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Chapter 2: The Network of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproducibility – Film Avant-garde and Industry Around 1930

*[O]ne day somebody should figure out how much
>experimental< work has been done in commercials
that would not have been done without them.*

Hans Richter (1949)¹

The avant-garde has often been conceptualised either as a movement or as a network – both metaphors point to its dynamic and movable nature. Flow and change are defining characteristics of a phenomenon that had taken up the cause of transforming life and art. The energy generated within avant-garde circles did not flow completely without channels or river beds, the flow did not run from a central summit down an evenly shaped cone in all directions with equal force. The avant-garde formed (semi-)permanent connections and it had nodes through which much of the current was channelled. These networks and nodes can be detected on different levels which should not be thought of hierarchically but rather rhizomatically. The layers are not vertically subordinated, but they are horizontally connected in a variety of fashions. None of those layers predetermines the other, but they all influence each other as they are interrelated in a variety of ways.

The first layer relates to physical and geographical location and movement and is provided by the cities of modernism. My concentration on Berlin, Paris, London, Amsterdam, Moscow with glances to Brussels, La Sarraz, Magnigotorsk, Stuttgart and some other places reflects the cultural logic of the network of modernist art. Rather than developing evenly in major cities across Europe, the avant-garde emerged at several places more or less simultaneously. These places subsequently became centres of gravity and attracted energy, activists and followers on an international level. Paris in the 1920s was not only a home to avant-garde filmmakers, activists and theoreticians from all over France, but also from Spain and Italy, from Great Britain and Germany, from Brazil and Romania. Berlin was a similar meeting point for Germans, Austrians and Hungarians, but also for Scandinavians, Russians, as well as for Czech and Polish citizens. When Scotsman John Grierson turned London into a centre of innovative filmmaking in the 1930s, the cast of characters was similarly international, with activists from places as far as the United States, Brazil and New Zealand. At least for a relatively small group of activists the cities that I concentrate on were forming a global network not altogether different from the one that more recently Saskia Sassen has diagnosed for the global financial system spanning across New York, London and Tokyo.² Often, an artist would move through different milieus that might shift from time to time from one place to another. To give one example: After leaving his

home town Lund in Sweden, Viking Eggeling first mingled with the cubists in Paris, during World War One he was part of the cosmopolitan artist-intellectual scene in Zürich and Ascona and after the war until his untimely death in 1924 he was a part of the emergent German film avant-garde and worked closely with Hans Richter, both in Berlin and at Richter's family home in Forst (Lausitz).³ This »city« level belongs to a general history of the avant-garde and I will not discuss the social, political, cultural and economic reasons for the attraction of these cities in detail as this would exceed the frame of my study.⁴

Moving on to the next level, the institutions, organisations, clubs and support mechanisms provide the channels of transmission and network nodes on the second layer. The ciné-clubs and specialised film theatres, the film societies and audience organisations, the various (inter-)national affiliations and links had the purpose of making contacts and personal acquaintances more permanent and stable. A cinema specialising in a certain kind of film gathers an audience that exceeds the small and necessarily limited circle of friendship and acquaintance. Also located on this level are such industry departments as the Tobis company experimenting with sound between 1928 and 1930, Grierson's different state sponsored film units or Ufa's *Kulturfilmabteilung*. All these efforts amount to an attempt at forming an alternative network as opposed to that of the commercial film industry. By having organisations for screening, distribution or production one acquires a higher degree of security in planning – a film club with regular screenings and annual subscription provides an audience that does not have to be mobilised anew for every screening. I will discuss the networks of audience organisations in chapter three in detail.

The next level could be said to be made up of the events that these semi-permanent networks of the second level created: the screenings and discussions, the meetings and exhibitions – only by achieving a certain regularity on this more fleeting level could one move up to the next level of a permanent organisation: a ciné-club that does not meet on a regular basis ceases to exist, a specialised cinema that shows conventional fare loses its distinguishing mark in comparison to normal cinemas. Also included on the third level are such singular events as the festival in La Sarraz (even though the participants believed it was the beginning of a more stable network), the Stuttgart exhibition (which went on tour to different cities, but in total it only amounted to a series of local events) or the music festival in Baden-Baden in the years leading up to the introduction of sound. I will concentrate on these events – fragments of a practice that attempted to achieve regularity and stability – in chapter four.

Finally, the last level can be conceptualised as the elements that circulated inside these networks: the lectures and personal appearances, the visits and travels, but also the commissions and films in which certain elements, key players, ideas, and conceptions meet for a short while (even though the network is the flow and vice versa – we have to be wary with the notion that there is a network and

something flowing inside the vessels). My interest to these semi-successful and failed attempts at network building is archaeological. These events show quite clear how the players involved in the avant-garde conceptualised the development of the movement and intended to sustain it.

2.1 The Aporias of the Avant-garde

*...an experimental approach can only be found
in the new possibility of the advertising film.
Indeed, the advertising film provides an economic
basis for all pioneer work at the moment.
Oswald Blakeston (1931)⁵*

As indicated in chapter one, I see the coming of sound not as a radical break of moment of decline, but rather as a catalyst which made visible a number of internal contradictions in the self-organisation of the avant-garde. These aporias were exposed when synchronised sound changed the production process, the exhibition patterns and the financial basis of filmmaking fundamentally and when – almost simultaneously – the economic crisis altered the balance of power between producers and distributors, between patent holders and cinema owners. What I want to consider here are the internal contradictions of and the tensions within the avant-garde if viewed as an unified movement in the 1920s (and the participants at the time saw the avant-garde as a unity to a certain degree). I will consider issues of independence (in terms of money and organisation), of commercialism, of abstraction, and of politics (the idea of progress). I will furthermore ponder the various attempts at defining avant-garde and avant-garde cinema because the concept is rather fleeting and amorphous, taking on new shapes and guises. An important element for a reconsideration of the avant-garde in relation to the industry will be constructivism because the film avant-garde had to engage directly with a technical and reproductive medium.

The first and probably most obvious problem faced by the avant-garde was the independence and/or dependence of the filmmaker. Any filmmaker is dependent in a number of ways on a variety of factors which escape his/her control: Financially, a filmmaker is limited by monetary resources. While any writer, painter or other artist can represent wildly extravagant set pieces such as an elaborate battle sequence, fantastic imagery or strange effects in his/her work, a filmmaker is facing many limitations concerning financial, organisational and technical resources. Even the most basic equipment necessary to shoot a film demands a considerable investment and film material is also very costly. Thus, no filmmaker was able to be financially independent, no matter if commercially minded or with an avant-garde stance.⁶ Film, like architecture, is a medium that requires huge investments, thus limiting the possibility of true independence in a monetary way.⁷ Once a film was produced despite pecuniary difficulties it still needed distribution

and exhibition; since the avant-garde organised these sectors also on the basis of a cottage industry the reach of these films was limited. The economic aspect of filmmaking could be a possible reason for the abstract films of the early 1920s as the production process was artisanal (and thus in keeping with the romantic ideals of originality and creation) and no sets or co-workers were needed. These formal experiments offered at least the possibility of a partial independence from some of the industry's constraints. Contrary to traditional arguments which either argue that abstract films were the furthest removed from realist depiction or purport that the move towards anti-realistic representation followed the lead of painting, one could argue that an even more important reason for this tendency was the anti-industrial vein inherent in this kind of film. Abstract or, as they were known in Germany at the time, »absolute« films did away with actors and props, settings and costumes. No matter how to decide in this case: The autonomy of the avant-garde filmmaker regarding the means of production was a debated issue as this basic tenet of other arts was hardly obtainable for the large-scale film apparatus.

Perhaps the most radical solution to this dilemma can be found in the activities of Lev Kuleshov's workshop at the Soviet State Film School. Kuleshov and his pupils would stage so called »films without film«, stage productions in which light and sound cues and a turning stage simulated »shot transitions« (cuts). Montage was deliberately rapid in order to explore the possibilities of the film medium and moreover in order to de-emphasise the self-contained nature of the shot or scene. Paradoxically enough, the medium of theatre was used to simulate a kind of film that was furthest removed from theatre as normally conceived and executed. Of course, this method was partly born out of scarcity as the Soviet Union had a chronic dearth of film material in the 1920s, yet it also presented a radical solution of disconnecting »film« as an aesthetic and cultural object from its economic and technological ramifications. By simulating those aspects of film that they were most interested in, Kuleshov's workshop was able to create a laboratory for the development of an idiosyncratic film style. At the same time that these experiments allowed for experimentation with certain features of the medium cinema, they did not have to deal with economic or technological aspects of filmmaking. Similarly, the most radical experiments in techniques of remontage and compilation filmmaking were also made in the 1920s in the Soviet Union: Here was a gigantic laboratory in which radical experiments were not only thought and formulated, but also put into practice.⁸

As a general consequence of the economic frame, hardly any of the avant-garde films of the 1920s and 1930s (or of any other period for that matter) are independent in the sense that they have been produced without any outside interference in the form of a commission, a patron or a helping hand by a studio. This could take very different forms as I will briefly outline in connection to Walter Ruttmann, Hans Richter, Joris Ivens, three filmmaker-activists that played a central role in the avant-garde, and Oskar Fischinger and Alexander

Hackenschmied⁹, two slightly more marginal activist that by virtue of their later activities in the United States connect the historical film avant-garde in interwar Europe to the US post-World War Two-scene. All cineastes under consideration here made a considerable number of advertising films (in which a client finances a film that presents a certain product as being useful or desirable) such as DER ZWEIGROSCHEN-ZAUBER (DE 1929, Hans Richter, ›The Two-Penny Magic‹) for a newspaper, DAS WUNDER (DE 1922, Walter Ruttmann, ›The Miracle‹) for liquor, DAS WIEDERGEFUNDENE PARADIES (DE 1925, Walter Ruttmann, ›Paradise Regained‹) for flowers, PHILIPS RADIO (NL 1931, Joris Ivens) for the electrical company or SILNICE ZPÍVÁ (CZ 1937, Alexander Hackenschmied et al., ›The Highway Sings‹) for Bata tyres. They also worked for exhibitions and initiatives in the public sector that formed parts of larger media offensives, especially in connection with reformist social and architectural ideas: Ruttmann made DER AUFSTIEG for the public health exhibition *GeSoLei* (DE 1926, ›The Ascent‹); Richter was in charge of promotional films for the exhibition BAUEN UND WOHNEN (DE 1928, ›Building and Dwelling‹) and DIE NEUE WOHNUNG (CH 1930, ›New Living‹) commissioned by the Schweizer Werkbund¹⁰ while Joris Ivens made WIJ BOUWEN (NL 1929, ›We Are Building‹) and newsreels for various left-wing organisations. They also worked for commercial film productions: Ruttmann made BERLIN, DIE SINFONIE DER GROSSSTADT (DE 1926/27, ›Berlin, Symphony of a Big City‹) as a »quota-quickie« for Fox¹¹, Richter shot two experimental sound films in collaboration with Tobis, VORMITTAGS-SPUK (DE 1927/28, ›Ghosts before Breakfast‹) and ALLES DREHT SICH, ALLES BEWEGT SICH (DE 1929, ›Everything Turns, Everything Revolves‹). They contributed openers and sequences for regular commercial programmes – Richter's INFLATION (DE 1928) and RENNSYMPHONIE (DE 1928, ›Race Symphony‹) were meant as introductions for regular commercial films while Ruttmann's »falcon dream«-sequence was a part of Fritz Lang's DIE NIBELUNGEN (DE 1922-24) – and films poised between commercials and industrial films: the films for electrical and chemical companies by Ivens (PHILIPS RADIO, NL 1931; CREOSOTE, NL 1931) and Richter (EUROPA RADIO, NL 1931 and HALLO EVERYBODY, NL 1933) and Ruttmann's MELODIE DER WELT (DE 1928/29, ›Melody of the World‹) made in commission for Tobis and Hapag. Even the earliest experiments in abstract film (*absoluter Film*) were supported by Ufa (Richter and Eggeling¹²) and by Emelka (Ruttmann¹³). And Ivens' first steps would have been unthinkable without his father's business where he could experiment with and use a variety of different technologies for film production. Oskar Fischinger who took up and continued some abstract tendencies developed in the first half of the 1920s in the late decade worked for the *Kulturfilmabteilung* of the Ufa (SCHÖPFERIN NATUR, DE 1927, ›Creatress Nature‹), contributed special effects to Fritz Lang's DIE FRAU IM MOND (DE 1928/29, ›The Woman in the Moon‹) collaborated with Ernő Metzner on DEIN SCHICKSAL (DE 1928, ›Your Destiny‹), a film supporting the social democratic

party and made several advertising films.¹⁴ Alexander Hackenschmied, retrospectively normally seen as the central proponent of the Prague film avant-garde, started his active film involvement in 1929: he published photographs and wrote on film for the fashionable society weekly *Pestrý týden* («Colourful Week») and *Národní osvobození* («National Liberation») and he was hired as an artistic consultant for Gustav Machatý's *EROTIKON* (CZ 1929). In the following years Hackenschmied made two independent films, *BEZÚČELNÁ PROCHÁZKA* (CZ 1930, «Aimless Walk») and *NA PRAŽSKÉM HRADĚ* (CZ 1932, «Prague Castle»), while also pursuing a career in the film industry as a visual consultant. In the mid-1920s Hackenschmied worked mainly for the publicity department of the shoe manufacturer Bata in Zlín where a thoroughly modern city had been constructed.¹⁵ This list is far from exhaustive and could be continued. The closer one studies the production history of the avant-garde, the clearer becomes the interrelatedness and entangled co-existence with state institutions and industry.

While industry commissions proved to be the most important source for the avant-garde, there were older models to turn to like the private patronage typical of art in the pre-modern period. Tom Gunning has pointed out the irony that the film allegedly shot at the festival of La Sarraz in 1929 by the participants – *LA GUERRE ENTRE LE FILM INDEPENDANT ET LE FILM INDUSTRIEL / TEMPÊTE SUR LA SARRAZ* (CH 1929, «The War between Independent and Commercial Film» / «The Storming of La Sarraz») – featured Hélène de Mandrot as the embodiment of the independent cinema.¹⁶ Now, de Mandrot was a rich art lover who had invited the filmmaking activists to her castle and basically financed the meeting (just as she had supported the progressive architects the year before when she hosted the *CIAM – Congrès International des Architectes Modernes*). The film shot at La Sarraz thus mirrored and allegorised the strange dependence of the avant-garde on private patrons – a model of art production which had basically vanished into obscurity with the rise of the bourgeoisie in the 18th Century (introducing the capitalist market model in the realms of art).¹⁷ The avant-garde faced the problem of who should pay for their films: the state, private patrons or the public? Or could a market be created for these films in order to support a regular production, no matter how small? There are some isolated cases and thus exceptions that prove the rule in which private patrons financed films like the Vicomte de Noailles who paid the bills for Man Ray's *LES MYSTÈRES DU CHÂTEAU DE DÉ* (FR 1929, «The Mystery of the Chateau of the Dice»), Luis Buñuel's and Salvador Dalí's *L'ÂGE D'OR* (FR 1930, «The Golden Age»), and Jean Cocteau's *LE SANG D'UN POÈTE* (FR 1930, «The Blood of a Poet»), the rich Parisian jeweller Leon Rosenthal who sponsored *ROMANCE SENTIMENTALE* (FR 1929, Grigorij Alexandrov, «Sentimental Romance») in order to entertain his mistress Mara Gris or the Comte Etienne de Beaumont who financed some of Henri Chomette's films in the mid-1920s. Now, while private financing seems hardly an option, the film shot at La Sarraz ironically could only be made under this specific situation and therefore allegorically commented on the

situation of the avant-garde vis-à-vis commissions. Some months earlier in May 1929 Walter Ruttmann had already considered this problem. Under the title »Der isolierte Künstler« (»The Isolated Artist«) he had published thoughts on a possible counter initiative:

Denkbar wäre die Versöhnung und Ausbalancierung von Kunst und Geschäft durch einen außerhalb stehenden Machtfaktor: durch einen Mäzen oder den Staat. Aber Mäzene existieren nur noch in Märchenbüchern oder zur Propagierung einer Diva und der Staat scheint – wenigstens in unseren kapitalistischen Ländern – an diesem Problem vorläufig gänzlich uninteressiert zu sein. Bleibt also die Initiative der Kunst. Wer aber repräsentiert die Kunst für den Film? In Frankreich, vielleicht auch in Holland und anderswo besteht die Möglichkeit des Zusammenschlusses, der Einheitsfront derer, die Kunst wollen und Kunst für nützlich halten. Man nennt das »Avantgarde«, hat Kenntnis genommen von ihrem Vorhandensein und rechnet bis zu einem gewissen Grade mit ihr, weil sie Beweise dafür erbracht hat, daß Nachfrage besteht. [...] Dieser anderswo erzielte Erfolg ist aber [...] in Deutschland nicht einfach zu imitieren. [...] So bleibt für uns nur die Hoffnung auf die Persönlichkeit, die stark genug ist, alle Kompromisse zu riskieren, ohne sich zu degradieren; auf die Persönlichkeit, die elastisch genug ist, sich bis ins Hauptquartier des Gegners durchzuschwindeln – um ihn zu überzeugen.¹⁸

This text, written and published just before La Sarraz, demonstrates how aware a key player such as Ruttmann was of the contradictions inherent in the avant-garde position as allegedly independent and avant-garde filmmakers. Ruttmann dismisses the state as a potential partner – actually, it was the state in different countries that supported the 1920s avant-garde in the following decade, not only in terms of personnel, but also in continuing their programme and aesthetic innovations. Ruttmann puts some hopes into audience organisations like the Dutch *Filmliga* and the French ciné-clubs (which he sees as the germ for the creation of a market for avant-garde films), but ultimately sees no chance for a similar advance in Germany. Ruttmann leaves open who the »opponent« really is – and thus in whose head quarters the »elastic personality« should advance. Ruttmann's paradox statement of »conning one's way into the enemy headquarter« should acquire a new urgency eventually by his return to Germany in 1933 and his willingness to take on commission from the Nazis, including propaganda films for rearmament and his helping hand that he lent Leni Riefenstahl in the making of TRIUMPH DES WILLENS (DE 1934/35, »Triumph of the Will«).

In fact, this question of funding and (in)dependence was one of the main topics at two crucial international meetings in La Sarraz 1929 and at the succeeding meeting in Brussels 1930:

Une question en particulier avait alimenté les discussions et suscité des prises de positions opposées, celle de la définition même de »cinéma indépendant«; la plupart des congressistes, parmi lesquels Moussinac, Richter, Balász, Ruttmann et

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Eisenstein, reconnaissaient le caractère illusoire d'une indépendance absolue et attribuaient l'épithète à un cinéma affranchi des lois de l'industrie.¹⁹

While acknowledging the impossibility of achieving independence in its »purest« sense, this formulation opens up another set of problems: If one understands independence as the freedom from the laws of the industry, then the question is: which laws of which industry? As I will argue, the film industry had very different interests from the electrical industry and even within the film industry the exhibition outlets might have a very distinct position from, say, the producers or the hardware manufacturers. These were indeed some of the fault lines and predetermined breaking points that would determine the debates and positions of the 1930s; whether to look for independence in the service of the state or of a political party, whether to move into industrial filmmaking or to concentrate on advertising. A similar case of this recognition, albeit with a different solution, can be found in a statement made by director Victor Trivas in 1931, himself a frequent border crosser between avant-garde and commercial cinema:

Ich kann mir kein unabhängiges Kino vorstellen. Film ist ein industrielles Produkt, das seinen Weg zu den Konsumenten finden muß. Für sie werden die Filme gemacht – sie müssen daher vor allem der Masse zugänglich sein. Falls nicht, so wurde das Ziel sowohl vom gesellschaftlichen als auch vom kommerziellen Gesichtspunkt aus verfehlt. Der Regisseur muß sich bemühen, die wirkliche Verbindung zwischen sich und dem Publikum zu finden. Verheerende Abhängigkeiten sind solche, die für jedermann gelten...²⁰

Trivas' polemic was directed against Ufa's influence in Germany which forced all artists in his opinion into the same strait jacket which then could only generate mediocre results, very similar to Hollywood's film factories. Yet, even Ufa was far from monolithic as the *Kulturfilmabteilung* supported many experiments and even became a (temporary) home to a number of activists from the avant-garde. One has to differentiate between the different factions within the industry as much as within the avant-garde.

These considerations gave rise to the idea of an experimental film studio or film laboratory that was hotly debated in Germany in 1928/29. This studio was expected to focus research for the well-being of art, education, culture and industry and give a steady and reliable base for experiments. Since the cinema was increasingly viewed as a crucial element in the construction of national identity both internally and externally, as a decisive industrial factor and as an independent form of expression more and more voices supported an experimental studio. Whereas a widespread agreement existed concerning the necessity of such an institution the crucial question was, again, who was to finance this facility and, perhaps even more importantly, who was to control it. The usual suspects named in this discussion were the state and the industry, but the unresolved question

haunting the arguments remained the dependency of the experimenter on the financing body. The state or the industry would only pay if they expected to receive something in return for their investment.²¹ In a similar fashion Hans Richter objected to the term »experiment« in relation to the avant-garde. Richter saw »experiments« at work in the commercial production with their internally unconnected elements. For Richter it was important to start with a new conception of cinema and discover from this perspective new techniques, rather than to try out novel tricks and techniques without an underlying theory. The balance between industry and avant-garde that he addresses in this respect needs a studio in which new work is attempted, but according to a specific plan.²²

Not coincidentally, Moritz Seeler named his experimental production company, founded in the key year of 1929, *Studio 1929*, both paying homage to the ongoing debate in Germany, but also to the Parisian cinema *Studio 28*. As is well-known, this experimental company only made one film, yet a highly influential one: *MENSCHEN AM SONNTAG* (DE 1929, Robert Siodmak et al., »People on Sunday«).²³

Another possible solution to this impasse would have been for the avant-garde to claim a non-professional status. By claiming to be an amateur one could have opted for a certain naïveté that should be understood less a proclamation of modesty but rather an avant-gardistic statement of radical difference. By occupying a non-professional position one could have implicitly opened up the field of filmmaking to anyone who had a camera and was making films. The production of films was not limited anymore to professionals and the industry, but everybody could now move on the field. A number of companies had introduced affordable and portable cameras in the course of the 1920s which had made filmmaking equipment available for a wider circle. A whole system of amateur initiatives with clubs, magazines and institutions soon evolved.²⁴ Yet, on the whole there was very little contact between the avant-garde and the amateur movement which could have been more natural partners.²⁵

The main opponent of the avant-garde was not the industry *per se*, but the *film* industry with its unabashed commercialism. In the manifestoes and position papers the film industry was often attacked for their barefaced market-orientation. The avant-garde by contrast would often face the opposing charge of elitism, of producing an elitist art that was beyond ordinary people's understanding. This second aporia can be detected in the manifesto of the Dutch *Filmliga* who stated in their manifesto that they were against *cinema* and in favour of *film*: »Eens op de honderd keer zien wij: de film. Voor de rest zien wij: bioscoop.«.²⁶ They equated cinema with kitsch, Hollywood, formulaic filmmaking, and sentimentalism whereas film pointed towards the discourse around medium specificity. Film denotes in this view the essence of the medium towards which the avant-garde strived (even though they never agreed on what that would be). Many of the film societies with their publications and events aimed originally at developing that

aspect of film that turned it into an art without thinking too much about representation of reality or abstraction, about political and social change or revolution. This impetus against mass culture reveals a current which was more interested in elevating film to the established arts and thus adhering closely to bourgeois and romantic conception of art than in revolutionising the institution art. The Dutch Filmliga, the London Film Society, the Parisian cinephile community – many successful initiatives in this sector modelled itself on theatre, literature, music, and the visual arts rather than approaching cinema as a mass medium. A tension can be found here between attempts to lift film up to the status of accepted art forms and the counter impulse from avant-garde circles opposing the traditional institutions of high culture: museums, theatres, galleries, concert halls, literary clubs, etc. This tension between revolutionising cinema by breaking down all traditional categories of art or establishing it in the »respected circles« persisted all through the 1920s and 1930s.

Or, to put it into socio-historical terms: As film was a latecomer to the stage of art it was undecided whether it should try to leapfrog its way right into the avant-garde movements of Dada and Surrealism (thereby skipping the period of bourgeois art in which a market and a public of (dis)interested citizens would receive and collect art) or whether to stride through that period in high-speed tempo. In fact, traces of both models co-existed in the period under investigation. Moreover, an anti-industrial (and thus anti-modern) streak runs through the film avant-garde's activities; in its opposition to assembly line filmmaking, the activists found themselves in a contradictory position vis-à-vis a thoroughly modern machine for producing social fantasies such as Hollywood, Paris-Joinville or Ufa-Babelsberg. Thus, some avant-garde groups such as the Surrealists wholeheartedly embraced serial dramas and crime films and opposed the lofty idealism of the commercial art cinema or serious attempts at identifying an artistic essence of film. The clash between Antonin Artaud (supported by the Surrealist group) and Germaine Dulac over *LA COQUILLE ET LE CLERGYMAN* (FR 1927) was partly based on the divergent definitions of avant-garde cinema.²⁷

Yet, it was possible to differentiate even within the film industry between projects that were acceptable and those that were considered to be running against all principles of avant-garde ideas. Germaine Dulac who not only alternated experiments in *cinéma pur* with serials and commercial features, but spent her whole career on the interstices of industry and avant-garde has made a distinction in order to break down the all-too-simple binarism:

L'industrie du cinéma produit les films commerciaux, c'est-à-dire les films composés avec le souci de toucher la grande masse, et les films mercantiles. Il faut entendre par films mercantiles ceux qui, se soumettant à toutes les concessions, poursuivent un simple but financier et par films commerciaux ceux qui, s'emparant au mieux de l'expression et de la technique cinématographiques, produisent parfois

des œuvres intéressantes tout en visant des gains justifiés. C'est alors l'union de l'industrie et de l'art.

Du cinéma commercial sort l'oeuvre totale, le film équilibré pour lequel l'industrie et l'avant-garde, séparées en deux camps travaillent. Généralement, l'industrie ne s'attache pas, avec zèle, à l'apport artistique; dans un élan opposé, le considère seul. D'où antagonisme. [...] L'avant-garde et le cinéma commercial, soit l'art et l'industrie du film, forment un tout inséparable. Mais l'avant-garde nécessaire à l'évolution a contre elle la majorité du public et la totalité des éditeurs.²⁸

By breaking open the binary distinction between art and industry and by introducing »films commerciaux« as a third term, Dulac allows herself to find a pragmatic in-between-space. Her work took place in the liminal space where the film industry joined hand with some of the experimental attempts first tried out in avant-garde circles. It is via the transitional space of »commercial cinema« as described by Dulac, in some sense congruent with commercial art cinema, that innovation seeped into the mainstream. When conceived as a cyclical model, the avant-garde would lead the way with experiments – some of those were subsequently taken up in commercial art cinema of which only some in turn would enter the mainstream. These features that found their way to a broader public became gradually unacceptable to the avant-garde. Yet, I do not want to imply a too-simple model of trickling down or innovation and implementation – instead, I would conceptualise the relationship following a logic from system's theory. Part of the output of the separated systems is being picked up by another system and translated to their own frequency. As some devices are reworked, recycled and employed in commercial cinema this is picked up again by the avant-garde which then discards these features altogether as they receive them coming from their arch enemy. Thus, certain techniques that might have been characteristic of the avant-garde in the mid-1920s were picked up by the industry, changed and recycled and were sometimes even fed back to the avant-garde. A similar idea was advanced in the German trade press in mid-1928:

Experimente sind Geschäfte, so paradox es klingt. [...] Findet man etwas, das des Wagens wert erscheint, dann heißt es durchsetzen. À la longue sind wertvolle Anregungen bisher immer durchgegangen. Weiterkommen ist nur möglich durch Ausprobieren neuer Wege. Denn gerade bei einer Massenkunst wie der Film ist die Gefahr einer Erstarrung gefährlich.²⁹

This mutual dependency, this dialectical relationship between avant-garde and film industry is crucial to an understanding of the dynamic attraction and repulsion between the two entities which are in fact not clearly distinguishable and their relationship is not reducible to a binary opposition.

Commercial cinema, not in Dulac's sense, but referring to a market-driven industry, is almost by definition populist: It has to create its own audience since cinema competes on an open market of different forms of entertainment without, as

a rule of thumb, any support mechanisms from state governments or private patrons.³⁰ Commercial cinema is therefore mostly conservative in formal aspects, sentimental in content and traditional in the social norms that are depicted; at least, this was the opinion (and the polemic formulation) of the avant-garde. An early way of resistance against the overwhelming normative framework of the commercial industry and probably the most radical break with the representational paradigm was located by many activists in abstraction. Mostly the models were borrowed from painting as can be found in the early work of Hans Richter, Viking Eggeling, Henri Chomette, Man Ray, Walter Ruttmann, and others. Later developments leaned rather to political radicalisation, but one streak of the avant-garde in the 1930s combined music with abstract moving shapes and colours, exemplified by Oskar Fischinger and Len Lye. Opposition to the industry was not directed against the industry as such, but against the commercialism and the mass public of the film industry. The competition with mass media was something that accepted art forms (literature, visual art) had to deal with only to a limited degree, thus, the film avant-garde had no model to imitate. Of course, the film avant-garde was to a certain extent aware of its inherent elitism which frowned upon mass taste and mass-produced distraction.

Joris Ivens has in 1931 discussed the documentary film as an avant-garde film, as the last stand of the avant-garde against the supreme film industry, to keep the military terminology so typical of many of these writings. Ivens starts off by claiming that »the documentary film is the only means that remains for the avant-garde filmmaker to stand up to the film industry«. ³¹ He clearly distinguishes between commissioned films for the (non-film) industry and work inside the film industry. While the former means only dealing with one person (or one entity such as a board of directors) who normally is not an expert on questions of film the latter amounts in Ivens' opinion to a sell-out as one is caught in a system that thrives on selling the same sentimental stories to the audience, trying to keep their common taste at a low level. There is of course a big difference in terms of usage between a commissioned industrial film and a commercial feature which Ivens hints at, but does not make explicit. The key difference is the address – or what has been theorised in relation to commercial cinema on the one hand as the operations of paratexts³² and on the other as spectatorship.³³ While a commercial feature needed to draw an audience on the basis of its story, stars, spectacle values, narrative engine or any other point that one could use to sell a film, a commissioned industrial film would normally be shown to audiences interested in a company or a certain technology. These spectators were much more open to experimental formats as their main incentive for watching a film was not entertainment. Thus, different forms of address or a stronger stress on information were rather accepted in these circles than in the commercial circuit where big investments needed big cash returns which consequently creates a climate disinclined to innovation. Yet, the collection and maintenance of these spectators who accepted different forms of

address did not work over longer periods of time; exactly this was the incentive of the various film societies which failed in their attempt to alter cinema culture fundamentally, but which nevertheless managed to build up an alternative and long-running distribution and exhibition circuit.³⁴

The question of the essence of cinema was high on the discursive agenda in the 1920s. As critics and theorists discussed cinema as an art form they often hit upon the opposition between realism and abstraction in film. When the first serious discussions about film appeared they mostly stated that film had to move away from theatre, that it should not copy reality because – as the argument went – a camera is a mechanical tool for the photographic recording and reproduction of reality. Thus, a film that showed only outside reality in any documentary way could not qualify as art because it was fabricated by a machine that reproduced optical effects of reality in a mechanical fashion. And the definition of art at that time implied that the outside world had to be filtered through a subjectivity in order to present an idiosyncratic or subjective interpretation of reality. Therefore, the early avant-garde currents such as Expressionism, Impressionism or even the Soviet Montage school distorted and stylised ordinary reality in order to adhere to standards of art as a singular and subjective vision of outside reality. The most extreme experiments in this direction were the early abstract works of Walter Ruttmann, Hans Richter and Viking Eggeling. They had eliminated the referent in outside reality as much as possible. No trace of the photographic index in a Peircian sense can be found in these plays of shape, plane, size, direction and (not to be forgotten) colour.³⁵ This was also in tune with theories on the cinema advanced at the time: both Béla Balász and Rudolf Arnheim attempted to single out those elements of the cinema that turned it into an art. Both stressed capacities that were inherently anti-realist, both saw the artistic ability of cinema beyond its indexical nature.³⁶

Yet, the »absoluter Film«, as it was called in Germany, only had a very brief blossoming. After two matinees on May 3rd and 10th, 1925 the zenith of the absolute film was passed.³⁷ Even though the term would be floating around in discussions for a while the only major event under this banner brought together light projections by Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack (DREITEILIGE FARBENSONATINE, DE 1925 and REFLEKTORISCHE FARBENSPIELE, DE 1925) with films by Hans Richter (FILM IST RHYTHMUS, i.e. RHYTHMUS 23, DE 1923–1925³⁸), Viking Eggeling (SYMPHONIE DIAGONALE, DE 1923–1924), Walter Ruttmann (OPUS 2, DE 1921; OPUS 3, DE 1924; OPUS 4, DE 1925), Fernand Leger and Dudley Murphy (IMAGES MOBILES, i.e. BALLET MECANIQUE, FR 1924) and René Clair (ENTR'ACTE, FR 1924). The term persisted in the German context for a while and by 1928 it had become an issue of polemics. While Hans Richter was instrumental in founding the *Gesellschaft »Neuer Film«*³⁹ which aimed at promoting this kind of cinema, Walter Ruttmann – himself a pioneer of abstract movement with his series OPUS I – IV (DE 1919–1925) who had turned with BERLIN. DIE SINFONIE DER GROSSSTADT

(DE 1926/27) away from pure abstraction – wrote exactly at this time an article on the »absolute fashion«:

Es konnte offenbar nicht ausbleiben: Der ›absolute‹ Film, den man vor Jahren, als ich seine ersten Proben zeigte, teils fanatisch begrüßte, teils gönnerhaft als Outsidertum belächelte, ist Mode geworden. Eine Ebbe der allgemeinen Filmproduktion ist Anlaß, den absoluten Film als Evangelium zu propagieren. Die Unklarheit über sein Wesen ist der Propaganda nur günstig.

Was ist ein absoluter Film? Ein Film, bei dem man sich nicht darauf verläßt, daß aus der Praxis des Filmmachens heraus sich Kunst entwickeln möge, sondern bei dem die Theorie, die überzeugte Vorstellung von autonomer Filmkunst am Anfang steht – die Gewißheit a priori: »So und *nur* so sind die ästhetischen Gesetze des Films.«

Natürlich wäre es an sich erfreulich, wenn Künstler die Routiniers verdrängen. Aber – meint man es gut mit dem Film, wenn man zu eifrig auf seine künstlerische Reinigung drängt? Versteht man ihn richtig, wenn man ihm z.B. das Schicksal der absoluten Musik wünscht? Soll er in schlecht besuchte Konzertsäle abwandern, sich klösterlich destillieren für eine kleine Gemeinde ästhetisch Anspruchsvoller, die über die ›Reinheit‹ seiner Struktur wachen?

Doch wo er [der absolute Film, MH] sich als Selbstzweck und –ziel gebärdet, gleitet er automatisch in die Rumpelkammern des l'art pour l'art hinein, aus denen gerade der Film uns erlöst hat.⁴⁰

Hans Richter had presented the first programme of the *Gesellschaft »Neuer Film«*, including Richter's own *FILMSTUDIE* (DE 1928) on 15 January 1928 in a private house and one month later, on 19 February, in a cinema on Kurfürstendamm. Since Ruttmann's article was published in between these two screenings it does not appear far fetched to understand the text as an attack on Richter and his activities. Ironically, Ruttmann had been scolded by Kracauer and others for the lacking social relevance and political responsibility of his *BERLIN-film*⁴¹ which had premiered some months earlier in September 1927. Taking up this charge Ruttmann now went against Richter whose approach was at this point still more abstract than Ruttmann's, even though their development was after all not that different. Between the lines (»poorly attended concert halls«) Ruttmann possibly also poked fun at Richter's engagement with the *Deutsche Kammermusiktage* in Baden-Baden, a festival devoted to »new music« which had begun screening films with modern scores and experiments in synchronisation in 1927.⁴² Richter had been commissioned in 1928 to make a film for which Paul Hindemith, the artistic director of the festival, composed the music. Perhaps most importantly, Ruttmann dispersed with the notion of autonomous film art: he objected to the idea that theory is overriding or prefiguring practice. A theory should develop from a practice, not the other way around. The asset of the cinema is exactly to free art from the *l'art pour l'art* and give art a new chance to engage with social reality – Ruttmann poised the cinema as a part of modernity against film art as part of high modernism.

Implicitly (and sometimes even explicitly), the thrust of the avant-garde was anti-narrative. Many films being shown within the context of the film societies which were considered to be avant-garde were non-narrative. As the dominant form of the commercial cinema exhibited a regime of heavily formalised narrative schemata concentrated on characters this became the major point of attack on the commercial industry as becomes clear in Tom Gunning's formulation of the programme of the Dutch *Filmliga*:

De Filmliga was niet alleen opgericht om films te draaien die elders zelden te zien waren, maar ook om nieuwe manieren van filmkijken te ontdekken en te onderrichten. In wezen sprak hieruit een minachting voor eenvoudige narratieve uitgangspunten. De Liga programmeerde wel veel verhalende films, maar lanceerde ook een frontale aanval op de hegemonie van de verhalende film zoals die door de klassieke Hollywood-speelfilm werd vertegenwoordigd. Zij bood een gevarieerde keuze aan alternatieven. De abstracte films, de zwaar politieke en meestal weinig psychologische sovjetfilms, de absurdistische melange van dadaïstische en surrealistische films, de visuele associaties en het symbolisme van de Franse impressionisten, de dynamische beelden uit het alledaagse leven in de stadsymfonieën en in andere documentaires – in al deze vormen werden organisatieprincipes gezocht die afstand namen van het conventionele, rond personages opgebouwde verhaal. Nieuwe vormen van film eisten een nieuw publiek, en de Filmliga-programma's moesten de oude gewoonten in het kijken naar film doorbreken om een nieuw besef van filmkunst op te bouwen.⁴³

The question of narrative which was bound up with the opposition to the mainstream film industry proved to be a point of contestation in this discussion around realism and abstraction. Yet, when looking at the films screened at the *Film und Foto*-exhibition in Stuttgart in 1929 which were meant to give an overview of the development in the first decade of the avant-garde one discovers narrative films the are nowadays classics of the silent film like *THE CIRCUS* (US 1926-28, Charlie Chaplin) and *VARIÉTÉ* (DE 1925, E.A. Dupont), but also films like the Zille-adaptation *DIE VERRUFENEN* (DE 1925, Gerhard Lamprecht), or the Cecil B. DeMille-production *CHICAGO* (US 1927, Frank Urson), both films nowadays more or less forgotten.⁴⁴ The rhetorical purity to be found in the manifestoes and theoretical treatises was not always matched by the programmes which were far more varied than one would guess from studying the founding documents of these organisations.

It was from the mid-1920s onwards that in the context of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (new sobriety) or of political movements the outside reality was able to regain a higher standard for avant-garde filmmakers.⁴⁵ Tom Gunning has argued that the opposition between realism and abstraction is rather an academic differentiation that does not do justice to the filmmakers and activists of the 1920s and 1930s:

Hier zien we [...] een theoretische tegenstelling waarbij in praktijk verschillende filmstijlen een dialectische relatie aangaan, in plaats van elkaar uit te sluiten. Voor een deel wordt dit begrijpelijk wanneer we ons realiseren dat deze ogenschijnlijk botsende technieken beide tegenover de commerciële speelfilm staan.⁴⁶

Yet, if we replace the opposition of abstraction vs. realism with the opposition of both to the commercial feature film we are back with our second aporia of commercialism/elitism. It should be kept in mind though that these oppositions were mainly mobilised in order to construct a common enemy to hold together an alliance that was highly diverse and going in very different directions. If we consider for example the microscopic films of J.C. Mol (they were included in several programmes of the *Filmliga* for their qualities as »absolute films« and also screened at the *FiFo*-programme in Stuttgart) we see a scientific impulse to depict phenomena that are too small for the normal eye. The same holds true for the work of Jean Painlevé, originally a scientist who was »discovered« and hailed by the surrealists.⁴⁷ This attempt to construct a new kind of visuality in order to make processes undetectable to the human eye visible, connects Mol's and Painlevé's films with the New Vision as proposed by Moholy-Nagy.⁴⁸ A similar observation of the convergence of scientific and aesthetic functions of reproductive media has been predicted by Walter Benjamin: »Es wird eine der revolutionären Funktionen des Films sein, die künstlerische und die wissenschaftliche Verwertung der Photographie, die vordem meist auseinander fielen, als identisch erkennbar zu machen.«⁴⁹ Yet, this striving for rendering visible the invisible is very different from an artistic urge for self-expression and rather comparable to a disinterested observer who is attempting pure neutrality.

John Grierson is an important figure in tracing some of the shifts that happened simultaneously to, yet independently of the introduction of sound.⁵⁰ Grierson had been trained as a social scientist and had developed an interest in cinema as a mass medium while doing research in the United States from 1924 to 1927. After returning to England he was hired as head of the newly formed Empire Marketing Film Board where he was able to put some of his ideas into practice. Part of the energy generated in the various alternative cinema activities in England flowed into the so called »Documentary Film Movement« led by Grierson whose ideas form a transition from the avant-garde ethos of the late 1920s to other forms of filmmaking outside the film industry in the 1930s. In fact, Grierson's school could be counted as a continuing effort to bridge the gap between art and life through filmmaking and, equally important, through distribution and exhibition (a lot of energy was directed into these two sectors, yet they are often forgotten in accounts of the movements). Grierson was in the 1970s often attacked for being a naive realist, yet his theory which rested upon sociological theories of mass communication and German idealist philosophy aimed at making visible the reality of human relations which, according to this approach, can only be accessed through empirical reality. Grierson argued that »the principal function of the documentary

film [w]as that of representing the interdependence and evolution of social relations in a dramatic, descriptive and symbolic way.«⁵¹ Grierson was obsessed by modernisation and its effects on society, yet he was less a modernist in the sense that it is normally applied to the arts.⁵²

Another important strand of this discussion re-emerges in the Soviet Union: While the montage films of Vertov, Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Dovshenko and others had made a lasting impact in Western Europe in the second half of the 1920s their triumphal procession through Berlin, Amsterdam, Paris and London happened at a time when their particular style of filmmaking was already on the retreat. Starting in 1928 with the end of the New Economic Policy (NEP) Stalinist doctrines were slowly but steadily altering the course of the Soviet cinema. What had dominated (at least in artistic terms) the Soviet cinema of the 1920s, namely a materialist film style based on ideas of collage, construction, juxtaposition and dialectical participation of the spectator in the reception process, gave way to Socialist Realism which can be conceptualised in two contradictory fashions. On the one hand, Soviet cinema of the 1930s moved towards character development modelled on realist novels, identification through empathy, invisible editing based on Hollywood orthodoxy, and a relationship to the audience that was grounded in the interests in the unfolding narrative. »Formalism«, »cosmopolitanism«, »intellectualism« (as it was labelled by Stalinist functionaries purging the industry), in short: abstraction was driven back in favour of a more realist engagement with the outside world (less as it was, rather as it was anticipated). This shift in the Soviet cinema seems to happen in unison with developments in other European countries – in the commercial industry as well as in the avant-garde. The move to Socialist Realism meant also a return to commercial and populist forms of filmmaking in which audience identification was becoming more important replacing issues such as medium specificity or abstraction. Even though this is a possible historical interpretation of the Soviet Union, Socialist Realism can be conceptualised in a very different manner: Soviet cinema of the 1930s was able to solve some of the problems of the avant-garde by becoming fully integrated into the Stalinist scheme of society. While the 1920s presented a fully fledged utopian cinema (showing a world how it should in the future – and would be, as the ardent followers of communism believed), the 1930s became dystopian in the way that art normatively dictated how a good Communist was supposed to be. As art was now integrated into life and society (this was the official doctrine), it was argued that art had a direct influence on the functioning of social relations. Thus, a critical portrayal of social problems became potentially an act of sabotage because of art's direct influence on society. The price that the avant-garde had to pay in the Soviet Union for gaining influence, for being reintegrated into daily life was that they were directly made responsible for their representations.⁵³

When members of the avant-garde met in 1930 in Brussels for their second congress a year after the high spirits of La Sarraz the shaky alliance of filmmakers

broke apart over politics (communism / fascism). This is the fourth and final point in which contradictory opinions haunt the avant-garde. At the meeting in Brussels the Spanish and Italian delegates blocked a resolution which formulated the main goal of the avant-garde film as the fight against fascism. Thus, it became clear that they were in the camp of the fascists, Falangistas and followers of Mussolini respectively. Many other participants were on the left-wing of the political spectrum and saw the opposition towards the rising fascism as their most important task. Yet, even within the group of left-wing filmmakers which might appear homogeneous at first glance many rifts persisted, most of them being explicable by the different positions of Social Democrats and Communists: While the Social Democrats had a reformist approach to society and also sought alliances with bourgeois groups if that could further their cause, the Communists had a revolutionary attitude and opposed any appeasing motion that could endanger their mission. For Communists violent revolution was the only path to real change while Social Democrats strove for change by reform. Anything that diminished the tension between the classes was deemed to be counter-revolutionary for Communists; for that reason they opposed reforms as the Social Democrats proposed because reforms only postponed revolution by giving the workers a share of petit bourgeois complacency and a make-believe co-determination. Especially the concept of a conflict of »class against class« was followed by communists all over Europe until the mid-1930s as the doctrines issued in Moscow dictated. Actually, the last gasps of the avant-garde of the interwar period (and probably one of its most successful episodes) happened to be the filmmaking during the Spanish civil war and the *front populaire* era in France (1936–1938) which came about as the Communist strategy had changed to forging alliances with all forces against the rampant fascism.⁵⁴

As a consequence, films calling for social reforms were opposed by the Communists until the mid-1930s. Thus, an initiative like the British state-funded Film Units (Empire Marketing Board, 1927–33; General Post Office, 1933–39; Crown Film, 1939–45) stood diametrically opposed to radical left-wing ideas. When the state (or institutions closely linked to the state) was directly or indirectly financing a project, the filmmaker was consequently dependent on an allegiance to a system that the Communists aimed at toppling. Famous debates like the legal conflict between Brecht and Eisler on the one side and Balász, Pabst and Nebenzal on the other over the control of *DIE 3-GROSCHEN-OPER* (DE 1930, »The Three-Penny-Opera) is only understandable against the horizon of this conflict. It replays the division within the left across the question of ownership and copyright. Brecht aimed at radicalising social conflicts – he consciously occupied a position that the production team around Pabst and Nebenzal could not share. Since the film was produced within a framework of a capitalist free market, the production company needed the cash return while Brecht on the other hand wanted to radically undermine this production model.⁵⁵ The same could be said of Eisenstein's failed

attempts to make a film in the United States that lived up to his expectations of revolutionary filmmaking. His rift with another famous left-wing writer, activist and agitator, Upton Sinclair, in the making of *QUE VIVA MEXICO* (US 1930-32) also shows the problematic nature of these pacts. Sinclair raised money from the US left in order to finance Eisenstein's venture. Yet, for a variety of circumstantial, personal – Sinclair's lack of his experience in film production, Eisenstein's undisciplined shooting style, natural catastrophes and rainy seasons – and political reasons – Eisenstein's clashes with Sinclair's brother-in-law Hunter Kimbrough who travelled along to Mexico as production manager and watchdog, Stalin's telegram to Sinclair – the ill-fated project turned into a ruin.⁵⁶ For similar reason the infamous »Aragon-affair« within the Surrealist circle which led in the long run to the »resignation« of such devoted Bretonian followers as Luis Buñuel or Pierre Unik (both of whom worked together on *TIERRA SIN PAN* subsequently) was driven by incompatible political and cultural agendas – and especially how to relate those two fields to each other.⁵⁷ Interestingly, a key figure in the Aragon-affair was Georges Sadoul who had accompanied Aragon on his trip to Kharkov for the Second International Conference of Proletarian and Revolutionary Writers. Sadoul in turn is one of the key figures in 1930s French film culture as well as in the post-war institutionalisation of film studies in French universities.

I have elaborated on the four aporias of the avant-garde primarily by drawing on contemporary examples. Many of the activists involved were aware of the problems and fault lines, but were unable to overcome them. In the contemporary writings and discussions these points were addressed repeatedly without coming up with any practicable solution. It was the search for medium specificity inspired by avant-garde groups in the traditional arts and a vague opposition to the commercial film industry which kept the players together until roughly 1930. When sound film had been introduced and while fascism was on the rise in some European countries and as the economic spiral was facing downward in the beginning Depression, the contradictions around independence, politics, elitism, and abstraction were brought into the open. What had appeared for several years as a flourishing and oppositional force to be reckoned with, lost some of its momentum in the 1930s. Even though film societies were certainly as numerous as in the 1920s and alternative films continued to be made, the belief of changing cinema culture in a short period of time was lost. The energy that had gravitated towards avant-garde cinema went elsewhere. Even though the cinema still played an important part in revolutionary activities, it now became subordinated to other concerns. Another fundamental problem in the self-understanding of the avant-garde was the model of production and reception that the players involved would adhere to.

My four aporias are certainly not the only possibility of delineating the fault lines inside the avant-garde. One way of reconfiguring them would be to address them as problems of funding and finance (in/dependence), aesthetics and

style (abstraction/realism), address and audience (elitism/populism) and politics and power (communism/fascism). I would nevertheless maintain a framework that provides the films with their context of production, distribution and exhibition as well as taking the contemporary reception into account. A purely aesthetic and formal analysis of documentaries, advertising or industrial films is problematic as this would mean ignoring the context in which the films would normally be seen. Especially the avant-garde had a wide and contextual approach to the cinema that should be reconstructed in any historiographic account of the movement.

2.2 Machine Aesthetics or Self-Expression: Constructivism or Expressionism

*Da vor allem die Produktion (produktive Gestaltung)
dem menschlichen Aufbau dient, müssen wir versuchen,
die bisher nur für Reproduktionszwecke angewandten
Apparate (Mittel) auch zu produktiven Zwecken zu erweitern.
László Moholy-Nagy (1922)⁵⁸*

Bill Nichols has contrasted in an auteuristically inclined study the paths of Kasimir Malevich and Joris Ivens.⁵⁹ One element that allows this parallel analysis in Nichols' reading is what he terms the turn from modernism to realism of both Malevich and Ivens in the early 1930s under the impact of communist ideology in a wider sense. While Malevich resorted to his form of realism because of the normative and threatening situation within the Soviet Union, Ivens did so under the impression of the political and economic situation in Western European countries. Certainly, a shift and a restructuring of the cultural landscape took place around 1930, but I doubt that modernism, or as I would prefer to call it, high modernism, is a productive key for the understanding of the shifting ground. Modernism as a concept implies to follow the logic of separating the work of art from the network and institution of art. It tries to create objects in a realm completely detached from their space of production and consumption, quite contrary to avant-garde's original impetus to reconcile art and life.⁶⁰ Thus, modernism in this sense can be opposed to realism in a diametral way effectively reducing the avant-garde of the 1920s and some of the currents in the 1930s trying to render visible the world in new ways (Ivens' 30s work, Grierson's school, the New Deal filmmakers, the films of the *front populaire*, but also Leni Riefenstahl). I will instead rather follow Thomas Elsaesser who has distinguished three forms of »the modern«:

the »modernism« of an artistic avant-garde; the »modernisation«, as it affects labour and work, with Fordist production-line techniques replacing the workshop and the craft practices when sound was introduced; and third »modernity« as a particular attitude to life, in Western societies usually associated with increased leisure time and new patterns of consumption. What makes these distinctions so tricky, but also

crucial is that in the domain of cinema, it is not always obvious that one can play off ›modernism‹ (in the sense of an artistic avant-garde) against the different forms of ›modernisation‹ (in technology, industry and science) and ›modernity‹ (in lifestyles, fashion and sexual mores) seeing how parts of the filmic avant-garde accommodated itself to the forced modernisation undertaken by the new industrial power that was Nazi Germany in the mid-1930s...⁶¹

Modernism is a limited part of wider social, technological, political, and cultural shifts, but especially in cinema it is hard to tell apart the overlapping frames of modernism, modernity and modernisation. In Nichols' view modernism is Habermas' »unfinished project« that could still be taken up while I would argue that its emergence as much as its incompleteness is a retrospective »invention of a tradition« by those involved in the movement and its subsequent historiography.

Instead I propose an alternative distinction that seems helpful in reconsidering avant-garde practice around the coming of sound: namely that between an expressionist (expressive) and a constructivist (functionalist) avant-garde. While the former subjectivised experience, striving towards the expression of interior states and phenomena at the level below or beyond consciousness, the latter worked within an industrial frame of mind, attempting to rationalise and modularise cultural production as part of the wider economic context. Surrealists are by extension also expressionists in this heuristic scheme as they aimed at giving form to interior and irrational (more precisely: pre-rational) processes, thoughts, instincts, and feelings. The constructivists on the other hand were thoroughly modern (in all three senses just outlined) in their cooperation with the industry, in their employment of radical new technologies of production, multiplication and diffusion and finally in their fascination for cars and aeroplanes, for innovative machines and for the velocity of the new.⁶² Even the production process for the two avant-gardes was thoroughly different: Surrealists and expressionists not only adhered to a romantic ideal of singular creation and of personal (self-)sacrifice, but they also produced their works in a traditional and artisanal way that often disregarded new technologies. The constructivists on the other hand relied on technological tools, industrial reproduction and professional expertise. In this respect an anecdote recounted by Hans Schoots in his seminal biography of Joris Ivens is quite telling: In autumn of 1927 Ivens, a young enthusiast involved with the Filmliga in Amsterdam, working in his father's photographic business, but completely unknown as a filmmaker, pays a visit to Walter Ruttmann in Berlin. Ruttmann is more than 10 years Ivens' senior and at the peak of his career, apart from Sergej Eisenstein possibly the most celebrated avant-garde filmmaker at that specific historical moment. Ivens, born into a family of professionals in photography and graduate from the technical university in Berlin, reports: »From our perspective in faraway Holland, Ruttmann was an artistic giant, but when I saw him at close hand, wrestling with an old, poorly equipped camera, and limited by a lack of craftsmanship, I realized that from a technical point of view I was more

than his equal.«.⁶³ In fact, while Ruttmann would always wrestle with the conflicting expressionist and constructivist paradigms, Ivens was squarely on the side of constructivism.⁶⁴ In a study of films on modern architecture in the cinema of the 1920s Thomas Elsaesser has written about the different conceptions of the city: While the expressionists followed the city symphony-model introduced by Dziga Vertov and Walter Ruttmann, some others followed concepts of modularity and pre-fabricated building blocks also as a filmic concept. The different conceptions could be called street vs. box. Ruttmann's artistic ego was schooled within painting – just as Hans Richter's and Viking Eggeling's, the champions of filmic abstraction in the 1920s – while Ivens' mind had rather the fine-tuning of the engineer. His background in his father's photography business and his studies at a technical university had given him a thoroughly different conception of the role and function of the artist.

The extension of this parallel to the production forms and artistic self-definition is crucial because here lies the more useful dimension to this distinction. While Ruttmann was always struggling with his self-definition as an artist and his dependency on various sources, Ivens very self-consciously published an article about the »avant-garde documentary« in 1931 which I have discussed above. Ivens shifted the ground from artistic self-expression to a more political domain: whereas in the 1920s abstraction was seen as a radical weapon in itself, in the 1930s a new urgency drove filmmakers towards documentaries and, generally speaking, a more direct depiction of reality with the aim of changing it. It is crucial not to fall into the trap of separating and de-historicising form and content as the relationship of the filmmaker to the commission as well as the strategies of representation have to be seen within the political and cultural climate of the day.⁶⁵ In the aforementioned article Ivens starts off by stating that »[t]he sound film is the starting point for all future possibilities of radio and television«⁶⁶ – sound film was there to stay for good without any discussion. He goes on to argue in favour of commissioned films. In fact, Ivens sees industrial commissions as a way out of the impasse that had opened up for filmmakers with the introduction of sound:

Because the documentary film mainly thrives on commissions – and for industries there is no better way of advertising – the documentary filmmaker only has to deal with one man: a businessman, an outsider in the field of filmmaking. Therefore, it is in the interest of that director to make a good film using truth and the documentary's character as the sole criterion. Should he work for the film industry, however, he has to deal with a board, artists, and censorship. He is no longer independent, he is bound; he is more or less a slave. To break free from this slavery, he has to be absolutely sure of the production and also be able to convince his spectator, whether it concerns someone from the industry or not.⁶⁷

Invoking Hegel's dialectic of master and slave Ivens' commentary is very telling in the respect that the film industry is seen as slavery for an avant-garde filmmaker

whereas a commissioned film is freedom in his opinion. A clear echo of the 1920s stance presents itself: the film industry is the enemy which unites the avant-garde.

For constructivism it was exactly the autonomy of art which proved to be a bourgeois illusion continuing to limit and enclose art in clearly circumscribed places in society, in ghettos like museums or galleries. It was the constructivist ethos that tried to transpose the machine aesthetics and industrial forms into mass culture and everyday life, but also into museum culture and the art world. For constructivists, artists should leave the bourgeois and separated sphere of so called »autonomous art« and enter with their practice into design and advertising, into newspapers and media in order to reach a mass public. Thus, industry and avant-garde were not necessarily opposed and antagonistically poised against each other in constructivist thinking. Instead, artists more or less close to this approach (*Bauhaus* teachers Walter Gropius, László Moholy-Nagy and Oskar Schlemmer, architects J.J.P. Oud, Mart Stam, and Cornelis van Eesteren, photographers Piet Zwart and Paul Schuitema, graphic artists George Grosz and John Heartfield, to name but a few) tried to enter the public sphere with commercial works, breaking open the ghetto of art where provocations and innovations were accepted and tolerated to a certain degree. This »lethal embrace« of tolerance towards innovation in the art system defused even potentially provocative positions as the impact as well as the audience were foreshortened by the limits imposed within the art institution. By actively addressing the mass mediated audience, the constructivist tried to rebuild the public, to educate the masses, to create a »new vision« (Moholy-Nagy), a »new typography« (Tschichold), a »new architecture« (Le Corbusier) with the ultimate goal in mind of creating the »new man«. ⁶⁸ Seen in this light, the industry was rather a partner for the avant-garde, albeit a difficult one, probably not a friend, but even less an enemy. For constructivists art played an important role in reshaping society and in the process creating the »new man«. The role of artists was wholly technologised as art had to break free from its elitist high-class ghettos and enter the public sphere where it could reach more people than in traditional art circles. The self-understanding of the artist had to shift accordingly from a romantic notion of the individual genius to the technician engineering a new society in his laboratory of art. ⁶⁹

The industry on the other hand also had good reasons to work with avant-garde artists. At some moments even the film industry employed avant-gardists in considerable numbers. In early to mid-1920s, Ufa supported a number of experimental approaches to filmmaking in the *Kulturfilmabteilung*, but under production head Erich Pommer the company also tried to integrate a degree of experimentation in their films after *DAS CABINET DES DR. CALIGARI* and other films around 1920 had been successful abroad. During the introduction of sound Tobis had filmmakers such as Walter Ruttmann, Hans Richter, Alexis Granowsky, René Clair and his brother Henri Chomette under contract. ⁷⁰ These companies were using the avant-garde as an outsourced *Research & Development*-department

because film studios normally did not invest in units working on new aesthetic developments (as opposed to technical innovations). As soon as these new techniques were either ready to go into mass production or had proven to be uninteresting the film industry disposed of the artists again. For advertising with its constant hunger for new sensations the turn to the avant-garde came much more logical: avant-garde art, advertising, and fashion always had close ties and continue to attract each other.⁷¹ For the avant-garde the industry assignments fulfilled at least a triple purpose: Firstly, these works provided a material support in terms of income. Secondly, they were also potentially opening up the limited audience that the institution art had to offer to a wider public in which mass-produced commodities circulated. And thirdly these assignments also gave the artists the opportunity for new experiments.

Constructivist thinking was opposed to the traditional role of the artist as original genius as much as to the traditional role of the craftsman. Whereas the romantic notion of the genius contains the idea of the lonely searching soul being misunderstood by contemporaries the notion of the craftsman implies a mastery of material and also a guild-like organisation. The guild's main function is to keep outsiders out – and thus implicitly to keep the balance between the number of artists and the commissions without an intervening market regulating this supply-and-demand equilibrium. While the metaphor of the craftsman suggests a functionalist relationship to the objects created (which might have been seductive to constructivist thinking), the disinterestedness of the craftsman in political and social terms was certainly a negative connotation that was overriding its positive aspects. The Dutch photographer Paul Schuitema recognised these problems inherent in different self-images of the artist and instead devised for himself the role of a fighter. In this view, art becomes a practice and weapon which continually had to be sharpened in order to win the battle:

Es ist dumm zu glauben, es genüge, ein Proletarier zu sein, um im Klassenkampf mit Waffen umgehen zu können. Klassenbewusster proletarischer Kampf bedeutet Üben und schließlich Beherrschen der Waffen im Klassenkampf. Das Training des proletarischen Fotokorrespondenten muss sich in erster Linie auf die praktische Handhabung seines Apparates beziehen und erst an zweiter Stelle auf das Studium der Suggestion. Keine Romantik, keine Kunst, sondern sachliche, grell suggestive Propaganda: Taktisch auf den Klassenkampf, technisch auf das Fach ausgerichtet.⁷²

Echoes of Ivens' statement about Ruttmann can be heard in Schuitema's position. Technical mastery and constant practice are equally important; the question of commission, organ of publication or genre are not even considered, unless in relation to the audience which is addressed by the revolutionary propaganda. In this connection it is important to note that Schuitema and Piet Zwart, a typographer with similar political ideas, both worked extensively on advertisement for industrial products. Both also moved in the activist group *Ophouw*, dominated by

architects such as Van Eesteren, Oud and Stam, who had pioneered new ways of building using pre-fabricated parts and functionalist styles. This active role within the production process that was often pioneered by architects was taken up by photographers, typographers, writers, and as we will see, also avant-garde filmmakers. Thus, advertisement (which is often very open to new ideas and concepts) was an easy way into the industry: »Die Reklame bot ihnen [Schuitema and Zwart] die Gelegenheit, eine aktive Rolle innerhalb des Produktionsprozesses zu spielen [...] und ihre Theorien einer zeitgenössischen Formgestaltung einem Massenpublikum mittels modernster Produktionsmethoden vor Augen zu führen.«⁷³ This engagement in commercial assignments was not limited to Western Europe as Lev Manovich has observed: »[A]ready in the 1920s, left avant-garde artists, both in Europe and in Soviet Russia worked for commercial industries on publicity and advertising campaigns.«⁷⁴ In the 1920s, it was the Soviet Union which provided the vanishing point for the avant-garde; as political and other tensions mounted towards World War II, the United States joined the Soviet Union as a contrasting vanishing point.⁷⁵ Both young and dynamic societies offered a different utopia of restructuring social relations beyond class-affiliation and family pedigree.

Besides the idea of the fighter, the time offered another metaphor for the artist to use as a self-image – given the fact that the innate genius of romanticism and the craftsman of the Gothic period were dated concepts that had to be refuted. The engineer was certainly a key metaphor for cultural activism in the interwar period. In a text written in 1930 Ruttmann has hinted at this engineering model by introducing the metaphor of a laboratory that was also used by Joris Ivens in a similar context:

So überrascht vor allen Dingen an [der Filmi]ndustrie bei einem Vergleich mit anderen Industrien und Fabrikationszweigen das vollkommene Fehlen des Laboratoriums. [...] Und doch wäre gerade das Laboratorium für den Film der Nährboden, auf dem er sich aus sich selbst heraus [...] entwickeln und befestigen könnte. [...] Es wäre nicht etwa die Aufgabe dieses Laboratoriums, die Verbesserung und Erweiterung der Apparaturen zu studieren. [...] Wohl aber müsste hier eine Versuchs- und Untersuchungswerkstätte geschaffen werden, in der das *Ausdrucksmittel* Film von allen Seite [...] auf seine Entwicklungsmöglichkeiten geprüft wird.⁷⁶

In the figure of the engineer one can find ideas of progress and rational production, of non-individual authorship and social progress without falling into the traps of traditional bourgeois notion of autonomous art and individual genius.⁷⁷ But this interest in the engineer as a symbol of the time was not limited to the avant-garde at the Bauhaus or in similar circles across Europe. As Thomas Elsaesser has pointed out the engineer also haunts, in different form the commercial feature film of the Weimar cinema because he occupies a crucial mediating position between different discourses:

...the figure of the engineer [is] positioned ambiguously between both the worker and the boss, but also between the inventor and those that commercialise an invention. The reason the engineer seems so crucial is because he has to mediate between two sets of binary oppositions, that of the class discourse [...], but also of the discourse of science and technology. [...] On the side of science is the figure of the professor or inventor – selfless, absent-minded, beneficial in his quest for pure knowledge. On the other side is the businessman: unscrupulous and megalomaniac, who stops at nothing in order to steal, sabotage or keep for himself the work that by rights belongs to others. The business man or financier is thus the one who applies science, who makes technological progress and productivity possible, but he is invariably seen as the villain. Here we have, in some sense, the romantic anti-capitalist, anti-technology vision intact, except that both sides need the engineer – the inventor in order to rescue him from his other-worldliness, and the businessman because only the engineer can make the invention ›work‹. The engineer's job is therefore to help materialise the immaterial (pure disembodied thought) and to moralise the material (pure inert matter). These oppositions and the mediating function of the engineer stand in glaring contrast to the actual relations affecting the processes of technology and invention.⁷⁸

What seems to be at issue in the trope of the engineer and the metaphor of engineering as cultural production is not some internal quarrel of the avant-garde, but rather the rhetoric domination of a discourse about technical progress, social engineering, and the future organisation of society that played a role in public life. The mass media was competing with the avant-garde over questions of discourse domination regarding the development of society and culture. Not coincidentally then, the avant-garde directly or indirectly found themselves in such movements as fascism, Grierson's filmmaking unit, Roosevelt's cultural initiatives and the French *front populaire* – all movements designed to find a path towards the future organisation of society. A more useful division to describe some aspects of the changes between the 1920s and the 1930s would thus be to replace the binary opposition of abstraction vs. realism with the transformation from the laboratory (research pure and simple, not necessarily determined by its use value) to engineering (applied science).

Constructivists had the declared aim of leaving the isolated corner of elitist art: As a result, the Soviet Union and later also the United States with their grand projects, utopian visions and social experiments became the main destinations for avant-garde artists since here ideas were put into practice.⁷⁹ Here, conflicts between the industry and the art world seemed to have been overcome as both the communist functionaries and after 1933 also Roosevelt's New Deal administration actively participated and supported artistic and cultural productions. In his account of the parallels between the constructivist German and Russian avant-garde of the 1920s with contemporary developments in the new media, Lev Manovich has hinted at these similar developments: »[A]ctive participation of the European

avant-garde artists in building American techno-society, whether through cinema (in Hollywood), architecture or design, can be understood as an equivalent of the Russian artists' collaboration with the new Revolutionary state.⁸⁰ Ivens and Piscator, Brecht and Moholy-Nagy, Eisenstein and Vertov, Richter and Buñuel all found themselves either in the United States or in the Soviet Union by 1940 – the aporias of the avant-garde had now settled into the bipolar division of the globe that should determine the course of history over the next 50 years.

2.3 Self-propaganda or revolutionary agitation: Organising visual facts

*der entwerfer ist kein zeichner, sondern organisator der optischen faktoren.
seine arbeit soll nicht handarbeitlich sein; sondern soll sich beschränken
auf notieren, gruppieren und technisch organisieren.
Paul Schuitema (1930)⁸¹*

I have so far avoided the question of what I mean by avant-garde as it is a historically malleable and complicated concept. Like most writers on the topic, I am indebted to one of the key theoretical studies of the avant-garde and its historiography, namely Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-garde*. Bürger sees the avant-garde as a reaction to the social isolation of art within the »institution art«; after *l'art pour l'art* in aestheticism had laid bare the complete absence of any impact of art on politics and society the avant-gardes radically questioned the basis for the production, dissemination and presentation of art in modern society. In Bürger's view the avant-garde is determined by its resistance and opposition to traditional notions and concepts of the institution art: »Die Avantgarde wendet sich gegen beides – gegen den Distributionsapparat, dem das Kunstwerk unterworfen ist, und gegen den mit dem Begriff der Autonomie beschriebenen Status der Kunst in der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft.«⁸² Now, Bürger's focus is on Dada and Surrealism, especially in its forms as literature and visual art, while film complicates the picture. Bürger's historical reasoning works for traditional arts with a long prehistory of emancipation from economic dependency (to the point of impactless independence) while modern media like photography and film had a much shorter evolution and a very different position in the 1920s. Moreover, financing which was often a factor of little importance to writers or painters (with the prime examples Franz Kafka and Vincent Van Gogh who went nearly unnoticed during their lifetime and nevertheless managed to produce a substantial oeuvre that has acquired the highest reputation since their death) whereas for modern mass media this proved to be the most crucial element in artistic production. While Bürger's central contention that the avant-garde has to be considered very differently from a new formal or aesthetic school is paramount to

an understanding of the avant-garde, the shift from literature and visual arts to reproductive media requires a different approach.

For traditional historians of the film avant-garde the movement basically ceased to exist by 1930. Yet, if the avant-garde did not fall apart around 1930, as I would concede, what happened to it instead? As abstraction had exhausted itself as a rallying point, as the film societies had united a variety of people with very different ideas about what cinema was (which came into the open with the coming of sound) different paths were followed: Grierson's school sought the state as its patron as did the New Deal filmmakers in the United States, political activists like Ivens travelled on the ticket of various international left-wing organisations while also filming in the Soviet Union, Ruttmann and Riefenstahl chose to accept commissions of the Nazi party, Hans Richter mainly worked in advertising and industrial film, later in teaching, while the Soviet cinema changed course from a concentration on montage and juxtaposition of images to Socialist Realism. In fact, all of these currents flowing from the avant-garde of the 1920s were able to reach an audience in the 1930s much greater than the one they addressed in the previous decade.

Given the wide variety of films that are now counted as avant-garde classics how can we construct a somewhat coherent corpus of the avant-garde? For example, where do we draw the line between commercial art films and avant-garde? Art cinema was produced in Germany in the wake of the success of *DAS CABINET DES DR. CALIGARI* (DE 1919/20, Robert Wiene) which had garnered considerable success abroad. The German industry realised that expressionism as a label could sell a German product abroad and at home as it fit into preconceived conceptions of art on the one hand and of German-ness on the other. All through the 1920s an art cinema tried to draw a huge audience domestically by including star actors and spectacular show values, by using popular narratives while at the same time also constructing an artistically valued alternative to Hollywood through brand name artists (directors), complicated and nested narratives and the use of cultural capital from the literary sphere.⁸³ Famous examples of this trend culminating in the mid-1920s include Fritz Lang's *DIE NIBELUNGEN* (DE 1922-24) and *METROPOLIS* (DE 1925/26), F.W. Murnau's *FAUST* (DE 1926) and *DER LETZTE MANN* (DE 1924, 'The Last Laugh'), and E.A. Dupont's *VARIÉTÉ* (DE 1925). Yet, these films were actually produced within the film industry that the avant-garde was so opposed to in rhetorical terms. The European situation might have been special as the existence of a commercial art cinema which was relatively open to innovation, yet also addressing a mass audience that allowed for a certain measure of moderation between the radical experiments of the avant-garde and the formulaic films of the film industry.⁸⁴ As Charles Boost has remarked in a brief history of the institutions of the film avant-garde:

...ondanks de ijver, inspanning en toewijding van een inventieve avant-garde, zijn de grote en blijvende impulsen in het proces dat leidde tot de erkenning van de film als kunstvorm, uitgegaan van opdrachten die met particuliere subsidie of in industrieel verband tot stand kwamen. In de jaren tussen 1920 en 1930 hebben drie films een dominerende rol gespeeld in de bewustmaking bij het bioscooppubliek, daarbij inbegrepen de filmcritici en de theoretici, van mogelijkheden en potenties die in het nieuwe medium aanwezig waren. Zowel *DAS KABINETT DES DR. CALIGARI* als *POTEMKIN* en *LA PASSION DE JEANNE D'ARC* zijn in hun tijd en ver daarna eye-openers geweest, schokkende films die niet pasten binnen het raam van de toen gangbare filmproductie, maar revoluties veroorzaakten in kijkgewoontes, bestaande definities imverwierpen en in een korte tijd (de vertoningstijd) veel duidelijk maakten van wat vaag begrepen werd of bevestigden wat tot dan vage vermoeden waren.⁸⁵

Thus, three commercial art films provided the model and impulse for much of the activity in avant-garde circles. It would therefore be much too easy to draw a line between »good« artists and the »bad« industry – in technological as well as in economic terms no clear demarcation exists between the two. Yet, it is important to note that for special services avant-garde artists were employed from the early 1920s onwards such as Ruttmann's dream of the falcon sequence for Lang's *DIE NIBELUNGEN*. For Ruttmann this might have been a commercial assignment aimed at making money in order to finance his »private« experiments. Nevertheless, when looking at Ruttmann's career and surveying his expressions it fits his overall trajectory working on the margins, but always keen on a wider audience.

Thomas Elsaesser has suggested an alternative definition for the Dada film which can be usefully extended to include avant-garde cinema:

What was Dada in regard to cinema was not a specific film, but the performance, not a specific set of techniques or textual organization, but the spectacle. One might argue that in order for a film to have been Dada it need not be made by a Dadaist, or conversely, that there were no Dada films outside the events in which they figured.⁸⁶

Dada film should thus not be defined by the form or content of the films, but rather by the relationship between film and spectator. Maybe this could be transferred to the interwar film avant-garde as a whole – avant-garde film is defined by a peculiar and specific kind of spectatorship, by the way the relationship of film and audience is constructed, by the framing of the cinema event. In this respect, avant-garde would also point back to early cinema in the way the spectator became a part of the performance.⁸⁷

The avant-garde was a small and endangered species and every new film also meant a triumph of the movement. The avant-garde films which are canonised as such are always in the first place advertising films for the avant-garde itself. Since avant-garde as an idea is characterised by a self-reflexive modernism it is very much determined by its opposition to institutions and traditions, it is always

context-dependent, namely dependent by the specific antagonism exhibited in the works. Thus, the avant-garde could only function by continuously promoting itself as new and innovative, as being against traditional institutions. The avant-garde was constantly »preaching to the converted«, making films for avant-garde film societies which were already won over by the concept that would then eternally be replicated in the films. The avant-garde had no choice, but to continuously innovate – what was a novelty one day already appeared trite and old the next. Avant-garde is a »movement« in the literal sense of the term: it is directed against stasis and formulaic solutions, it is constant flux and transformation. It is therefore quite difficult to see what a »success« could have been for the avant-garde because if they found themselves in tune with a mass audience they would no longer be in the forefront of a development forcing them to break for new ground again. An avant-garde is successful when it is caught up in the mainstream, yet at the time it ceases to exist – the ultimate success of the avant-garde is therefore by making itself redundant. The avant-garde can only succeed in »failure«, in becoming conventionalised, superfluous and thus pointless, i.e. not avant-garde anymore.

Addressing this specific dialectic Andor Kraszna-Krausz has pointed out why Germany and Russia were especially fruitful countries for avant-garde activities (I would add the Netherlands to the list). As just outlined, a certain movement was necessary in order to break new ground not just on the side of the avant-garde, but also in the industry because only if some innovations were taken up in wider circles of the (film) industry could the avant-garde claim to be a path finder. To claim to be in the forefront if one brings about no visible result or followers would be senseless and esoteric. Therefore a dynamic interchange between different groups in the cinema was required for an avant-garde to be successful:

While in America a too vehement film industry suppresses a too weak Avantgarde and in France a too vehement Avantgarde overpowers a too weak industry; in Germany – and it is similar in Russia – a mid-heavy industry seems to mix with a mid-heavy Avantgarde. [...] The German Avantgarde has found also new contents for new technics, while the French had been forced to discover new technics, without their contents ever turning up. The French waited for tasks that never came. They practiced for a work which they had expected in vain.⁸⁸

For Kraszna-Krausz who wrote this on the occasion of a review of the Stuttgart film programme, the first comprehensive retrospective of 1920s avant-garde cinema, a specific balance between avant-garde and industry led to the optimum result: »One saw that the Avantgarde could claim more right of existence if it was connected with a whole army behind it – practically or theoretically.« The vanguard has to have connections with the army and the other way around, only then can both profit from the dynamic relationship that is ever-changing and never resting in stasis.

When turning from the film industry in the narrow sense to the industry in general a certain reframing is necessary. The concept of propaganda is useful in

this context: In the 1920s and 1930s the term »propaganda« was not limited to political agitation (although it could mean that too), but it referred to any film that forcefully made a point and tried to convince the spectators of something. It should furthermore be borne in mind that our contemporary demarcations distinguishing documentary from industrial film or advertisement from political propaganda were not common currency around 1930. Thus, different genres and film forms converge in the term propaganda: advertising and industrial films, political films and committed documentaries, commissioned work and filmmaking in the service of the state. A catalogue accompanying an exhibition of photo montages in 1930 stated: »Wichtigster Verwendungsbereich der Fotomontage ist die Propaganda, kommerziell wie auch politisch.«⁸⁹ It is exactly this different usage that is of interest in relation to the avant-garde: As classificatory schemes differ historically, today's terminology denotes different things. Implicitly then, the thinking at the time about propaganda was a wholly different one. If propaganda could mean product promotion as well as political persuasion, social reformism as well as revolutionary agitation then there was no contradiction between work for the industry and for different political or social causes.

In 1927 Kurt Schwitters started an initiative and founded the *Ring neuer Werbegestalter* (Circle of New Designers) which included the Dutch graphic artists Zwart, Domela and Schuitema, but also Willi Baumeister, Jan Tschichold and others associated with the avant-garde of the 1920s. An exhibition accompanied by a publication – standard practice for creating a cross-media marketing platform in avant-garde circles – in 1930 had the title *Gefesselter Blick*. In the context of these activities not only the members of the group published articles, but also the big names of the European avant-garde contributed programmatic statements: El Lissitzky, Hans Richter, Werner Gräff, John Heartfield, László Moholy-Nagy and Mart Stam. A manifesto-like text by Schuitema explained some of the issues that appear distant to us nowadays:

Reklame ist weder kunst noch gestaltung. reklame heisst nach vorne schieben. sie hat keinen anderen zweck als materielle sowie geistige produktion des menschen zu propagieren. sie entsteht aus der *aufgabe*, und diese aufgabe soll sie klar und deutlich erfüllen. die aufgabe soll klar und deutlich sein und soll gebaut werden auf argumenten. reklame ohne argument ist keine reklame: ist eine arbeitslose. das argument betrifft ausschliesslich den auftraggeber und soll grundlage für die lösung sein. die idee der lösung ist der umbau der argumente zu optischer suggestion; sie soll sich dem tempo der zeit anschliessen. die lösung betrifft ausschliesslich den entwerfer; er soll die argumente verstehen. die technischen eigenarten des prozesses, in dem die aufgabe ausgeführt werden soll, bestimmen die form. der entwerfer ist kein zeichner, sondern organisator der optischen faktoren. seine arbeit soll nicht handarbeitlich sein; sondern soll sich beschränken auf notieren, gruppieren und technisch organisieren. der entwerfer soll sich ein klares bild der sache machen. jedes ding, das er gebraucht, soll steigerung der suggestion des argumentes bezwecken. die lösung soll änderungen ertragen können. sie soll in ihrer organisation

beweglich und in ihrer suggestion nachdrücklich sein. kein faktor soll um sich selbst willen da sein. reklame soll ökonomisch sein, weil sie zeitlich ist. gestaltung als selbstzweck ist studium des entwerfers und gehört auf das atelier. sie ist jeweils eine sache des künstler und hat nur für ihn wert, damit er besser zur lösung seiner aufgabe im stande ist. er studiert eben die optische suggestion seiner mittel, rein als experiment. reklame ist nur folge aus reeller produktion. meine arbeit soll sein wie ein baum; naturgemäss zum fruchte tragen gewachsen. für mich heisst das technisch: *natürlich* und *ungezwungen*. die gestaltung, welche die reklame dann von ihrer natur aus trägt, ist nicht die gestaltung der aufgabe, sondern unserer haltung den geschnehnissen gegenüber. kurz gesagt: reklame soll sein: reell, direkt, sachlich, konkurrenzfähig, argumentierend, aktiv, aktuell, funktionell, praktisch und technisch. keine kunst sondern wirklichkeit.⁹⁰

In this view the designer becomes »the organiser of optical factors« – a title that is fitting for many filmmakers relevant to this study. The organisation of optical factors is one of the most important elements of theories about medium specificity discussed below, from Vertov and Eisenstein to Richter and Cavalcanti. Implicit in this notion is the opposition to arts and crafts as a concept, to artisanal production, but also to a completely automatised and routine-based industrial production modelled on the conveyor belt. Instead what is proposed is a regrouping and technical-functionalist organising. Even the experiments of the early 1920s are reproached in Schuitema's manifesto: trials should be done in the atelier, behind closed doors. Here, the atelier becomes a laboratory, the artist simultaneously a scientist and an engineer, and art the result of a specific arrangement of the elements and parts that make up artistic practice.

Most avant-garde films that are canonised as such are predominantly determined by their formal(ist) innovations and by its relation the film industry, to traditional film form and genre, to conventional models of story telling. Most avant-garde films are therefore characterised by opposition and negativity. Let me quote a rather lengthy list that draws together the type of films that Ivens made in the early years of his career:

Even in his early years he was already using every form and type of filmmaking including feature film and newsreel. Within four years, between 1927 and 1931, he had worked on: science films [...]; home-movies [...]; feature films [...]; newsreel [...]; social reportage [...]; company films [...] and many other commissioned films [...]; even animated films [...]; aesthetic form and movement studies [...]; poetic nature recordings [...]; subjective films [...]; political pamphlets [...]; film sketches [...]; and abstract art [...]. He also worked on contrasting aspects: microshots as well as panoramic shots from an airplane; expressionist influences derived from vitalism as well as the abstract ›absolute‹ film; the feature film as well as the newsreel; assignments for a trade union or for umbrella organizations of the communist party, as well as assignments for large capitalist enterprises; subjective imagery as well as scientific imagery; formal aesthetics as well as social reportage; animation as well as

news pictures. He boasted a many-sided and inspired start like nobody else. In essence, all of the elements of his later work were present at the start.⁹¹

What this list draws together as an individual artistic sensibility that already had everything in his beginning, thus, reversing chronology and teleologically seeing his early films with eyes that know his full career. What I propose here is rather the inverse: In an archaeological fashion am trying to see possibility of something else in the avant-garde, of forgetting later developments that in this account become the line of flight for everything Ivens made in the beginning of his career. Such an auteur perspective is rather misleading as one always invariably ends up with retrospective explanations to construct an imaginary coherence across a diverse body of work. In fact, I would argue that these films were animated by a belief in the function and impact of film as a medium (not necessarily as an art form), that they had a certain effect on its spectators in mind that gives them a coherence quite different from an auteuristic subjectivity.

Another point should be made in relation to the self-referentiality of the avant-garde. Tom Gunning has argued that Joris Ivens' *DE BRUG* (NL 1928) »laat zien dat het onmogelijk is de visuele ervaring van een moderne structuur te scheiden van het object zelf.«⁹² Thus, if the modern structure is inseparable from its visual experience then the avant-garde film has to show the structure of the objects portrayed in its films. As cinema itself is as inseparably a part of this modern world as these objects (cities, bridges, ocean liners, department stores, etc.) any of these films is at least implicitly a film about cinema itself and about the specific »new vision« that is characteristic of it. The epitome of this self-advertisement of cinema as a modern structure rendering the modern structure visible (and not just making films about it, but mirroring its very own relations) is surely Dsiga Vertov's *CELOVEK S KINOAPPARATOM* (SU 1929, »The Man with the Movie Camera«), but the work of Ivens or Ruttmann, Richter or Cavalcanti between 1928 and 1932 circled around these topics and can thus be seen as the biggest campaign in favour of the cinema ever conducted. The same spirit of modernity that gave birth to the Eiffel tower also gave birth to the cinema: Avant-garde films which attempted to bring film into its own often used these structure as their subject, thereby creating a *mise-en-abyme* in which the cinema could talk to itself and about itself.⁹³

2.4 Conclusion

[B]y incorporating technology into art, the avantgarde liberated technology from its instrumental aspects and thus undermined both bourgeois notions of technology as progress and art as ›natural‹, ›autonomous‹, and ›organic‹.
Andreas Huyssen (1980)⁹⁴

Most theories dealing with the artistic avant-garde have referred either to literature or to the visual arts as an implicit or explicit model.⁹⁵ The main feature of the

avant-garde has been seen as the attempt to break down the barriers between art and life – in both directions, thus making art an integral part of life as well as putting real life into art. In this process both parts of the equation are effectively cancelled out, as their distinction vanishes and we are unable to differentiate them anymore. Yet, both concepts are in this synthesis also simultaneously redeemed and retained on a different level. It is this Hegelian dialectic of *Aufhebung* (sublation) that the avant-garde aimed at, but never truly achieved.

In thinking about the film avant-garde one encounters several problems which have not been thoroughly examined so far: The definition of what constitutes an avant-garde film is not clear at all. What distinguishes an avant-garde film from a commercial art film is often very hard to tell. Moreover, what has retrospectively often been labelled as documentary, advertisement, industrial film or *Kulturfilm* might in the logic of the day be an avant-garde film. Even though every categorisation always presupposes an excluding and an including gesture, in respect to the film avant-garde the issue seems especially significant and difficult to solve. In keeping with avant-garde logic every new film coming from their circles also questioned again the traditional boundaries erected rhetorically between different film styles. By including the scientific films of J.C. Mol or Jean Painlevé the avant-garde emphasised different aspects of these films and by praising Louis Feuillade's serials the surrealists consciously provoked the bourgeois taste makers. Here lies the true purpose of the avant-garde: constantly questioning boundaries and limits, including their own, and thereby radically undermining also their own basis. If the avant-garde stops doing this, it loses its momentum and therefore it can never succeed the traditional sense of institutionalisation. That some films produced within the circles of the avant-garde of the interwar period are by now canonised in museums and cinémathèques around the world is simultaneously the triumph and the defeat of the avant-garde and underscores the dialectic at the heart of this movement. The avant-garde aimed at radical change, yet only succeeded in entering those institutions of mainstream culture that they abhorred, fought and detested.

As I have argued, a number of aporias riddled the film avant-garde and the different actions and manifestations fluctuated between the positions making the avant-garde at best an unstable configuration. Retrospectively, abstraction has proven to be the most crucial factor in deciding which films were to enter the canon of the avant-garde – as (high) »modernism« began to replace avant-garde as the guiding term for art historical studies of the first half of the Twentieth Century. Since the visual arts in the 1920s tended towards abstraction (Kandinsky, Malevich, Mondrian) their model has been transferred to film without too much discussion. In effect this shift of focus from transformation as the central factor of avant-garde activism to abstraction as a formal category has effectively meant a depoliticisation of the avant-garde. Consequently, topics like (political) engagement or realism (which were at the time much hotter issues than the question of

abstraction which seems to have been already by 1928 a dated concept) proved to be conspicuously absent from canonical accounts (1960s to 1980s) of the interwar avant-garde manifestations. The four aporias that I have elaborated on in this chapter as independence/dependence, abstraction/realism, commercial/elitist, communist/fascist could be reconfigured as problems of funding, aesthetics, address (audience) and politics.⁹⁶

What seems to be crucial to me is a concentration on issues of strategy and networking within a European perspective. What should be avoided are auteuristically derived arguments and biographical retellings as well as arguments limited to a specific nation or interpretation of singular works disregarding their context as the avant-garde was trans-national, trans-generic, and trans-subjective in its outlook from its very inception.

¹ Hans Richter: »Avant-Garde Film in Germany«. In: Roger Manvell (ed.): *Experiment in the Film*. London: The Grey Walls Press 1949: 219-233, here 227.

² Saskia Sassen: *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1991.

³ See Peter Wollen: »Viking Eggeling«. In: P.W.: *Paris Hollywood: Writings on Film*. London, New York: Verso 2002: 39-54. See also the booklength study Louise O'Konor: *Viking Eggeling 1880-1925. Artist and Filmmaker*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell 1971.

⁴ See for a useful introductory description Malcolm Bradbury: »The Cities of Modernism«. In: Malcolm Bradbury, James McFarlane (eds): *Modernism 1890-1930*. Harmondsworth: Penguin 1991: 96-103.

⁵ Oswald Blakeston in: *Commercial Art*, vol. 10: 65. Quoted in Deke Dusinberre: »The Other Avantgardes«. In: Philip Drummond et al. (eds.): *Film as Film. Formal Experiment in Film 1910-1975*. London: Hayward Gallery 1979: 53-58, here 54.

⁶ An echo of this position can be detected in the ironic comment by Todd Solondz – normally considered to be an American independent filmmaker – who remarked when confronted with this designation that the only truly independent filmmaker in the United States is Steven Spielberg who has the money and power to basically produce and distribute any film he wants to.

⁷ This problem persists until today; yet, many experimental filmmakers can nowadays make a living through lecturing, commissions and scholarships from art foundations or teaching positions at art school – a different kind of dependency.

⁸ The »films without film« are described and analysed in Vance Kepley, Jr.: »The Kuleshov workshop«. In: *Iris*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1986: 5-23. See also my chapter on the »Vanishing Point Soviet Union« for a more thorough discussion of the »films without film« and of remontage in the context of a Constructivist avant-garde practice.

⁹ As names are concerned I have chosen for consistency: I will write Walter (instead of Walther) Ruttmann as he himself dropped the »h« because it appeared more sober and modern to him. Alexander Hackenschmied changed his name to Hammid in the United States – I will stick to his original name since during the time under consideration he was known as Hackenschmied.

¹⁰ For a detailed account of Richter's film DIE NEUE WOHNUNG see Andres Janser, Arthur Ruegg: *Hans Richter. New Living. Architecture, Film, Space*. Baden: Lars Müller 2001.

¹¹ Ironically, the German administration did not accept BERLIN as a quota filler for a foreign fiction film as it argued that it was a »Kulturfilm«, an educational film. See Herbert Ihering: »Gegen den Paragraphengeist der behördlichen Kontingentschützer. Die Behörde erzwingt den Filmkitsch«. In: *Film-Kurier*, vol. 9, no. 213, 9.9.1927.

¹² In fact, Richter and Eggeling first thought about transferring their scroll paintings to film when a banker friend of Richter's father offered them money which they then used to write and print their manifesto *Universelle Sprache* which in turn helped them to secure the assistance of Ufa.

¹³ One of the first public presentation of OPUS I (1919) took place in Munich in the screening rooms of the Emelka and involved in its production and/or distribution was the so-called »Neue Kinematographische Gesellschaft«, a company belonging to Emelka. See L. Adelt: »Optische Symphonie«. In: *Film-Kurier*, vol. 3, no. 295, 19.12.1921.

¹⁴ William Moritz: »Oskar Fischinger«. In: Herbert Gehr (ed.): *Optische Poesie. Oskar Fischinger – Leben und Werk*. Frankfurt/Main: Deutsches Filmmuseum 1993. (Kinematograph 9): 7-80, here 18f.

¹⁵ See Michal Bregant: »Alexander Hammid's Czech Years. Space and Time of His Early Films«. In: Michael Omasta (ed.): *Tribute to Sasha. Das filmische Werk von Alexander Hammid. Regie, Kamera, Schnitt und Kritiker*. Wien: Synema 2002: 21-41. An overview has been given by Petr Szczepanik: »Czech Industrial Film of the 1930s and Bat'a«. Presentation on 9 December 2004 at the conference *Filme, die arbeiten. Internationale Tagung zum Industriefilm / Films at Work. International Industrial Film Workshop*. Bibliothek des Ruhrgebiets, Bochum / Ruhr-Universität Bochum, Institut für Medienwissenschaft. 9.–10.12.2004.

¹⁶ 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: 217–263, here 226.

¹⁷ A classic study tracing the outlines of the transitions from an aristocratic form of governance to a bourgeois public sphere with free circulation of discourse and art on a capitalist market is Jürgen Habermas: *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchung zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*. Neuwied: Luchterhand 1962. A canonised case study on the appearance of the novel is Ian Watt: *The Rise of the Novel*. London: Chatto & Windus 1957. More generally on the visual arts see Arnold Hauser: *Sozialgeschichte der Kunst und Literatur*. München 1969.

¹⁸ Walter Ruttmann: »Der isolierte Künstler«. In: *Filmtechnik*, 25 May 1929. Reprinted in and quoted from: Jeanpaul Goergen (ed.): *Walter Ruttmann. Eine Dokumentation*. Berlin: Freunde der Deutschen Kinemathek 1989: 86. [»It might be possible to reach the reconciliation and equilibrium between art and commerce through an exterior power: for example through patrons or the state. However, patrons only exist in fairy tales or to promote a diva and the state seems – at least in our capitalistic countries – to neglect the problem. What is left, is art's own initiative. But who represents film as art? The possibility to build unions among those who want art and consider art as important exists in France, perhaps also in Holland and some other places. It is called »avant-garde«, its existence has been recognized and to a certain extent it has evolved to be a reliable source because avant-garde has delivered proof for an existing demand. [...] This foreign success cannot be imitated in Germany. [...] Therefore we can only hope for a personality, flexible enough, to con and swindle himself into the opponent's headquarters and convince him.«, my trans.]

¹⁹ Laura Vichi: *Henri Storck. De l'avant-garde au documentaire social*. Crisnée (BE): Éditions Yellow Now 2002: 11f. [»One question in particular fueled the discussions and led to the taking of opposite positions: the definition itself of »independent cinema«; the majority of participants – among whom were Moussinac, Richter, Balasz, Ruttmann, and Eisenstein – realized the illusory character of absolute independence and understood the phrase as a cinema free of the industry's rules.«, my trans.]

²⁰ Julien J. London: »Entretiens: Victor Trivas nous a parlé du cinéma-art et du cinéma-industrie«. In: *Ciné-Comoedia*, no. 2138, 12.1.1933. German translation reprinted in and quoted after Jeanpaul Goergen (ed.): *Victor Trivas*. Hamburg, Berlin: CineGraph, Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek 1996: 6-8, here 7. [»I cannot imagine an independent cinema. Film is an industrial product which has to find its way to consumers. For them films are made – therefore films have to be approachable by the masses above all. If not, the aim has been missed socially and commercially. The director has to be willing to find a true connection between himself and the audience. Devastating dependencies are those that are valid for everyone...«, my trans.]

²¹ See for examples from this debate about the centralised »film studio« anon.: »Der deutsche Film fordert vom Staat«. In: *Film-Kurier*, vol. 10, no. 197, 18.8.1928; anon.: »Eine der Republik würdige Aufgabe: Wo bleibt das Film-Experimental-Studio?«. In: *Film-Kurier*, vol. 10, no. 274, 16.11.1928; Hans Richter: »Filmstudio – Industrie – Staat«. In: *Film-Kurier*, vol. 10, no. 280, 24.11.1928; Erik Reger: »Avantgarde-Debatte: Von außen besehen«. In: *Film-Kurier*, vol. 10, no. 280, 24.11.1928.

²² See anon.: »Der absolute Film braucht die Industrie. Ein Gespräch mit Hans Richter«. In: *Film-Kurier*, vol. 11, no. 6, 5.1.1929.

²³ See anon.: »Moritz Seelers Filmstudie«. In: *Film-Kurier*, vol. 11, no. 166, 15.7.1929. For production background, biographical information, and contemporary texts see Wolfgang Jacobsen, Hans Helmut Prinzler (eds.): *Siodmak Bros. Berlin – Paris – London – Hollywood*. Berlin: Argon 1998: passim. For a report on future film plans of Seeler see »Nachwuchs? Bitte!«. In: *Film-Kurier*, vol. 12, no. 111, 18.5.1930.

²⁴ See Patricia Zimmermann: *Reel Families. A Social History of Amateur Film*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press 1995 for a history of amateur film in the United States. For two collection of articles see Nancy Kapstein (ed.): *Rencontres autour des inédits. Jubilee Book. Essays on Amateur Film*. Charleroi (BE): Association Européenne Inédits / European Association Inédits 1997 and *Film History*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2003 (special issue »Small Gauge and Amateur Film«, edited by Melinda Stone and Dan Streible). See for a case study of Switzerland Alexandra Schneider: *Die Stars sind wir. Heimkino als filmische Praxis*. Marburg: Schüren 2004. (Zürcher Filmstudien 9).

²⁵ See Walter Benjamin's lecture »Der Autor als Produzent« for an explanation of this position. In: W.B.: *Gesammelte Schriften. II.2*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1977: 683-701.

²⁶ See the manifesto »Het gaat om de film« in: Jan Heijns (ed.): *Filmliga 1927–1931*. (reprint of magazine published by the *Filmliga*). Nijmegen: SUN 1982: 34.

²⁷ There are other reasons (gender, sexual orientation) that also played into this conflict. See Naomi Green: »Artaud and Film: A Reconsideration«. In: *Cinema Journal*, vol. 23, no. 4, Summer 1984: 28-40.

²⁸ Germaine Dulac: »Le cinéma d'avant-garde«. In: Henri Fescourt (ed.): *Le Cinéma des origines à nos jours*. Paris Éditions du Cygne 1932: 357-364. Reprinted in and quoted after Prosper Hillairet (ed.): *Germaine Dulac. Écrits sur le cinéma (1919-1937)*. Paris: Éditions Expérimental 1994: 182-190, here 182f. [»The film industry is producing commercial films, i.e. films intended to reach a wide audience, and market-oriented films. Market-oriented films are willing to make any concession and are pursuing purely financial goals; commercial films are using expressions and techniques in the best possible way and among these one finds occasionally interesting works, without ignoring the necessary profits. In this case we have a union of industry and art. From commercial cinema emerges the total work, the balanced film for which industry and avant-garde work in two divided camps. In general the industry is not interested in the artistic elements while the avant-garde is caring about nothing else. From this results the antagonism. Avant-garde and commercial cinema, or art and film industry, form an inseparable whole. But the avant-garde – without which there would be no development in film – has against itself the majority of the public and all producers.«, my trans.]

²⁹ anon.: »Experimente sind Geschäfte«. In: *Film-Kurier*, vol. 10, no. 101, 28.4.1928. (special »Die Avant-Garde«). [»It sounds paradox, but experiments are deals. [...] If you find something that is worth a risk, then push it through. In the long run valuable inspirations have always been successful. Improvement is only possible by trying out new ways. Film as an art for the masses can easily run into the danger of solidifying.«, my trans.]

³⁰ A wide context of popular entertainment, of mass-circulated media, and of new modes of spectatorship around 1900 can be found in the seminal anthology Leo Charney, Vanessa R. Schwartz: *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 1995.

³¹ Joris Ivens: »Quelques réflexions sur les documentaires d'avant-garde«. In: *La revue des vivants*, No. 10, 1931: 518–520. English translation reprinted in and quoted after: »Notes on the Avant-garde Documentary Film«. In: Kees Bakker (ed.): *Joris Ivens and the Documentary Context*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 1999: 224–226, here 224.

³² The *locus classicus* for the concept »paratext« in relation to literature is Gérard Genette: *Seuils*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil 1987. (engl.: *Paratexts. Thresholds of Interpretation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997). See on special forms related to the cinema such as the film trailer Vinzenz Hediger: *Verführung zum Film. Der amerikanische Kinotrailer seit 1912*. Marburg: Schüren 2001 and on the poster Wolfgang Beilenhoff, Martin Heller (eds.): *Das Filmplakat*. Zurich, Berlin, New York: Scalo 1995.

³³ For a concise and good (albeit already somewhat dated) introduction to this discussion see Judith Mayne: *Cinema and Spectatorship*. London, New York: Routledge 1993.

³⁴ See chapter three on film societies and ciné-clubs.

³⁵ Only the post-World War II avant-garde would work directly on the film material, scratching and painting directly on the film strip, eliminating the photographic process altogether.

³⁶ See Béla Balász: *Der sichtbare Mensch, oder die Kultur des Films*. Wien, Leipzig: Deutsch-Österreichischer Verlag 1924. (reprint Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 2001), Béla Balász: *Der Geist des Films*. Halle/Saale: Wilhelm Knapp 1930. (reprint Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 2001) and Rudolf Arnheim: *Film als Kunst*. Berlin: Rowohlt 1932. (reprint Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 2002).

³⁷ For an attempt to understand the »absoluter Film« as a movement see Holger Wilmesmeier: *Deutsche Avantgarde und Film. Die Filmmatinee »Der absolute Film« 3. und 10. Mai 1925*. Münster, Hamburg: Lit Verlag 1993.

³⁸ It is not absolutely certain which of Richter's RHYTHMUS-films was shown and if that film was shown on both matinees. See Wilmesmeier, absolute Film, op.cit., 17–30.

³⁹ See chapter three on film societies for more on the *Gesellschaft »Neuer Film«*.

⁴⁰ Walter Ruttmann: »Die »absolute« Mode«. In: *Filmkurier*, no. 30, 3 February 1928. Reprinted in and quoted after: Jeanpaul Goergen (ed.): *Walter Ruttmann. Eine Dokumentation*. Berlin: Freunde der Deutschen Kinemathek 1989: 82. [»It was inevitable: The »absolute« film is now in fashion. Years ago when I presented the first examples, it was fanatically welcomed by some, mildly frowned upon by others. The low tide of film production is the reason why absolute film is now propagated as the holy bible. Its diffuse character is helpful for its propaganda. What is an absolute film? A film where one does not have to rely on the manner how the film is made for it to develop into art, but a film where the theory and the idea of film as an autonomous art stands first – a priori: »In such a manner only are film's aesthetical laws.« Certainly it would be delightful if artist would supersede the routiniers. But – is it the best for film, when its artistic cleansing is forced too eagerly? Is film rightly understood, if one wishes him the destiny of absolute music? Shall film be shown in poorly visited halls? Become virginized for a small community of the aesthetically high-demanding concerned with its structural pureness? When it [the absolute film, MH] is self-sufficient and becomes a goal in itself, it leans toward the storerooms of l'art por l'art. From there film had just liberated us.«, my trans.]

⁴¹ See Siegfried Kracauer: »Wir schaffens«. In: *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 17.11.1927. Reprinted in S.K.: *Von Caligari zu Hitler. Eine psychologische Geschichte des deutschen Films*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 1979: 404f. See also *ibid.*: 192-198.

⁴² See my chapter on the discursive formations for more on Baden-Baden.

⁴³ Tom Gunning: »Ontmoetingen in verduisterde ruimten. De alternatieve programmering van de Nederlandsche Filmliga«. In: Linssen, Céline; Schoots, Hans; Gunning, Tom: *Het gaat om de film! Een nieuwe geschiedenis van de Nederlandsche Filmliga 1927–1933*. Amsterdam: Bas Lubberhuizen / Filmmuseum 1999: 217–263, here 252. [»The Filmliga was not only founded to project films that were not be screened anywhere else, but also to discover and teach new ways of film spectatorship. Essentially, this meant an undermining of the dominance of narrative. The Liga did programme a number of narrative films, but it also started a frontal attack on the hegemony of the narrative film as it is represented in the classical Hollywood feature film. It offered a varied choice of alternatives. The abstract films, the heavily political but often little psychological Soviet films, the absurdist mixture of dadaist and surrealist films, the visual association and the symbolism of the French Impressionists, the dynamic images of everyday life in the city symphonies and other documentaries – in all these forms one searched for organisational principles that were at a distance from conventional stories focused on well-rounded characters. New film forms required new audiences and the programmes of the Filmliga

had to break with old habits of film spectatorship in order to create a new appreciation for film art.«, my trans.]

⁴⁴ See for the programme »Die Stuttgarter Sondervorführungen der Werkbundaustellung »Film und Foto««. In: *Lichtbild-Bühne*, vol. 22, no. 145, 19.6.1929. See for an annotated reconstruction of the programme Helma Schleif (ed.): *Stationen der Moderne im Film. Vol. 1: FiFo. Film- und Fotoausstellung Stuttgart 1929. Rekonstruktion des Filmprogramms*. Berlin: Freunde der Deutschen Kinemathek 1988.

⁴⁵ For classical accounts of the aesthetic and cultural style of *Neue Sachlichkeit* see John Willett: *The New Sobriety*. New York: Pantheon 1978, and Helmut Lethen: *Verhaltenslehren der Kälte. Lebensversuche zwischen den Kriegen*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1994.

⁴⁶ Tom Gunning: »Ontmoetingen in verduisterde ruimten. De alternatieve programmering van de Nederlandse Filmliga«. In: Linsen, Céline; Schoots, Hans; Gunning, Tom: *Het gaat om de film! Een nieuwe geschiedenis van de Nederlandsche Filmliga 1927–1933*. Amsterdam: Bas Lubberhuizen / Filmmuseum 1999: 217–263, here 232. [»Here we see a theoretical opposition whereas in practice different film styles form a dialectic relation instead of excluding each other. Partly this can be expained as these seemingly mutually exclusive techniques were both opposed to the commercial feature film.«, my trans.]

⁴⁷ For more on Painlevé see Andy Masaki Bellows, Marina McDougall (eds.): *Science Is Fiction. The Films of Jean Painlevé*. Cambridge, MA, London: MIT Press 2000.

⁴⁸ Cf. László Moholy-Nagy: *The New Vision and Abstract of an Artist*. New York: George Wittenborn 1947. (orig. German as *Von Material zu Architektur* 1928, orig. English 1930).

⁴⁹ Walter Benjamin: »Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit« (Dritte Fassung). In: W.B.: *Gesammelte Schriften. Band I.2*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1977: 471–508, here 499. [»To demonstrate the identity of the artistic and scientific uses of photography which heretofore usually were separated will be one of the revolutionary functions of the film.«, trans. Harry Zohn, *Illuminations*: 236]

⁵⁰ See Ian Aitken: *Film and Reform. John Grierson and the Documentary Film Movement*. London, New York: Routledge 1990 for a detailed discussion of the background and influences upon Grierson. See also Ian Aitken: *European Film Theory and Cinema. An Introduction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2001 (chapter 7 on realism) for a more concise overview. See for a study of Grierson's film theory Patrick Hörl: *Film als Fenster zur Welt. Eine Untersuchung des filmtheoretischen Denkens von John Grierson*. Konstanz: UVK Medien Ölschläger 1996.

⁵¹ Ian Aitken: *European Film Theory and Cinema. An Introduction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2001: 165.

⁵² For more on the distinction between modernism and modernisation and a more thorough treatment of Grierson see my chapter on the emergence of the documentary.

⁵³ See my chapter on the »Vanishing Point Soviet Union« for more details.

⁵⁴ For filmmaking during the *front populaire*-period see Goffredo Fofi: »The Cinema of the Popular Front in France (1934–38)«. In: *Screen*, vol. 13, no. 4, Winter 1972/73: 5–57; Ginette Vincendeau, Keith Reader (eds.): *La vie est à nous. French Cinema of the Popular Front 1935–1938*. London: British Film Institute 1986; Geneviève Guillaume-Grimaud: *Le cinéma du front populaire*. Paris: Lherminier 1986; Jonathan Buchsbaum: *Cinema engage. Film in the Popular Front*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press 1988. On films from the Spanish civil war inside and outside Spain see Marjorie A. Valleau: *The Spanish Civil War in American and European Films*. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press 1982; Román Gubern: *La guerra de España en la pantalla (1936–1939). De la propaganda a la historia*. Madrid: Filmoteca Española 1986; Wolfgang Martin Hamdorf: *Zwischen »No Pasaran!« und »Arriba España!«*. *Film und Propaganda im Spanischen Bürgerkrieg*. Münster: M&S Publikationen 1991.

⁵⁵ See Hans-Michael Bock, Jürgen Berger (eds.): *Photo: Casparius. Filmgeschichte in Berlin. Berlin um 1930*. Berlin: Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek 1978 and Erika Wottrich (ed.): *M wie Nebenanzl*. München: edition text + kritik 2002; both books contain documents and texts on the case. For Brecht's perspective see Bertolt Brecht: *Der Dreigroschenprozess*. In: Bertolt Brecht: *Gesammelte*

Werke. Band 18: Schriften zur Literatur und Kunst I. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1967: 139-209. [first published 1931]

⁵⁶ For a collection of annotated source material see Harry M. Geduld, Ronald Gottesman (eds.): *Sergei Eisenstein and Upton Sinclair. The Making and Unmaking of 'Que viva Mexico!'*. Bloomington, IN, London: Indiana University Press 1970.

⁵⁷ See for a general history of surrealism largely from Breton's perspective Maurice Nadeau: *Histoire du Surréalisme*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil 1945, see also for Buñuel's reasons to resign from the group Paul Hammond: »To the Paradise of Pitfalls«. In: Maria Casanova (ed.): *Tierra sin pan. Luis Buñuel y los nuevos caminos de las vanguardias*. Valencia: Institut Valencià d'Art Modern 1999 : 211-217.

⁵⁸ Laszlo Moholy-Nagy: »Produktion – Reproduktion«. In: *De Stijl*, vol. 5, no. 7, July 1922: 98-100. Reprinted in and quoted after: *Laszlo Moholy-Nagy. Fotogramme 1922-1943*. München, Paris, London: Schirmer/Mosel 1996: 28-29. [»Since production (productive design) mainly serves the progress of mankind, we must try to expand the means of production (the apparatus) – onto fields until now only used for reproduction – into productive fields.«, my trans.]

⁵⁹ Bill Nichols: »The Documentary and the Turn from Modernism«. In: Kees Bakker (ed.): *Joris Ivens and the Documentary Context*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 1999: 142–159.

⁶⁰ I am aware that I am using the term modernism here to designate what some theorists (like Fredric Jameson) call high modernism. Yet, I find the latter term unrewarding and hard to define; therefore I refrain from using it and employ modernism to refer to artistic production from (roughly) 1900 to 1960 which challenged the dominant institutions of art and traditional manners of expression.

⁶¹ Thomas Elsaesser: *Weimar Cinema and After. Germany's Historical Imaginary*. London, New York: Routledge 2000: 390.

⁶² I am aware that the surrealists also shared some preoccupations with constructivists such as a fascination for the city, an investigation into chance encounters; more generally speaking: an interest in social aspects of modern life.

⁶³ Hans Schoots *Living Dangerously. A Biography of Joris Ivens*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2000: 41.

⁶⁴ 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*. Stuttgart, Leipzig: Reclam; to be published 2005.

⁶⁵ The parameters of form and content (and their interrelatedness) are never absolute essentials, but always historically relative. Peter Bürger argues that »[d]ie ready-mades von Duchamp sind keine Kunstwerke, sondern Manifestationen. Nicht aus der Form-Inhalt-Totalität der einzelnen von Duchamp signierten Gegenstände läßt sich der Sinn seiner Provokation ablesen, sondern einzig aus dem Gegensatz von serienmäßig produziertem Objekt einerseits und Signatur und Kunstaussstellung andererseits. Daß dieser Typus von Provokation sich nicht beliebig oft wiederholen läßt, liegt auf der Hand. Die Provokation ist abhängig von dem, wogegen sie sich richtet; hier von der Vorstellung, das Individuum sei das Subjekt des künstlerischen Schaffens. Nachdem einmal der signierte Flaschentrockner als museumswürdiger Gegenstand akzeptiert ist, fällt die Provokation ins Leere; sie verkehrt sich ins Gegenteil. Wenn heute ein Künstler ein Ofenrohr signiert und ausstellt, denunziert er damit keineswegs mehr den Kunstmarkt, sondern fügt sich ihm ein; er destruiert nicht die Vorstellung vom individuellen Schöpferum, sondern er bestätigt sie.« Peter Bürger: *Theorie der Avantgarde*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1974: 71.

⁶⁶ Joris Ivens: »Quelques réflexions sur les documentaires d'avant-garde«. In: *La revue des vivants*, no. 10, 1931: 518–520. Reprinted translation in and quoted from: »Notes on the Avant-garde Documentary Film«. In: Kees Bakker (ed.): *Joris Ivens and the Documentary Context*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 1999: 224–226, here 224.

⁶⁷ Ivens: »Quelques réflexions sur les documentaires d'avant-garde«. 1931. Reprinted translation in and quoted from: Bakker (ed.), *Documentary Context*: 224–226, here 224f.

⁶⁸ I have borrowed this list from Lev Manovich's essay »Avant-garde as Software« (http://www.manovich.net/docs/avantgarde_as_software.doc) in which he draws extensive parallels between the constructivist avant-garde of the 1920s and developments in new media in the 1990s.

Even though I do not share all of Manovich's conclusion which sometimes appear like technological determinism I still find this article useful in giving a historical perspective on new media as well as a contemporary perspective on the canonical avant-garde.

⁶⁹ See Herbert Molderings: »Lichtjahre eines Lebens. Das Fotogramm in der Ästhetik Laszlo Moholy-Nagys«. In: Museum Folkwang (ed.): *Lászlo Moholy-Nagy: Fotogramme 1922-1943*. München, Paris, London: Schirmer/Mosel 1996: 8-17.

⁷⁰ For the strategies of the Tobis after the introduction of sound see Malte Hagener: »Unter den Dächern der Tobis. Nationale Märkte und europäische Strategien«. In: Jan Distelmeyer (Red.): *Tonfilmfrieden/Tonfilmkrieg. Die Geschichte der Tobis vom Technik-Syndikat zum Staatskonzern*. München: edition text + kritik 2003: 51-64.

⁷¹ Just think of *Saatchi & Saatchi*'s infamous *Sensation*-exhibition.

⁷² S. Palsma [= Paul Schuitema]: »Foto als wapen in de klassestrijd«. In: *Links Richten*, February 1933. Reprinted in and quoted after: Flip Bool: »Paul Schuitema und Piet Zwart. Die Neue Typografie und die Neue Fotografie im Dienste der Industrie und des politischen Kampfes«. In: Stanislaus von Moos, Chris Smeenk (eds.): *Avantgarde und Industrie*. Delft: Delft University Press 1983: 121-134, here 122. [»It is naive to believe, it suffices to be a proletarian in order to deal with weapons in the class struggle. Class-conscious proletarian struggle means exercise and eventually mastery of the weapons in class struggle. The training of the proletarian photo-correspondent must primarily be related to operating his camera and only subsequently to the study of seduction. No romanticism, no art, rather objective, openly seductive propaganda: tactically aimed towards class struggle, technically aimed towards the job.«, my trans.]

⁷³ Bool, »Schuitema und Zwart«, op.cit.: 124. [»Advertisement offered them [Schuitema and Zwart] the opportunity to play an active role within the production process [...] and to present their theories about contemporary forms of production to a wide audience by using ultra-modern production facilities.«, my trans.]

⁷⁴ Lev Manovich: »Avant-garde as Software«, op.cit.: 8.

⁷⁵ I have elaborated the role of the Soviet Union within the imaginary geography of the avant-garde in more detail in the chapter »Vanishing Point Soviet Union«.

⁷⁶ Walter Ruttmann: »Technik und Film«. In: Leo Kestenberg (ed.): *Kunst und Technik*. Berlin 1930: 327. Reprinted in and quoted from: Jeapaul Goergen: *Walter Ruttmann. Eine Dokumentation*. Berlin: Freunde der Deutschen Kinemathek 1989, S. 87-88. A discussion of this quote and Ruttmann's position in detail can be found in Thomas Elsaesser, Malte Hagener: »Walter Ruttmann. 1929«. In: Stefan Andriopoulos, Bernhard Dotzler (eds.): *1929. Beiträge zur Archäologie der Medien*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 2002: 316-349. [»What is surprising when compared to other industries and fabrication fields is that the film industry never had a laboratory. [...] And still the laboratory could have been the nutrient medium which could have helped it develop and strengthen. [...] Not improvement and development of the apparatus would have been the task of this laboratory. [...] Indeed here experimental departments should be created in order to prove the range of possibilities [...] within film as a form of expression.«, my trans.]

⁷⁷ See Flip Bool: »Paul Schuitema und Piet Zwart. Die Neue Typografie und die Neue Fotografie im Dienste der Industrie und des politischen Kampfes«. In: Stanislaus von Moos, Chris Smeenk (eds.): *Avantgarde und Industrie*. Delft: Delft University Press 1983: 121-134. for a case study on a photographer between political and commercial assignments.

⁷⁸ Thomas Elsaesser: *Weimar Cinema and After. Germany's Historical Imaginary*. London, New York: Routledge 2000: 402f.

⁷⁹ Actually, the third huge laboratory in the 1930s was Nazi-Germany which drew upon artistic figure heads such as Leni Riefenstahl and Walter Ruttmann. See Thomas Elsaesser, Malte Hagener: »Walter Ruttmann. 1929«. In: Stefan Andriopoulos, Bernhard Dotzler (eds.): *1929. Beiträge zur Archäologie der Medien*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 2002: 316-349.

⁸⁰ Lev Manovich: »Avant-garde as Software«: 8. (http://www.manovich.net/docs/avantgarde_as_software.doc).

⁸¹ Paul Schuitema in Heinz Rasch, Bodo Rasch (eds.): *Gefesselter Blick*. 1930. Reprinted in and quoted after Flip Flip Bool: »Paul Schuitema und Piet Zwart. Die Neue Typografie und die Neue Fotografie im Dienste der Industrie und des politischen Kampfes«. In: Stanislaus von Moos, Chris Smeenk (eds.): *Avantgarde und Industrie*. Delft: Delft University Press 1983: 121–134, here 124. [»the designer is not sketching, but organising the optical factors. his work is not in the manner of handicraft; it is limited to taking notes, building groups and technical organization.«, my trans.]

⁸² Peter Bürger: *Theorie der Avantgarde*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1974: 29. [»The avant-garde is opposed to both the apparatus of distribution to which the work of art is subjected as well as to the concept of autonomy which describes the status of art in bourgeois society.«, my trans.]

⁸³ For a detailed and stimulating discussion of the Weimar art cinema between commercialism, cultural value and modernisation see Thomas Elsaesser: *Weimar Cinema and After. Germany's Historical Imaginary*. London, New York: Routledge 2000.

⁸⁴ In this respect Hollywood might have been different as a former avant-gardist like Slavko Vorkapich was only used for a very circumscribed technique: montage sequences in which stylistic influences from the avant-garde are noticeable. For Slavko Vorkapich see Don Whittemore, Philip Alan Cecchetti: *Passport to Hollywood. Film Immigrants Anthology*. New York et al. : Mc Graw-Hill 1976: 432f. See also the special section in *Monthly Film Bulletin*, vol. 48, no. 572, September 1981: 185-190.

⁸⁵ Charles Boost: *Van Ciné-Club tot Filmhuis. Tien jaren die de filmindustrie deden wankelen*. Amsterdam: Meulenhoff 1979: 42. [»...despite the enthusiasm and activity of an inventive avant-garde, the big and lasting impulses in the process that led to the recognition of film as art came from assignments made with private subsidies or in industrial context. Three films have played a dominating role in the years 1920 to 1930 in showing the cinema-going public, including critics and theoreticians, the possibilities and potentials of the new medium. DAS CABINET DES DR. CALIGARI, POTEKIN as well as LA PASSION DE JEANNE D'ARC were in their own time and ever since eye-opener, shocking films that did not fit within the frame of film productions up till then. They created revolutions in spectatorship, shook existing definitions and made in a short time span (the time of release) a lot clear what was vaguely understood or confirmed what was only a vague thought up until then.«, my trans.]

⁸⁶ Thomas Elsaesser: »»Dada/Cinema?«. In: Rudolf E. Kuenzli (ed.): *Dada and Surrealist Film*. New York: Willis, Locker and Owens 1987: 13-27, here 19.

⁸⁷ Tom Gunning has discussed the affinity between early cinema and avant-garde film in his seminal article: »The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde«. In: Thomas Elsaesser (ed.): *Early Cinema. Space – Frame – Narrative*. London: BFI 1990: 56–62.

⁸⁸ A. Kraszna-Krausz: »Exhibition in Stuttgart, June, 1929, and Its Effects«. In: *Close Up*, vol. 5, no. 6, December 1929: 455-464, here 463.

⁸⁹ Catalogue edited by Cesar Domela for exhibition at the Kunstgewerbemuseum Berlin quoted in: Bool, »Schuitema und Zwart«, op.cit.: 125. [»The most important use of photomontage is in propaganda, in commercial as well as political contexts.«, my trans.]

⁹⁰ Paul Schuitema in Heinz Rasch, Bodo Rasch (eds.): *Gefesselter Blick*. 1930. Reprinted in and quoted after Flip Flip Bool: »Paul Schuitema und Piet Zwart. Die Neue Typografie und die Neue Fotografie im Dienste der Industrie und des politischen Kampfes«. In: Stanislaus von Moos, Chris Smeenk (eds.): *Avantgarde und Industrie*. Delft: Delft University Press 1983: 121–134, here 124. [»advertisement is neither art nor design. advertisement means to push forward. it does not have any other purpose rather than to propagate the material and mental production of man. it evolves from the task, and it has to clearly fulfill this task. the task has to be clear and has to be based on arguments. advertisement without arguments is not advertisement: is unemployed. the argument only relates to the commissioning body and has to be the basis for the solution. the idea for the solution has to be a re-arrangement of the arguments into an visual suggestion. it has relate to the speed of the times. the solution only relates to the designer. he has to understand the arguments. the technical circumstances of the process, in which the the task is carried out, define the form. the designer is not a sketcher, but an organizer of the the optical factors. his work is not in the manner of handicraft; it is limited to

taking notes, building groups and technical organization. the designer should have a clear image. every thing he uses should be in order to amplify the the seduction of the argument. the solution should bear changes. the solution has to be fluid in its organisation and explicit in its seduction. nothing should be included for the sake of itself. advertisement should be economic, because it is temporal. design for its own sake is study of the designer and belongs in the studio. it is the business of the designer and is only valuable for him to solve his tasks better. he studies the optical seduction of his means, purely as an experiment. Advertisement is only a result of actual production. My work shall be as a tree; according to nature grown in order to bear fruits. That is technical: natural and unforced. The design which advertisement carries naturally is not the design of the task but of our attitude towards the events. In short: advertisement shall be: actual, direct, factual, able to compete, argumentative, active, topical, functional, practical and technical. Not art but reality.«, my trans.]

⁹¹ André Stufkens: »The Song of Movement. Joris Ivens's First Films and the Cycle of the Avant-garde«. In: Kees Bakker (ed): *Joris Ivens and the Documentary Context*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 1999: 46–71, here 66.

⁹² Gunning, »Ontmoetingen...«, op.cit.: 254. [»shows that it is impossible to disentangle the visual experience of a modern structure from the object itself.«, my trans.]

⁹³ The developments in the German film industry around the coming of sound points to a high awareness of these issues not only in the circles of the avant-garde, but also in the industry at large: The commercial cinema is in a somewhat different, yet also similar fashion staging its own mise-en-scène in films such as *UND NELSON SPIELT* (DE 1928/29, Hans Conradi), *DAS LIED IST AUS* (DE 1930, Geza von Bolvary), *DAS CABINET DES DR. LARIFARI* (DE 1930, Robert Wohlmut), *DIE GROSSE SEHNSUCHT* (DE 1930, István Székely), *DER SCHUSS IM TONFILMATELIER* (DE 1930, Alfred Zeisler), *WIR SCHALTEN UM AUF HOLLYWOOD* (DE 1931, Frank Reicher), *DAS LIED EINER NACHT* (DE 1932, Anatol Litvak), *DIE VERLIEBTE FIRMA* (DE 1932, Max Ophüls), *ICH BEI TAG UND DU BEI NACHT* (DE 1932, Ludwig Berger). For some of the issues concerning the industry see the essays collected in Malte Hagener, Jan Hans (eds.): *Als die Filme singen lernten. Innovation und Tradition im Musikfilm 1928-1938*. München: edition text + kritik 1999. For the self-reflexive wave in early German sound films see Jörg Schweinitz: »Wie im Kino!«. Die autothematiscche Welle im frühen Tonfilm. *Figurationen des Selbstreflexiven*. In: Thomas Koebner, Norbert Grob, Bernd Kiefer (eds.): *Diesseits der »Dämonischen Leinwand«*. München: edition text + kritik 2003: 373–392.

⁹⁴ 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 11.

⁹⁵ I am aware that most avant-garde movements tried to work in different genres and formats and consciously attempted at breaking down the barriers between the different art forms; yet, disciplinary limits in the academy have largely confined studies to a concentration of one art form with occasional asides towards others.

⁹⁶ Seen from this perspective my four aporias also relate closely to the »three As« proposed by Thomas Elsaesser in relation to the commissioned industrial film – »Auftraggeber, Anlass, Adressat« (commissioning body, occasion, expected audience / address). 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*. Stuttgart, Leipzig: Reclam 2005. (to be published).

