metaphor as well as a place. The city was cause and effect of the modern world as much as the avant-garde: both were results of the fundamental social, political, economic, psychic and economical transformations, but both also contributed to them. Bradbury isolates the novel as the quintessential artistic form of the city. While the connection between the city and the novel is certainly crucial, I would contend that the cinema, and especially the city symphony, provides the ultimate metaphor of and for the modern life in the city.

If the national is the Scylla of studies of the film avant-garde, then the biographical is its Charybdis. Biography provides the easiest ready-made frame of reference available for aesthetic study. A biography supplies firstly a clear structure (chronology, organic development, physical coherence) and secondly tends towards isolating works of art from their context in which they were first produced and received. In focusing on stylistic analyses of isolated artefacts one misunderstands the avant-garde which is striving towards a media concept which has to be grasped in its totality before contemplating isolated elements. My interest therefore focuses on the strategic manoeuvring, the political and social interventions (intra-filmic and, equally important, extra-filmic), the networking and publishing efforts, the discursive regimes established, modified, and rejected. I doubt that the most fruitful way of doing historiographical work in the arts is to put the durable and material work of art above more fleeting and ephemeral activity, to put the seeming consistency of the biography above the more unstable networks and connections. For reasons of convenience, tradition, institutional ramifications and support mechanisms the study of the film avant-garde has focused on either of the two

sides, the national and the biographical. I will downplay both structures in the following and instead concentrate on institutions, events, networks and discourses.

1.3 The conceptual frame: Crisis, archaeology, and systems theory

Ein konsequent archäologischer Ansatz müsste deshalb nicht nur die Reichweite der Fragen, die man für relevant erachtet, vergrößern, sondern noch einmal den Ansatzpunkt der Fragestellung verändern und die eigenen historiografischen Prämissen infrage stellen; beispielsweise indem man die Diskontinuitäten mitbedenkt, die so genannten Sackgassen und die Möglichkeit einer erstaunlichen Andersartigkeit der Vergangenheit.
Thomas Elsaesser (2002)²⁵

The historiographic model employed here testifies to a number of influences. The first theoretical frame has been provided by the New Film History that emerged in the 1980s and added a methodological rigid ramification to traditionalist, untheoretical historiographic work and fact finding missions.²⁶ The move away from the film as text and an increased attention towards the cinema as a social, economic, political and cultural institution is the most important factor borrowed from the New Film History.²⁷ A second key influence has been Michel Foucault's conception of history as archaeology and genealogy. The third theorist to be reckoned with is Niklas Luhmann and his branch of systems theory which helped me to think about the interactions, co-optations and dependencies of the avant-garde within a public media arena. Wherever possible I have fallen back upon the writings of the activists from the 1920s and 1930s as many of the tools for the understanding of the film avant-garde have been developed by the people involved in these activities.

In terms of historiography the period of the introduction of sound can be seen as a prime example for a »crisis-model of historiography«²⁸ which involves a triple focus: on indexicality, on economic factors and on political issues. In theoretical and aesthetic terms, the coming of sound resulted in a »crisis of indexicality« – the (representational) film image now had to cope with an addition that was by some observers perceived to heighten realism, yet that also opened up a gap between the visible body on the screen and the audible sound from the loudspeakers. Not only does the film image originate at the back of the architectural space of the cinema while sound comes from behind the screen in front of the spectators, but sight and sound are also inscribed and worked upon with different technological processes on different apparati. The simultaneity and synchronicity between image and sound perceived by the spectator is therefore in technological terms an arbitrary relation and was seen this way from the very start. Sound film did not only have aesthetic repercussions, its economic ramifications challenged the existing order of the institution cinema. The gigantic costs involved

in wiring production facilities and cinemas in a relatively short time around 1930 caused a gigantic upheaval in economic terms. This economic-institutional crisis was deepened by the first depression of global scope following the US-stock market crash of October 1929. The third crisis is cultural and political in nature: the introduction of sound not only brought noise and music to the film, but also language. In the silent era intertitles were easy to replace, thus adapting a film for a different market was fairly easy and relatively unproblematic. With sound the different methods of translation all became problematic: subtitles made the otherness of a language omnipresent in visual as well as in aural terms while it was perceived by contemporaries as a step back towards the intertitles of the silent era that had just been left behind. Dubbing coupled a visible human body with an audible voice not connected to the body, thus destroying the assumed unity of sight and sound that many thought was the main achievement of sound film.²⁹ In some countries (e.g. Czechoslovakia, Italy) this resulted in an extreme, sometimes even violent reaction against dialogue spoken in a foreign language. This triple crisis – of indexicality, of the economic-institutional base of the film industry, and of the national – focuses problems and contradictions because the ensuing upheaval questioned many elements of the institution cinema.

My method is relying on the concept of archaeology that has been introduced into historiographical thinking by Michel Foucault.³⁰ In a number of studies on prison and surveillance³¹, on the organisation of knowledge and the development of categories³², on the »invention« of insanity in the age of reason³³, and on the medical gaze³⁴, Foucault has exemplified his historiographical practice on specific objects. He has pioneered a method of understanding specific practices as discourses that perform at least two intimately related functions: these practices as discourses play a central part in the constitution of society and they are regulating exclusion and inclusion. For Foucault the acts of discursive demarcation are the basis for analysing how power, language and society interact at specific moments in the creation of specific historical configuration. Foucault is useful in understanding discursive operations (basically any text can contribute to a discourse as text in poststructuralist fashion can also refer to elaborately staged events or live discussions) as historical practices that are being operated in order to produce hierarchical divisions.

Within media history the concept of archaeology has gained ground in the last ten years developing its own methodology.³⁵ Wolfgang Ernst has likened the archaeological gaze to the cold and emotionless gaze of a machine that first and foremost registers without interpreting. He has juxtaposed it to the hermeneutic gaze which always already sees (or in structuralist terminology: reads) something else behind every text or object. Whereas hermeneutics attempt to fit everything in an already known horizon of expectation, the aim of media archaeology is »das Artefakt zunächst nur in seiner Gegebenheit, also: als *datum*, als Daten zu beschreiben, quasi als Monument stehenzulassen, statt es (wie in der Operation der

Historiker) sogleich zum Dokument oder zur Illustration einer dahinterstehenden Geschichte zu machen«³⁶ The method of media archaeology consists first of all in an act of »forgetting« everything that has come after the fact in an attempt to understand a period on its own terms. By going back in time and trying to understand what was meant by a specific practice, by attempting to see historical facts as monuments of a past practice archaeology tries to reconstruct this practice. Of course, this forgetting is bound to fail just as Jorge Luis Borges' author Pierre Menard rewriting *Don Quijote* tries in vain to become Cervantes – the method lies in the (Deleuzian act of) becoming itself.

Siegfried Zielinski has borrowed the notion of a historical »deep time« from natural historian Stephen Jay Gould to introduce it into media historiography. Zielinski's method comprises deep cuts at specific historical moments in order to give an overview of longer developments:

In der Sondierung verschiedener Perioden sollen qualitative Umschlagpunkte in einer kontinuierlichen Entwicklung aufscheinen. Die historischen Ausschnitte, die ich ausgewählt habe, verstehen sich als attraktive Verdichtungen, in denen mögliche Entwicklungsrichtungen ausprobiert wurden, in denen Wechsel von Paradigmen stattgefunden haben.³⁷

In some sense Zielinski's proposal can be understood as the inverse mirror image of the *longe durée* of the *Annales*-school. Zielinski attempts to capture developments at points of emergence: when gradual change suddenly becomes visible in a qualitative transformation. Such a moment is provided in my model with the introduction of sound. This media transition concentrates and condenses developments, opens up many possibilities and allows for paradigmatic changes. The idea of media changes and transitions as privileged sites for investigating the formations and dispositions of interrelationships between media and culture at large has recently gained ground.³⁸

By returning to a specific sub-genre of film studies, the study of early cinema, Thomas Elsaesser has opened a new perspective on today's media. In Elsaesser's archaeology early cinema can function as a possible blueprint for the restructured field of new media, but also for the possible development of film and media studies into new media studies. The attention given to moments of transitions and change, possibility and utopia have influenced my model. A number of parameters and paradigms provide Elsaesser with an agenda for future research and a renewed media history: the refusal to search for beginnings amounts to a renewal of history, questioning the already-said at the level of existence gives new perspectives on well-known facts, an attention to the dead-ends and failures of media history opens up a space of possible futures that were imaginable at a certain point in time, and a heightened awareness for the absence of evidence as the evidence of a past presence (with Arthur Conan Doyle's »dog that did not bark« as the key metaphor) opens history up to a wider perspective.³⁹

Finally, Niklas Luhmann has developed a highly useful method of conceptualising the relationship of different systems to each other that does not revert to simplistic notions of influence or direct cause-effect schemata. In his branch of systems theory, a system is characterised by its complete closure to the outside; the basic distinction runs between the system itself and the environment because this distinction creates the system in the first place, brings it into existence. A system observes the environment according to the terms of its own operation and its contacts with the outside are self-contacts: »[Selbstreferentielle Systeme haben] keine andere Form für Umweltkontakte als Selbstkontakte«. ⁴⁰ Thus, the economic system which operates under the basic distinction of paying or not paying (having money or not, trading or not) assesses everything according to this code and logic, including those operations that involve entities outside its boundaries. Every system translates outside events into its own frequency because this is the only way that a system is able to understand what is going on in the environment. Thus, communication and interaction is always self-reflexive, necessarily indirect and distorted by the translation from one code to the other. Communication that is meaningful in one system might be just white noise when picked up by another. To take the systems theory idea further: The systemic logic and functioning of the film industry and the avant-garde were separate from each other (even though neither of them achieved full autonomy) and one system was basically not visible to the other system as they worked under different operational premises. For the film industry the avant-garde did not exist as a stable entity because everything outside the industry is perceived as environment. Moreover, industry and avant-garde are incapable of understanding the other system on the terms it is using, but translates their operations into their own frequency. These translations of signals and codes make misunderstanding, or rather: distortion and white noise, inevitable.

1.4 The corpus: Defining the avant-garde

[The historiography of artistic modernism] has typically formalized the work of early twentieth-century European movements in ways that decontextualize the works and diminish access to their historical significance.

For decades the analysis and evaluation of these movements has subjected them to normative procedures that sidestepped political issues and guaranteed their conformity to the separation of art and pointed social purpose [...].

This work has been disproportionately aestheticized in such a way that the losses for cultural history exceed the gains for art's formal and craft history.

Stephen C. Foster (1998)⁴¹

There is certainly no shortage of books on the film avant-garde: There are histories of film theory which provide ample space for the contribution of the avant-garde ⁴², very detailed historical studies of specific groups which were active in producing, exhibiting, publishing and teaching of avant-garde cinema ⁴³, reprints of magazines

dealing with avant-garde film⁴⁴ and studies of specific movements⁴⁵, national cinematographies⁴⁶ or auteurs of this period,⁴⁷ not to mention those books giving a general overview of avant-garde, independent and experimental film.⁴⁸ These studies all have their historical and analytical use value and if I depart from them it is with a measure of respect for the achievements of those pioneers who came before. Where I intend to diverge from these studies is, very broadly speaking, in the way in which they dissect and isolate a specific person, oeuvre or facet without taking into account or reflecting the dispositivs, discourses, networks, systems, levels of self-reference or structuring absences that I consider to be much more crucial shaping factors than the biography or the nation state. I believe that the works of avant-garde art can only be understood adequately if analysed in their context of production, distribution and consumption, if scrutinised dialectically, and thus brought to another level of generality.

Especially interesting and fascinating are those instances transgressing or blowing up conventional categories into which retrospective thinking had squeezed the avant-garde. To give an example: instead of concentrating on Hans Richter as an artist in the conventional sense (producing works that are aesthetically explorative and that can be hermeneutically analysed), he can be rethought as an activist on many different fronts. Richter organised exhibitions, programmed a cinema for an artistic-industrial exhibition and founded film societies, lectured and wrote, published and networked, not to mention the many different film forms in which he worked (advertisement, industrial film, compilation film, experimental short). These fields are disparate in some senses, but they also belong together. They are part of a whole discourse which can be only discerned when taking practice as seriously as the material results of the work. Further key figures that will feature centrally in this study are Germaine Dulac, Béla Balász, Joris Ivens, Walter Ruttmann, Sergei Eisenstein, Dsiga Vertov, László Moholy-Nagy, to mention only the most famous ones. These agents adhered to an ideal of totality at a time before the functional differentiation of the film industry after the introduction of sound did away with these conceptions of wholeness.

In analysing the Dutch *Filmliga* Tom Gunning has argued in a similar vein for a wide perspective. Traditional approaches have concentrated on films and theoretical texts in keeping with traditional thinking which was based on the analysis of texts (herein of course following structuralist terminology in which film counts as a text too). Gunning argues for the inclusion of facets which are more ephemeral and harder to detect: institutions and programming, distribution, publication and debate.⁴⁹ He argues that the films and the printed texts in the magazine *Filmliga* forms only the most visible trace of a network consisting of a group of people in several Dutch cities coming together in the dark to watch films and discuss them afterwards. Retrospective analyses very often neglect the social practice because material results (films, books) are much easier to get hold of and to analyse. Moreover, film studies are not well-equipped methodologically to deal

with social practice because the genealogy in the humanities provides an orientation towards audio-visual artefacts or written texts. Furthermore, theory formation is normally considered retrospectively: histories of film theory are written afterwards on the basis of the important canonised texts (mostly from canonised writers). For contemporary observers in the 1920s and 1930s the situation was much more difficult: For them film theory, or rather: attempts at theory formation, were much more a process than a result, rather a snapshot than a monolith, whereas later critics and historians look at those texts that have for various reasons stood the test of time. What I will attempt here is to give the theorisation some of its processual nature back. Theory is a process, not a product.

As I have just laid out the object to be reconstructed in the following pages is not without its vicissitudes. It may start with a simple question that raises complicated problems: Does one speak of avant-garde in the singular or in the plural? The avant-garde as a unified movement perhaps never existed, but a loose structure which saw itself as belonging together can be detected. Avant-garde was a common name both as a self-description and also as a name given by others in the period under consideration.⁵⁰ When I examine the activities of the avant-garde I am not primarily interested in the aesthetic style of their films or the underlying philosophy. Therefore I am not interested in the questions whether *BALLET MECHANIQUE* (FR 1924, Fernand Léger / Dudley Murphy) is more Dada, Surrealist or Constructivist as this would mean a departure from the archaeological method. The different strands of the avant-garde had very strong personal, intellectual and organisational continuity and categorisation or compartmentalisation was a very unimportant factor at the time. Sometimes, when it is necessary to differentiate Constructivism from Expressionism, I will distinguish different trends, but on the whole the proximity of the different movements is stronger than their differences.

The complete scope of the specific »practice« of the avant-garde is important for a thorough understanding and this will be the topic of my study: In lecturing and writing the avant-garde formulated some of their ideas (though these texts certainly form no simple description of their ideas and convictions), production, distribution, and exhibition show attempts at putting these ideas into practice. In teaching and in building institutions we can recognise the attempt of constructing structures that are independent of individual actors and that will be self-sustaining over time. Their activities formed a discourse and they attempted to create a system of their own, yet they never achieved operational closure to the environment in a Luhmannian sense. A concentration on the films alone results in a duplication of the limits of traditional film history because the end product often camouflages the work and negotiations that led to the finished artefact. Examining a film that originates with the avant-garde under purely aesthetic principles misconceives the movement's ideas about the transformation of film culture.

My turn from work of art to network of art, from hermeneutics to discourse analysis and from biography to systems theory implies no disregard for the artefacts and their possible resonances in aesthetic analyses which are often exquisite and many-layered, but I am pursuing a different path of understanding this movement. Every step, be it the making of a film, the founding of a ciné-club or the publication of an article, can be seen as a systemic operation focussed on the survival, nourishment and expansion of the avant-garde. By adopting an archaeological gaze couched in a logic of systems theory I hope to shed new light on well-known, forgotten and unknown facets of the network that constituted the European film avant-garde. The practice under examination brought forth works of art that are neither by-products nor objects waiting for exegesis, but elements of a system that I want to reconstruct. In my opinion, many of the activities, filmmaking or not, aimed at creating a *Medienverbund* (media offensive) in an ensemble of different media, an audience capable of growing and a changed production situation working together to create a new art for new statements in a new public sphere.

A disclaimer in order not be misunderstood seems necessary here: This is an archaeological work in the sense that I have gathered a number of well-known and less well-known facts in order to understand the specific practice of a group at a specific moment in history. I have attempted to let the historical documents talk back as monuments from a distant past on their own terms. By developing a logic out of the practice of the avant-garde I hope to avoid the problematic nature of hermeneutics in which a horizon of expectation puts everything into perspective before the elements are allowed »to speak for themselves«. For my purposes I have gathered, summarised and analysed material that has become available in the last ten to 15 years. As I had to create my own object in the first place, I had to fight with an instability of what I was dealing with. As a result, I have attempted to construct a frame of reference and a number of ideas for the study of the avant-garde cinema between 1919 and 1939 and the transformations of a technological medium. I hope that some of the ideas put forward on the following pages will give rise to renewed attention to the avant-garde and will bring forth novel research and revisionist historiography.

1.5 Medienverbund

Das Neue [an Brechts Schaffen] ist, daß diese Stellen in ihrer ganzen Wichtigkeit hervortreten, der Dichter um ihretwillen sich von seinem ›Werke‹ beurlaubt und, wie ein Ingenieur in der Wüste mit Petroleumbohrungen anfängt, in der Wüste der Gegenwart an genau berechneten Punkten seine Tätigkeit aufnimmt. Solche Stellen sind hier das Theater, die Anekdote, das Radio – andere werden später in Angriff genommen werden.
Walter Benjamin (1930)⁵¹

The avant-garde was – by the mid to late 1920s – theoretically and practically well on its way towards a *Medienverbund* which can be conceptualised as a media

offensive in keeping with the avant-garde motto of converting art into life and life into art.⁵² There was no doubt that producing ground-breaking and innovative films was simply not enough, but that a concerted effort of publication, distribution, production, teaching, lecturing, exhibiting and networking was needed in order to create and win over a public for their aims. Now, one of the problems was, as we will see, that whereas there was a widespread consensus that such a *Medienverbund* was necessary, neither the means for achieving it nor the function to which such a public should be put were clear to anybody at the time. Besides, the coming of sound fundamentally changed the production process and accelerated tendencies already underway, such as the convergence of the avant-garde with the industry. This has classically been interpreted as a selling-out or a break-down, yet within the logic of a constructivist avant-garde⁵³ it is necessary to leave the path of self-expression and move towards mass-producible and mass-consumable forms to create a new aesthetics: typography and photography, advertisement and propaganda, industry and commerce. Furthermore, the film avant-garde was never completely sealed off from the industry as both co-existed in an interdependency of master and slave, of parasite and host. Although antagonistically poised against each other, both needed the other: the avant-garde had to rely on the industry for technological support and commissions while the industry needed the avant-garde for innovation and the development of new prototypes. Or, to stay in the military terminology that the avant-garde was so fond of: the avant-garde literally acted as the spearhead of cinema culture. Being small, mobile and versatile, the avant-garde was a mine-sweeper and bridge-builder, it could test out terrain and seek out the safest passage. Mainstream film at large often followed the route found by the avant-garde. Logically, not every stretch of land found by the avant-garde proved to be useful for the settlers of the industry and often when some of those adventurous pathfinders returned from a fascinating path that ultimately was a dead-end without fertile ground, they found out that the caravan of mainstream film culture had passed them by and they were suddenly in the arrièrè-garde. Yet, while being in the service of the commercial film industry, the avant-garde also attempted to change the means of productions on which it partly had to rely. This was the balancing act that the film artist as producer in Benjamin's sense had to perform on the tightrope.

The avant-garde acted as a kind of *Research & Development*-department for much wider circles than they or anybody else actually realised at the time. The avant-garde developed tools, strategies and models that became common currency in film culture at large and that persisted into the post-war period. Moreover, one of the main contributions of the avant-garde was that it put into focus a number of aporias inherent in film culture. Those contradictions showed the fissures and tensions that riddled a larger part of cinema culture and the problems that had to be addressed. Even though the avant-garde itself was not really able to solve these problems, it pointed out questions and it developed methods that would later

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contribute to different answers. In a way, the avant-garde posed the right questions and recognised the key problems, but did not manage to solve them in a way that it could profit directly from these solutions. In the late 1920s, as the avant-garde was extending its network, some people realised the mutual dependence of avant-garde and industry:

Hoffentlich gelingt es, die Ziele der Gesellschaft mit den Zielen der Industrie zu verbinden. Was nütze sonst alle Modernität, wenn sie ein Spielzeug der Experimentler bleibt. Die Filmfabrikation von heute muß für den Film von morgen gewonnen werden. [...] Deshalb sind an der Avantgarde der Experimentler alle Filmproduktionsstätten der Erde gleich interessiert. Die Einsichtigen wissen es. Und sie müssen nun veranlaßt werden, die Avantgarde der schöpferisch Bemühten als ihre Vorhut anzuerkennen, ebenso wie die Techniker und Theoretiker des neuen Films wissen müssen, daß sie für die heutige Industrie arbeiten, und daß ihre Versuche und Erfahrungen sobald sie praktische Ergebnisse gezeitigt haben, für die gegenwärtige Filmfabrikation verwertbar gemacht werden müssen.⁵⁴

Ernst Jäger's call for a dialectic relationship of avant-garde and industry would have certainly not satisfied a cultural critic like Benjamin: Jäger, editor-in-chief of the largest German film trade paper *Film-Kurier*, saw himself as a spokesman for the industry, possibly further-sighted than most of his colleagues, but nevertheless steeped in a logic of functional utilisation. In general, the *Film-Kurier* followed a similar logic as the largest German studio Ufa: the German film industry was the only serious challenge to Hollywood's domination of the world market where German films should again achieve international recognition. The avant-garde was only interesting insofar as they could contribute to this goal. Experiments should yield prototypes which then in turn would contribute to the well-being of the industry. Benjamin also objected to the avant-garde, but his criticism came from a revolutionary stance: its aim had to be radical change and therefore many experiments for him were not fierce enough or simply stuck in a bourgeois ideology of art. It is in between these two poles that the avant-garde was operating in this time when many different factions were interested in their development.

It is questionable whether the avant-garde could have really found solutions to the problems that they addressed, even more so if that is what they aimed at. In a cyclical model outlined above, the avant-garde tried out new directions that were either ignored or followed. If ignored, such a movement is characterised by constant movement as standstill because nobody is following; if followed, then it would mean that the avant-garde was caught up in the mainstream. By definition the avant-garde is constantly moving and changing shape in order to discover new spaces – the coming of sound certainly changed a lot, yet to claim that it meant the end of the avant-garde ignores many of the continuities (personal, institutional, stylistically) that crossed the line from silent to sound film. Moreover, it implies a static image of the avant-garde to claim that the

movement came to an end with the coming of sound. I believe that one can only properly understand the avant-garde when thinking about it in dynamic and ever-changing forms. The avant-garde did not fall with the coming of sound, it restructured and diversified itself in the early 1930s – and sound film was just one factor that contributed (mostly indirectly) to this development. As crucial were the world-wide economic crisis, the growing political polarisation, and a certain momentum which had brought many strands into congruence around 1929 and that afterwards drove them apart again.

1.6 The avant-garde as angel of history: theses on the interwar film avant-garde

[U]pheavals such as the coming of recorded sound intensify and help direct the progress of trends already in place. In continental Europe, for example, these included the weakening and fragmentation of the post war avant-garde movements.
Alan Williams (1992)⁵⁵

In 1929, after the successes of the *Werkbund*-exhibition in Stuttgart and the meeting in La Sarraz⁵⁶, with a boom in audience organisations and an upsurge in publishing and writing, the avant-garde seemed to be on the verge of a breakthrough to a mass-movement. Yet, the opposite was the case: the avant-garde fell apart and petered out. Why, one could formulate the first thesis, did the avant-garde not stay together firmly and build on what had been achieved by 1929? I will argue that a number of aporias riddled the avant-garde and with the introduction of sound film these internal contradictions became increasingly points of conflict. Groups that had been kept together before by a vague opposition to the commercial feature film or to narrative cinema broke apart. One of the important tasks of the avant-garde was to raise these aporias to the level of consciousness. As the fault lines were being realised different people took different approaches to these problems and consequently went in different directions. Yet, it was paramount that these issues of in/dependence, abstraction/realism, communism/fascism, and commercialism/elitism were addressed properly and thoroughly. The post-war avant-garde turned to these forerunners, yet in a highly selective fashion: they were looking for heroic and spiritual forefathers in order to build a genealogy justifying their actions. In a way, my four aporias point out one central problem of any alternative political or social movement aimed at change (and thus still valid for the postwar avant-garde): What is the role of art in society and how can culture engender change while operating in an environment that it wants to transform? The aporias of the avant-garde will be the focus of the following chapter and I will illustrate them by a rereading of contemporary debates. Also pertinent to this issue is the question of self-definition of what avant-garde was meant to be and the self-positioning of the artists.

The second thesis aims at restructuring and reconfiguring the history of the European cinema in the interwar period. It is my contention that sound film had a decisive effect on the avant-garde, but that it is insufficient to argue that sound brought about the downfall of the avant-garde. In aesthetic terms, sound film proved to be a welcome addition to the avant-garde as many early sound films were made in a context that was clearly influenced by the avant-garde. Here are some examples of early sound film that belong to a combined history of the avant-garde and the mainstream that put sound to innovative use: *MELODIE DER WELT* (DE 1928/29, Walter Ruttmann, ›Melody of the World‹), *ALLES DREHT SICH, ALLES BEWEGT SICH* (DE 1929, Hans Richter, ›Everything turns, everything moves‹), *SOUS LES TOITS DE PARIS* (FR 1929/30, René Clair, ›Under the roofs of Paris‹), *LE MILLION* (FR 1930, René Clair, ›The Million‹), *DAS LIED VOM LEBEN* (DE 1930, Alexis Granowsky, ›The Song of life‹), *M* (DE 1930/31, Fritz Lang), *PHILIPS RADIO* (NL 1931, Joris Ivens), *ENTUZIAZM: SINFONIJA DONBASSA* (SU 1930, Dziga Vertov, ›Enthusiasm: Donbass Symphony‹), *KUHLE WAMPE, ODER WEM GEHÖRT DIE WELT* (DE 1932, Slatan Dudow, ›Kuhle Wampe, or to whom belongs the world?‹), *DEZERTIR* (SU 1933, Vsevolod Pudovkin, ›Deserter‹), and the sound films of Oskar Fischinger or Len Lye. One could also point to Richter's work in advertising in Switzerland or the films produced as part of the film department of the Bat'a shoe company in Zlín (Czechoslovakia).⁵⁷ Besides these films, many of the central figures of the avant-garde had interesting ideas on the employment of sound and did not reject the new technology outright. Some of the reasons for the restructuring and functional differentiation of the field (terms I find more productive than ›destruction‹ or ›downfall‹) are connected to the introduction of sound, but should be framed in a slightly more complicated fashion. Sound film did in fact act as an engine and catalyst that restructured cinema culture in total. Yet this is often very hard to distinguish from effects brought about by reactions to the beginning global economic downturn following on the heels of the October 1929 Wall Street crash. It could be argued that the decisive factor for the decline or restructuring of the avant-garde was not the aesthetic implications of the sound film, but the economic results, i.e. higher production costs and extra investments in wiring cinemas for sound. Yet again, films continued to be made that were innovative and initiatives continued to be active after the introduction of sound for longer periods of time.

The avant-garde through its *strategic convergence* had reached a critical mass by 1929 and the ensuing *functional differentiation* has been understood by many as a demise. On the one hand, the avant-garde did not manage to engender change in a way that many of its adherents were hoping for. On the other hand, one can also describe the development that set in around 1929 as the ultimate triumph of the film avant-garde: it did not bring about a transformation of the kind it had hoped for (i.e. a revolution), but it had considerable impact in a lot of different

areas. The avant-garde could be held responsible for the naturalisation of the documentary as a genre and for the foundation of film archives in different countries, for large-scale government support for cinema in virtually all European countries, for the establishment of film theory as a field of its own, and for the emergence of art house cinemas. The cultural acceptance of cinema as an artistic form and cultural force leads us invariably back to the avant-garde and its wide-ranging activities. Thus, what counts as a defeat from one perspective, can be rephrased as a success story when using a different focus. It is this change of perspective that this study proposes and I will focus on the strategic convergence and functional differentiation in my chapter on the film societies. This movement was intimately connected with the avant-garde and provided a platform for the films and ideas developed within a smaller circles of activists. I will attempt to lay out how the different strands converged briefly and then differentiated again.

My third thesis is involved with the understanding of the avant-garde as a movement. The avant-garde aimed at a *Aufhebung* (sublation) of life and art in a Hegelian sense – the ultimate task was to break down the barriers between art and life in order to achieve a different world in which art would occupy a different (social/economic/cultural) position. It is my contention that in order to understand this utopian nature of the avant-garde it is necessary to see the activities as not just limited to filmmaking, but that they were attempting to restructure the cinema as an institution and to produce a veritable discourse on the cinema. The writings and publications, the activities in teaching and lecturing, the foundation of ciné-clubs and international networks are not secondary activities that were undertaken in order to heighten the visibility and effect of the films, but they have to be considered as part and parcel of the avant-garde. By restructuring the institution cinema, from the production process to the screening context, from the film script to the spectator's head the activists wanted to gain access to the means of production and transform the medium from within. Only by writing and talking about film differently did it make sense to make different films, only by changing film education would a new generation emerge that would look differently upon the cinema. I am emphasising this approach to cinema as discourse (different from aesthetic or industrial approaches) in chapter four which deals with the development of theory, criticism and publishing, with the constitution of networks in which teaching and event culture played a key role that is still being undervalued.

My final and fourth point is that the avant-garde was bound to fail because of a paradoxical temporal construction that was inscribed into its very conception. In its original meaning in military jargon the avant-garde has an advance function in spatial terms. The transposition of the term to arts and culture transposed the spatial dimension into time. Avant-garde art is ahead in temporal terms, it is

experimenting with forms and topics that will only later become acceptable to the mainstream. By projecting all hope into the future, by promising an amazing time ahead, the avant-garde is directed into the future. The avant-garde can never be a reform movement, it is by definition revolutionary. At the same time that the promise of the avant-garde is futuristic (it is therefore no coincidence that the first true avant-garde movement called itself »Futurism«), its reference to art is steeped in the past. Many of the activities emerge from a deep-seated discontent with the *status quo*: the avant-garde rebels against traditional art and the way that traditional art is presented, discussed and received. This results in a temporal double bind – rebelling against the past while promising the future – which creates an insolvable riddle that haunted the avant-garde all through its existence and makes it a movement that is cyclically on the rise and on the downturn. The avant-garde is constantly proclaiming that it is already operating in the future and a standstill would mean that it would be caught up. A permanent state of avant-garde would be as paradox as a permanent revolution (or, for that matter, an »institutionalised revolution« like the Mexican). This cyclical nature is as inevitable as the temporal construction of looking into the past while being fixed on the future. Everywhere, from the NEP period in the Soviet Union to the political infighting around 1930 in Europe did this temporal paradox play itself out. As already mentioned, the Soviet Union strongly presents this paradoxical temporal construction and therefore chapter five on the »Vanishing Point Soviet Union« will concentrate on this structure. As the Soviet Union proclaimed to be the first state to have achieved a future that would sooner or later be the destiny of every society.

Curiously enough, this temporal paradox has been played out famously by two thinkers who are strange bedfellows indeed. Niklas Luhmann has argued that avant-garde art is often only understandable when you have internalised in a preceding step the autonomy of art as a self-enclosed sub-system of society. After having observed this, Luhmann quite typically slips from his cold and somewhat technocratic prose to a sudden flash of aphorism and metaphor: »Das, was sich merkwürdigerweise Avantgarde nennt, hat diese rückblickende Bestimmungsweise ins Extrem getrieben – wie Ruderer, die nur sehen, woher sie kommen, und das Ziel ihrer Fahrt im Rücken haben.«⁵⁸ The avant-garde attempted to overtake the present by being transfixed on the future which was not yet achieved. Walter Benjamin has seen a very similar construction at work in his description of the angel of history:

Er hat das Antlitz der Vergangenheit zugewendet. Wo eine Kette von Begebenheiten vor *uns* erscheint, da sieht *er* eine einzige Katastrophe, die unablässig Trümmer auf Trümmer häuft und sie ihm vor die Füße schleudert. Er möchte wohl verweilen, die Toten wecken und das Zerschlagene zusammenfügen. Aber ein Sturm weht vom Paradiese her, der sich in seinen Flügeln verfangen hat und so stark ist, dass der Engel sie nicht mehr schließen kann. Dieser Sturm treibt ihn unaufhaltsam in die

Zukunft, der er den Rücken kehrt, während der Trümmerhaufen vor ihm zum Himmel wächst. Das, was wir Fortschritt nennen, ist *dieser* Sturm.⁵⁹

Not coincidentally, Benjamin borrows this materialist-religious image from a painting he had bought from Paul Klee, an avant-garde artist who was a founding member of the *Bauhaus*-collective. Both Benjamin and Klee could have recognised themselves in the description of the angel of history. The avant-garde as angel of history is being blown and driven by progress (or, as one could have it: modernisation) relentlessly into a future that it cannot see. The only way that the avant-garde can heal past wounds is by giving out a promise, an advance on the future that it never can fully redeem. At heart thus, the avant-garde is a tragic movement because it is facing the shambles and fragments of history, but the avant-garde cannot change the past anymore, as much as it wants to. The course into the future is determined by a merciless storm – in Benjamin's image facing the past does therefore not mean being backwards in historical terms, but the avant-garde is the only group that is truly trying to figure out how to make sense of the past in a way to make it productive for the future. A crucial difference between Luhmann's and Benjamin's conceptions of history thus remains: while in Luhmann's image the movement is active (rowing), Benjamin's angel of history is passive (being driven by the storm of progress). For Luhmann, the avant-garde wants to achieve the future while for Benjamin it wants to heal the past. Maybe, that is then the difference between systems theory and historical materialism: while Luhmann still recognises something like agency in the confined cage of will that the system is giving an individual, for Benjamin the course of history is a storm of unstoppable power.

As I have pointed out, each of these four theses will occupy a central position in one of the four following chapters. Yet, by its dialectical and networked nature, the other three ideas will also simultaneously be present, perhaps less visible and worked through to a smaller degree within the text. The co-presence of these four points is also a sign of the interconnected and indivisible nature of the different elements that constitute the avant-garde. The art-historical approach centred on biography and the work of art as an autonomous aesthetic structure reduces this totality that the avant-garde worked towards separate entities contained within strict and limited boundaries.

Ultimately, the avant-garde was as much a symptom of modernity – being unthinkable without the widespread technological, social, political, economic and cultural changes that are united under this banner – as a cause that contributed to the uncertainty that many felt when confronted by a radically transformed environment. The avant-garde itself acted as a half-transparent mirror that on the one hand reflected modernity in all its deeply felt ambivalence, yet on the other

hand it also gave an interpretation of the human condition under changed circumstances. Not coincidentally, the city symphony became the most celebrated genre of the avant-garde and something of a fad in the late 1920s as it provided a *mise-en-abyme* and allegory of the conditions that had brought the avant-garde movement into existence. The city viewed through the lens of the technologically most advanced medium focused on contradictions inherent in the avant-garde. The city as an allegory and short-hand of modern life with all its social and economic factors that contributed to it became the most decisive factor in avant-garde activity. The avant-garde with all its critical and affirmative potential is as divided at heart as modernity – while it aimed ultimately at »solving« the problems of modernity, it was itself »part of the problem«. It is only in this dialectical nature that one can understand the avant-garde, its triumphs and defeats which are often to be found in the same instance and which we should rather see in an inclusive »as-well-as« logic instead of in an exclusive »either-or« binarism.

My final chapter on two simultaneously very different and very similar films, John Grierson's *DRIFTERS* (GB 1929) and Walter Ruttmann's *MELODIE DER WELT* (DE 1929) which share more than their year of production will attempt to illustrate the deeply paradoxical nature of the avant-garde. Both films participate on strategies developed within avant-garde films while also drawing on other filmmaking traditions. Yet, both films have to be situated in a number of different contexts in order to fully understand their potential as well as their impact. These contextual factors will reflect back on the films and demonstrate how a specific film form (the documentary) could emerge from the encounter of certain stylistic features with an organisational model borrowed from the media strategies of the avant-garde, yet with a radically new support system in the service of the nation state. The final chapter will thus return to the films from which I have departed in the main body of this work. This symbolic return to the material with a renewed agenda in mind will, I hope, demonstrate that the approach proposed here does not necessarily lead away from the films, but that it also opens a fresh perspective on otherwise well-known classics.

¹ Andreas Huyssen: »The Hidden Dialectic: Avantgarde – Technology – Mass Culture«. First published in Kathleen Woodward (ed.): *The Myths of Information: Technology and Postindustrial Culture*. Madison, WI: Coda Press 1980: 151-164. Reprinted in and quoted after: Andreas Huyssen: *After the Great Divide. Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*. Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 1986: 3-15, here 9.

² A series of Benjamin's texts from the second half of the 1920s onwards implicitly or explicitly illustrate this position. See as central examples »Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit«. (written 1935/36) In: W.B.: *Gesammelte Schriften. I.2*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1977: 471-508; »Der Sürrealismus. Die letzte Momentaufnahme der europäischen Intelligenz«. (written 1928/29) In: W.B.: *Gesammelte Schriften. II.1*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1977: 295-310; »Der Erzähler. Betrachtungen zum Werk Nikolai Lesskows«. (written 1928-35) In: W.B.: *Gesammelte Schriften. II.2*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1977: 438-465; »Der Autor als

Produzent«. (lecture given in Paris 27 April 1934) In: W.B.: *Gesammelte Schriften. II.2.* Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1977: 683-701; »Zur Lage der russischen Filmkunst«. In: W.B.: *Gesammelte Schriften. II.2.* Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1977: 747-751; »Erwiderung an Oscar A.H. Schmitz«. (both written 1927) In: W.B.: *Gesammelte Schriften. II.2.* Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1977: 751-755. See also the series of texts on Bertolt Brecht and the *Passagenwerk*.

³ See Lotte H. Eisner: »Avantgarde – Achtung!«. In: *Film-Kurier*, vol. 10, no. 126, 26.5.1928. [»If the avant-garde is no longer the privileg of the truly brave pioneers, the danger might occur that it becomes a common basis for the slowly moving masses. [...] The avantgarde needs to sound out its own rows; it must free itself from those, who may harm it. [...] The avant-garde has to be aware of staying avant-garde. It has to know its friends and accept criticism from its own. Otherwise it will become, despite its name, yesterday's issue.«, my trans.]

⁴ My understanding of the avant-garde relies on Peter Bürger's ideas as elaborated in: *Theorie der Avantgarde*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1974. (engl.: *Theory of the Avant-garde*. Manchester: Manchester University Press 1984). I will discuss the notion of avant-garde in relation to the cinema around 1930 in detail in chapter two.

⁵ Walter Benjamin: »Der Autor als Produzent«. (lecture given in Paris 27 April 1934). In: W.B.: *Gesammelte Schriften. II.2.* Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1977: 683-701, here 692. [»...to supply a production apparatus without trying, within the limits of the possible, to change it, is a highly disputable activity even when the material supplied appears to be of a revolutionary nature.«, trans. Anna Bostock, *Understanding Brecht*: 93f.]

⁶ *Ibid.*: 693. [»... intellectual production cannot become politically useful until the seperate spheres of competence to which, according to the bourgeois view, the process of intellectual production owes its order, have been surmounted; more precisely, the barriers of competence must be broken down by each of the productive forces they were created to separate, acting in concert.«, trans. Anna Bostock, *Understanding Brecht*: 95]

⁷ I am detailing these developments in chapter three on the film societies.

⁸ For more on these terms see Thomas Elsaesser: »Moderne und Modernisierung. Der deutsche Film der dreißiger Jahre«. In: *montage/av*, vol. 3, no. 2, 1994: 23-40; see also Thomas Elsaesser: *Das Weimarer Kino – aufgeklärt und doppelbödig*. Berlin: Vorwerk 8 1999: passim.

⁹ Alan Williams: »Historical and Theoretical Issues in the Coming of Recorded Sound to the Cinema«. In: Rick Altman (ed.): *Sound Theory, Sound Practice*. New York, London: Routledge 1992: 126-137, here 126.

¹⁰ See Harald Jossé: *Die Entstehung des Tonfilms. Beitrag zu einer faktenorientierten Mediengeschichtsschreibung*. Freiburg, München: Alber 1984, and Wolfgang Mühl-Benninghaus: *Das Ringen um den Tonfilm. Strategien der Elektro- und Filmindustrie in den 20er und 30er Jahren*. Düsseldorf: Droste 1999. For English-language overviews see also Douglas Gomery: »Tri-Ergon, Tobis Klangfilm, and the Coming of Sound«. In: *Cinema Journal*, vol. 16, (1976): 51-61 and Douglas Gomery: »Economic Struggle and Hollywood Imperialism: Europe Converts to Sound«. In: *Yale French Studies*, no. 60 (1980): 80-93. The classic (and by now somewhat dated) works in this field are Harry M. Geduld: *The Birth of the Talkies: From Edison to Jolson*. Bloomington, IN, London: Indiana University Press 1975 and Alexander Walker: *The Shattered Silents. How the Talkies Came to Stay*. London: Elm Tree 1978.

¹¹ See Karel Dibbets: *Sprekende films. De komst van de geluidsfilm in Nederland 1928-1933*. Amsterdam: Cramwinckel 1993.

¹² See for a thorough study Donald Crafton: *The Talkies. American Cinema's Transition to Sound 1926-1931*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1997, and for a more popular account Scott Eyman: *The Speed of Sound. Hollywood and the Talkie Revolution*. New York: Simon & Schuster 1997.

¹³ See Christien Belaygue (ed.): *Le passage du muet au parlant*. Toulouse: Cinémathèque de Toulouse 1988; Michele Canosa (ed.): *L'Immagine Acustica. Dal muto al sonoro: gli anni della transizione in Europa*. Ancona: Transeuropa 1992. (Cinegrafie 2/5); Martin Barnier: *En route vers le parlant. Histoire d'une évolution technologique, économique et esthétique du cinéma (1926-1934)*.

Liège (BE): Éditions du Céfal 2002. (Histoire du Cinéma / Collection Travaux & Thèses) and Corinna Müller: *Vom Stummfilm zum Tonfilm*. München: Wilhelm Fink 2003.

¹⁴ Cda [= Chris Darke]: »Avant-garde Cinema in Europe«. In: Ginette Vincendeau (ed.): *Encyclopedia of European Cinema*. London / New York: Cassell, British Film Institute / Facts on File 1995: 25

¹⁵ The term *cinéma pur* was used in the French discourse in the 1920s to describe the free montage of photographically created images according to laws of music or formal logic (films by Henri Chomette, Germaine Dulac, Jean Epstein and others) while *absoluter Film* was employed in the mid-1920s in Germany to denote the abstract and non-figurative animations of Viking Eggeling, Hans Richter and Walter Ruttmann.

¹⁶ I will examine the role of the Soviet Union for the European film avant-garde in more detail in my chapter on the »Vanishing Point Soviet Union«.

¹⁷ David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, Kristin Thompson: *The Classical Hollywood Cinema. Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960*. London: Routledge 1985: 301.

¹⁸ Alan Williams: »Historical and Theoretical Issues in the Coming of Recorded Sound to the Cinema«. In: Rick Altman (ed.): *Sound Theory, Sound Practice*. New York, London: Routledge 1992: 126–137, here 128.

¹⁹ Andrew Higson: »The Limiting Imagination of National Cinema«. In: Mette Hjort, Scott MacKenzie (eds.): *Film & Nation*. London, New York: Routledge 2000: 63–74, here 66.

²⁰ See Benedict Anderson: *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso 1983; Anthony Smith: *Theories of Nationalism*. London: Duckworth 1983; Anthony D. Smith: *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*. Oxford: Blackwell 1986; Anthony D. Smith: *National Identity*. London: Penguin / Reno, NV: University of Nevada Press 1991; Anthony D. Smith: *Nationalism and Modernism*. London, New York: Routledge 1998; and Eric J. Hobsbawm: *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1990.

²¹ Homi K. Bhabha: *Nation and Narration*. London: Routledge 1990; Homi K. Bhabha: *The Location of Culture*. London, New York: Routledge 1994; Edward W. Said: *Orientalism. Western Conceptions of the Orient*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1978; Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson, Edward Said (eds.): *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press 1990. For an application of some of the issues on the cinema see the influential book by Hamid Naficy: *An Accented Cinema. Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*. Princeton, PA, Oxford: Princeton University Press 2001.

²² Important contributions to this debate in the last 20 years are Thomas Elsaesser: »Images for England (and Scotland, Ireland, Wales...)«. In: *Monthly Film Bulletin*, vol. 51, no. 608, September 1984: 267–269, Thomas Elsaesser: »Chronicle of a Death Retold: Hyper, Retro, or Counter-Cinema«. In: *Monthly Film Bulletin*, vol. 54, no. 641, June 1987: 164–167, Thomas Elsaesser: »The Idea of National Cinema«. (»De competitie met Hollywood«). In: *Skrien* 186, October/November 1992. Reprinted in English translation in T.E.: *European Cinema. Face to Face with Hollywood. Essays and Reviews, 1969–1999*. Amsterdam 2001 (unpublished manuscript), Thomas Elsaesser: »German Cinema in the 1990s«. In: Thomas Elsaesser, Michael Wedel (eds.): *The BFI Companion to German Cinema*. London: British Film Institute 1999, Stephen Crofts: »Reconceptualising National Cinema/s«. In: *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, vol. 14, no. 3, 1993: 49–67, Stephen Crofts: »Concepts of National Cinema«. In: John Hill, Pamela Church Gibson (eds.): *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1998: 385–394, Andrew Higson: »The Concept of National Cinema«. In: *Screen*, vol. 30, no. 4, Autumn 1989: 36–46, Andrew Higson: »The Instability of the National«. In: Justine Ashby, Andrew Higson (eds.): *British Cinema, Past and Present*. London, New York: Routledge 2000: 35–47. Two well-selected and edited anthologies also testify to the increasing significance of this field: see Mette Hjort, Scott MacKenzie (eds.): *Cinema & Nation*. London, New York: Routledge 2000, and Alan Williams: *Film and Nationalism*. New Brunswick, NJ, London: Rutgers University Press 2002. (Rutgers Depth of Field Series).

²³ See Richard Abel: *French Cinema. The First Wave, 1915-1929*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1984: 251f.; Richard Abel: »Cinégraphie and the Search for Specificity«. In: R.A.: *French Film Theory and Criticism, 1907-1939. A History/Anthology. I: 1907-1929*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1988: 194-223, here 198; Christophe Gauthier: *La passion du cinéma. Cinéphiles, Ciné-Clubs et salles spécialisées à Paris de 1920 à 1929*. Paris: École nationale de Chartres / AFRHC 1999: 57. See Kristin Thompson: »Dr. Caligari at the Folies-Bergère, or, The Successes of an Early Avant-Garde Film«. In: Mike Budd (ed.): *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari. Texts, Contexts, Histories*. New Brunswick, London: Rutgers University Press 1990: 121-169, on the French reception of CALIGARI see 149-156.

²⁴ Malcolm Bradbury: »The Cities of Modernism«. In: Malcolm Bradbury, James McFarlane (eds.): *Modernism 1890-1930*. Harmondsworth: Penguin 1991: 96-103, here 96.

²⁵ Thomas Elsaesser: *Filmgeschichte und frühes Kino. Archäologie eines Medienwandels*. München: edition text + kritik 2002: 305. [»A consistently archaeological approach not only has to widen the range of questions deemed relevant, but also to change the starting-point of the questions and to put into doubt one's own historiographic premises; for example by including discontinuities, the so called dead ends and the possibility of an amazing otherness of the past.«, my trans.]

²⁶ On the *New Film History* see Thomas Elsaesser: »The New Film History«. In: *Sight and Sound*, vol. 55, no. 4, Autumn 1986: 246-251 for a concise introduction. See for a book-length discussion Robert C. Allen, Douglas Gomery: *Film History. Theory and Practice*. New York: Knopf 1985. A critical evaluation is provided by Paul Kusters: »New Film History. Grundzüge einer neuen Filmgeschichtswissenschaft«. In: *montage/av*, vol. 5, no. 1, 1996: 39-60.

²⁷ For more recent overviews and re-evaluations see the special section on »Film History, or a Baedeker Guide to the Historical Turn« edited by Sumiko Higashi in: *Cinema Journal*, vol. 44, no. 1, Fall 2004: 94-143. See also Thomas Elsaesser: »Writing and Rewriting Film History: Terms of a Debate«. In: *Cinéma et cie.*, no. 1, Fall 2001: 24-33.

²⁸ Rick Altman has suggested a more general model of crisis historiography that could also be subsumed under these archaeological approaches. See Rick Altman: »Penser l'histoire (du cinéma) autrement : un modèle de crise«. In: *Vingtème siècle*, no. 46, 1995: 65-74.

²⁹ On the cultural, technological and political pitfalls of dubbing see Nataša Đurovičová: »Local Ghosts: Dubbing Bodies in Early Sound Cinema«. In: Anna Antonini (ed.): *Il film e i suoi multipli. Film and Its Multiples*. Udine: Forum 2003: 83-98.

³⁰ See especially his *The Archaeology of Knowledge & The Discourse on Language*. New York: Pantheon 1972.

³¹ See *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*. Harmondsworth: Penguin 1977.

³² See *The Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. London: Tavistock 1970.

³³ See *Madness and Civilisation. A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. New York: Random House 1965.

³⁴ See *The Birth of the Clinic. An Archaeology of Medical Perception*. London: Tavistock 1973.

³⁵ See Thomas Elsaesser: *Filmgeschichte und frühes Kino. Archäologie eines Medienwandels*. München: edition text + kritik 2002. See Siegfried Zielinski: *Archäologie der Medien*. Reinbek: Rowohlt 2002. See also Wolfgang Ernst: »Der medienarchäologische Blick«. In: Harro Segeberg (ed.): *Die Medien und ihre Technik. Theorien – Modelle – Geschichte*. Marburg: Schüren 2004: 28-42. For an evaluation of Elsaesser's position see Leonardo Quaresima: »Sherlock Holmes und das marokkanische Wadi«. In: *Kintop – Jahrbuch zur Erforschung des frühen Films. Vol. 12: Theorien zum frühen Kino*. Frankfurt/Main, Basel: Stroemfeld / Roter Stern 2003: 165-170.

³⁶ Wolfgang Ernst: »Der medienarchäologische Blick«. In: Harro Segeberg (ed.): *Die Medien und ihre Technik. Theorien – Modelle – Geschichte*. Marburg: Schüren 2004: 28-42, here 32. [»...primarily to describe the artefact in its givenness – in other words: as a datum, as data – i.e. letting it stand as a monument instead of (just as historians tend to operate) transforming it into a document or an illustration of an underlying history.«, my trans.]

³⁷ Siegfried Zielinski: *Archäologie der Medien*. Reinbek: Rowohlt 2002: 45. [»Different time periods are examined in order to highlight the qualitative moments of change in a continuous development.

The historical eras chosen should be attractive compressions in which possible directions for development have been tried out, in which changes of paradigms have taken place.», my trans.]

³⁸ See for example the anthology David Thorburn, Henry Jenkins (Hrsg.): *Rethinking Media Change. The Aesthetics of Transition*. Cambridge, MA, London: The MIT Press 2003.

³⁹ See Thomas Elsaesser: *Filmgeschichte und frühes Kino. Archäologie eines Medienwandels*. München: edition text + kritik 2002. See also Thomas Elsaesser: »Early Film History and Multi-Media: An Archaeology of Possible Futures?«. In: Wendy Chung (ed.): *The Archaeology of Multimedia*. New York: Routledge 2003.

⁴⁰ Niklas Luhmann: *Soziale Systeme. Grundriß einer allgemeinen Theorie*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1984: 59. [»self-referential systems do not possess any other way of contact with the environment than self-contact.«, my trans.]

⁴¹ Stephen C. Foster: »Hans Richter: Prophet of Modernism«. In: Stephen C. Foster (ed.): *Hans Richter. Activism, Modernism, and the Avantgarde*. Cambridge, MA, London: The MIT Press 1998. (in collaboration with the University of Iowa Museum of Art, Iowa City): 2-15, here 3.

⁴² See for good overviews Robert Stam: *Film Theory. An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell 2000, and Francesco Casetti: *Teorie del cinema (1945–1990)*. Milano: Bompiani 1993; engl.: *Theories of Cinema, 1945–1995*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press 1999. See for collections of early texts Helmut H. Diederichs (ed.): *Geschichte der Filmtheorie. Kunsttheoretische Texte von Méliès bis Arnheim*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 2004 and Richard Abel: *French Film Theory and Criticism, 1907-1939. A History/Anthology. I: 1907-1929. II: 1929-1939*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1988.

⁴³ See Francesco Bono et al. (eds.): *La Filmliga olandesa (1927-1933). Avanguardia, critica, organizzazione del cinema*. Bologna: Comune di Bologna 1991. and Nico de Klerk, Ruud Visschedijk(eds.): *Het gaat om de film! Een nieuwe geschiedenis van de Nederlandsche Filmliga 1927–1933*. Amsterdam: Bas Lubberhuizen / Filmmuseum 1999. for the Dutch Filmliga, see Christophe Gauthier: *La Passion du cinéma. Cinéphiles, ciné-clubs et salles spécialisées à Paris de 1920 à 1929*. Paris: Association Française de Recherche sur l'Histoire du Cinéma / Ecole des Chartres 1999 for the Parisian cinephiles of the pre-sound era, see Jamie Sexton: *The British Film Societies*. Norwich: University of East Anglia 2001 (unpublished PhD thesis) for the activities of the British Film Societies.

⁴⁴ See Jan Heijs (ed.): *Filmliga 1927–1931*. Nijmegen: SUN 1982 for the Dutch Filmliga, see James Donald, Anne Friedberg, Laura Marcus (eds.): *Close Up, 1927–1933. Cinema and Modernism*. London: Cassell 1998 for a valuable annotated selection of *Close Up*, see the complete reprint of the magazine in 10 volumes Nendeln (Liechtenstein): Kraus Reprint 1969, see Richard Weber (ed.): *Film und Volk. Organ des Volksfilmverbandes. Februar 1928–März 1930*. Köln: Verlag Gahme, Henke 1975 for *Film und Volk*, see Rolf Henke, Richard Weber (eds.): *Arbeiterbühne und Film. Zentralorgan des Arbeiter-Theater-Bundes Deutschlands e.V. Juni 1930–Juni 1931*. Köln: Verlag Gahme, Henke 1974 for *Arbeiterbühne und Film*.

⁴⁵ See Paul Hammond: *The Shadow and Its Shadow: Surrealist Writings on the Cinema*. Edinburgh: Polygon 1991, Standish Lawder: *The Cubist Cinema*. New York: New York University Press 1975, Inez Hedges: *Languages of Revolt. Dada and Surrealist Literature and Film*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press 1983, Rudolf E. Kuenzli (ed.): *Dada and Surrealist Film*. New York: Willis, Locker and Owens 1987, and Thomas Elsaesser: »Dada/Kino? Die Avantgarde und das frühe Filmerlebnis«. In: T.E.: *Filmgeschichte und frühes Kino. Archäologie eines Medienwandels*. München: edition text + kritik 2002: 250–277.

⁴⁶ See Angelika Leitner, Uwe Nitschke (eds.): *Der deutsche Avant-Garde Film der 20er Jahre*. München: Goethe-Institut 1989 and Christine Noll Brinckmann: »Experimentalfilm, 1920-1990. Einzelgänge und Schübe«. In: Wolfgang Jacobsen, Anton Kaes, Hans Helmut Prinzler (eds.): *Geschichte des deutschen Films*. Stuttgart, Weimar: J.B. Metzler 1993: 417-450 and Anne Hoormann: *Lichtspiele. Zur Medienreflexion der Avantgarde in der Weimarer Republik*. München: Wilhelm Fink 2003 on the German avant-garde film; see Nicole Brenez, Christian Lebrat (eds.): *Jeune, dure et pure! Une histoire du cinéma d'avant-garde et expérimental en France*. Milano / Paris: Mazzotta / Cinéma-

thèque française 2001 and Oliver Fahl: *Jenseits des Bildes. Poetik des französischen Films der zwanziger Jahre*. Mainz: Bender 2000 on the French avant-garde. See Michael O'Pray (ed.): *The British Avant-Garde Film 1936-1995*. Luton: Arts Council / John Libbey 1996 for the British avant-garde.

⁴⁷ See Jeanpaul Goergen (ed.): *Walter Ruttmann. Eine Dokumentation*. Berlin: Freunde der Deutschen Kinemathek 1989 and Leonardo Quaresima (ed.): *Walter Ruttmann. Cinema, pittura, ars acustica*. Calliano: Manfrini 1994 for Walter Ruttmann, see Herbert Gehr, Marion von Hofacker (eds.): *Hans Richter. Malerei und Film*. Frankfurt/Main: Deutsches Filmmuseum 1989, Stephen C. Foster (ed.): *Hans Richter. Activism, Modernism and the Avant-Garde*. Boston, MA: MIT Press 1998 and Jeanpaul Goergen, Angelika Hoch, Erika Gregor, Ulrich Gregor (eds.): *Hans Richter. Film ist Rhythmus*. Berlin: Freunde der Kinemathek 2003 for Hans Richter, see Joris Ivens: *The Camera and I*. Berlin/DDR: Seven Seas Publishers 1969, Joris Ivens, Robert Destanque: *Joris Ivens ou la mémoire d'un regard*. Paris: Éditions BFB 1982, Hans Schoots: *Gevaarlijk leven. Een biografie van Joris Ivens*. Amsterdam: Jan Mets 1995. (English edition: *Living Dangerously. A Biography of Joris Ivens*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2000) and Kees Bakker (ed.): *Joris Ivens and the Documentary Context*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 1999 for Joris Ivens, see Prosper Hillairet (ed.): *Germaine Dulac. Ecrits sur le cinéma (1919-1937)*. Paris: Éditions Expérimental 1994 and Sabine Nessel, Heide Schlüpmann, Stefanie Schulte Strathaus (eds.): *L'Invitation au voyage. Germaine Dulac*. Berlin: Freunde der Deutschen Kinemathek 2002. (Kinemathek 93) for Germaine Dulac, see Jean Epstein: *Écrits sur le cinéma, 1921-1953. Édition chronologique. I: 1921-1947. II: 1946-1953*. (2 vols.) Paris: Seghers 1974; 1975, Jacques Aumont (ed.): *Jean Epstein. Cinéaste, poète, philosophe*. Paris: Cinémathèque française 1998 for Jean Epstein; see Joseph Zsuffa: *Béla Balász. The Man and the Artist*. Berkeley, CA et al.: University of California Press 1987, Hanno Loewy: »Die Geister des Films. Balász' Berliner Auftrübe im Kontext«. In: Béla Balász: *Der Geist des Films*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 2001. (originally Halle/Saale: Wilhelm Knapp 1930): 171-230; Helmut H. Diederichs: »Ihr müßt etwas von guter Filmkunst verstehen« Béla Balász als Filmtheoretiker und Medienpädagoge«. In: Béla Balász: *Der sichtbare Mensch, oder die Kultur des Films*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 2001. (originally Wien, Leipzig: Deutsch-Österreichischer Verlag 1924): 115-147 and Hanno Loewy: *Béla Balász – Märchen, Ritual und Film*. Berlin: Vorwerk 8 2003 for Béla Balász, see Hilmar Hoffmann, Walter Schobert (eds.): *Optische Poesie. Oskar Fischinger – Leben und Werk*. Frankfurt/Main: Deutsches Filmmuseum 1993. (Kinematograph 9) for Oskar Fischinger, see Michael Omasta (ed.): *Tribute to Sasha. Das filmische Werk von Alexander Hammid. Regie, Kamera, Schnitt und Kritiker*. Wien: Synema 2002 for Alexander Hackenschmied / Hammid.

⁴⁸ See Roger Manvell (ed.): *Experiment in the Film*. London: Grey Walls Press 1948; Parker Tyler: *Underground Film. A Critical History*. New York: Grove Press 1969; David Curtis: *Experimental Cinema. A Fifty-Year Evolution*. London: Studio Vista 1971; Jean Mitry: *Le cinéma expérimental. Histoire et perspectives*. Paris: Seghers 1974; Hans Scheugl, Ernst Schmidt: *Eine Subgeschichte des Films*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1974; Birgit Hein, Wulf Herzogenrath (eds.): *Film als Film. 1910 bis heute*. Köln: Kölnischer Kunstverein 1977; P. Adams Sitney (ed.): *The Avant-Garde Film: A Reader of Theory and Criticism*. New York: New York University Press Anthology 1978; Phillip Drummond (ed.): *Film as Film. Formal Experiment in Film, 1910-1975*. London: Hayward Gallery 1979; Ingo Petzke: *Das Experimentalfilm-Handbuch*. Frankfurt/Main: Deutsches Filmmuseum 1989; Peter Weiss: *Avantgarde Film*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1995 (originally Swedish 1956); Paolo Bertetto, Sergio Toffetti (eds.): *Cinema d'avanguardia in Europa. Dalle origini al 1945*. Torino: Il Castoro 1996; A.L. Rees: *A History of Experimental Film and Video. From the Canonical Avant-Garde to Contemporary British Practice*. London: British Film Institute 1999.

⁴⁹ See Tom Gunning: »Ontmoetingen in verduisterde ruimten. De alternatieve programmering van de Nederlandse Filmliga«. In: Nico de Klerk, Ruud Visschedijk (eds.): *Het gaat om de film! Een nieuwe geschiedenis van de Nederlandse Filmliga 1927-1933*. Amsterdam: Bas Lubberhuizen / Filmmuseum 1999: 218.

⁵⁰ The term »avant-garde« had currency in the 1920s and 1930s: The German trade daily *Film-Kurier* introduced in 1928 as part of its weekend edition a special on »Die Avantgarde« which ran for several months and demonstrates the currency of the term (and of the movement) in the late 1920s. Richard

Abel has gathered a substantial numbers of contemporary articles from France which address the avant-garde as a focus (and term) of interest. See Richard Abel (ed.): *French Film Theory and Criticism, 1907-1939. A History/Anthology. Vol. 1: 1907-1929*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1988: 319-436 (especially part 4, »The Great Debates« on the years 1925-29). See also the texts by activists such as Ruttmann, Richter or Dulac who applied the term frequently in the 1920s and 1930s. Ruttmann's texts can be found in Jeanpaul Goergen (ed.): *Walter Ruttmann. Eine Dokumentation*. Berlin: Freunde der Deutschen Kinemathek 1989, Richter's in Jeanpaul Goergen, Angelika Hoch, Erika Gregor, Ulrich Gregor (eds.): *Hans Richter. Film ist Rhythmus*. Berlin: Freunde der Kinemathek 2003 and Dulac's in Prosper Hillairet (ed.): *Germaine Dulac. Ecrits sur le cinéma (1919-1937)*. Paris : Éditions Expérimental 1994.

⁵¹ Walter Benjamin: »Aus dem Brecht-Kommentar«. In: W.B.: *Gesammelte Schriften. Band II.2*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1977: 506. [»The new thing here is that these points emerge in their full importance; that the author, for their sake, takes temporary leave of his *oeuvre* and, like an engineer starting to drill for oil in the desert, takes up his activity at precisely calculated places in the desert of contemporary life. Here these points are situated in the theatre, the anecdote, and radio; others will be tackled at a later stage.«, trans. Anna Bostock]

⁵² The idea of the *Medienverbund* in connection to the interwar avant-garde has been proposed by Thomas Elsaesser in his study on the *Bund »Das Neue Frankfurt«*. See Thomas Elsaesser: »Die Stadt von Morgen: Filme zum Bauen und Wohnen in der Weimarer Republik«. Text for DFG-project: *Geschichte des deutschen Dokumentarfilms bis 1945*. (3 volumes). Stuttgart, Leipzig: Reclam 2005: to be published.

⁵³ See part 2.1.2 on the constructivist logic of the avant-garde.

⁵⁴ Ej. [=Ernst Jäger]: »Berlins Filmproduktion braucht ein Film-Studio. Aber es muß unter Aufsicht der Industrie arbeiten«. In: *Film-Kurier*, vol. 9, no. 255, 28.10.1927. [»Hopefully it will be possible to combine the goals of society with those of the industry. What is the use of modernity otherwise, if it is only the toy of fiddlers. The film production of today must be won for tomorrow's film. [...] Therefore film production companies from all over the world are equally interested in the avant-garde of the experimenters and fiddlers. Those with insight know this. And now they have to be encouraged to recognise the avant-garde as their creative task force. Also the technicians and the theorists must know, that they are workers of the present film industry, and that their attempts and experiences as soon as they show any practical results should be used for the present film fabrication.«, my trans.]

⁵⁵ Alan Williams: »Historical and Theoretical Issues in the Coming of Recorded Sound to the Cinema«. In: Rick Altman (ed.): *Sound Theory, Sound Practice*. New York, London: Routledge 1992: 126-137, here 136.

⁵⁶ See my discussion in chapter four on the event culture of the avant-garde.

⁵⁷ See the presentation by Petr Szczepanik: »Czech Industrial Film of the 1930s and Bat'a«. Paper given at *Films at Work. International Industrial Film Workshop*, Bibliothek des Ruhrgebiets, Bochum, 9-10 December 2004. See moreover the website aimed at a resuscitation of the old industrial town www.zlinbata.com.

⁵⁸ Niklas Luhmann: *Die Kunst der Gesellschaft*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1995: 198f. [»What is paradoxically called avant-garde, has pushed this backward-looking mode of determination to extremes – like rowing oarsmen who only see where they are coming from while they have turned their back to the aim of their journey.«, my trans.]

⁵⁹ Walter Benjamin: »Über den Begriff der Geschichte«. In: W.B.: *Gesammelte Schriften. I.2*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1977: 691-704, here 697f. [»His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.«, trans. Harry Zohn, *Illuminations*: 257f.]