Avant-garde culture and media strategies: the networks and discourses of the European film avant-garde, 1919-39
Hagener, M.

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: http://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
Chapter 4: Mapping a Totality of Networks, Nodes, and Flows
The Discourses of Publishing, Theory, Teaching, and Exhibitions

L'avant-garde, c'est la curiosité d'esprit appliquée à un domaine où les découvertes à faire restent nombreuses et passionnantes. René Clair (1927)

This chapter will deal with a variety of practices: publishing and theorisation, teaching and event culture, and last but not least one central part of this chapter is devoted to an exploration of the various attempt from the avant-garde to overcome the limiting screening situation of the traditional dispositif of the cinema. In all these fragments of practices we can recognise how the avant-garde worked towards a reintegration of art into life: art’s function should be different from the cult status of pre-modern art and from the bourgeois autonomous art of the modern period. The different examples discussed here show the avant-garde on its way to a totality: by writing differently about the cinema the avant-garde hoped to influence and change spectators, by venturing into teaching the aim was to transform a future generation of practitioners and theoreticians, by organising events the avant-garde wanted to create moments of qualitative transformations, and all these measures culminated in an effort to create an immersive cinema experience as a possible utopia of spectatorship, reception and exhibition. This utopian promise that encompasses technology, film style and spectatorship shows avant-garde ideals at its most obvious: cinema was more than just the films projected. The hope was to overcome any distinction separating screen and auditorium, life and art, theory and practice, film and spectator. Thus, the last part of this chapter on the immersive film experience tries to map the utopian aspirations towards a totality. The attempts of breaking open the codified, distanced and sanitised way of film reception demonstrate astutely how the avant-garde wanted to liberate the cinema from its two gaolers: mass entertainment on the one side and bourgeois art on the other.

The different practices discussed here are all captured at points of emergence, or — as Michel Foucault would have it — at thresholds. In his Archaeology of Knowledge Foucault has theorised four different kinds of thresholds that a discourse can cross; yet they are not steps in a logical succession, they are »neither regular nor homogeneous«: the first threshold of positivity is marked by »the moment at which a discursive practice achieves individuality and autonomy«, the second threshold of epistemologization is reached when a specific discourse »exercises a dominant function [...] over knowledge«, for the third threshold of scientificity to be reached the discourse must comply with »a number of formal criteria [...and] certain laws for the construction of propositions«, and
Discourses and Networks

the fourth threshold of formalization is reached once »the scientific discourse [...] is] able, taking itself as a starting-point, to deploy the formal edifice that it constitutes«. As the avant-garde was at heart a transformative movement, their achievements are best captured in moments of change, even though as a movement it never went beyond the threshold of epistemologization. In singling out those moments of transformation a discourse becomes visible at a point where it is moving from one stage to another. Since the avant-garde mainly thrives on possibility and utopian promise this chapter will stress the virtual dimensions of the avant-garde – virtual understood as a possibility that has not been actualised (yet).

4.1 Publishing as Discourse Formation: Magazines and Books

A few years ago books on the cinema were almost as scarce as intelligent films. To-day the number can fill a shelf or two...

Herbert Read (1932)

One of the key nodes for the avant-garde in general, not just for film, was the magazine, or as it is sometimes called, »the little magazine«. These publication organs were established in networks of acquaintances and friends, came out irregularly, often did not survive more than a couple of numbers and were produced in an amateur or artisanal style. In fact, their mode of production is similar to the films that are produced in a comparable fashion in networks of relations and on the surface all too often they appear as »poor« and »imperfect« as compared to the »polished« and outwardly »perfect«, commercial products. The avant-garde approached the arts not as distinct disciplines but as a large field that could not be separated into sharply delineated entities. In their attempt to map a totality many of the general magazines (i.e. not specialised in film) dealt with the cinema as well as with literature, visual arts, theatre, performance, dance, architecture and other issues of relevance to those involved in these movements. The magazines were decidedly transdisciplinary and convincingly internationalist – often articles were published in their original language with – or without – accompanying translation. The magazines as well as the key players involved in the movements formed connections between the key places: they were conduits for communication in which positions could be outlined and work could be published. The magazines provided the basis for inclusion and exclusion (of persons, topics, positions) and guaranteed a measure of exchange that transcended the limited level of friendship and acquaintance.

The number of general magazines, often short-lived, but often also influential until the present day, that have been published in these crucial years between 1919 and 1939, especially in the years from the mid-1920s to the mid-1930s is very hard to estimate. A handful of them reached prominent status. One such important general magazine that also published on film topics was G.
Material zur elementaren Gestaltung. G stands for Gestaltung and publication amounted to six issues from July 1923 to 1926 under the editorship of Hans Richter and supported by, among others, Theo van Doesburg, Werner Graeff, El Lissitzky, and Mies van der Rohe. All artist-activists are crucial figures in the exchanges between places (Doesburg between the Netherlands and Germany, El Lissitzky between the Soviet Union and Germany), between art forms (architecture, film, visual arts, all also produced texts of »theory«) and between styles (Dada, Constructivism, Surrealism). In this context, Richter and van der Rohe met and realised similar interests in the regularity of the patterns of modernism. Richter has retrospectively remembered this meeting:

Die Grundrisse und Pläne [eines Hauses, das von der Rohe gerade in Neu-Babelsberg baute, MH] sahen in der Tat nicht nur aus wie Mondrians oder meine Zeichnungen, sondern wie Musik, eben jene visuelle Musik, von der wir sprachen, über die wir diskutierten, an der wir arbeiteten und die wir im Film realisierten. Das war nicht nur ein Grundriß, das war eine neue Sprache, eben jene, die unsere Generation zu verbinden schien.6

One of the preoccupations of the avant-garde was to find common underlying elements that would connect the arts – like the »Generalbass« (basso continuo) that Viking Eggeling envisioned or the »spiritual« that Vasily Kandinsky elaborated in his treatise Über das Geistige in der Kunst (1911). Characteristically, this foundational moment is either located in the realm of language (hieroglyphs, Esperanto, universal language) or in terms of music (symphony, melody, basso continuo). G was mainly a result of the meeting of the Russian and the German Constructivists while i10 under the directorship of Arthur Lehning – who commuted in the 1920s between the cities of modernism Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Paris, and Berlin – was more closely connected to the Dutch scene which was particularly strong on architecture. i10 had sections on architecture (edited by J.J.P. Oud) and on photography and film (edited by László Moholy-Nagy). The magazine came out from January 1927 to June 1929, following in the footsteps of the magazine De Stijl, albeit in a more radical fashion lobbying for a revolutionary integration of art and life.7

In France besides André Breton’s La Révolution Surréaliste (1924–29), the literary journal transition and the magazine documents which in some respects was a successor to Breton’s magazine were published in Paris. documents came out in 1929/30 with Georges Bataille and Carl Einstein as the key figures and a strong focus on ethnography.8 Sometimes magazines exhausted their energy in a very short time span and came out with very few issues: Germaine Dulac herself published only one issue of a magazine Schémas in 1927 which included texts by Dulac and Hans Richter defending abstraction confronted with essays by Henri Fescourt and Jean-Louis Bouquet in support of narrative film. 9 Some magazines were supported by influential institutions such as Die Form published by the
Discourses and Networks

Werkbund or the magazine Bauhaus connected to the design and architecture school in Weimar and Dessau. In Frankfurt architecture, design, photography and film was dealt with in the magazine Das neue Frankfurt which came out from 1925 to 1932. Other magazines catered to a specific (national) audience such as the Hungarian exile magazine Ma (>Today<, 1918-25, published in Vienna).

These general and transdisciplinary magazines that created a transgeneric and transdisciplinary communication platform for political, social and cultural revolutionaries had their complimentaries in journals specifically devoted to the cinema. The publishing activity especially between 1927 and 1933 was enormous and the quality as well as quantity of film magazines only reached the same level again in the 1960s. The English-language magazine Close Up that exhibited its outspoken internationalism by including texts in French and German came out from July 1927 to December 1933 in Switzerland and it was probably the single most important film journal in the interbellum. Anne Friedberg has called the journal transnational, transgender, and transrace as the pronounced internationalism of Close Up paid tribute to the »established geography of modernism. [...] The imagined international reader of Close Up was a psychically slippery subject, constructed at the borderlines – geographic, social, sexual and national.«¹⁰ Maybe there is one factor to add: transitional, as the various activities of the Close Up-collective all addressed a situation of crisis that was reflected and negotiated, but also intensified and reinforced. The strength of the avant-garde depended crucially on a sense of crisis and discontent in the institution cinema while Close Up added exterritoriality, sexual deviancy, nomadic sensibility and overcoming traditional categories of race.

Publication activities should not be limited to magazines alone: the Film Society of London produced detailed notes accompanying the programmed films that were handed out for the monthly screening.¹¹ Unlike the avant-garde magazines and in keeping with the spirit of the London Film Society these texts were situating films historically and aesthetically, but they were not radical battle cries for change.¹² In the 1930s a number of British magazines continued the serious discussion of film: Cinema Quarterly came out from 1932 to 1935 and was followed by World Film News (1936-38) – the first three numbers of the latter were edited by Hans Feld, formerly editor-in-chief at the most important German trade paper Film-Kurier. The editorship was afterwards taken over by Marion A. Grierson, John Grierson’s sister who was also working within the circles of the documentary film movement. The founder of the documentary film movement was a regular contributor to the magazine as well as other activists involved in it. While Cinema Quaterly was published in close vicinity to the British documentarists with many collaborators publishing articles, Film Art (the first number was called Film) which was published from 1933 to 1937 was rather oriented towards formal experiment and saw itself as a successor to Close Up which had ceased publication shortly before Film Art started appearing. If we look at the multitude of »little
Avant-garde Culture

magazines on the cinema, the large number of active film societies - in autumn 1934 the British Cinema Quarterly remarked that »the film societies movement is growing rapidly throughout the country« - as well as the relatively stable number of films produced we can see that the avant-garde did by no means cease to exist in the 1930s.

In Germany the left-wing Volksfilmverband published its magazine Film und Volk from February 1928 until March 1930; after the audience organisation fused with a theatre organisation the organ of the new Communist oriented organisation was called Arbeiterbühne und Film, published 1930/31. Otherwise, the German film discourse settled into several different organs; one forum for a serious discussion of the cinema were quality dailies, mostly liberal in outlook like the Frankfurter Zeitung or the Vossische Zeitung. The Frankfurter Zeitung boasted two prominent critics, Siegfried Kracauer and Bernhard Diebold, a Swiss citizen who championed abstract cinema supporting Walther Ruttmann and Oskar Fischinger. Even the trade press clearly aligned to the film industry (with the two important dailies Film-Kurier and Lichtbild-Bühne) often ran articles on the avant-garde or by activists and in general showed a keen interest in the developments beyond the industry proper. The fact that publications nominally devoted to an audience of people active in the film industry were interested in avant-garde affairs testifies to the cross-over potentialities of the movement around 1930. Finally, a number of general left-leaning magazines like Die Weltbühne (Hans Siemsen and Rudolf Arnheim being the key writers on the cinema) or Der Querschnitt published reviews as well as longer pieces on the cinema.

The Dutch Filmliga had a monthly publication from 1927 to 1931 which not only ran texts in Dutch, but also exhibited its internationalism like Close Up in a multilinguality as they printed articles in English, French and German. The Filmliga invited practitioners from these countries which normally gave their presentations in their native language, addresses that were subsequently printed in the magazine. France boasted several magazines devoted to film within an intellectual and artistic context: Cinéa – Ciné pour tous was created in late 1923 when Jean Tedesco took over editorship of Cinéa (1921-23) from the recently deceased Louis Delluc and merged it with its rival Ciné pour tous (1919-23) ran by Pierre Henri. The result of this merger was the single most important French film magazine of the 1920s which not only brought together critics and filmmakers, theoreticians and practitioners, but it also lobbied for a repertory cinema and argued in general for a film avant-garde. In the late 1920s Jean-Georges Auriol published the glossy and elitist magazine La Revue du cinéma (1928-31) which echoed Léon Moussinac’s call for a different cinema in both aesthetic and social terms. Other influential specialised film magazines were the popular stars-and-genres oriented Cinémagazine (from 1921 onwards) on which Robert Florey served as Hollywood correspondent, himself the director of some experimental short in the late 1920s such as The Life and Death of 9413 – A Hollywood Extra (US
1927), and *Photo-Ciné* (1927, edited by Jean Dréville). Apart from these journals there were a number of publication either connected to the film industry (like the most important French trade paper *Cinématographie française*) or to the mass press (like *Ciné-Miroir, Cinémonde* or *Pour Vous*) besides a flourishing publication activity in newspapers and general magazines that were all concerned with issues of the avant-garde.14

In many European countries existed one or more magazines devoted almost exclusively to film art and to avant-garde filmmaking, general film magazines with an interest in avant-garde filmmaking or cultural publication with an outspoken interest in the cinema.15 In Portugal, for example, several shortlived magazines – *Cinéfilo, Animatógrafo, Imagen* – competed for an avid cinephile audience. Quite typically, editors and authors on these magazines were figures such as actor Manoel de Oliveira who adapted the city symphony to Porto with *DOURO, FAINA FLUVIAL* (PT 1931), later filmmaker António Lopes Ribeiro, one of the most prolific directors of the 1940s and 1940s, but also the director of the national newsreel output, and film historian M. Felix Ribeiro, head censor of the authoritarian Salazar-regime and later founding director of the *Cinemateca Portuguesa*.16 The Soviet Union had the most lively magazine scene apart from France with several intellectual film journals competing for attention in the 1920s.17

While the magazines (and to a certain extent newspapers reporting on film) provided active networks and platforms for debates, the more extended pieces started to settle into book format by the mid-1920s. An (incomplete) list of books published in these years shall suffice to substantiate the thesis that those names and titles staked the first time a claim for demarcating the evolving field of film theory and history. The books published in this period can be grouped in several waves which helps to understand the shifting ideas, fashions and alliances. Serious publishing began in the mid-1920s and the decade from 1925 to 1935 was only surpassed in quality and quantity of publication in the 1960s.

In the mid-1920s many of the debates and networks were still characterised by their national scope – consequently, the books primarily addressed a national audience and national preoccupations. It was only in the second half of the 1920s that a truly European network and discourse emerged from the overlap and fusion of erstwhile separate institutions. Therefore the first wave of books published around 1925 was still characterised by a largely separated audience. Three very different books came out in German in 1924/25 which all revolved around the question of film’s role within a wider social and cultural context. While Belá Balázs in *Der sichtbare Mensch* saw the cinema as a pacemaker on the way to a visual society that would overcome many of the problems of human language, Edgar Beyfuss and A. Kossowsky brought a large number of contributors together in his *Kulturfilmbuch* – an anthology which conceptualised the cinema as occupying a position between education, science and national culture. Finally, Willi Münzenberg’s pamphlet *Erobert den Film!* put the cinema in the camp of
overthrowing the existing order and creating a new communist world.\textsuperscript{18} As different as these three approaches were, they all shared a discontent with the status quo and attempted to open up a future for the cinema different from the situation as it was. Markedly diverse are the positions from which the three writers argued: Balázs wrote as a critic, but since he was also active as a screenwriter he occupied a position on the fringes of the industry (much like Willy Haas, another part-time screenwriter and bright critic). Beyfuss by contrast was one of the crucial instigators and innovators of the film production (he was employed with Ufa) and a bridge-builder between the industry and the avant-garde while Münzenberg ran an international conglomerate of communist media outlets. The fact that all of them were able to occupy multiple positions – scriptwriter and critic (later also teacher and director), producer and lecturer, head of a publishing house and propagandist – testifies to the flexible nature of film culture in this period. This was the climate from which the avant-garde was able to emerge.

The first wave of serious writing on the cinema in France appeared at around the same time: three influential books were published in French in 1925. Georges Michel Coissac’s \textit{Histoire du cinéma} was mainly a history of the technological and industrial development of the film whereas Léon Moussinac’s \textit{Naissance du cinéma} argued from an avant-garde position in which film’s potential as art was based on plastic and rhythmic elements. Furthermore, Moussinac summed up the evolution of the cinema through various stages in different nations. The third serious contender, Henri Fescourt’s and Jean-Louis Bouquet’s \textit{L’Idée et l’écran}, conceptualised cinema as a popular art of storytelling that was possibly in need of refining its style and method, yet should not revert to abstraction or pure rhythm. These three books illustrate central positions of the French discourse in the first half of the 1920s between the drive towards abstraction and the attempt to create an innovative narrative and popular cinema. In a somewhat similar vein wrote British film critic and founding member of the \textit{Film Society} of London Iris Barry in \textit{Let’s Go to the Pictures} (1926) about the cinema as a popular art form.\textsuperscript{19}

This initial wave of books attempted on the one hand to sum up the evolution of the cinema over the first 30 years while on the other hand they wanted to point the way in which cinema should and could be advancing. Apart from Moussinac’s and Münzenberg’s treatises this first round of serious publications on the cinema was characterised by cautionary works geared towards an elevation of the cinema into the canon of the established arts. It appears safe to conclude that around 1925 the avant-garde was still a miniscule object that had not yet realised to any extent the radical potential inherent in the movement. Yet, this would change in a very short time. A few years later the impact of the Soviet cinema left not only a strong impression on filmmaking and criticism, but a number of books attest to the influence that Eisenstein & Co. had on Western European film in the second half of the 1920s. In French Pierre Marchand and René Weinstein reported on \textit{L’art dans la Russie nouvelle: Le cinéma (1917–1926)} (1927) while Léon Moussinac
explained *Le cinéma sovietique* (1928). German critic Alfred Kerr celebrated *Russische Filmkunst* (1927) while the Anglo-Swiss POOL-collective published Winifred Bryher’s report on *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* (1929). All these books were reactions to the sudden and unexpected appearance of the Soviet montage cinema. Whereas the books that were published around 1925 still originated from a frame mostly defined by national culture and language, the reception of the Soviet cinema acted as a unifying element for the separate schools and styles. Thanks to the wave of Soviet films a certain synchronicity was achieved in the major avant-garde centres of Western Europe. Moreover, the »Russenfilme« carried the forceful promise that film could be and would be an agent of social, political and cultural change – the cinema took on a new urgency and significance for many observers. Even though these films were often halted by censorship and not seen by huge audiences their discursive promise and battle cry was heard widely. As I have elaborated in chapter five on the imaginary dimension of the Soviet cinema, the art and culture of the young and revolutionary country was an avant-garde promise by the fact of its sheer existence. Or, to most conservative observers, it meant the threat of imminent revolution.

Just as the film societies and ciné-clubs peaked around 1930, a number of important books came out in these crucial years when the avant-garde seemed on the verge of a breakthrough into a mass movement. Accompanying the *Werkbund*-exhibition »Film und Foto«, in itself an international affair, was a pair of books on photography and the cinema: Hans Richter’s *Filmgegner von heute – Filmfreunde von morgen* (1929) and Werner Graeff’s *Es kommt der neue Photograph!* (1929). These two books formulated a programme of an alternative aesthetic and social use of audiovisual media supported by many examples. Richter’s and Graeff’s publications, along with the touring exhibition and the film programmes, formed a veritable media offensive. Also in 1929 two radical books were published: Léon Moussinac’s *Panoramique du cinéma* lobbied – among other things – for the foundation of an international library and cinémathèque to preserve the heritage of the cinema; in the most important Dutch book on film theory before World War Two, *Cinema Militans*, Menno ter Braak argued for a cinema built on the parameters of rhythm and form. Only a year later Paul Rotha of the London Film Society joined ranks with *The Film Till Now* (1930) which proved to be an influential film history well into the postwar era. One can already sense a decisive shift from the immediate years before 1930 in which the radical transformation of cinema appeared imminent to contemporary observers while Rotha’s book was one of the first concise histories of the cinema, testifying to the sense that the past was gaining ground over the future. A similar development took place in all centres of the avant-garde: Guido Bagier wrote on *Der kommende Film* in 1928 looking optimistically forward to sound cinema while Rudolf Arnheim’s swan song for silent cinema *Film als Kunst* (1932, translated the following year into English) only a few years later cast a nostalgic glance back on an era. Béla Balázs’ summary *Der
Avant-garde Culture

*Geist des Films* came out in 1930, while C.A. Lejeune's cautious collection *Cinema* was published in 1931, and Ilja Ehrenburg's influential novel *Die Traumfabrik* was translated into German in 1931. While these works in some respects still illustrate the enthusiasm and high hopes they nevertheless already display the fault lines along which the avant-garde differentiated. Some writers (Ehrenburg, Moussinac, Richter) believed in the revolutionary capacities of the cinema while others (ter Braak, Arnheim) were ultimately more interested in formal parameters of film. Yet, for a short moment these preoccupations overlapped and the intersection of these two sectors could form the avant-garde. Lejeune worked as a film critic for British mainstream newspapers and argued in favour of an ambitious art cinema. Bagier was a protagonist of the introduction of sound in Germany that was supported by large capital interests (Siemens & Halske, AEG), yet he gave commissions for early sound films to Walter Ruttmann and founded a ciné-club with Hans Richter.

Nonetheless, the most lasting impression possibly was made by the many translations of Russian theory that were circulating in these years: a German edition of *Filmregie und Filmmanuskript* was available in 1928 and an English one of *On Film Technique* in 1929 (the expanded version was translated by Montagu as *Film Technique and Film Acting* in 1933–35) and the release of Sergei Eisenstein's *STAROE I NOVOE* (SU 1926-29, *The Old and the New*) was accompanied by a German book, to mention only some book-length studies. The reception of Soviet theory is in many respects characterised by an »Ungleichzeitigkeit«, to borrow a term from Ernst Bloch, a seemingly temporal synchronicity which nevertheless testifies to an uneven development, to different states that coexist in the same time. Dziga Vertov provides a good example for this paradox temporality: Vertov was a pioneer of revolutionary filmmaking and groundbreaking theory in the early 1920s Soviet Union, but he only got known in the West in 1929 when he travelled extensively in Western Europe, gave lectures in major filmmaking and avant-garde centres and translations of his texts were published in important magazines. The reception of Soviet theory in the West was decidedly different from the Soviet reception as Vertov was read at a time when he was under attack in the Soviet Union from the increasingly conservative nomenklatura, but also from the young turks of *Novy Lef*. This inverted perspective explains some of the peculiarities of the Western European reception. On the whole, one can read the development of the avant-garde through the publishing activities: from humble beginnings to a multiplication of magazines the peak was reached with numerous translations of Soviet directors appearing around 1930. After 1930 the stream became wider, but also more steady and calm: whereas before film's radical novelty and difference and the promise of its possibilities had carried a revolutionary furour. The 1930s showed a functional differentiation in which the amateur movement, the documentary movement, political filmmaking and other streaks departed and the
cross-over potential that had pushed the avant-garde forward receded into the background.

To fully comprehend the avant-garde it is important to realise the aspect of the media offensive. Even the canonised network nodes have only been uncovered partly: it is generally known that Close Up was an influential film journal, but there was a whole institution formed around. Anne Friedberg has described the trans-national nature of the venture: »Close Up hoped to combine the climate of alternative production and exhibition established by the French ciné-clubs and cinéastes with the stylistic lessons of Soviet experimentation with montage and from this fertile hybrid, to help revitalise the British cinema.« Under the label POOL which was formed around the editorial triumvirate of H.D., Kenneth MacPherson, and Bryher eight books were published between 1927 and 1929 – four of them on film: Oswald Blakestone’s examinations of studio life Through a Yellow Glass, 1928, Eric Eliot’s technical manual Anatomy of Motion Picture Art, 1928, Bryher’s study of the Soviet cinema Film Problems of Soviet Union, 1929, and of British film studios Extra Passenger, 1930. Moreover, POOL produced three short films – WING BEAT (CH 1927, H.D.)26, FOOTHILLS (CH 1929), and MONKEY’S MOON (CH 1929) – and one feature-length film: BORDERLINE (CH 1930, Kenneth MacPherson). Except for this last film which has entered the list of classics available and is screened on a more or less regular basis the books as well as the short films are virtually unknown. Instead of being a stand-alone periodical Close Up was an element of a much wider Medienverbund in which ideas about film were developed, discussed and made public. The existence of this media concept depended crucially on the financial contributions of a patron: Bryher had inherited a considerable fortune from his father which he used for the financing of various avant-garde and modernist activities. Independence hinged on personal wealth in this case – one of the crucial issues for the avant-garde that was never solved. Other examples of alternative networks can be discerned in Willi Münzenberg’s empire (copying strategies employed by industry magnates such as the right-wing Alfred Hugenberg) or in the attempts of the Dutch Filmliga. Publishing in these years was normally seen as an element of an attempt at restructuring the cinema.

4.2 Teaching

Teaching film is a topic that has so far not garnered a lot of interest in film history. Certain institutions have produced brochures, books or texts on their own history,
but they are mostly self-celebratory and often produced on the occasion of anniversaries. Despite the negligence in film studies I believe that teaching and vocational training were an integral element of the avant-garde conception of restructing the cinema: by creating a new generation of practitioners one could guarantee the sustained activities of the institutions and networks, by passing on ideas the avant-garde strived for the multiplying position of the teacher. Quite logically, teaching should not be seen as a secondary or tertiary job taken on to increase status or to make a living, but in its attempt to stabilise and sustain an alternative network of film culture, teaching logically occupies a central position. Moreover, teaching also requires an active reflection on the practice that otherwise often goes unquestioned; thus, teaching reinforces the tendency to theorise and reflect upon practice already inherent in the avant-garde. Teaching always presupposes a certain measure of self-reflexivity. In a systemic logic, teaching could be seen as a step towards the self-reflexive auto-poiesis of the system. The constructive reproduction of the avant-garde position achieved through teaching could lead to stabilisation and autonomy of the system. The more people were drawn to avant-garde convictions, the more support could be expected for the network of films, magazines, screening clubs and cinemas. Not coincidentally, it was in the Soviet Union that the first film school was founded – the avant-garde spirit of the revolutionary country was sure that the education of a new generation was a paramount task in the construction of a communist reality. Teaching in the Soviet Union not only began earlier and was undertaken in a more intensive manner than in other countries, it also was most experimental in form: traditional hierarchies were toppled, conservative teaching methods were discarded and radical forms were put to the test. Especially teaching methods modelled on project work or workshop situation fitted well within avant-garde conceptions of overcoming distinctions between theory and practice.

In France (cycles of) lectures were a mainstay of the flourishing scene of ciné-clubs that developed at first in Paris and later spread throughout the country. While the orientation of many societies was not on teaching *per se*, conferences (i.e. extended introductions to films or evaluations afterwards) soon evolved into lecture cycles that could be classified at attempts to systematise and mediate ideas and conceptions about the cinema. A first major series of lectures was held in conjunction with the exhibition »L’Exposition de l’art dans le cinéma français« at the *Musée Galliera* in May and June of 1924, a second cycle in October 1924. Talks were given by central figures of the avant-garde scene such as Léon Moussinac, Marcel L’Herbier, Jaque Catelain, Robert Mallet-Stevens, Jean Epstein and others. A year later the new *Ciné-club de France* organised a lecture cycle at the recently opened *Théâtre du Vieux Colombier* from 28 November 1925 to 20 February 1926 with a similar cast of speakers: Jean Epstein, Jean Tedesco, Germaine Dulac, Marcel L’Herbier. Contrary to commercial cinema which sold the cinema experience as such, the avant-garde created a whole system with
magazines and lectures as an integral part of a new kind of cinema. Yet, with the possible exception of Moussinac’s *Les amis de Spartacus*, the French institutions were not radical in their teaching formats. Lectures and other formats of frontal teaching reinforce a hierarchy between teacher and pupil and a situation in which knowledge originates with a figure of authority contrary to avant-garde ideals.

Within the circles of the European avant-garde of the 1920s the *Bauhaus* was probably the institution that went furthest towards realising crucial avant-garde ideals: breaking down the distinction between life and art (working and living spaces are pushed into one another in Gropius’ building in Dessau), tearing down the separation between the arts, overcoming the limitations of the studio, putting ideas into practice (in the settlement Dessau-Törten of Walter Gropius and the *Laubenganghäuser* of Hannes Meyer as well as in Gropius’ *Arbeitsamt*) and connecting the production of art-works and crafts-work with teaching and debating, theorising and publishing (*Bauhaus-Bücher*). In the *Bauhaus* this impulse of turning an aesthetic revolution into a social revolution was strongest, yet in retrospect it was only really utopian in the short years of the Weimar Republic when a relative stability (1924-29) allowed it to prosper during the stint at Dessau. The dual teaching system of combining craftsmanship and art aimed at overcoming distinctions such as between theory and practice, creativity and technique or form and content. In this respect, the *Bauhaus* was one of the few attempts for realising avant-garde ideas over a certain duration, at a specific place and with a relatively stable personnel. Crucially, the *Bauhaus* adopted the metaphor of the laboratory in which teaching (and research) was an integral part of cultural development.

Talking more specifically about film, László Moholy-Nagy was the key figure to work in photography and cinema at the *Bauhaus*. Originally hired in March 1922 as a successor to Johannes Itten for giving the general introductory course (»Vorkurs«) and as director of the metal workshop, Moholy-Nagy was later teaching photography and also responsible for film activities at the *Bauhaus*. Yet, practical film work only happened seldomly and intermittently as the *Bauhaus* never managed to establish a veritable film workshop, one of the reasons why Moholy-Nagy moved to Berlin in 1928 to pursue filmmaking. Film activities took place within the context of the institution at irregular intervals, for example the screening of a film programme on the occasion of the opening of the famous Gropius-building in Dessau. This new complex of connected buildings had an auditorium equipped for cinema and the programme consisted of documentary and educational films. Published at the *Bauhaus* in the celebrated series of books was Moholy-Nagy’s influential treatise on painting, photography and film. In 1930, two years after Moholy-Nagy had departed as a teacher from the *Bauhaus*, then-director Hannes Meyer reported to the mayor of Dessau that he had secured the collaboration of Dziga Vertov and Hans Richter as teachers. Yet, before the course started, the institution had to leave Dessau for political reasons the same year (the Nazis became part of the city government and cancelled the financial and
organisational support) and Meyer resigned as director. The Bauhaus was continued by Mies van der Rohe in Berlin with a strong focus on architecture, so this collaboration and venturing of the Bauhaus into the cinema did not materialise. In the mid-1920s while still at the Bauhaus Moholy-Nagy was still hoping for the film industry as the sponsor of an experimental film school:

The turn from the utopian attempt to reconcile art and life towards a more functionalist and pragmatic approach is apparent in the transition from the Bauhaus’ initial dogma of a »Synthese von Kunst und Handwerk am Bau« (1919, »The synthesis of art and handicraft in building«) to the new slogan »Kunst und Technik – eine neue Einheit« (1923, »Art and technology – a new unity«). On the one hand this turn illustrates a new realism that no longer hopes for an esoteric new human being and a clear acceptance of facts, but on the other it also runs the danger of falling victim to an ideology of pure efficiency devoid of utopian expectations. One possible solution might be to see functionalism not as the soulless dictatorship of efficiency, but to reconsider functionalism as including emotional and affective aspects of the individual.  

For an understanding of the avant-garde it is crucial to see that teaching forms a central part of their whole strategy. Moholy-Nagy traversed all traditional borders between the arts as he worked in painting and photography, film and sculpture, typography and graphic design, scenography, shop window and exhibition design. Yet, and maybe above all, he was a theorician and a teacher who in true avant-garde fashion never severed artistic production from vocational work or theorising. He taught all his life at various institutions, most famously at the Bauhaus, but also in England and the United States:

Moholy-Nagy called on the state to found studios, schools or workshops for educational and experimental purposes – the question of in/dependence was not only within film circles highly debated, but formed a key issue for the constructivist avant-garde which aimed at a transformation of life and art and tried to address a wide public by going into sectors of industrial design. Thus, the problem arose who the avant-garde should choose as a sponsor and source of income.

As the Bauhaus was never able to install a workshop for film, it remained a marginal place for the cinema, just as Moholy-Nagy’s film experiments date from a time after quitting the school. Important teaching activities were often taking place within the framework of film societies. In November/December of 1929, Sergei Eisenstein and Hans Richter were giving a three-weeks-course for the Film Society Study Group, a subdivision of the London Film Society. Hans Richter has retrospectively remembered this workshop:


Eisenstein lectured in English, while Richter shot a short film with the students, EVERYDAY (GB 1929/1975) which was only edited much later into a film. Among the participants of the workshop were later prominent figures of the British documentary movement such as Basil Wright, Mark Segal, Lionel Britton, Michael Hankinson and Len Lye. Six lecturers were given by Eisenstein from 19 to 29 November 1929 on the following topics: script technique, montage and rapid editing, conflict and solution, first form of expression: psychology, second form of expression: montage, third form of expression: allegory.41 In Britain, vocational activity and filmmaking was perhaps as closely intertwined as elsewhere only in the Soviet Union. John Grierson for example was not running his film units with the ambition to become a »director« or even »artists« in the conventional sense. He wanted to firmly establish film as a medium of persuasion and reform, run a state-sponsored agency and give training to a number of young activists. In fact, a contemporary observer like the émigré photographer Wolfgang Suschitzky remembers Grierson and Rothe not so much as filmmakers, but primarily as teachers:

Film und lernte alles, was er über Film wusste, in der praktischen Erfahrung. [...] Grierson und Rothen wollten die Menschen in diesem Land über Armut und über Medizin und Gesundheit aufklären. Rothen schrieb mehrere Bücher. [...] Er war ein Filmtheoretiker. Er schrieb zum Beispiel über russische Filme, die hier in England fast gänzlich unbekannt waren, weil sie zensiert wurden. Wir hatten aber die Möglichkeit, manche Filme von Vertov, Pudovkin und Eisenstein in privaten Vorstellungen zu sehen. Es gab einen Filmklub und ein Kino in Regent Street, die importierte russische Filme zeigten.42

When John Grierson set up his film unit one of his first activity was to introduce regular screenings of films made outside the Empire Marketing Board. On the one hand, this helped Grierson to shape his ideas of how propaganda was handled in other countries, on the other it also provided illustrative material for the aspiring filmmakers in Grierson's unit. Grierson himself described these viewing sessions:

[W]e must have seen every propaganda film in existence between Moscow and Washington. We certainly prepared the first surveys of the propaganda and educational services of the principal Governments. We ran, too, a school of cinema where all the films we thought had a bearing on our problem were brought together and demonstrated in whole or part, for the instruction of Whitehall.... We had all the documentaries and epics worth a damn; though, in calculation of our audience, we had perforce to change a few endings and consider some of the close-ups among the less forceful arguments.43

The films being screened resemble a typical programme from the film societies: a handful of the German and French avant-garde and abstract classics (Walter Ruttmann, Alberto Cavalcanti) mixed with many Soviet montage films and the addition of Robert Flaherty's films which held special significance for Grierson.

In Germany, the left-wing Volksfilmverband organised several courses on film topics: the first issue of the new organ of the society, Film und Volk, announced a film course by Bela Balasz that was accompanied by screenings and ran over several Sundays.44 Erwin Piscator, to turn to another example from German left-wing activists, was one of the most celebrated innovators in the theatre. He had pioneered the use of projected film in his theatre shows in the 1920s45, on which George Grosz, Curt Oertel, Walter Ruttmann, Leo Lania, Svend Noldan, László Moholy-Nagy, Albrecht Viktor Blum and others collaborated.46 In 1929 he initiated a school for theatre and film in Berlin with the intention of educating a new generation of theatre workers while at the same time acting as a laboratory for his many theatre projects. With the introduction of sound film, Piscator saw an increased influence of the theatre on the cinema. Responsible as teachers for the film section were László Moholy-Nagy, Béla Balázs, Carl Oertel, Guttmann, Hanns Eisler, Leo Lania.47 Many more avant-garde activists can be seen in this line. In Paris, Germaine Dulac taught film at the Ecole Technique de Photographie et de Cinématographie in the 1930s.48
Despite all these crucial teaching activities in France, Germany, England, the Netherlands and other Western countries the hotbed of teaching was the Soviet Union in terms of intensity as well as regarding the innovation of new methods. Vance Kepley has examined the workshop of Lev Kuleshov in more detail which was characterised by three interrelated aspects: »an interest in the precision of science [...] the social influence of modern industrial practice [...]and] the tradition of pragmatism in pedagogy«. In fact, education was a crucial factor after the Bolsheviks had seized power as they realised that the future of the revolution depended on a re-education of both an elite to lead the country, but also of the masses that would advance the country at the basis of farm and factory work. Thus, while the cinema played a central role in the instruction of the masses (due partly to the widespread analphabetism, but also in a push for new methods of persuasion), filmmaking itself was to be advanced by breeding a next generation of practitioners who would carry on the task of creating a truly Soviet cinema. In this perspective, the cinema has first and foremost an instructional value that in turn gives rise to its social use value. Aesthetic experiments are in this perspective neither an end in themselves nor a valued category, but only necessary insofar as the new times required a new style for creating a new man. Not surprisingly then, many of the most valued Soviet film filmmakers (including Kuleshov, Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Vertov) devoted considerable time of their career to teaching and building up the State Film Institute (the first of its kind) – an activity quite unthinkable in Hollywood in any period (where most directors only start teaching, if at all, once they retire from active filmmaking). While this has often been interpreted in traditional historiography as a retreat from the heavily policed public sphere of the Stalinist 1930s, it remains questionable if the education of the next generation would be less decisive and politicised for the state than filmmaking. If those activists denounced as »formalists« were considered to be completely unreliable (i.e. if that was the reason why the directors were »not allowed« to make films anymore), one would have hardly trusted them to educate the next generation of filmmakers. I rather believe that the more experimental work of the 1920s was seen in the following decade as a phase, necessary yet passing, and that those in the forefront of the development in the 1920s were still useful, yet in another function. Thus, education was a suitable field for this first wave of innovators of the Soviet cinema as they would communicate the revolutionary fervour of the first decade of the Soviet cinema to the students.

The Moscow-based State Film Institute (GTK) has often been called the first film school in the world. Even though there were simultaneous activities in Petrograd, these proved to be rather short-lived courses dealing with cinema while the State Film Institute had a lasting influence on further developments in teaching film. It was founded in 1919 when the authorities realised that the majority of the experts of the Tsarist cinema had fled the country and that specialists were badly needed in all technical aspects of filmmaking. In an effort to make the education of
those specialists efficient and centralised, Vladimir Gardin was appointed to set up such a film school which started classes in the summer of 1919.\textsuperscript{50} Despite the revolutionary utopianism of the early Soviet Union the atmosphere at the State Film Institute has been characterised as a »spirit of pragmatism«.\textsuperscript{51} While this might be true, the attention to project work, problem solving and hands-on learning did also adhere to avant-garde ideals of the artist-engineer. Over the course of the 1920s, the improvised vocational school developed into an established institute of higher education (the Soviet version of a university). Simultaneously, the emphasis of teaching shifted from hands-on project work to a more formalised and abstract academic training. Estimates as to the success of this undertaking differ widely. Some have lauded the installation of the school and its innovative approaches to teaching while others have pointed out the practical problems resulting from a lack of funds and experience.\textsuperscript{52} A crucial example was Kuleshov's workshop which was active from 1922 to 1926. In these courses Kuleshov tried to break with tried formulas of teaching:

In Kuleshov's application of project teaching, research and training went hand-in-hand. There was no scholastic tradition to be passed on but a new field, cinema, to be explored by teacher and student alike. [...] Classes ignored most tried academic rituals. [...] No formal grades were ever issued. [...] A sense of shared responsibility governed the classes.\textsuperscript{53}

As already mentioned earlier, Kuleshov and his students started staging »films without film«, turning necessity into advantage as no film material was available and the workshop was attempting to emulate editing and rapid scene transition on a theatre stage. These productions can be seen as »a scientific inquiry into the nature of cinema [...] as a de facto laboratory: [Pudovkin] consciously imitated the rituals and rhetoric of science to justify his theoretical claims.«\textsuperscript{54} The »films without film« also followed the wider cultural logic of the Soviet Union before the first Five-Year-Plan came into effect: the arts were able to open upon an utopian field on which the hope of future development could be projected. As reality was so shockingly desolate that it could not act as a measuring stick anyway, wildly futuristic ideas could be tried out. Just as architects were drawing plans that would be never realised, so Kuleshov's workshop staged films that were never (meant to be) shot. The strategy discernible in the Soviet film school serves to illustrate the multi-level approach that the avant-garde took: making different films was just one element, the main purposes of the activity was rather to make film differently – to restructure the institution cinema, especially the relationship between spectator and film.

The State Film Institute was founded as a tekhnikum, a practical school for vocational training organised around workshops and practical work. Within the four-year teaching period, students worked closely with mentors – most of the big names of Soviet cinema taught at one time or another at the school – and were also
Discourses and Networks

involved in production work outside the school context. While this scheme partly grew out of necessity, it also illustrates an approach to cinema that combines intellectual development with practical work. After several restructuring efforts in the 1920s under the direct influence of Lunarcharski the school became more of an academic institute, yet what remained from the initial spirit was the proximity of filmmakers to the institute. In 1932 Eisenstein was added as a permanent member to the school’s faculty and he brought many collaborators with him like Esfir Shub who led the editing section in Eisenstein’s directing classes. Simultaneous to this recognition that film required a wide context was the institution of a film archive. The GTK founded its cinémathèque in 1931 starting with a collection of 500 Soviet and foreign films. In 1932 an »Office for the History of Soviet Film« was founded. Finally in 1934 Nikolai Lebedev, a film historian, was appointed as head of the institution marking the increased status of history, archive and canon in the Soviet context – yet, in tune with developments in other countries. It was this functional differentiation into film history, vocational film education, archiving, screening alternative films and the cinema in the service of the national that is characteristic of the 1930s.55

4.3 Event Culture: Exhibitions, Conferences, Festival

...à La Sarraz c’est d’armement qu’il est question, armement rapide et minutieux, mobilisation générale de toutes les unités agissant, préparation de plans de campagne définis en vue d’assurer au film artistique sa place au soleil et aux gourmets des salles obscures un régal, au moins, par semaine.

Freddy Chevalley (1929)56

While the formation of a steady base of subscribing supporters and regular screening activities was instrumental for the creation of an alternative cinema culture, another necessary activity for the construction of an international network was the organisation of events which could draw together many different activists while also mobilising an audience and creating a public sphere. These events can be seen as trial runs for a different kind of cinema culture: while the film societies with their local constituencies, the logistic, financial and organisational limitations of obtaining films and guests and their relatively long breaks between activities could at best achieve a circumscribed activity, special events tried to create a temporary utopia. Especially the meeting in La Sarraz (and to a lesser degree the exhibition in Stuttgart) can be seen as trial runs for an avant-gardistic future in which films were reintegrated into life and the avant-garde would rest on a broad international basis of support. Some of these events were planned and executed by the film industry and offered the avant-garde a side-bar or a specific section where they could gather within a larger context, sometimes – as in the cases of the events

156
in Stuttgart or La Sarraz – they were specifically organised by and for the avant-garde. These events that I will discuss here were even more trans-national than the film clubs because they aimed at international audiences and their event character motivated many key figures of the film avant-garde to participate.

Every country had its energy centre which acted as a kind of metronome for the wider context of alternative cinema culture: in France it was the cluster of cinemas and ciné-clubs in Paris devoted to experimental work, in Britain it was the Film Society of London later joined by the nation-wide Workers’ Film Societies, in the Netherlands it was the Filmliga based in Amsterdam and Rotterdam and in Germany it was divided by the fault line between the artistic circles and the political activists, yet also pretty closely woven with some activists constantly transgressing the invisible line. Even though the search for an origin and a »first time« that Ivor Montagu articulates in his retrospective appraisal of the Film Society is highly problematic in historiographic terms, it is nevertheless noteworthy how he recognises all the different sectors that the Film Society was active in:

> We were the first to hold a public exhibition of set designs (Leni), a public discussion of a feature (after MOTHER), a lecture of practice (Pudovkin’s paper »Doing Without Actors«) and an instructional course on theory (Eisenstein’s, attended by a scintillating array of current and future British directors and technicians).<ref>

One could take issue with some of Montagu’s contentions (arguing for other places and times), but it would prove ultimately futile who and when the first time was as the Soviet Union as much as France could claim similar incidences for their national cinema culture. Montagu even forgets to mention the innovation of teaching with Hans Richter’s course on practical film making which was taking place together with Eisenstein’s theory seminar. Nevertheless, Montagu demonstrates a clear grasp of the scope of activity typical of these alternative movements.

One of the first formats that was used besides screening clubs were exhibitions: they had an important function as they could draw together at a specific place and for a limited period of time more energy than could be generated in (ir)regular weekly or monthly activities. Exhibitions were nodes to focus energy, cross-roads where biographical, stylistic and national paths would cross while also showcases in which a wider public was addressed than that normally attending the film societies. Moreover, exhibitions could lend an important support for the legitimisation of film as an accepted art form. By emulating strategies typical of the visual arts, the cinema attempted to increase its status as an art form. Nor surprisingly, France with its intellectual and artistic scene was the pacemaker as far as exhibitions were concerned. The ciné-club ran by Ricciotto Canudo, Club des amis du septième art (CASA), was frequented by artists and intellectuals. Through their joint effort they were able to include film programmes and lectures on film in
Discourses and Networks

the prestigious Salon d’Automne, a visual art exhibition. For three years, from 1921 to 1924, the film programme ran back to back with the exhibition and often fragments accompanied the lectures making this event also a pioneer in early teaching activity. The increasing convergence of different cinéma-clubs and the generally favourable devotion to the cinema in Parisian intellectual circles led to a major exhibition on the cinema from May through October 1924 at the Musée Galliera, the »Exposition de l’art dans le cinéma français«.58

The situation in Germany was markedly different: whereas in France the avant-garde movement emerged clearly from the ranks of intellectuals and artists in literature or visual arts, the proximity of avant-garde and industry in Germany was much closer than in other countries. In retrospect it is difficult to judge if this is rather a cause or an effect of the orientation of the German avant-garde towards constructivism, just as French filmmaking was inspired by concepts such as photogénie and lyrical or musical analogies.59 Exhibitions in Germany were characterised by a relatively strong film industry presence (compared to France) that occasionally crossed over into avant-garde circles. One regular event was the Funkausstellung (radio communication exhibition) which took place annually in Berlin from 1924 onwards. At the 5th edition in 1928, the year in which the first experimental television transmission was presented, the premiere of Ruttmann’s early experimental sound film DEUTSCHE WELLE – TÖNENDER RUNDFUNK (DE 1928) took place within the context of the exhibition. The film was a cross-section of German cities explaining the functioning of the young radio system. The Funkausstellung in general aimed at demonstrating the convergence of radio, television, and (sound) film, but being a show of consumer culture it was dominated by the industry.60

A big event foreshadowing in some ways later developments was the Kino- und Photoausstellung (Kipho) in Berlin, from 25 September to 5 October 1925. The exhibition mixed technical, economic, social, educational and artistic concerns and proved to be a huge audience success, drawing approximately 100,000 spectators. The exhibition itself shows a mixed approach similar to the concept of the Funkausstellung (a consumer show in which the industry had a ready-made showcase for its products) and more artistically minded conferences. The Kipho was characterised by conflicting interests and divergent meetings so the whole remained a singular event because it ultimately lacked a clear focus: it attempted to cater to the industry as well as to the mass audience, it was interested in artistic and educational as well as in economic and cultural matters. Even though it drew an enormous number of visitors the conference nevertheless had a frame so wide that it was not followed up.

Probably the most famous avant-garde trace of this event is Guido Seeber’s short propaganda KIPHO-FILM for the exhibition which was screened as a trailer in regular cinemas. In a playful manner the film marked the beginning co-operation of the avant-garde with the industry. The film also inaugurated the trend for avant-
garde films advertising public events, such as the film promoting the touring health exhibition GeSoLei (Gesundheitspflege, Soziale Fürsorge, Leibesübungen) put together by the Dresden Hygienemuseum which commissioned Walter Ruttman’s DER AUFTIEG (DE 1926) or Hans Richter’s film for the Swiss Werkbund in support of their exhibition DIE NEUE WOHNUNG (CH 1930). Even though Seeber is a marginal figure to the avant-garde movement the KIPHO-film, standing at the beginning of avant-garde filmmaking in Germany, demonstrates the inextricable proximity of avant-garde and industry. The film introduces an early trailer-format using famous images in combination with surprising tricks and montages: scenes from DAS CABINET DES DR. CALIGARI (DE 1919/20, Robert Wiene), WEGE ZU KRAFT UND SCHÖNHEIT (DE 1924/25, Wilhelm Prager), and DIE NIBELUNGEN (DE 1922-24, Fritz Lang) are seen besides a caricature of DER LETZTE MANN (DE 1924, F.W. Murnau) and Ottomar Anschütz’ pre-cinematic device Schnellseher. At first the screen is split kaleidoscopically into five fields with rapidly changing motives showing scenes of film production: decorations are being built, film is being dried on gigantic drums, during the shooting in the studio a record player is running. Then a title announces »Du musst...« followed by a shot of Caligari outside his tent on a fairground as a Barker, then the title »...zur Kipho« and another film clip showing the audience entering Caligari’s tent. Here, the short film puns on the famous and modern campaign for the film on its initial cinema release in 1920 which had as its tag line »Du musst ... Caligari werden«. The KIPHO-trailer evokes the transformative power of cinema not only in a highly self-reflexive way as it uses the paradigmatic status of certain scenes for a self-presentation of the industry that produces these commodities. The short film also comments on the (alleged) origins of the cinema as a fairground attraction and ironically conjures film’s quasi-mystical power for transformation while also laying open the steps in the production chain that are normally masqueraded and invisible in the finished product. The audience invited into the tent (i.e. the exhibition) will gain an exclusive view from behind the scenes of filmmaking, this is the promise of this short film. In the first part the trailer shows the process of fabrication in an almost constructivist fashion – prefiguring in some ways Dziga Vertov’s later CELOVEK S KINOAPPARATOM (SU 1929) – while the second part winks ironically at the overall impression that the finished film delivers: cinema is at the same time an industrial product that consists of a number of separate steps in a production chain that can be isolated conceptually and visually, yet it also overwhelms like a magic trick and it envelops and fascinates just like the fairground crowd is lured into the tent and then hypnotised by cinema’s specular power. With cinema – the KIPHO-film seems to say – one can have one’s cake and eat it too. Cinema is the perfect match of a rational and industrial product with irrational and hypnotising forces. In this way, the short film fits in with avant-garde preoccupations of exploring the fundamental basic tenets of the medium. Not
coincidentally, Hans Richter included Seeber’s film in his programmatic retrospection on the occasion of the 1929 FiFo-exhibition in Stuttgart.

Besides, the inclusion of scenes from Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari is anything but coincidental as the paradigmatic status of the film for the avant-garde is hard to over-estimate and the same allegorical shortcut between mystical powers and modern technology mediated by avant-garde style is already exhibited in Caligari itself.63 Part of the success of the film relies on its power to speak on multiple levels to multiple audiences: by borrowing visual tropes and techniques from visual arts it promised to an educated audience a cinema experience elevated to the status of art and by borrowing motives and narrative tricks from genres as sensationalist as the detective film and the fantastic film it offered a mass audience the thrills associated with the popular medium. To spectators outside Germany it provided an acceptable image of the erstwhile enemy, filtered through distorted shapes and convoluted plot fulfilling expectations connected to the brooding and gloomy Germans.64 It was not lost on contemporary observers that this kind of film had only five years later transformed from a style in an art-historical sense to a style of modernity, typical of fashion and advertisement. Rudolf Arnheim remarked on a revival of Caligari in October 1925 (possibly on the occasion of the Kipho) that the tag line »Du musst Caligari werden« (»You have to become Caligari«) only conjured up associations with the cigarette advertising slogan »Du darfst nur Walasco rauchen!« (»You may only smoke Walasco!«) The cinema as medium and cultural force cannot be isolated from popular culture at large – therefore style in the cinema is always fashion and design. Seeber’s trailer knowingly alluded to this multiplicity of levels on which the avant-garde was operating.

A similar conference to Kipho was organised by film industry and specialised press from 14 April to 15 May 1928 in Den Haag: the Internationale Tentoonstelling op filmgebied (»International Exhibition on Film«) with presentations of sound films by Küchenmeister and Tri-Ergon.66 As part of this fair an international conference of educational cinema was held, the Internationale Leerfilm Conferentie.67 Maybe these events are best characterised as experimental venues for the exploration of how regular events could deal with the cinema. Andor Kraszna-Krausz has criticised these early attempts at exhibiting films for their concentration on the economic side of the cinema: »the principal mistake of all such attempts was that they had tried to show the commercial side before all and left the nucleus of the craft in the shadows of the background.«68 At least three models seem to overlap in these early exhibition formats; they were either further developed afterwards or the energy flowed elsewhere: On the one hand these conferences were copying some formulas from the specular nature of the World Fairs which lured a mass audience with modern technological wonders. A second tendency would be to see those events as catering to a trade fair audience mostly interested in a business platform. And a third model were film festivals that began to be developed as regular events in the course of the 1930s. It took several years
until different formats were found and established. The avant-garde contributed to the developments of the functional differentiation of World Fair/amusement parc, trade fair and film festival, different formats that are still with us today.

An indication of the radicalised political situation in Germany is visible in the various activities staged by the Interessengemeinschaft für Arbeiterkultur (IfA – Interest group of working class culture). In February 1930 an exhibition on working class culture was staged at the Pschorr-Haus near Potsdamer Platz in Berlin. Many communist cultural organisations were present with booths and activities. A further conference for the leaders of the IfA was taking place on 15 and 16 November 1930 in Berlin. The conference created a film division under the party-directed umbrella organisation IfA. By that time, the broad consensus that had brought left-wing socialdemocrats, pacifists, communists, liberal intellectuals and others together in the Volksfilmverband had been destroyed. The communist support of the IfA at the expense of the VFV testified to the changed communist tactics of breaking the left-wing coalition and intensifying social tensions. In fact, by instrumentalising culture and art for politics this was a more or less decisive break with the aims of the avant-garde in which political-economic transformations were inseparably intertwined with cultural-aesthetic innovations.

Another important event and a forum for the presentation of experiments in combining image and music was the music festival Festspiele Deutsche Kammermusik. The director, experimental composer Paul Hindemith, had moved the festival from Donaueschingen to Baden-Baden. For a couple of seasons the film avant-garde rubbed shoulders at this annual event with experimental composers, but they also found a ready-made audience that was accustomed to experimentation and innovative approaches, more open than an ordinary cinema audience. Especially in the years leading up to the introduction of sound the cooperation intensified and every year experiments combining experimental films with experimental music were presented at the festival to a public interested in »new music«. The collaboration between avant-garde filmmakers and musicians started seriously in 1927 when the festival took place 15-17 July. That year the festival presented one of Walter Ruttmann’s OPUS-films with music by Hanns Eisler for two clarinets, trumpet and a string trio. The same film was presented twice with the same score: once played by a live orchestra present in the auditorium (synchronised with the support of Carl Robert Blum’s Musiksynchronometer) and once with a light-sound copy from Tri-Ergon. Other films screened were FELIX THE CAT AT THE CIRCUS (US 1926) with music by Paul Hindemith specifically composed for the Welte-organ, an instrument often used in cinemas (also synchronised by Carl Robert Blum’s Musiksynchronometer) and SPRECHENDER FILM (DE 1927, Guido Bagier).

It was during the music festival of Baden-Baden in 1928 and 1929 that Hans Richter came to work with Paul Hindemith. Richter was commissioned to make a film in 1927 and he chose Hindemith to compose the music for his film.
Thus, this film is also a commissioned work, yet not in the service of the industry, but for an art market, much like today’s *documenta* or *Biennale*. The festival of Baden-Baden was at the time interested in mechanical music, in film and in radio – a veritable *Medienverbund* was in the making which traversed barriers between industry and avant-garde. The lesson of these collaborations was possibly not lost on the artists involved: by collaborating with composers, by getting used to the radio, by coping with mechanical (Blum’s device) and with filmic synchronisation (Tobis was heavily involved in this event) and by working with the film industry they changed their conception of what was important and on how to achieve their goals.

Hindemith wanted to develop original music for the mechanical organs and pianos that could be found in most large cinemas (Welte-Kinoorgeln). He was against traditional instruments or traditional tunes (from operetta, songs, etc.), but instead wanted to have mechanical music to accompany mechanical films. To that end he used Carl Robert Blum’s *Musiksynchronometer*, a machine for synchronising the speed of the film with the speed of a musical notation scroll that the musician would use as his cues. Edmund Meisel had used that chronometer for his work on Ruttmann’s *BERLIN* and Eisenstein’s *POTEMKIN* before. Darius Milhaud also worked with this machine when he wrote music accompanying newsreels for the festival edition of 1928. The film that Richter made for the festival in 1928, *VORMITTAGSSPUK*, is normally deemed important because it marks the shift for Richter from abstract to concrete representations and forms, the step from pure formal experiments to surrealism and a more immediate political engagement. In another perspective, this film could also be seen as a shift from a precarious independence to an engagement with the industry.

Documentary interest, fragmentary narratives, concrete representations of people, places, objects, figures enter the avant-garde film in the late 1920s, in the work of Richter, Ruttmann and others. Several influences seem to converge here: Firstly, the financing of the abstract films was increasingly difficult as the formal attempts did not really lead to something new; pure abstract experiments had lost their novelty appeal by the late 1920s and consequently fewer sources were willing to give money and commissions for this kind of film. In a negative formulation this testifies to a pure commercial selection. Yet again, one could argue that the avant-gardistic potential of abstraction as a strategy had worn off and had already changed into convention. The avant-garde with its self-definition of being ahead could not accept even the hint of having exhausted itself. A turn to a different strategy was only logical then. Secondly, the encounter with the Soviet montage cinema is an influence that would be hard to under-evaluate, especially Eisenstein’s *POTEMKIN* really pushed many progressively minded artists in another direction. And thirdly the increasing experiments with documentary forms, from Vertov’s essays to Grierson’s British Empire Film Board (founded in 1927), from Flaherty’s fame to Ruttmann’s city film were not lost on the artists themselves. As is so often
the case with trends: once they are set in motion the different factors that first contributed to the emergence of the trend reinforce each other.

In 1929, it was Tobis that produced the whole film programme for the Baden-Baden festival that not only boasted film programmes, but that became a legendary event thanks to the premiere of Bertolt Brecht’s and Kurt Weill’s Lindberghflug. With the introduction of sound imminent in the German cinemas, this move garnered much response and the publicity for a festival that had some years before only catered to a small and select audience of lovers of new music was considerable. The intentions of Tobis which had developed a hardware system, but desperately needed software (due to a »patents war« the American films could not be used) are easy to explain: As they did not have a R&D department they employed avant-garde artists as the commercial film workers had no feeling for experimentation. Richter claimed in this context that is was »besonders beachtenswert, daß die deutsche Tonfilm-Produktion, die Tobis, anläßlich der Baden-Badener Musikfestspiele am 25. Juli eine Anzahl von Tonfilmen vorbereitet hat, die dem Tonfilm als künstlerischem Problem gerecht werden.« Besides Richter’s VORMITTAGSSPUK (DE 1927/28) it was Richter’s ALLES DREHT SICH, ALLES BEWEGT SICH (DE 1929) with music by Walter Gronostay that premiered at the 1929-festival. Moreover, Alberto Cavalcanti’s LA P’TITE LILLI (FR 1927/28) with music by Darius Milhaud was shown. Collaborations that began here resulted in longer cooperations. Richter and Milhaud later worked together for Philips on HALLO EVERYBODY (NL 1933) and for the Centralfilm in Zürich on DIE EROBERUNG DES HIMMELS (CH 1938), Gronostay and Richter for Philips as well on EUROPÄ RADI O (NL 1931). The festival actually took place in between the Stuttgart exhibition and the La Sarraz meeting, so that a line could be drawn between the three events that summer. In fact, in his book for the Stuttgart-exhibition Filmgegner von heute – Filmfreunde von morgen Richter claimed that film composers wished that sound would find its place within the whole machinery of cinema: »Der Ton kann Geräusch, Klang oder gesprochenes Wort sein – aber sinnvoll wird er im Film erst dadurch, daß er seinen Platz in einem künstlerischen Gesamtplan erhält.« This might hint at conceptions of Medienverbund much more than Gesamtkunstwerk, a constructivist and piecemeal approach of component parts working independently towards a common goal rather than an overarching scheme of Romantic totality in which everything is subjected to one big whole. It was less a totalising vision of one concept subordinating everything than an organisation of independent networks working towards a common goal, each keeping their (relative) autonomy, such a model we find in Deleuze, the Internet or even al-quaïda. Later commentators were sometimes critical, Hanns Eisler for instance scathingly remarked on the new music festival:

Das Baden-Badener Musikfest, wo zur ersten Male Experimente mit Filmmusik unternommen wurden, die den Begriff der Gebrauchskunst abstrakt verklärten, ist
Discourses and Networks

This sounds very much like Adorno (who co-authored the book) and is of course written at a later moment in time and from a pessimistic vantage point. Adorno has argued that music was subjugated in the 1920s by radio, grammophone, film to adhere to standards that proved to be compatible with mechanical reproduction as well as with popular taste. Thus, music lost out to capitalistic practices, to shortlived trends, fads, and fashions. It had to be fitted into a system of immediate purpose-fulfilment.

The first comprehensive retrospective of the avant-garde of the 1920s took place already in 1929. The exhibition organised by the Werkbund in Stuttgart on film and photography with its film programme curated by Hans Richter and featuring an appearance by Dziga Vertov can be seen – besides La Sarraz – as the apotheosis of the avant-garde development, but it also has to be counted as the turning point when things started to go in a different direction again. The two most decisive events both took place in the summer of 1929, spatially less than 300 km apart (Stuttgart and La Sarraz) and temporally within three months (mid-June and early September respectively). The Werkbund-exhibition »Film und Foto« in summer 1929 in Stuttgart was an epoch-making event. There had been a number of exhibitions on the cinema and on modern photography before, but the FiFo was the first to concentrate on the artistic and cultural side of the medium, not being (co-)organised by institutions from the industry. The 1925-Kipho in Berlin for example had exhibited a visible film as art, but it was largely an exhibition dominated (and organised) by the industry, therefore the character of a trade fair remained. Moreover, Stuttgart had a decisive advantage of timing: by the end of the 1920s the trend of Neue Sachlichkeit had been established in the public, so the exhibition also had the function of collecting material from Germany and abroad which was seen for the first time together and contextualised, turning the photo exhibition effectively into something of a provisional appraisal and a retrospective. The announcements to be found for the FiFo in the specialised press from early 1929 onwards testify to a huge interest in the event, both in Germany, but more importantly all over Europe. Famous names put together national sections – El Lissitzky, the tireless propagandist of Soviet revolutionary art and culture, coordinated the Russian section while Piet Zwart was in charge of the Dutch contribution – and many groups and institutions took notice already well ahead of the opening.
The photo exhibition at the *Neue Städtische Ausstellungshalle* opened on 18 May 1929 and closed on 7 July 1929. In thirteen rooms the exhibition aimed at giving an overview of contemporary trends in photography. László Moholy-Nagy took upon himself the task of curating the first room which was designed to present an overview of the development of photography up to the 1920s. The remaining twelve rooms were organised by nationality. Unlike earlier photographic exhibitions, the *FiFo* had installed a jury without professional photographers in order to avoid the usual suspects which were to be found in industrial photography. The film part consisted of 15 film programmes curated by Hans Richter shown within a time span of two weeks from 13 to 26 June 1929 at the Königsbau-Lichtspiele in Stuttgart. The films were selected according to three focal points: 1. Master works of cinematic production; 2. Advances of the avant-garde; 3. Soviet features and documentaries. Two of the most striking features of Richter’s film programme are the inclusion of CHICAGO (US 1927, Frank Urson), a Cecil B. DeMille-production that is today largely forgotten, and the absence of Luis Buñuel’s and Salvador Dalí’s UN CHIEN ANDALOU (FR 1928) which was not being screened. Considering how well-connected Richter was and how carefully chosen the programme was, it is hard to believe in an oversight. Jan-Christopher Horak has argued that the film lacked a concept of film language and was excluded for that reason.

Dziga Vertov participated as the Soviet delegate and the only other lecture or conference apart from the opening night (with addresses by Geheimrat Dr. Peter Bruckmann, Heilbronn, Hans Richter on behalf of the film avant-garde and Friedrich Kurt, Stuttgart, on behalf of the *Werkbund*) was given by Dr. Edgar Beyfuss of the Ufa-Kulturfilmabteilung, in Germany a fixture in avant-garde circles who had already participated in the organisation of the matinee »Der absolute Film« in 1925. Even though Beyfuss was well-established within these circles, it is still interesting to note that Beyfuss was chosen over the likes of René Clair, Walter Ruttmann, Alberto Cavalcanti or any other protagonist of the European avant-garde movement. A possible explanation would be to point to Richter’s tireless self-promotion as an artist, theoretician and organiser (being present in Stuttgart as filmmaker, curator, *conférencier* and author of the quasi-catalogue *Filmgegner von heute – Filmfreunde von morgen*) that would not allow too many big names beside him. Yet, from a different perspective, Beyfuss’ importance at least in the German context is perhaps still underrated. Beyfuss’ central position points to the significance of Ufa in support of the avant-garde: it was Ufa that helped out Richter and Eggeling in 1920 in designing a short animation sequence (and thus started the brief blossoming of *absoluter Film* in Germany), it was Beyfuss that first screened Hans Richter’s films in the cinema in Germany when he instigated the matinee *Der absolute Film* in 1925 (with Beyfuss as a *conférencier*) and it is possible to speculate that Beyfuss had a hand in Richter’s commission for INFLATION (DE 1928) as the opener to the Ufa-
production DIE DAME MIT DER MASKE (DE 1928, Wilhelm Thiele). Besides underlining the often overlooked importance of Ufa for the German avant-garde (also Walter Ruttmann had received early and crucial assignments from Ufa such as the »dream of the falcon« sequence for Fritz Lang’s DIE NIEBULGEN, DE 1922-24), it is possible (yet speculative) that Richter repaid a favour and Beyfuss (in his capacity as a Ufa-employee) should be seen as a hidden protagonist of the avant-garde: his film WUNDER DES FILMS was also included in the Stuttgart programme. Moreover, Beyfuss’ lecture was given in conjunction with an avant-garde programme introducing a selection of now-classic works by Eggeling, Richter, Ruttmann, Clair, Cavalcanti, Chomette, Man Ray and others. Whatever Beyfuss’ real function was, the fact that he was chosen over an avant-garde artist must be considered crucial and has until now been overlooked.

When the FiFo-conference opened in Stuttgart, other cities lined up who wanted to take over the exhibition. A travelling exhibition of the photo section, already smaller than the original Stuttgart event was subsequently on display in Zürich, Danzig, Vienna, Munich, Tokyo, Osaka and Berlin, often accompanied by screenings. In Berlin, for lack of space only half of the already reduced show is on display. The exhibition opened on 19 October 1929 in the covered inner courtyard of the former Kunstgewerbemuseum (today: Martin-Gropius-Bau) and ran one month until 19 November. A film programme was hurriedly put together presenting in five matinees mostly new material at the Capitol and a programme of classics at the repertory cinema Kamera. By turning from a singular event into a travelling exhibition the FiFo attempted to overcome the limitations of a spatially and temporally circum-scribed situation that an event occupies. On the one hand, this was a failure since the exhibition was rather the crowning achievement of a development than a launch pad for future activities, but FiFo also genealogically relates to film festivals and film exhibitions. Triumph and defeat are, as is so often the case with the dialectics of the avant-garde, two sides of the same coin.

La Sarraz rightfully occupies a central position for the European avant-garde of the interwar period for a couple of reasons: never before or after have so many protagonists of the movement met in one place at one time. In terms of timing La Sarraz came at exactly the right moment in early September 1929, neither too early nor too late. Many of the key figures of these years were present either in Stuttgart or in La Sarraz (or at both occasions): Ruttmann and Richter, Balazs and Moussinac, Eisenstein, Vertov and Cavalcanti. During the La Sarraz meeting films were shown, there was even one film shot, lectures were given, discussions held. Just like in Stuttgart it was an event at which the industry was conspicuously absent. Yet, in the long run this proved to be a problem since the avant-garde was as much in need of the industry as the other way around. Nevertheless, to contemporaries it seemed as if a transnational avant-garde was on the verge of its breakthrough, yet La Sarraz marked the peak of the developments of the 1920s that
took a very different direction in the 1930s.\textsuperscript{95} In fact, one could argue that it was the coming of sound, inevitable by 1929, that brought about this upsurge for the film societies, mainly to defend some of the achievements of the silent film since people interested from a (bourgeois) artistic point-of-view had just gotten used to the idea that film had the potential of being art. This young bloom was now threatened by the evil grip of capitalist forces — to evoke the argumentation and rhetorics of those years. Even though the film societies might have profited from a certain fear of and aversion to sound, but also from a natural curiosity towards sound, they did not manage to reposition themselves in relation to sound film and changed economic and political circumstances. Yet, some problems became clear even to those present at the occasion: Hans Richter objected that G.W. Pabst had been invited (and declined the invitation) because in Richter’s opinion Pabst worked for the industry and was not an independent filmmaker. This, in turn, is held against Richter who is charged in a report on La Sarraz printed in \textit{Close Up} (their not-so-secret champion was Pabst) of unnecessarily limiting the avant-garde to abstract cinema.\textsuperscript{96} Again, the implicit aporias of the avant-garde came to the fore and showed that the superficial unity was nothing but a self-deception. Even at the crucial moment of the \textit{Congres International du Cinéma Indépendant} (CICI) the glue that held the avant-garde together showed cracks and fissures, the later breaking points and fault lines were already apparent to keen observers.

It was already in 1930 when things started to look differently even to those involved in the movement: The successor to La Sarraz was the Brussels conference (\textit{2\textdegree Congres International du Cinéma Indépendent et Moderne — CICIM}) which took place from 27 November to 2 December 1930 at the Palais des Beaux Arts.\textsuperscript{97} Following after the high hopes and the enthusiasm that had characterised the activities in the previous year around the events in Stuttgart and La Sarraz, the Brussels meeting was at the time often perceived to be a failure.\textsuperscript{98} The films screened in Brussels attest to the trouble of the avant-garde getting hold of commissions for sound films or of finished sound films. Among those present were Robert Aron, Jean Painlevé and Gustave Cauvin from Paris, Carl Vincent from Brussels, Hans Richter from Berlin, Jiminez Caballero from Spain, Kenneth MacPherson presenting \textsc{Borderline}, and Helene de Mandrot, the host of the first congress at La Sarraz.\textsuperscript{99} Of the approximately two dozen films shown at this occasion only three were sound film: King Vidor’s \textit{Hallelujah} (US 1929) and \textit{Thunder} (US 1929), a tribute to the recently deceased Lon Chaney were both not shown in its entirety, but only presented as excerpts. Walter Ruttmann’s \textit{Melodie der Welt} (1928/29), the only sound film available that could qualify as avant-garde, was screened in its entirety. Yet, in the following years interesting experimental work with sound film emerged from the circles of avant-garde. Thus, it was neither sound film in itself nor the economic grip of large corporation that hampered the further development of the avant-garde. Only a few weeks after the
conference in Brussels first provisions are being made for a third conference to be held in Berlin in May 1932, another plan that did not materialise.\textsuperscript{100}

Besides the question of sound other issues also came to the fore forcefully. The delegates in Brussels dissolved the League of Independent Cinema which had been established only the year before at La Sarraz and founded a new organisation, the Association des artistes et écrivains révolutionnaires (AEAR) which had as its main aim the fight against the rising fascism in Europe. The Italian (Enrico Prampolino) and Spanish (Juan Piqueraz) delegates objected to this decision, as they had moved into the camp of Mussolini and the Falangista respectively. This political rift was obviously unbridgeable and the conflict intensified during the 1930s. Not only this division between left-wing and right-wing activists was becoming more obvious, but there were more subtle differences within the political left: The affair around the 3-GROSCHEN-OPER (which had its premiere on 19 February 1931) with Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill on the one side, and Belá Bálasz, G.W. Pabst, and producer Nebenzal on the other was a symptom of new political alliances. These activists who met as opponents in the court room most probably would have been on the same side earlier in the 1920s. Another classic case was the public and heated debate in which Sergej Eisenstein accused Béla Bálasz of valuing the individual shot higher than the montage of the pieces, of adhering to an overly traditional aesthetic conception of realism. Nominally, they both stood on the same political ground as both Eisenstein and Bálasz were communist party members.\textsuperscript{101} For a loosely constructivist avant-garde like the Soviet filmmakers the value of art was to be found in the combination of elements, in the construction work, in the montage of pieces – and not in elements themselves who were only building blocks. Another by now classic example is the debate between Siegfried Kracauer and Walter Ruttmann. Even though Ruttmann was one of the most successful filmmakers in the second half of the 1920s Kracauer continually scolded him for his lack of political engagement, for his reliance on formal relations instead of looking at social dependencies, for his general disinterestedness.\textsuperscript{102} Kracauer makes his point perhaps most forcefully in a comparison of Vertov and Ruttmann:

\begin{quote}
Während aber seine [Ruttmans, MH] Assoziationen rein formal sind – er scheint sich auch in seinen Tonbildfilmen mit äußerlichen, unerhellten Verknüpfungen zu begnügen –, gewinnt Wertow [sic] durch die Montage dem Zusammenhang der Wirklichkeitssplitter einen Sinn ab. Ruttmann gibt ein Nebeneinander, ohne es aufzuklären; Wertow interpretiert es, indem er es darstellt.\textsuperscript{103}
\end{quote}

Politically, institutionally and aesthetically, alliances that seemed promising and rich a short time before proved to be very unstable and shifting.\textsuperscript{104}

Yet, on another note, the Brussels meeting could be said to point in different directions not at all obvious to contemporaries because they were naturally looking for things already familiar to them. When comparing the films
screened in Brussels to those shown at La Sarraz a tendency away from formal experiment and towards a greater engagement with the social or political context is discernible.\textsuperscript{105} Brussels also continued the convergence of the avantgarde with the industry on several levels: Hans Richter for example worked mainly on industry commissions in the 1930s, particularly advertising films, while his rival and companion Walter Ruttmann continued his work in fascist Germany. Some filmmakers like Joris Ivens or Henri Storck turned to radical and independent films that were largely free from formal experiments and rather modelled on agit-prop works. Germaine Dulac, pioneer of the French avant-garde in the early 1920s who had by now found employment within the French industry attended the Brussels conference to recruit avant-garde activists to work within the industry:

[L]a présence de Germaine Dulac, directrice d’une des plus grandes maisons de production françaises, Gaumont-Franco-Film-Aubert (GFFA), qui soutint la génération des cinéastes des années trente, était emblématique de la jonction avec le cinéma commercial. C’est là [à Bruxelles, MH], en effet, qu’elle recrute Vigo pour la réalisation de TARIS (1931) ainsi que [Henri] Storck, choisi comme assistant de Pierre Billon au Studio des Buttes-Chaumont.\textsuperscript{106}

Dulac’s itinerary and wandering between avant-garde and industry demonstrates how unstable designations and labelling can be: Even today Dulac is still mainly remembered for her most experimental works, \textit{LA SOURIANTE MADAME BEUDET} (FR 1923) and \textit{LA COQUILLE ET LE CLERGYMAN} (FR 1927) which achieved notoriety as the surrealists disrupted the premiere. Yet again, she theorised and taught, she made commercial and industrial films, she was in charge of the French society of ciné-clubs and she recruited avant-garde filmmakers to work for the industry.

4.4 Film Criticism and Theory

\textit{Die Arbeit der Avantgarde wird ein verdammtes Nichts sein, wenn sie in ihren letzten Wirkungen l’art pour l’art bleiben will.}

\textit{Ernst Jäger (1929)\textsuperscript{107}}

I will certainly not be able to lay out in detail the development of a theoretical discourse in the 1920s and 1930s. Even a close examination of one country with a strong focus on the avant-garde would constitute a work of its own.\textsuperscript{108} What I can only hint at in the following section are some broader features of an intricate and wide formation. I am especially interested in the fault lines and breaking moments when one formation transformed into another.

As is the case for film societies, the beginnings of didactic-discursive activity can be traced back to Paris which was, as usual, the hub of the most lively
activities in Europe – and again Ricciotto Canudo and Louis Delluc played key roles in the early developments. Two influential magazines appeared during World War One in the French capital: Ciné-Journal was published from March 1915 onwards while Henri Diamant-Berger started his weekly Le Film a year later in March 1916. He commissioned the novelist Colette to write a series of articles on the cinema in May 1917 and, more importantly, he hired the young writer and critic Louis Delluc as editor-in-chief in June 1917. Delluc had started out as a theatre critic of the Parisian boulevards and he had worked briefly for Miguel Almereyda’s (father of Jean Vigo) anarchist magazine Le bonnet rouge before becoming editor of Le Film. Among the contributors to the journal under Delluc’s editorship in the late 1910s were Louis Aragon, Jean Cocteau, Germaine Dulac and Marcel L’Herbier – a core of activists that were to become key figures of the following decade. Many more magazines were founded in the course of the 1920s, often connected to ciné-clubs and audience organisations.

From 1 June 1918 onwards Louis Delluc had his own column »Cinéma et Cie« in the newspaper Paris-Midi which proved so influential that he turned it from weekly instalments to a daily column in January 1919 (then simply called »cinéma«). Within three years most major French newspapers were reporting regularly on the cinema. Delluc started his own magazine Cinéa parallel to his ciné-club while he was also writing scripts and directing films. He published the books Cinéma et Cie in 1919, Photogénie in 1920, and Charlot in 1921 and he was instrumental in changing the cinema culture of France in the early 1920s. Canudo on the other hand had been involved in the first wave of the European avant-garde, the Italian pre-war movements of Futurism and Cubism. Canudo as an individual connects the pre-World War One avant-garde in the visual arts with the avant-garde activity in cinema circles in the 1920s that was poised between elitist avant-garde and populist attempts to gather a mass movement. In Paris Canudo befriended Pablo Picasso, Blaise Cendrars, Fernand Léger and others. Already around 1920 when the core of the later whirlwind formed the setup was international: The writings of an Italian (Canudo) are published in French in Switzerland. The Parisian cinéphile circles were always decidedly international, from the beginning onwards.

### 4.4.1 Photogénie

The concept of photogénie has emerged in the context of French Impressionist filmmaking in the second half of the 1910s. First elaborated by Louis Delluc and taken up by – among others – Louis Aragon, Emile Vuillermoiz and Jean Epstein, it referred to the capability of the cinema (as a dispositif) to estrange (in the sense of the Russian formalists ostranenie) the natural environment for the viewer. Interestingly, as Delluc theorised it, the idea was situated between absorption and de-familiarisation, two terms normally considered to be antagonistic. On the one side the concept stands for closeness, identification and emotional response while
the other pole is occupied by ideas such as distance, non-identification and intellectual response – this dichotomy replays a central problem of avant-garde film: how to reconcile abstraction and realist tendencies. It can be seen in the contemporary German debate between »Einfühlung« (empathy) and »Abstraktion« (abstraction)\(^{114}\) as well as in the discussion whether the true vocation of film is to be found in realist depictions or in abstract space-time images.\(^{115}\) In many respects, *photogénie* was a somewhat vague concept that was nevertheless very useful in covering up a fault line of the avant-garde for a certain period.

*Photogénie* became a central concept in France in the first half of the 1920s and Jean Epstein became its champion. According to Paul Willemen, *photogénie* describes a viewer’s theory, a reception aesthetic as opposed to a production aesthetics:

> the particular relationship supported or constituted by the spectatorial look [...,] a mark of distinction conferred by a special set of viewers upon film-makers, differentiating those who are qualified to make cinema and so are entitled to a position of cultural power from those who merely manufacture cinema [...]. *Photogénie* is meant] to institute demarcations between viewers by differentiating those who are »sensitive« from those who are not.\(^{116}\)

*Photogénie* always escapes language, can only be spoken of metaphorically and is situated in the look. The impressionists launched that term, forever circling an absent hole in the discourse which cannot be spoken about, to name exactly that absence, that empty center of the gaze of the spectator: »*Photogénie*, then, refers to the unspeakable within the relation of looking and operates through the activation of a fantasy in the viewer which he or she refuses to verbalise.«\(^{117}\) The term shifted the ground to the production side and helped the avant-garde to develop a concept for the cinema. If the beauty and art of the cinema, its capability to enchant and incite the viewer to action rested in the spectatorial look, then restructuring the reception situation became at least as important as changing the films that were being watched. Willemen moves into psychoanalytic theory when he relates it to a nostalgia for the pre-symbolic, and to the tendency towards abstraction inherent in fetishism:

That *photogénie* relates primarily to a viewers’ aesthetic is important if seen in context of the movement that the French avant-garde directors of the 1920s helped to promote. This was the first institutionalised »film culture« movement to be organised around exhibition priorities, through the film society movement initiated by Delluc and Canudo.\(^{118}\)

As important as this first generation was, they nevertheless lacked the rigour and revolutionary fervour of the avant-garde. In some sense they transposed the reformist discussion of the 1910s about the social role of film onto aesthetics. In 1923, just after Canudo had died, his friend Divoire published his collected articles
on the cinema under the title *L’Usine des Images* in Geneva. Canudo argued for medium specificity in terms of aesthetics, but also industry organisation, professionalism, terms and concepts (suggesting for example to use the term »écraniste« instead of »metteur-en-scène« to sever the implicit connection to the theatre which the latter term hinted at). It needed the contact with avant-garde movements which had been in around in visual arts before World War One and which had developed in the relative isolation of Switzerland during the war to shift the discourse on cinema to avant-garde preoccupations.

### 4.4.2 The musical analogy

The main focus of the theoretical debate being led by the practitioners-theorists in the 1920s was to describe the specificity of film; »photogénie« and the »film sense«, the »Geist des Films« and »pure cinema« – everybody was searching for something that could be defined as the essence of cinema. The titles of many films from the avant-garde circles, especially the early films of Viking Eggeling, Hans Richter, Oskar Fischinger and Walter Ruttmann either testify to a tendency of linking music and space (HORIZONTAL-VERTIKAL ORCHESTER, DIAGONALSINFONIE, KOMPOSITION IN BLAU), allude to relatively open categories from the art such as work or study (OPUS, FILMSTUDIE) or vaguely abstract musical categories (PRELUDE, DISQUE 957). Yet, while Richter and Eggeling published their (now lost) brochure on universal language (1920) in a constructivist spirit, the French texts of the first half of the 1920s elaborated on the »musical analogy« as it has been called retrospectively. Especially important in this respect were the writings by Germaine Dulac. In 1925, in an influential special edition of the magazine *Les cahiers du mois* on film, she outlined in relatively vague terms the similarity of film and music:

La musique seule, peut évoquer cette impression que propose aussi le cinéma, et nous pouvons à la lumière des sensations qu’elle nous offre comprendre celles que le cinéma de l’avenir nous offrira. La musique n’a pas non plus de frontières précises; ne peut-on en déduire, à la lumière des choses existantes, que l’idée visuelle, que le thème qui chante au coeur des cinéastes ressortit beaucoup plus à la technique musicale qu’à toute autre technique ou tout autre idéal? [...] Le film intégral que nous rêvons tous de composer, c’est une symphonie visuelle faite d’images rythmées et que seule la sensation d’un artiste coordonne et jette sur l’écran.\(^{119}\)

The metaphoric and imprecise use of terms such as rhythm, melody or symphony was a hallmark of this particular thinking. The musical analogy has been heavily criticised by later authors\(^ {120}\) mainly from a high modernist perspective for its romanticism and synaestheticism, yet it nevertheless continued as an important streak of the avant-garde. Walter Ruttmann continued to call his films »symphony« or »melody« and Oskar Fischinger’s success rested on the combination of popular classical music with more or less abstract images. Not coincidentally, Fischinger’s
career progressed from the German avant-garde circles to his work at Disney in the United States (even though creative differences over FANTASIA (US 1940) led to their falling out).

The unification of different art forms under one single principle was a preoccupation of the avant-garde in the 1920s. Abstraction certainly was an important impulse towards discovering the assumed basic laws of artistic production because the artists hoped by abstracting from the representative practice of former schools and styles to find common ground between music, painting, and visual art. One commentator went as far as to credit abstraction with the prefiguration of a future order which would replace the chaos of the contemporary world: »Ihre [Eggeling’s and Richter’s] abstrakten Filmgestaltungen antizipieren ideell mit ihrer strukturellen Klarheit und ihrer formalen Strenge die reale Kollektivität der Zukunft, entgegen der heutigen faktischen Anarchie der gesellschaftlichen Organisation.« 121 In this opinion, abstract film would be malleable to fit communist as well as fascist projects as both promised a »new order« that would bring forth a »new man«.

The practice of filmmaking is never completely matching the practice of criticism. On the agenda of the theoretical debates of the 1920s the issue of essence or specificity still remained when filmmaking practice was already moving elsewhere, into the transitional space between committed documentary, experiment, politics, and institutional support. For example, Ivens stated in 1927 (in the first issue of Filmliga) that the essence of cinema was »the duration of successive images; the direction and speed of movement in one image compared with its direction and speed in the next and finally the black and white division of the image compared with that division in the next image.« 122 At that time Ivens was already moving in a different direction – and even his films from the early years like REGEN (NL 1929) or DE BRUG (NL 1928) are much less formalised than one could suspect on reading his text.

4.4.3 Montage and Constructivism
France and the Soviet Union have to be singled out as the countries with the most lively discourse on film theory in the 1920s. Whereas Germany had the strongest European film industry and it could boast some important experimental filmmakers, it nevertheless lacked the variety and breadth of magazines specialising in the aesthetic and cultural appreciation of film. While France was leading the discussion around photogénie and the musical analogy in the first half of the 1920s, Soviet theory had a huge impact when the texts of Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Kuleshov and Vertov began appearing in English, German or French translation. In fact, the appearance of Soviet film on the European stage was a veritable media offensive: the films were flanked on either side by translations of (theoretical) texts and by personal appearances with lectures and presentations. Instead of advocating an inherent character of the single image or shot (as in
Discourses and Networks

photogénie) the Soviets proposed to look at the relationship and combination between the different shots. Constructivism was a modular approach which was preoccupied with composition, not with immanence. As French theory had proposed music as an analogy, so the Soviet practitioners also saw the cinema as one element within a wide ensemble of the arts: constructivism as a movement ran across different art forms and can be found in literature, architecture, and visual arts (not only painting, but perhaps more importantly also design and typography).  

Indeed, Soviet films and theory came to France at a crucial moment when the idea of cinéma pur which had glued different positions together increasingly came under attack: »By late 1926 or early 1927 [...] this amalgam had come unstuck. The good ship avant-garde [...] now seemed more like a bateau ivre lost at sea.« At the same time in Germany, the idea of abstraction was similarly running into a dead end. The Soviet films – and the Soviet theories – filled this double space: replacing theories under attack and infusing revolutionary energy while they could revert to the networks of the avant-garde already in place. Timing was an important factor in the Soviet success in Western Europe.

When the debate in the second half of the 1920s turned more heated, this had a double effect on its discursive status: on the one hand, it meant an intensification which generated energy and moved film into the spotlight, while on the other thes also reinforced the polemic nature creating deep schisms and divides between positions and persons. The intense dynamism that the theoretical discourse took in the wake of the Soviet revolutionary cinema opened up the possibility of a change caused by cinema (and in turn, a cinema caused by change) while it also intensified the cracks and fissures in the fabric of the avant-garde. Inspired by the Soviet examples, more and more intellectuals and theoreticians believed that what was at stake was not just a transformed cinema, but that the crisis of the cinema was only a manifest sign of a general crisis of the socio-economic system of the capitalist democracies. These ideas were clearly present in the Soviet discourse. Consider Mayakovski’s text »Kino and Kino« in its typical mixture of political statement, avant-garde manifesto and free verse:

For you Kino is – something to look at.
For me – it is almost a way to understand the world...
But – Kino is sick. Capitalism has covered its eyes with gold. Smart producers lead it by the hand through the streets. They collect money by touching the heart with snivelling subjects.
This must come to an end.
Communism must confiscate Kino from the speculating leaders of the blind...  

It was under the impression of these kinds of texts and theories that the question arose whether it was enough to construct an alternative system (in terms of production, distribution, exhibition, but also theory, spectatorship and criticism) as some argued that an oppositional system was needed. Even though the
Avant-garde Culture

distinction is not always clear (presenting an alternative implies a certain opposition to the status quo), the crucial peak years of the avant-garde around 1929 are characterised by attempts to move in this direction: in France exemplified by Les amis de Spartacus, in England visible in the Workers' Film Societies and the Progressive Film Institute and in Germany the Volksfilmverband is the clearest sign of a radicalisation of cinema culture. This rift cut across the diverse other aporias inherent in the avant-garde.

In different countries, attempts were launched not just for a different kind of film discourse, but to change it more fundamentally. In France and Germany, especially within communist publications such as L'Humanité and Arbeiterbühne und Film, experiments with worker-critics were started, an initiative that at least fulfilled a triple function: first of all it was hoped to draw the large majority of the working class audience away from commercial films which remained the most popular fare even with working class spectators. By raising issues of class affiliation and political content to the consciousness of non-professionals the instigators of such programmes hoped to transform audience taste. The second reason is closely related to avant-garde concerns of breaking down the sharp distinction between producers and recipients, between activism and passivity. By turning ordinary spectators into critics, the professionalism and special status of critics was downplayed in favour of a more open cinema culture. And thirdly it was hoped that these non-professionals were able to integrate cinema back into life; employed critics evaluated films from a position of disinterested art contemplation—workers would judge films as workers and help to re-integrate the cinema into a transformed social context.127

More importantly perhaps, theory was not limited to professional writers and critics in newspapers or universities, but theory was part and parcel of the new and transformed cinema culture. It is impossible to find any key player of the avant-garde who limited his or her activities to just one facet of the avant-garde attempt at renewing and revolutionising cinema culture. Richter and Ruttmann, Eisenstein and Vertov, Epstein and Dulac, Ivens and Hackenschmied—they all made films and wrote theoretical texts, they lectured and travelled, they taught and organised film clubs and exhibitions. Theory and practice were activities taking place on the same level and without clear demarcation lines. Jay Leyda has given an apt description of Eisenstein’s activities outside filmmaking, yet understood them traditionally as secondary, separated and subordinate to his own films:

It was during the cutting of The General Line that Eisenstein made a serious beginning on a second career that in time would rank beside his film-making career—his work as a teacher and theoretician. Even before his first film he had balanced—and in public print—the compelling intuitions of an artist with the inquiring mind of a logician; his teaching, too, had begun in the Proletkult days, when he had given a class in theatre direction (chiefly to show a method distinct from that of Meyerhold). And now his work on the montage of The General Line with all the technical
maturity that it represented, required words and print to explain his new steps to others — and to himself. I believe that the propaganda purpose for the unusual quantity of writing that began in 1928 and 1929 was less important than the personal reason: to find and define the reasons behind the thoughts and acts of excited creativity, to prepare himself for next steps. There are magazine and newspaper articles, prefaces, and notebooks dating from this time, dealing with everything from theory to polemic, various enough for several active minds. Engaged in production twelve hours a day, with some of the remaining time spent in detailed preparation for the next day’s shooting, he yet found time to write, for example, an analysis of the relation between the arts of Japan and his theory of montage, followed by a vigorous (and effectual) attack on the methods of certain complacent scenarists. […] The GENERAL LINE crew returned to Moscow just as a school year was starting at the State Film Technicum, and Eisenstein, full of energy, offered to direct a workshop course there, simultaneously with his completion of the film. Eisenstein threw himself totally into this job, as if it were an extension of his creative work. One of the last leading directors to teach at the Technicum (Pudovkin had begun the first of his many classes there at the time of MOTHER’s release, and Abram Room had opened a workshop there the same year), Eisenstein eventually became the creative head of the school. This, though, was several years and many frustrations later; now he poured more and more of his time and ideas into eager young ears, and even went to battle the administration of the film industry for more authority and facilities to be given the school programme. […] His passionate interest in the education of future Soviet film-makers changed the emphasis of the curriculum of the directors’ course. Heretofore a manipulation of the instruments of film-making had been the aim; Eisenstein changed this, now and in the future, to a preparation in the principles of all creative work, based chiefly on their experience. 128

While Leyda’s observations are most astute, I disagree with some of his conclusion and tend to see teaching, writing, filmmaking very much within the same force field of propaganda, persuasion and fostering change that the avant-garde was working towards. That Eisenstein stepped up the output of theoretical texts, manuals, and manifestoes in 1928/29 might have something to do with the editing of The GENERAL LINE, yet it also coincides with the convergence of several strands of the avant-garde and with the triumphant arrival of the Soviet cinema in the West. Eisenstein’s increased theoretical activity can also be seen as a realisation and an acknowledgement of the upsurge and boom that needed to be supported and fostered by texts, lectures and personal appearances. Thus, the trips and publications, the courses and position papers were elements in a media offensive staged by the Soviet revolutionary filmmakers.

4.4.4 Reactions to and theoretical debate on sound
As just sketched all too briefly, the discourse about film and its expressive potentialities had acquired its positions and terminology, its camps and protagonists by the late 1920s. The discourse had, to revert to Foucault’s terminology, crossed the second threshold of epistemologization:
When in the operation of a discursive formation, a group of statements is articulated, claims to validate (even unsuccessfully) norms of verification and coherence, and when it exercises a dominant function (as a model, a critique, or a verification) over knowledge, we will say that the discursive formation crosses a threshold of epistemologization. 

Exactly at the culmination point of this debate the sound film entered with the result of annihilating the whole discourse. Hence, the hostility of many observers such as Rudolf Arnheim to the sound film. Exactly at a moment when cinema had conquered a space in the cultural arena of the respected artistic and aesthetic expressions by rhetoric means cinema as an economic institution tore down all that had been achieved in the past 15 years to pursue a novelty that to contemporary observers was nothing but a fairground attraction only added to drive some competitors out of the market and to have something new to promote. Yet, for those members of the avant-garde that were not interested in elevating the cinema to the established arts, the introduction of sound first of all meant an accentuation of the conflicts and tensions that the avant-garde already addressed. In Marxist terms, the intensification on the level of economic base would also intensify the conflicts in the superstructure – thus, sound film could even contribute to revolutionary transformations.

In discussing the transition to sound as presented in the journal Close Up James Donald observes that »for a start, the issue was not sound as such«. It is not true that the introduction of sound gave rise to the idea that sound film was artistically worthless, but sound proved to be such an enormous step for the institution cinema that it created all by itself a sense of history in the making; while silent cinema passed from the cinema listings within more or less two years, people began to realise that it would vanish forever if nobody would do anything about it. The idea of the repertory or repertoire – a canon of classics to be held available and to show on a regular basis – was born with the coming of sound. In a certain sense, the cinema only acquired a history when part of it was lost for good. This moment of an experienced transition also proved to be the key event for collectors and historians such as Henri Langlois for whom the introduction of sound was the key event that set him on his career as collector and archivist. Similar paths can be found for other activists operating between filmmaking, collecting and writing film history. Paul Rotha’s father was a curator (collector, so to speak) at the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum in London. During World War One he was in charge of a hospital, showing films to patients when young Paul started taking notes and collecting photos, magazines, programmes, thus embarking on a practice of cinema culture that led him towards alternatives of the commercial industry. Rotha joined the Film Society during their first season while studying design at the Slade School of Art. He was writing film reviews for Close Up and other magazines; in 1928 he had a brief stint as a designer at British International Pictures (BIP) where he met
Henrik Galeen and E.A. Dupont. Yet, he was fired for publishing a critical article on the state of the art in British film design. After being sacked he went to Paris to work for a small company meeting René Clair, Jean Epstein, Georges Lacombe, Alberto Cavalcanti and others, then returned to London where he could not secure regular work in film. As a last resort he accepted a contract from Jonathan Cape to write *The Film Till Now*, one of the earliest important books of film history, for which Rotha travelled to Berlin (where Pommer screened films for him) and to Paris (where the Soviet trade agency gave him the opportunity to watch Soviet films).\(^{133}\) Rotha praised Dupont and Alexander Korda and later became a friend of Carl Mayer when Mayer emigrated to London. In an article on »The »Unusual« Film Movement« Rotha develops the category of the »Continental Film« as a positive etiquette. The cinemas which screened them in the 1920s like the *Embassy* in 1924 ultimately failed: »...the Embassy was before its time.«\(^{134}\) In the 1930s, after sound cinema had completely driven out silent cinema, a number of repertory houses took up the task of screening older, silent films and new experimental work.

Rotha called for a museum of the cinema in 1930 (including posters, books, photos, machines, costumes, set designs, etc.) and for a national repertory film theatre in 1931 (in addition to the active film societies which he accuses of »effeminate dilettantism«) – both demands were realised within the framework of the British Film Institute later in the 1930s:

In recent months, several enterprising exhibitors, having scented the way of the wind, have played seasons of silent revivals. [...] The time is at hand when the achievements of cinema should be recorded whilst they are still fresh in our minds. It is surely a matter of much urgency that we should document this great medium which is developing so rapidly before it has passed altogether from its primitive stage.\(^{135}\)

The energy generated in this theorisation of a history quickly flowed into the first film archives that mushroomed in the 1930s. The coming of sound thus not only intensified the economic tensions within the film industry, but also created a sense of historicity in the avant-garde movement. As film aesthetics and film theory had made themselves room in the public sphere, it was only logical to follow this up with archives, history books and museums.

Let us look in some more detail at some artists active at the time of the transition to sound. The musician Edmund Meisel who composed scores for Eisenstein, Ruttmann and Fanck wholeheartedly embraced the introduction of synchronised light sound because for him it meant greater control over his scores. For Meisel, sound film meant that original music could be recorded as intended by the composer without having to rely on the shortcomings of suburban or provincial cinemas which all too often did not live up to the high standards of his artistic ideas that only the extravagant and large metropolitan cinemas could satisfy. Sound film
meant that music became an integral part of the filmic creation like the script or the titles.\textsuperscript{136}

What appears as the most widespread position vis-à-vis the sound film was a kind of cautious optimism, realising the dangers as well as the possibilities opened up with the new medium as is visible in this statement by director Jacques Feyder:

»[L]e film parlant comporte toutes les possibilités d'un art cinématographique élargi, délivré enfin des sous-titres, augmenté de toutes les émotions sonores. [...] Le mouvement cinégraphique, le rythme visuel, la coordination des objectifs, l'interprétation optique restent acquis pour le film sonore.«\textsuperscript{137}

What Feyder seems to be suggesting here is an enlarged art form in which some of the hindrances and circumstantial coincidences like musical accompaniment can be controlled in the sense of an artist wanting to control every aspect of his work. Also discernible in his statement is a search for a cinema that could be called total in the sense that André Bazin has suggested. While being despised by some theoreticians like Rudolf Arnheim who had just worked out their theory on the artistic capabilities of silent cinema, sound did fit into another tendency of the avant-garde, namely to create a cinema that would not be bound and confined to screenings without further effect, but that would metaphorically and literally move beyond the limits of the auditorium space and continue its life beyond the narrow borders of traditional art and entertainment.

4.5 The myth of total cinema

The dream of total cinema is an old one – complete immersion has been dreamed up long before the cinema came into existence and some have sought the roots of cinema in the dream of submersion in another reality.\textsuperscript{139} In his article »Le mythe du cinéma total« André Bazin has reflected on this myth of origin for the cinema. For Bazin, cinema was conceived mentally – »invented« as an idea so to speak – long before it came into existence as a technological fact, yet in practice the cinema remains but a shadow of what it was meant to be. Bazin dreams of a total cinema:

C'est celui du réalisme intégral, d'une recreation du monde à son image, une image sur laquelle ne pèserait pas l'hypothèse de la liberté d'interprétation de l'artiste ni l'irréversibilité du temps. Si le cinéma au berceau n'eut pas tous les attributs du cinéma total de demain, ce fut donc bien à son corps défendant et seulement parce
Discourses and Networks

que ses fées étaient techniquement impuissantes à l’en doter en dépit de leurs désirs. 140

For Bazin, the silence of the silent cinema was only a coincidence and every addition (sound, colour, widescreen) was a step towards the realisation of what cinema was meant to be. Hyperbolically, Bazin concludes his short essay that »Le cinéma n’est pas encore inventé!« Despite its problematic technological determinism and teleological nature it is interesting to note how this myth of origin which is also a myth of imperfection (the cinema is not fulfilling its promise) is being reiterated and played out in various advances from avant-garde filmmakers. In congruence with the avant-garde ideal of transforming and integrating life into art, the film avant-garde often imagined overcoming the limiting dimensions of the screening situation: cinema going as a social event with all the rituals and expectations that are part and parcel of it reduce the impact of the medium. The architectural disposition of the auditorium took away any possibility of interaction or active participation, the style and manner of films in terms of narrative, editing reduced the spectator to a more or less passive receiver of audio-visual cues, and the promotion and selling of the cinema experience was geared towards keeping up the status quo. Blowing up the cinema or taking film out of the cinema and into the streets promised to interpellate and assault, to encounter and confuse people everywhere. For those reasons many of the avant-garde activists dreamed up ways of either total immersion inside the cinema theatre or total projection everywhere outside. There are thus two strands to be found in the avant-garde dream of total cinema: either the cinema itself should be expanded spatially and technologically in order to make the experience in the auditorium as overwhelming and breathtaking as possible or the cinema should be brought into the life and daily routine of people, exiting the auditorium to encounter spectators in their daily routines. Both avenues ultimately (and teleologically) culminated in the utopian idea of bringing life and art into congruence: either cinema will be lifelike and impossible to distinguish from our perception of reality or cinema will be everywhere around, again making it indistinguishable from the environment in which people live and move about. By pointing out a genealogy of total and expanded cinema I want to show how the film avant-garde of the 1920s and 1930s engaged with those dreams of complete immersion.

Perhaps the most consistent experimenter in the direction of blowing up the traditional dispositif of the cinema, yet also the most contradictory figure on the margins of the avant-garde and the art film is Abel Gance. He has often publicly acted out the image of the misunderstood artist and genius ruined by the evil forces of the film industry. In fact, there is another side of Gance that I would see as equally important: the technician, the engineer, the bricoleur. In this perspective on Gance, his patents, technological developments and inventions become an integral, perhaps even the decisive part of his cinema. Gance imagined and tried to create a
Avant-garde Culture

cinema that was expanded in the sense that the avant-garde of the 1960s conceived of it: Gance’s cinema wanted to overwhelm and envelop, surround and enchant in visual as well as in aural ways. This overwhelming presence of cinema was not to be achieved by means of narrative or image and sound alone, it required a transformation, in effect an enlargement, of the cinematic apparatus. His ideas of polyvisions, experiments with wide-screen, enhanced depth of the image, multiple projections and surround sound were begun in the 1920s and lasted for the whole duration of his career until the post-war era.

Gance has always been a contradictory and controversial figure and remains so in retrospect: On the one hand, Gance saw himself as an industrial designer of mass communication, on the other he catered to the image of the misunderstood artist. After his initial successes with J’ACCUSE (FR 1918) and LA ROUE (FR 1920-22) Gance spent considerable time researching what he called »visual language«. His proposal of seeing film as a modern form of visual hieroglyphs relates on the one hand to research being done in Russian Constructivism into the laws and rules of visual communication, on the other hand it points forward to film theoretical concepts such as Christian Metz’ attempt to formulate the basis of film as a language system. Attempts at developing a universal language were also a main-stay of the avant-garde in the first decades of the Twentieth Century, in painting (Vasily Kandinsky, Paul Klee), in literature (Khlebnikov, Hugo Ball, Kurt Schwitters, James Joyce) or in film (Hans Richter, Viking Eggeling). Yet, even within popular film this was a hot topic of debate as has been demonstrated by Miriam Hansen. The result of Gance’s experiments was his monumental NAPOLEON (FR 1925-27) which overflows with visual tropes. The film with its superimpositions, mobile shots, awkward camera angles and, of course, with the famous triple screen employed at climactic moments has been called »an encyclopaedia of optical effects« (Kevin Brownlow). In various ways, Gance tried to expand and exceed the limits of the conventional frame, addressing the spectator in new and unexpected ways; or, as Gance himself put it: »Dès cette époque j’avais compris la nécessité de s’évader des limites ordinaires de l’écran. Le cinéma muet était arrivé aux limites extrêmes de ses enseignements. Pour ma part, j’essayais de les dépasser. [...] Le triptyque avait le mérite d’enrichir l’alphabet.« Gance saw the limits of the silent cinema in the rigid frames of recording and projection which he tried to overcome, but he remained within the confines of the metaphor of a language of the cinema. Similar ideas were advanced at roughly the same time by visual artist and Bauhaus-teacher László Moholy-Nagy.

For NAPOLEON he devised, developed and put into practice a system of three overlapping images side-by-side that were shot simultaneously and projected synchronously in the cinema. Gance’s system was complicated and cumbersome and only very few cinemas in major cities were able to project those films in the correct format. In Paris, one of the leading avant-garde theatres permanently
Discourses and Networks

installed an apparatus for screening triptych films after the success of Abel Gance’s *NAPOLEON*, to my knowledge a singular case:

La véritable raison du Studio 28 étant d’être un laboratoire du film, il ne comportera pas un orchestre animé de mouvements ascensionnels, une seule chose importe: la cabine de projection photographique, et l’écran, qui d’une seule pièce, s’étendra sur neuf mètres de largeur formant une vaste fresque murale au fond de la salle. [...] Le Studio 28 est donc la seule salle à Paris où une cabine triptyque est installée d’une manière permanente et toutes les recherches faites sur cette invention y seront poursuivies par l’inventeur même: Abel Gance.¹⁴⁴

The author of this piece was none other than Jean Mauclaire, himself a protagonist of the Parisian avant-garde scene as the owner and programme maker of the Studio 28. Mauclaire also held the exclusive distribution rights to Abel Gance’s triptych films. By converting his cinema to the triptych format he attempted to support the search for an essence of cinema that saw the aim realised in the orchestration of images. Invariably, the idea of the laboratory returns with the artist-director as the engineer – only here the place of the experiment shifts from the film studio to the cinema. The avant-garde saw its activities as experiments that would lead the way to future developments.

The triptych technique was also used for films which were not specifically made for this dispositif as if to demonstrate the universal nature of the technology: J.C. Mol’s *UIT HET RIJK DER KRISTALLEN* (NL 1927) was shown on a triple screen at the Studio 28 in February 1928.¹⁴⁵ Again, this demonstrates how much the film avant-garde is a phenomenon that is being active across a vast field and not limited to producing experimental films. The activities of the avant-garde are also to be seen in exhibition, teaching, publishing, writing and curating exhibitions. Mauclaire even went as far as to claim that this new triple image would do away with the typical musical accompaniment of the epoch. In the Studio 28 the experiment was extended to sound accompaniment as the live orchestra was replaced by mechanical music thanks to the triptych’s overwhelming presence:

Les possibilités du triptyque sont plus vastes encore, permettant l’orchestration des images, le triptyque tuera l’orchestre. Aussi n’emploierons-nous qu’une musique mécanique, concession nécessaire pour préparer la transition trop brusque. Mais un jour très proche les salles ne posséderont qu’un écran et qu’une cabine. Le cinéma suffit à lui-même. Le cinéma est une force qui se rit de ses adversaires.¹⁴⁶

Similar to formalist theories such as that of Arnheim and others, Mauclaire argued for a cinema that was characterised not by its realistic features and life-likeness, but by those characteristics that lent the cinema a life of its own. Indeed, the orchestration of images could for Mauclaire do away with the orchestration of sound.

182
Gance's NAPOLEON was one of the outstanding successes capable of crossing from a limited avant-garde public to a more general audience like DAS CABINET DES DR. CALIGARI (DE 1919/20, Robert Wiene), BERLIN, DIE SINFONIE DER GROSSSTADT (DE 1926/27, Walter Ruttmann) or LA PASSION DE JEANNE D'ARC (FR 1928, Carl Theodor Dreyer). It is therefore not surprising that Alexander Dovzhenko on his visit to Berlin was taken by Hans Richter to the cinema to watch this film which Richter compares favourably to Fritz Lang's METROPOLIS (DE 1925/26): »Wir besuchten gemeinsam die Premiere von Abel Gances NAPOLEON im Ufapalast am Zoo. So deprimierend und dumm der Monsterfilm METROPOLIS vorher an derselben Stelle ausgesehen hatte, so großartig und intelligent offenbarte sich NAPOLEON.« As remembered by Richter, Dovzenko's enthusiasm culminates in ideas for a different kind of cinematic dispositif when the Soviet director exclaimed on leaving the cinema:

> Was ich machen möchte? Einen Film in Schnee und Eis, aber nicht nur auf drei Leinwände vorn auf der Bühne, sondern überall projizierend. An der Decke, an den Seiten und selbst im Rücken des Publikums. Es soll mit dem Helden frieren und sich mit ihm am Feuer wärmen, während draußen die hungrigen Wölfe um uns immer engere Kreise ziehen. Die rohen, gefrorenen Fische zerreißt mit den Zähnen, und die erfrorbenen Gesichter werden mit Schnee abgerieben. Das Publikum zittert, friert, kommt wieder zu sich, fühlt sich, fast erfrorren, als Held.

Dovzenko already imagines the IMAX in the late 1920s or envisions today's »experience economy« with its shopping malls, theme parks and amusement rides. His synaesthetic totality went beyond representation in its traditional sense and envisioned the cinema as a simulation of a different world. The eternal dream of creating a world that one can inhabit, being a God, is being replayed in today's media concepts such as THE TRUMAN SHOW (US 1998, Peter Weir), IDIOTERNE (DK 1998, Lars von Trier) or BIG BROTHER (NL 1999ff.) – creating a self-contained world with its own rules and parameters and watching it evolve.

After the laboriously long work on NAPOLEON, Gance toyed with various projects, but it was not until the middle of 1929 that he again turned towards a subject that gripped his imagination. He opted for LA FIN DU MONDE, based on a »rather quaint and tedious novel« by the French astronomer Camille Flammarion about the last days of the earth before a comet destroys all life on the planet. The book has been described as a mixture of heavy-handed symbolism, spiritistic theories, scientific speculation and Christian eschatology. Besides the scope of the project, critics have speculated that there might have been a political reason for Gance's choice: the film features prominently an institution modelled on the League of Nations, an initiative that Gance supported. In the film, it is an international institution that saves the day for humanity that has otherwise turned to sects and spiritism. Here was a project which could demonstrate the necessity and
positive effects of such institutions which were by contemporaries often seen as powerless constructions in which endless talk would lead to no visible result.\textsuperscript{151}

This film was Gance's first sound film and as he had no previous experience with the new technology he turned for technical support to Walter Ruttman who had just finished his first sound film, MELODIE DER WELT (DE 1928/29). Ruttman could be seen in many respects a similar figure to Abel Gance, always struggling with his self-definition as an artist poised between constructivism and a romantic cult of creative genius and in political terms equally difficult to pin down. Both were at the forefront of the emerging avant-garde movement around 1927 after NAPOLÉON and BERLIN. DIE SINFONIE DER GROSSTADT had been met with enthusiastic responses. A couple of years later after the introduction of sound both had a sudden drop in reputation and their joint project might have contributed to it. The production of LA FIN DU MONDE (FR 1930) proved to be disastrous: despite an unusually large budget, the film soon ran into financial difficulties; sound technology was only in the process of being introduced at the time in France, thus problems had to be solved on a pragmatic day-by-day basis. The film was finished without Gance's presence and the reception was catastrophic. Supporters of Abel Gance like film historian Kevin Brownlow are certain of the reasons for his downfall: here is the classic case of a filmmaker cut short by sound film as Gance never returned to the reputation and stature he had enjoyed during the 1920s, as he never fully recovered from the terrible blow inflicted by the failure of LA FIN DU MONDE. Here is a highly original genius killed by a combination of careless and money-greedy producers with imperfect technology that the artist is only forced to use because of the folly of the uneducated audience.

However, the background story of LA FIN DU MONDE can also be told in another way: what might have attracted Gance apart from the grandiose scope of the project, was the possibility to do for sound what Napoleon had done for visuals: to present a caleidoscopic encyclopaedia of every imaginable sound effect. Just like the triptych was meant to enrich the visual possibilities of the silent film through new manners of construction, LA FIN DU MONDE innovated what Gance has termed »perspectival sound«. This surround system avant la lettre was developed for LA FIN DU MONDE and its technological achievements were conceived to contribute triumphantly to the success of the film. At the time when the film was just about to go into production, on 13 August 1929 Gance deposited a patent that described »perspectival sound«. Loudspeakers were to be placed in different locations of the cinema space: not only behind the screen as was usually the case, but also on the sides of the auditorium, on the ceiling and on the floor. This way, the auditorium space would become a truly three-dimensional space and the film would be extended beyond the flat, two-dimensional surface of the screen. In fact, Gance had also experimented with various systems of enhanced depth in film, early forms of three-dimensional cinema. Gance saw the cinema as a medium

184
that should immerse the audience, by its force of story telling, by the choice for prototypical or famous story and last but not least by its technological gadgets.

In fact, the sound system was not ready for the market yet, it lacked a serious testing phase and therefore it contributed to the catastrophic failure of the film. The practical problems with Gance’s plans were not altogether new. Even the projection of the NAPOLEON-triptychs proved to be difficult in practice; only very few cinemas in big cities could screen them. Yet, NAPOLEON functioned as a film without them and the contribution of the triptychs to the impact of the film has in retrospect possibly been overestimated. The problem of LA FIN DU MONDE was that unlike his earlier historical film many scenes simply did not work without the surround feeling that Gance had envisioned. The film is largely a montage of reactions to the imminent destruction of the earth; the tedious string of scenes lacking narrative coherence becomes only understandable if you conceive of them as scenes demonstrating the power of a surround sound system. Thus, LA FIN DU MONDE should not be judged by standards normally applied to ordinary narrative films, it should be rather seen as a promotional film demonstrating the capabilities of the new system. Gance continued his experiments with Polyvision and écrans variables into the 1950s when Hollywood had adapted a tamed version of his triptychs in their various wide-screen formats.¹⁵²

This dream of immersion was meant to render the cinema invisible through extension: the cinematic apparatus should grow into the auditorium space and become so realistic that the representation would override the technology behind it. This utopian possibility has been continued, worked upon and extended in amusement parks and gaming arcades, but most importantly in the efforts of the IMAX company which could locate its genealogy in the avant-garde.¹⁵³ Yet, there is another tendency of total cinema within the ranks of the avant-garde that wanted to abolish cinema altogether or at least to transform it beyond recognition. Film should be taken to the streets and shops, to private homes and public events – or projection should get rid of representational reality and be limited to include only forms, lines and colours. Indeed, the first daylight film projectors that were able to take film out of the cinema building were developed and installed in the 1920s, mostly in department stores, museums or exhibitions. Besides these commercial applications, the avant-garde activists also devised alternative methods how to take film out of the cinema and into other walks of life. Implicitly, this conception also refers back to the relationship between auditorium space and screen space as two of the most crucial variables of the cinema as dispositif.¹⁵⁴

The attempt of bringing cinema out of the auditorium space focused many tendencies of »pre-cinematic films«, films that were not quite films yet or films that were thought up, but not made such as in the futurist colour music of Carlo Carrà and Arnoldo Ginna in Italy (1910-1912), Duncan Grant’s Abstract Kinetic Painting with Collages (1914), a scroll to be moved synchronically through a light-box to a Bach-piece, or the serial paintings Rythme coloré of Leopold Survage in
France (1912/13). Avant-gardistic ideas of overcoming traditional bourgeois distinctions between art forms (especially between music and visual art) mixed with fin-de-siècle conceptions of a synaesthetic Gesamtkunstwerk uniting all arts in one single disposition. The musical analogy which I have discussed above implies a similar conception of expanded cinema. Viking Eggeling shortly before his death thought about »a system for the projection of light onto the clouds at night, based on the still-to-be-developed theory of »Eidodynamics«.« Here, the cinema intersects with much larger trends of a spatial-movement art – the abstract films of Richter, Eggeling and Ruttmann are in this perspective much less singular events; rather, they come out of a tradition of revolutionising visual arts, sculpture, music and architecture. The central and common element unifying these trends is the concentration on light as the main medium of a new art. Not coincidentally, all three had very strong ideas about musical accompaniment to their films (or silence as in the case of Eggeling). Ruttmann collaborated with composer Max Butting on scores for his films while Fischinger started off with musical pieces which he would then visually illustrate. Eggeling specifically asked for a complete suppression of sound (another strong idea on the relationship between visual and aural elements in the cinema) while Richter collaborated in 1928 and 1929 intensely with composer in his commissions by the music festival Baden-Baden. Thus, while it is possible to argue for the film avant-garde that »independent experiments [...] before 1925 are few and far between«, this leaves out the larger context in which the attempts with scroll paintings and coloured projection, movable stages and light sculptures, serial painting and musical visualisations contextualise the »absolute films«.

In his early years Oskar Fischinger collaborated with composer and musician Alexander Laszlo who had written a treatise on coloured light music, a trend which had resulted in hundreds of public shows and written reactions all through the 19th Century and well into the 20th. Laszlo toured successfully through Germany with a light organ and films prepared by Fischinger in the mid-1920s. Fischinger continued these experiments into multiple projections with combinations of abstract moving colours and shapes with static slides accompanied either by music specifically composed by Erich Korngold or a percussion group. Fischinger continued his experiments well into the 1950s:

Later, when Fischinger was disillusioned with the film industry because of the Hollywood studios’ refusal to give him creative control, he hoped to strike gold by inventing a Lumigraph, a piano that projected colours onto a screen. He imagined that every good bourgeois home would like a Lumigraph next to the piano.

It was the post-war avant-garde that would take up this challenge from their predecessors, albeit without truly acknowledging the debt to these innovators.

Many of these devices and experiments are now largely forgotten such as the experiments of the loner Alexander Laszlo or the trials at the Bauhaus where
ideas of overcoming traditional boundaries between the arts was one of the driving forces behind the endeavour. The Bauhaus-teachers Kurt Schwerdtfeger (Farbenlichtspiel, DE 1921-23) and Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack (Reflektorische Farbenspiele, DE 1921-23) worked on similar ideas of projecting (coloured) light in conjunction with musical and stage experiments. Both presented performances as part of the matinee Der absolute Film in Berlin in 1925. In a similar way ENTR’ACTE (FR 1924) was originally conceived as an intermission in Francis Picabia’s avant-garde ballet Ballet Suédois presenting Relâche in Paris while Erwin Piscator regularly used projection technology as part of his theatre productions. These films were prepared by protagonists of the German avant-garde movements such as Albrecht Viktor Blum, George Grosz, Leo Lania, Svend Noldan and others. There are more examples in the 1920s of composite events combining stage and film. One of the more obvious problems for these projections was the fleeting nature of a complicated set-up that was put together for one show only and dismantled afterwards. In contrast, film is a relatively stable technology: even decades later one can still revive and project a film (under the condition that it has not suffered too much from poor storage).

Probably one of the most famous apparatus devised to »explode« the cinema was Moholy-Nagy’s kinetic sculpture »light-space-modulator« (kinetische Skulptur Licht-Raum-Modulator), immortalised in his film LICHTSPIEL SCHWARZ-WEISS-GRAU (DE 1931/32). The construction comes out of a tradition that attempted to create a composite art from music, light, colour and movement in a three-dimensional space. The development of the »light-space-modulator« was greatly aided in terms of financing and technology by one of the leading German manufacturers of electronic equipment and technology, AEG (Allgemeine Elektrizitäts Gesellschaft, established 1883). This company was interested in a device for projecting mobile advertisement from moving vehicles such as trains, cars, or buses. The underlying idea was to mobilise advertisements, to use the city as a projection screen and especially those objects or vehicles already moving through the city as projection booths. While traversing streets and squares the moving projector on the bus, car or tram would project images or slogans on objects, buildings and people. Moholy-Nagy combined two important strands here: on the one hand stands the fascination for the city as the locus classicus of modernity and modernism, the city as cause and effect of the fundamental transformations brought about in perception and experience. On the other hand is the idea to expand and explode the cinema that is clearly visible in the classical avant-garde, but that only got broader notice after World War Two when Gene Youngblood coined the term »expanded cinema« and experiments at Knokke and elsewhere introduced a wider public to these ideas. Moholy-Nagy’s film LICHTSPIEL SCHWARZ-WEISS-GRAU (DE 1931/32) can thus be seen as a first demonstration of the machine, rather a trial run of a propaganda machine that was not intended for the cinema in the ordinary sense. Seen in this light, a film
Discourses and Networks

normally referred to as an avant-garde classic acquires a wholly new genealogy and is inserted into the lineage of the industrial film or the documentary when we view the result as documenting light and shadow.\(^{168}\) Moholy-Nagy's interest in light as a medium of expression is complemented by his choice of subject matter in his other films which deal with the city and the conditions of living offered to different groups: IMPRESSIONEN VOM ALTEN MARSEILLER HAFEN (DE 1929), BERLINER STILLEBEN (DE 1930), and GROSSTADTZIGEUNER (DE 1932). Later on, architecture was added as a topic, but similarly mirroring his concerns with living conditions and constructivist preoccupations about social engineering: ARCHITEKTURKONGRESS ATHEN (DE 1933) and NEW ARCHITECTURE AT THE LONDON ZOO (GB 1936).\(^{169}\)

Let us return to our point of departure in this short account of expanded cinema avant la lettre. For Bazin, the inventors and industrialists who capitalised the new medium – the Edisons and Lumières – only belong to a side line of film and cinema history. Those who count are the fanatics who give everything for approaching the myth of total cinema:

Les fanatiques, les maniaques, les pionniers désintéressés, capables comme Bernard Palissy de brûler leurs meubles pour quelques secondes d'images tremblotantes, ne sont ni des industriels ni des savants mais des possédés de leur imagination. Si le cinéma est né, c'est de la convergence de leur obsession; c'est-à-dire d'un mythe, celui du cinéma total.\(^{170}\)

It is those »men obsessed by their own imaginings« that we find in the circles of the avant-garde, following stubbornly this Bazinian myth which proved unfulfillable, yet whose pursuit brought about some of the most interesting examples of avant-garde activity. Even in later years these ideas did not die, but they went underground and resurfaced at certain points in history. Not coincidentally, Alexander Hammid, one of the key figures of the Czech avant-garde scene in the 1930s worked with Francis Thompson on several early IMAX films in the 1960s made for Expos or other events such as TO BE ALIVE! (1964), TO THE FAIR (1965), WE ARE YOUNG / NOUS SOMMES JEUNES (1967) or US (1968).\(^{171}\)

4.6 Conclusion


Peter Bürger (1974)\(^{172}\)

My discussion of several facets of the avant-garde – publishing, teaching, exhibitions, theory formation, and the utopia of a cinema expanded beyond the
limits of the screen and reaching into the life of the spectators – was aimed at least in three directions: firstly, to show how the avant-garde was a broad cultural and political movement that was much more than a handful of »masterworks« or »classics« characterised by formal experiments. Avant-garde culture encompassed exhibitions and publishing, teaching and theorising and activism in many different directions. Secondly, this wide field cannot be seen as merely a context or as an ancillary or secondary activity aimed at supporting the films, but the whole strategy of the avant-garde was geared towards a restructuring of cinema as an institution. For that reason the avant-garde formed media strategies that were aimed at a transformation of the social and political order. Thirdly, from an archaeological perspective the attempts at overcoming the standard set-up of the cinema, the traditional dispositif aptly demonstrates the far-sighted nature of the avant-garde: what was at stake was not an experimental technique or a formal innovation, but the cinema in its totality. Looked at from today, they were indeed our avant-garde.


6 Hans Richter: Köpfe und Hinterköpfe. Zürich: Verlag Die Arche 1967: 70. [»The ground plans [of a house that von der Rohe was building in Neu-Babelsberg] did not only look like Mondrians or my drawings, but like music, that visual music we talked about, we discussed, we worked on and we realised in films. It was not only a ground plan, it was a new language that seemed to connect our generation.«, my trans.]

Discourses and Networks


12 See chapter three for a thorough discussion of the political stance of the London Film Society.


17 See a list of titles and a discussion of the Soviet situation in part »5.6 Publication and the Grand Tour«.


21 Lion Feuchtwanger has given brilliant portrait of such conservative angst in the face of the power of montage cinema in his novel Erfolg. See the chapter »Panzerkreuzer Orlow« (Berlin: Aufbau 1993: 533-538).


26 The film was probably never finished. See 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 53.


28 Quoted after –r.: »Film vom Bauhaus«. In: *Film-Kurier*, vol. 8, no. 290, 11.12.1926. [»[The intention of the Bauhaus] is the intellectual and technical education of creative human beings for creative work, especially for building and fulfilling practical of experimental work, especially for building houses and their interior, as well as for the development of models for industry and handicraft.«my trans.]

29 I have discussed the Soviet film school below and in chapter five »Vanishing Point Soviet Union«.


33 See anon.: »Der Künstler gehört in die Industrie! Ein Gespräch mit Professor L. Moholy-Nagy, Dessau-Berlin«. In: *Film-Kurier*, vol. 10, no. 283, 28.11.1928.

34 The programme is describes as the »Nurmi-Film«, WACHSENDE KRISTALLE, and parts of the »Humboldt-film« (E.Paulick). See –r.: »Film vom Bauhaus«. In: *Film-Kurier*, vol. 8, no. 290, 11.12.1926.


37 L. Moholy-nagy: »film im Bauhaus. eine erwiderung«. In: *Film-Kurier*, vol. 8, no. 296, 18.12.1926. [»my, our investment will find its structure in ideas, suggestions, plans, »manuscripts«, theories. it shall be the issue of the others, let us say of the industry, to invest on the other side: namely by making the means accessible where one can expect something. to expect, that is the task of the sustaining factors, where evidence already has been brought, there is no challenge any longer.«, my trans.]


examine and master the – in his opinion – most modern form of design of the presence. Eight years later in his London exile he returned to this suggestion. Meanwhile, the name the teaching facility should have, was much more ambitious: ‘Academy of Light’ it was supposed to be named. In 1939 he finally introduced a mandatory class ‘Light Atelier’ for his students at the ‘School of Design’ in Chicago which he had established.«, my trans.]

40 Hans Richter: Köpfe und Hinterköpfe. Zürich: Verlag Die Arche 1967: 136. [»Ivor Montagu, the nephew of the director of the Bank of England, who had also been at the La Sarraz-Meeting, invited Einstein to give lectures at the Film Society that Montagu led. (He asked me to do a workshop there.) In the meantime Montagu attempted to set up a Hollywood engagement for Eisenstein, thereby giving him an adequate production possibility outside the Soviet Union. The speeches were attended intensely by those who later gained name and fame in British film production especially in the field of documentary productions.«, my trans.]


42 Julia Winckler: »Gespräch mit Wolfgang Suschitzky, Fotograf und Kameramann. Geführt in seiner Wohnung in Maida Vale, London, am 15. Dezember 2001, London, am 15. Dezember 2001, 22. März 2002, 17. Mai 2002«. In: Claus-Dieter Krohn et al.: Exilforschung. Film und Fotografie. München: edition text + kritik 2003: 254-279, here 269f. [»Both wanted to teach, I believe. Grierson was an academic and surrounded himself with people from Cambridge and Oxford. He had little knowledge about film and learned all he knew about film through practical work. [...] Grierson and Rothe wanted to enlighten the people in this country about poverty, medicine and health. Rothe wrote several books. [...] He was a film theorist. For example, he wrote about Russian films that were totally unknown here in England because they were censored. Still we had the possibility to see some films by Vertov, Pudovkin and Eisenstein in private screenings. There was a film club and a movie theatre in Regent Street that showed imported Russian films.«, my trans.]


44 See »Mitteilungen des Volksverbandes für Filmkunst: Film-Seminar«. In: Film und Volk, vol. 1, no. 1, Feb./March 1928: 32.


55 For more on the birth of the historicist movement from the spirit of the avant-garde and the functional differentiation see chapter three on the film societies.
Avant-garde Culture

56 Freddy Chevalley: »Pour la defense du cinema artistique«. In: Close Up, vol. 5, no. 4, October 1929: 304-306, here 305f. [...] at La Sarraz it was the weapons that were in question, quick and meticulous, general mobilization of all industrious units, preparations of plans for the campaign aimed at securing the artistic film its place at the sun and the audiences in obscure cinemas at least one meal per week.«, my trans.] 57 Ivor Montagu: »Old Man's Mumble. Reflections on a Semi-Centenary«. In: Sight & Sound, autumn 1975: 223.
63 For an examination of the discourses surrounding hypnosis, the control of the body in relation to the cinema, especially CALIGARI, see Stefan Andriopoulos: Besessene Körper. Hypnose, Körperschaften und die Erfindung des Kinos. München: Wilhelm Fink 2000.
66 For a report from this exhibition see Close Up, vol. 2, no. 5, May 1928: 75-77.
Discourses and Networks


79 Hanns Eisler (& Theodor Adorno): Komposition für den Film. Berlin: Henschel 1948: 58. [»The Baden-Baden music festival was the first to undertake experiments with film music which celebrated the notion of useful art. It is not Hollywood where such things are already without a clue and without any shame put into practice. The relationship between the two spheres does not go much further than that modernistic experimenting with »mechnical music« has encouraged some authors to dare and jump into the new market. They justify this adjustment to the new market as an advanced achievement of technocratic consciousness.«, my trans.]

80 A context for this exhibition with a discussion of the status of photography, of previous exhibitions and of the general discourse around photography is provided by Ute Eskildsen: »Fotokunst statt Kunstphotographie. Die Durchsetzung des fotografischen Mediums in Deutschland 1920-1933«. In: Ute Eskildsen, Jan-Christopher Horak (eds.): Film und Foto der Zwanziger Jahre. Stuttgart: Gerd Hatje 1979: 8-25.


83 See the catalogue Internationale Ausstellung des Deutschen Werkbunds Film und Foto. Stuttgart 1929. (Reprint Stuttgart 1979). See also the reconstruction Ute Eskildsen, Jan-Christopher Horak
Avant-garde Culture


84 For the programme see wh.: »Die Stuttgarter Sondervorfahrungen der Werkbundausstellung Film und Photo [sic]«. In: *Lichtbildbühne*, vol. 22, no. 145, 19.6.1929 and ad.: »Die Avantgarde im Stuttgarter Programm. Donnerstag – Beginn der Filmschau«. In: *Film-Kurier*, vol. 11, no. 139, 13.6.1929.

85 See the annotated reconstruction of the film programme in Helma Schleif (ed.): *Stationen der Moderne im Film I: FiFo – Film- und Fotoausstellung Stuttgart 1929*. Berlin: Freunde der Deutschen Kinemathek 1988.


87 See *Film-Kurier*, vol. 11, no. 136, 10.6.1929. For a summary of the opening speeches see Rudolf Schand: »Film und Foto: Ehrentage des stummen Films«. In: *Film-Kurier*, vol. 11, no. 141, 15.6.1929.


90 See »Film, Photo, Filmphoto«. In: *Lichtbild-Bühne*, vol. 22, no. 263, 4.11.1929.

91 See »Stuttgarter »Film und Foto«-Ausstellung in Berlin«. In: *Lichtbild-Bühne*, vol. 22, no. 238, 5.10.1929.

92 See »Der gute Film«. In: *Lichtbild-Bühne*, vol. 22, no. 247, 16.10.1929 and »Berliner Sondervorführung guter Filme«. In: *Film-Kurier*, vol. 11, no. 241, 10.10.1929.


100 See »Die Avantgarde tagt in Brüssel. Bemerkenswerte Filmvorführungen«. In: *Film-Kurier*, vol. 12, no. 283, 1.12.1930. Originally from Germany also Béla Balázs and G.W. Pabst were invited. See »Die Avantgarde. Deutschlands Vertreter auf dem Brüsseler Kongreß«. In: *Film-Kurier*, vol. 12, no. 256, 29.10.1930.
Discourses and Networks


101 This exchange was triggered by Bélá Balázs’ talk at an association of cameramen in Berlin on 9 June 1926. The text was printed as »Produktive und reproduktive Filmkunst«. In: Filmtechnik, no. 12, 12.6.1926: 234f. Reprinted in B.B.: Schriften zum Film. Vol. 2: Der Geist des Films. Kritiken und Aufsätze 1926-1931. (edited by Helmut H. Diederichs and Wolfgang Gersch). München / Berlin (Ost) / Budapest: Hanser / Henschel / Akademie 1984. The article was translated into Russian as »O budushchem fil’my«. In: Kino, 6.7.1926. Sergei Eisenstein responded polemically to Balázs’ contention that the cameraman was the most important part in the film production process. His response was published in two parts as »O pozitsii Bела Balasha«. In: Kino, 20.7.1926 and »Bela zabyvaet nozhnitsy«. In: Kino, 16.8.1926. In German published as: »Bela vergisst die Schere«. Reprinted in Helmut H. Diederichs (ed.): Geschichte der Filmtheorie. Kunsttheoretische Texte von Méliès bis Arneheim. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 2004: 257-264.


104 I have layed out these internal contradiction of the avant-garde in more detail in part 2.1.1 The Aporias of the Avant-garde.

105 See chapter six on the intersection of documentary and avant-garde with state institutions for further details.

106 Laura Vichi: Henri Storck. De l’avant-garde au documentaire social. Crisnée (BE) : Editions Yellow Now 2002: 181. [»The presence of Germaine Dulac, director of one of the largest French production houses, Gaumont-Franco-Film-Aubert (GFFA) who supported the 1930s generation of cineastes, was emblematic for the junction with the commercial cinema. It was at Bruxelles effectively that she hired Vigo for directing TARIS (1931) as well as Henri Storck, chosen as assistant by Pierre Billon at the Studio Buttes-Chaumont.«, my trans.]

107 Ernst Jäger: »Avant-Garde-, das Gewissen der Weltfilmindustrie«. In: Film-Kurier, vol. 11, no. 206, 30.8.1929. [»The work of the avantgarde will be a damn nothing, if it remains in its last effects l’art pour l’art.«, my trans.]


I have discussed this debate at greater length in »The Aporias of the Avant-garde« in chapter two of this study.


Willemen, Photogénie, op.cit.: 129.

Willemsen, Photogénie, op.cit.: 127 (italics in original).

Germaine Dulac: »L’essence du cinéma: L’idée visuelle«. In: *Les cahiers du mois*, no. 16/17, 1925. Reprinted in and quoted after Prosper Hillairet (ed.): *Germaine Dulac. Ecrits sur le cinéma (1919-1937).* Paris: Editions Paris Expérimental 1994 : 62-67, here 66. [»Only the music can evoke similar emotions to the cinema; and considering these impressions we can get an idea of the film of the future. Music too has no precise barriers; is it possible to conclude from the fact that the visual idea, the theme that the filmmakers are interested in have much more in common with the music than with any other example? [...] The film itself of which we all dream is a visual symphony living out of the emotions of the artist and coming to life on the screen.«, my trans.]


See A.G. Kawan: »Abstrakte Filmkunst«. In: *Film-Kurier*, vol. 6, no. 276, 22.11.1924. [»Eggeling’s and Richter’s abstract film design anticipate in ideal fashion with their structural clarity and formal rigour the real collectivity of the future, as opposed to today’s factual anarchy of social organisation.«, my trans.]


Discourses and Networks

132 See part 3.4.2 on the birth of film historiography and the archival impulse from the spirit of the film societies. Langlois occupies a central position here.
137 Jacques Feyder: »Les possibilités d’un art élargi«. In: *Pour vous*, 20.6.1929. Reprinted in and quoted after Charles Ford (ed.): *Jacques Feyder. Présentation. Choix de textes. Filmographie. Illustrations*. Paris: Éditions Seghers 1973: 98-100. [»The talking film includes all the possibilities of an enlarged cinematographic art, redeemed finally from subtitles and supported by every sounding emotion. [...] The cinegraphic movement, the visual rhythm, the coordination of objectives, the optical interpretation will be achieved by sound film.«, my trans.]
138 Rudolf Arnheim: »Kino von hinten«. In: *Das Stachelschwein*, no. 6, 1.6.1927: 63. Quoted after Rudolf Arnheim: *Kritiken und Aufsätze zum Film*. (edited by Helmut H. Diederichs). Frankfurt/Main: Fischer 1979: 309. [»The most modern have already threatened to project reflecrory games in the sky, instead of painting or drawing. This light cone is perhaps a graphical page from the future book of art history.«, my trans.]
139 See as an early example of this approach the curious mixture of illustrations, scientific study, and adventure serial C.W. Ceram: *Eine Archéologie des Kino*. Reinbek: Rowohlt 1965.
140 André Bazin: »Le mythe du cinéma total«. In: André Bazin: *Qu’est-ce que le cinéma? I: Ontologie et Langage*. Paris: Les éditions du Cerf 1958. (7e art): 21-26, here 25. [»It is the myth of an all-encompassing realism, a recreation of the world according to its own image, an image that would feel neither the ballast of free interpretation of an artist nor the unidirectionality of time. And even if film at its cradle did not have all capacities of the coming total film, it was against its will and only because his fairies were technically not capable to give, even if they would have wanted to.«, my trans.]
142 Valérie Pesseux: Abel Gance (1889-1981). *L’innovation artistique et technique du «tripyque», de la «perspective sonore» et de la Polyvision*. Perpignan: Institut Jean Vigo 2001. (Archives 87 – Avril 2001): 2. [»From that time onwards I had understood the necessity to surpass the ordinary limits of the screen. The silent cinema had reached the extreme limits of its capabilities. On my part, I had attempted to surpass them. [...] The triptych had the advantage of enriching the alphabet.«, my trans.]
144 Jean Maclou: »Studio 28«. In: *Photo-Ciné*, no. 10, Janvier 1928: n.p. [»The veritable reason of the Studio 28 was to be a laboratory of film, it does not have an animated orchestra with ascending movements, only one thing is important: the photographic projection booth and the screen which is one piece, nine meters wide and forming one vast frescoed mural in the front of the auditorium."

198
Studio 28 is the only space in Paris where a trypych projection is installed in a permanent manner and all research about this invention is done by the inventor himself: Abel Gance.«, my trans.


Jean Mauclaire: »Studio 28«. In: Photo-Ciné, no. 10, Janvair 1928: n.p. [»The possibilities of the trypych are even more broad, permitting the orchestration of images, the trypych will kill the orchestra. We are also employing mechanical music, necessary concession for preparing a too brusque transition. But one day not too far away the auditoria will possess nothing but a screen and a booth. The cinema suffices on its own. The cinema is a force that will make fun of its adversaries.«, my trans.]

See my chapter »Vanishing Point Soviet Union« on the visits of Soviet filmmakers to the West.

An interesting case of comparison would be HIGH TREASON (GB 1929, Maurice Elvey) in terms of content as well as its position between silent and sound cinema. The film deals with attempts by women’s groups to disarm the nations. It was shot as a silent film and – during the transition – sound was added to increase the market value of the film. See Kenton Bamford: Distorted Images. British National Identity and Film in the 1920s. London, New York: I.B. Tauris 1999: 169.


166 For a genealogy of this development from a formalist perspective see Wulf Herzogenrath: »Light-play and Kinetic Theatre as Parallels to Absolute Film«. In: Philip Drummond et al. (eds.): *Film as Film. Formal Experiment in Film 1910-1975*. London: Hayward Gallery 1979: 22-26.
170 André Bazin: »Le mythe du cinéma total«. In: André Bazin: *Qu’est-ce que le cinéma? I: Ontologie et Langage*. Paris: Les éditions du Cerf 1958. (7e art): 21-26, here 26. [»The fanatics, the madmen, the selfless pioneers who were capable like Bernard Palissy to burn their furniture for a couple of seconds flickering images are neither industrials nor scholars, but possessed by the images of their phantasy. And film was born from the convergence of their obsession, from a myth, the myth of total cinema«, my trans.]
172 Peter Bürger: *Theorie der Avantgarde*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1974: 35. [»The coincidence of institution and content reveals the social irrelevance as a characteristic feature of art in bourgeois societies and challenges claims for self-criticism within art. The historical avantgarde movement has achieved this self-criticism«, my trans.]