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Chapter 6: Across the Oceans The Intersection of Documentary and Avant-garde

*To the retrospective mind, the end of a year that gave us Stuttgart,
La Sarraz, as banners to the avant garde – that strange platoon
forever marking time – that saw the dawn of montage consciousness,
not altogether unlike the angry weal of an insect sting, and sent or promised
a thousand and one mixed blessings, talkies überall; needs some recapitulation,
some winnowing thoughts to shape its varying developments for future benefit.
Kenneth MacPherson (1929)¹*

The year 1929 is not only marking the mid-point of the two decades separating the two World Wars that temporally frame this study, but the year 1929 is also pivotal for several thematic developments of importance to this study. The summer of 1929 saw several events, seemingly unrelated, which nevertheless came to bear on the further development of the film avant-garde. In July 1929 the Tobis – a European company pushing forward the introduction of sound in Europe, thus playing the role of Warner Bros for Germany and other countries² – presented a programme of short experimental sound films at the Baden-Baden music festival (*Deutsches Kammermusik Fest*), a festival devoted to modernist and experimental tendencies in the so called »New Music«. Another epoch making work first saw the light of day at this festival: Bertolt Brecht's, Kurt Weill's and Paul Hindemith's radio play *Lindberghflug* premiered on 27 July 1929. In June 1929 Hans Richter curated an extensive programme of avant-garde films to accompany a film and photo exhibition in Stuttgart, the *Film- und Fotoausstellung (FiFo)* organised by the *Deutsche Werkbund*, with personal appearances by luminaries such as Dziga Vertov. In September of that same year the *crème de la crème* of the European film avant-garde met on an old castle in Switzerland near La Sarraz for the *Congres International du Cinéma Indépendent (CICI)* that entered history books as »the first film festival« and »the most important film event on Swiss soil«.³

Moreover, the year 1929 is crucial not only for the avant-garde, but also for the introduction of sound film in Europe. When the US film industry triumphantly entered the European market with sound film several big players, for fear of being crushed by Hollywood's domination, moved to form a syndicate to innovate an alternative sound film system based on European inventions. Pooling Dutch venture capital gathered at the Amsterdam stock exchange with money from the German electrical and film industry, using Swiss and Danish patents the Tobis-Klangfilm syndicate succeeded in temporarily halting the American advance on European markets through a wave of court orders for infringement of patents. In summer 1929 a deadlock had effectively frozen the wiring of cinemas for sound and the further dissemination of sound film in most major European markets.⁴ The

talks between the two blocks failed and the film industry approached the season 1929/30 with gloomy feelings while the avant-garde went into the autumn of 1929 with a sense of optimism and progress. For the industry the transition to sound film lay ahead which required huge capital investments while nobody yet knew what the audience would accept and how the patents battle could be resolved. In short: the avant-garde seemed to have reached a critical mass and its breakthrough into a true mass movement appeared imminent while the future of the industry was more than uncertain. The avant-garde seemed to be on the verge of a leap into a brighter future while the film industry was haunted by an imminent sense of crisis.

In another instance this year occupies a pivotal position: for the development of the avant-garde and documentary film. I will focus in the following on a single year and two films which I consider to be partly antagonistic, partly complementary, but which nevertheless, when examined together, take the discourses around avant-garde, industry and documentary in new and unexpected directions. The films are Walter Ruttmann's *MELODIE DER WELT* (DE 1929) and John Grierson's *DRIFTERS* (GB 1929). Other films from this key year similarly walk the line between fact and fiction, between experiment and mainstream, between silence and sound, between documentary and avant-garde such as Dziga Vertov's *CELOVEK S KINOAPPARATOM* (SU 1929), Jean Vigo's *A PROPOS DE NICE* (FR 1929) or Robert Siodmak's *MENSCHEN AM SONNTAG* (DE 1929). I have chosen for *DRIFTERS* and *MELODIE DER WELT* because both point backwards and forwards in many different directions as they occupy a key turning point in film history where avant-garde and documentary occupied a common platform. They mark a moment of intersection in film history where the film avant-garde rubbed shoulders with the documentary in a contradictory manner around issues such as abstraction and realism, independence and commission, fiction and non-fiction, colonialism and the other. It is around these issues that I will examine the two films at hand.

6.1 *MELODIE DER WELT* and *DRIFTERS*: Models for What?

[T]he documentary film was [...] created [...] in Europe, around 1927. It was part of the avant-garde movement, to give film artistic and educational values. Joris Ivens (1939)⁵

In 1929, at a time when the introduction of sound was lingering around the corner, John Grierson's *DRIFTERS* and Walter Ruttmann's *MELODIE DER WELT* were being made in circles normally considered to be avant-garde. As different as might seem at first glance, the two films nevertheless share a lot of common ground, starting with the subject matter. Both films deal with the ocean and both are tracing the trip of a single ship, recording and presenting sights and events from this voyage. Both films are also innovating new forms of perception and expression characterised by formal experimentation, public relations and social concern. Note how a

description of DRIFTERS fits MELODIE DER WELT equally well when substituting title and name of the director

[The film] dispenses with any psychological interplay between characters and instead treats ordinary actions as dramatic in themselves. The film is both an abstract depiction of objective reality and a poetic treatment of reality. [The director] treats nature, industry and humans as abstract material, lingering on the shapes and patterns they create. [The film] is also rhythmic in that drama is created through editing juxtapositions and tempo. These elements conform to the poetic, rhythmic and visual cinema that [the director] advocated in his writings.⁶

By leaving out the film title and the director's name one gets an equally valid statement for both films because both films operate inside the parameters and characteristics of what alternative film making practice was at that time. Paramount was the rejection of conventional dramatic and narrative structure («psychological interplay») while the aim was to uncover some underlying truth. In fact, it was opposition (to the film industry, to narrative etc.) that kept the avant-garde together for some time and around 1929 these aporias turned into the breaking points.⁷

Yet, how was it possible that two such different figures, Grierson who is normally considered to be the »father« of the British Documentary Movement and Ruttmann as the »fallen angel« of the German experimental film, each made a film at roughly the same time that share so much common ground? In order to understand this co-incidence, this intersection, it is necessary to move backwards and forward in time simultaneously. Only by widening the temporal context can we achieve a deeper understanding of the forces that shaped both filmmakers and films. To start with, both characters should be located in their context of origin, a task which will stress the different approaches to the cinema that Grierson and Ruttmann stand for, making their 1929-congruence all the more surprising. In this context it is helpful to address Ernst Bloch's concept of *Ungleichzeitigkeit* (non-synchronism) that points to the existence of different times in the same present. The idea does not just refer to backwardness, but also past futures and never-redeemed utopias in an archaeological sense that still linger on after they have turned from possible futures to parallel universes.⁸

Walter Ruttmann had possibly reached the peak of his reputation in 1929.⁹ He came out of the generation that had gravitated from painting to filmmaking in the early 1920s (other representatives in Germany were Viking Eggeling and Hans Richter) and built up a reputation on the strength of his four abstract animation films, OPUS I-IV (1921-1925). His cross-section of a city, BERLIN. DIE SINFONIE DER GROSSSTADT (1927), was met with enthusiasm in Germany and abroad inaugurating the genre of the city symphony which flourished for some time around 1930.¹⁰ This film presents a portrait of the city as a »day in the life« or »slice of life«, a day from early in the morning until night, from the surrounding rural area to the bustling city centre. The film shows glimpses of work and play, technology

and entertainment, wealth and poverty without a human protagonist in the conventional way. *BERLIN* was produced by the German branch of the Hollywood major Fox, the production was supervised by cameraman Karl Freund, the idea came from writer Carl Mayer.¹¹ Ruttmann subsequently worked on an early sound experiment for the emerging German radio system (*DEUTSCHER RUNDFUNK / TÖNENDE WELLE*, DE 1928) before being commissioned by the shipping company Hapag (Hamburg-Amerikanische Packetfahrt Actiengesellschaft) and the hardware company Tobis (Tonbild-Syndikat AG) to oversee the montage and post-synchronisation of the raw material shot by a crew aboard the Hapag vessel *Resolute* during a trip around the world. Ruttmann was confronted with approximately 16,000 meters of exposed film stock which he had to select and arrange into little more than 1,100 meters (the length of the finished film). The audiovisual global trip was fused by Ruttmann into *MELODIE DER WELT*, one of the first German sound film which premiered on 12 March 1929 in Berlin.¹² In style the film follows Ruttmann's *BERLIN*-film by rhythmically editing the material together according to formal principles of musical phraseology. The material, framed by a (fictional) story of a sailor (Iwan Kowal-Samborski) and his girlfriend (Renée Stobrawa), is arranged in three parts dealing with the life and cultures of different places; it is not a chronological account of the ship's itinerary. After *MELODIE DER WELT* Ruttmann went to Paris where he collaborated with Abel Gance on the flawed catastrophe film *LA FIN DU MONDE* (FR 1930), then on to Italy where he made a semi-fictional film on the steel work(er)s in Terni, *ACCIAIO* (IT 1933) before returning to Germany where he continued to make films about cities, industry and steel works for the Nazi government until his death in 1941.

While Ruttmann's *MELODIE DER WELT* is often seen as the beginning of the end of the avant-garde movement as sound came along, John Grierson's *DRIFTERS* is normally considered to stand at the origin of the British documentary movement of the 1930s and 1940s.¹³ By extension, this is by many also considered to be the »proper« beginning of the documentary as a film form with codified rules and structures. The Scotsman Grierson had studied sociology at Glasgow University and he had been conducting research in the United States on the social effects of the cinema. On returning to England in 1927 Grierson sought employment within film circles and approached Stephen Tallents, secretary of the recently established (in 1926) Empire Marketing Board. This government institution was the public relations-arm of the ministry overseeing the British Empire with the aim of fostering trade, exchange and well-being within this global network. Besides his work for this government institution, Grierson was in the late 1920s also an active member of the Film Society in London. His first film *DRIFTERS* (which is also the only film he signed as director without a collaborator as he later acted mainly as supervisor and producer) is promoting herring fishing in the North Sea and was commissioned by the Empire Marketing Board (EMB) as the first film of its newly formed film department. It was shot in the summer of 1928 and Grierson and his

later wife Margaret Taylor edited the roughly 10,000 ft. of rushes (appr. 3,000 m.) into the final length of 3,631 ft. (appr. 1,100 m.) in winter 1928/29. The finished film was presented to the EMB Film Committee in summer 1929 and had its premiere at the London Film Society on 10 November 1929. Incidentally (or not quite so incidentally, we will come back to this) the film premiered alongside Sergei Eisenstein's *BRONENOSEZ POTEMKIN* (SU 1925) which Grierson himself had prepared for its English release and Walt Disney's *THE BARN DANCE* (US 1929). Grierson was able to build on the strength of the public success of this film and he was able to establish a film unit of considerable importance. He thus became the godfather of the British documentary movement (under the auspices of the Empire Marketing Board and the General Post Office) before going to Canada and the United States on the eve of World War II.

While Grierson is situated by film history firmly in the genealogy of the documentary, Ruttmann belongs to the avant-garde, two schools of filmmaking normally distinguished. Yet again, when looking closely at the labels that film history has put to filmmaking practice in the late 1920s a measure of overlap emerges. In his classic history of the documentary Erik Barnouw has called Hans Richter's *RENNYSYMPHONIE* (DE 1928) a »Muybridge fused with abstractionism« and labelled *BALLET MÉCANIQUE* (FR 1924) an »abstract documentary« while Ruttmann in his words becomes a »painter-documentarist«. ¹⁴ In a way the avant-garde provided a kind of Rohrschach-test in which any observer would recognise what s/he was interested in because the avant-garde marks a moment of overlap and intersection. The open form of the avant-garde was hailed as its achievement and the films that adhered most strictly to this open form were canonized as classics of the avant-garde movement. It is striking therefore and my point of departure how both *DRIFTERS* and *MELODIE DER WELT* which occupy pivotal positions in the respective filmmaker's careers can be described with the same brief text quoted above and can both be put in the avant-garde as well as documentary. Yet, before examining the two films at close hand we need to look back a bit into the history of non-fiction and documentary in order to understand what one could call »the instability of the documentary and the avant-garde«, at least until the coming of sound. This genealogical sketch will provide some issues that will become pertinent when returning to the two films.

6.2 On the threshold: An invention of a tradition

In a surprisingly short time, »documentary« has become transformed from a mere word into a sentence – almost a life sentence for all those who happen to be making films from natural material. Andrew Buchanan (1933)¹⁵

Defining a documentary film has never been an easy task: The definition has political implications as well as social and cultural. One possibility of dodging the

notoriously difficult question »What is documentary?«, thus moving away from a quasi-ontological definition towards a more pragmatic approach, would be to look at examples of films which have been termed documentary and what features have been singled out to demarcate the (fuzzy) boundaries of the category. Especially in early cinema, the line between non-fiction and documentary is a highly contested one. Instead of the what-question one then ends up with another question, maybe equally enigmatic, but more seldomly asked and thus maybe even as an impossible-to-answer-question productive: »When was documentary (beginning)?« Let us then briefly turn to the history of documentary and rethink to what ends the contested term has been used. As controversial as the concept has been theoretical as unstable it proves to be historically.

Many historians of documentary have gone back to the beginnings of cinema to locate the origin of documentary at the very start. In a famous gesture, François Truffaut has cut film history in half (and effectively French-ized it): documentary film begins with the Lumière brothers, fiction film with Georges Méliès.¹⁶ Addressing this initial divide, Bill Nichols has raised the question that why – following this story of mythical origins – it has taken 30 years for the documentary to be named and to acquire its form and to ascend to its »rightful« place.¹⁷ While John Grierson in a by now classical argument has seen the films of John Flaherty as the first documentary films¹⁸, other suggestions have been put forward recently: Martin Loiperdinger has located the birth of documentary in World War I propaganda¹⁹, while Charles Musser has instead opted to see documentary's ancestry and genealogy long before the cinema in the 18th and 19th Century magic lantern lecture.²⁰ Moreover, the booming study of Early Cinema has seriously questioned this simplistic binarism of Méliès vs. Lumière, introducing the more neutral and highly useful distinction between fiction (everything that is staged for the camera) and non-fiction (in which the pro-filmic event is assumed to would have taken place the same way without a camera present).²¹ From the vantage point of early cinema Tom Gunning has asked why historians of documentaries have persistently ignored the pre-classical period, a time in which non-fiction filmmaking in its various guises was the dominant form on screens everywhere around. Conventionally, historians of documentary locate the beginning of their subject at the time when fiction film was gaining dominance in the 1920s.²²

Traditional film history has it that Robert Flaherty single-handedly brought the genre of documentary into existence. More recently, this myth of origin has been questioned by scholars working on the documentary. One argument that has been levelled at Flaherty's films is the fact that he was convincing and persuading the subjects of his films to reenact scenes that are far removed from their actual life. In what is possibly the most (in)famous scene of *NANOOK OF THE NORTH* (US 1922), the Eskimos stage a dangerous kind of walrus hunt that their culture had abandoned generations ago. One could argue here that reenactment is not so much

a problem as the presence of a camera always changes a situation and that most people do act differently if a camera is present. Flaherty would then be knocked down to a tradition of documentary in which the camera acts a provoker and catalyst that brings the very fabric of the film into existence like in the films of Michael Moore or Ulrich Seidl. Yet, what distinguishes Flaherty from the styles of Moore or Seidl is the absence of historical time. What Flaherty's films are presenting are timeless bubbles in which Polynesians, Inuits or Aran Islanders are leading a life that they have always lived and will always live. In the way that (temporal) change or development (which is different from a cyclic return of always the same) is absent from his films, it becomes difficult to claim Flaherty's work for documentary. If we follow Grierson's definition of documentary as »the creative treatment of actuality«, then Flaherty's films are certainly not actuality and while they might be treatments it is not actuality that they are treating (they would get the credit of being creative though). A certain measure of change – and therefore history – is absolutely necessary for a film to be a documentary in the sense that we nowadays understand it. Besides, Flaherty's films lack a sense of public responsibility and purposefulness which became an important facet of the public reformer Grierson. In fact, when Flaherty worked for Grierson on *INDUSTRIAL BRITAIN* (GB 1931), he focused, much to Grierson's dismay, almost exclusively on arts and craft, not on industry, machines or modernisation. Not coincidentally then, it remained the only film that Flaherty made in the Grierson circle as Flaherty did not become a long-term member of the Grierson school.

It is my contention that the documentary is a highly unstable entity and that a textual definition of the documentary alone does never suffice in order to delineate sufficient conditions of its existence. A documentary needs a number of contextual factors in order to be stabilised. Let me illustrate this by casting yet another glance back into the history of the documentary. In his classical history of the documentary film Erik Barnouw passes through a pantheon of great men who advanced the art and science of documentary motion pictures: his chapters bear programmatic titles such as prophet, explorer, reporter, painter, advocate, bugler, prosecutor, poet, chronicler, promoter, observer, catalyst, guerilla.²³ At the same time that these romantic notions of man of (and in) action are deeply problematic in different ways they also point out that the non-fiction film can be fitted into many other fields and discourses as well. »Prophet« deals with inventors and their quasi-religious zeal, thus opening up the genealogy of non-fiction into the archaeology of technology. »Explorer« with its extensive discussions of the feats and adventures of Robert Flaherty on the one hand open up the films to a reading across ethnography, but it also situates Flaherty's movements and actions within the force field of colonialism and imperialism (not to mention the fictional dimension of the staged scenes). »Reporter« concentrates on how in Dziga Vertov's work the non-fiction film is related to the printed press, but also to the popular genre of reportage and thus opens the genealogy to the newsreel, journalism and propaganda. The list

could be easily continued. What Barnouw is (involuntarily) uncovering here is that early documentary as a genre is an unstable entity at least until the introduction of sound because what passes as »realistic« or »authentic« is subject to constant shifts and changes in the public eye. His view relies on a problematic notion of what the documentary film really is as it is not any unstructured piece of film that represents events that would have happened even if the camera had not been present. The necessary condition for the documentary as a genre is not, as commonly assumed, that it is depicting the outside world »as it really is« (in the Rankean sense), but it is rather the fortuitous intersection of different developments in the late 1920s that brought the documentary as we know it into existence.

Barnouw's categories demonstrate the contiguity of non-fictional filmmaking to other discourses and the instability of the documentary until the 1930s. The point of this chapter is not to argue that Grierson's *DRIFTERS* is the first documentary, that would just replace one dogma with another one, but to show the fragility of the documentary as a film form, at least until 1930, possibly until after World War Two. Grierson's achievement was to eclectically construct a film style (he freely took from Flaherty, Soviet montage cinema, abstract film) to borrow an organisational form from the avant-garde (*Medienverbund*) and to transpose it onto governmental institutions (thus breaking away from other, more fragile or precarious forms of dependence), thereby creating a relatively stable context that was able to generate a canon and definition of the documentary in the 1930s. The instability of the documentary is shared in many respects by avant-garde filmmaking which was in the interwar period contiguous to advertising and non-fiction, to commercial art cinema and political propaganda. Different film forms (not genres in the sense of Western, detective film etc.) need a somewhat stable context of production and exhibition in order to take shape. A similar observation for the French context has been made by Siân Reynolds: »Before the 1940-1950s, there was nothing coherent enough to be called a ›school of documentary‹ in France. Rather there was a scatter of different types of film, made by individuals or teams which might fit the documentary label.«²⁴ This instability can be located in all contextual sectors of the cinema: funding (state or private companies, film industry or patrons?), style (closer to the avant-garde or to classical film style?), address (giving the audience identification possibilities or turning to abstraction?), distribution and exhibition pattern (using commercial channels or those of educational film? screened as a part of commercial cinema programmes or in specialised events?), even length (short, medium or feature length) and format (35 or 16mm, silent or sound?). Thus, the problem to locate an »origin« for documentary has as much to do with the instability of institutions as with transformations in film style, as with changes in exhibition and reception. It is all these entities and factors one has to examine in turn in order to understand how avant-garde and documentary intersected, but also diversified into different film forms.

6.3 The Index, the Narrative, the Fragment and the Persuasion of the Masses

...what documentary film history sought to deny was not simply an overly aesthetic lineage but the radically transformative potential of film pursued by a large segment of the international avant-garde. [...A] wave of documentary activity takes shape at the point when cinema comes into the direct service of various, already active efforts to build national identity during the 1920s and 1930s.
Bill Nichols (2001)²⁵

Now, while these attempts are interesting and well-argued as prefiguring later configurations, I want to redraw an argument recently advanced by Bill Nichols. He locates the »birth«, »origin«, »emergence«, or »invention« of the documentary – or, as he preferably terms it, »documentary's historical moment – at the crucial intersection of four elements: »photographic realism, narrative structure, and modernist fragmentation – along with a new emphasis on the rhetoric of social persuasion«²⁶. Let me discuss Nichols' argument in detail and depth because the two films I will be dealing with can serve as a test case for his model. Nichols starts off by pointing out »a false division between the avant-garde and documentary that obscures their necessary proximity«.²⁷ Nichols' contention is that Grierson »tamed« modernist fragmentation to social(-democratic) ends, thus covering the contiguity of *DRIFTERS* to *POTEMKIN*. By stressing documentary film's social responsibility another link that was equally important in the forming of the genre drifts out of sight, namely the common genealogy documentary shares with the radical avant-garde. At their heart and origin, both avant-garde and documentary share the deep-seated will to change the world. Yet, they differed in the ends and the aims that were pursued. Usually, what was taken up as an explicit or implicit model was the filmmaking in the Soviet Union, the most radical attempt at transforming politics, work, life and art. Here, it seemed to many observers, the barriers between art and life had been broken down in the service of producing one of modernism's most cherished projects: the production of a new human being designed through principles derived from engineering and the natural sciences.

Nichols examines the four elements one by one that together constitute sufficient conditions for the documentary film: no single element is enough for defining a documentary, but the combination of all four is needed for the emergence of the documentary. The first element, the indexicality of the photographic image, is no exclusive property of the documentary. Both the cinema of attractions (with its contemporary extension in sensationalist TV shows such as *Cops* or reality TV) as well as pornography also rely heavily on the indexical nature of the photographic reproduction (hence the importance of the cum-shot as

evidence of the real in pornography), but nobody would refer to them as documentaries. This element is a »necessary if not sufficient condition for the appearance of documentary film. [...] It is safe to conclude that the documentary potential of the photographic image does not lead directly to a documentary film practice.«²⁸ The indexical nature was exploited before and after in non-documentary films. Narrative, the second element, is conventionally connected with fiction, not with documentary. Yet, as Hayden White and others have pointed out, narrative imbues historical time with meaning; time without narrative is simply duration. In documentary, a typical structure of conflict-resolution is used, even if the protagonist is an impersonal agent such as a river or a city. A series of spectacular views as typical of early travelogues is therefore distinguishable by its different narrative form and address.

How can, to turn to the third element in Nichols' scheme, the contribution of the modernist avant-garde to the documentary film be described? For Nichols the avant-garde gave »...representational techniques and a social context conducive to a documentary movement [that] affirmed the close proximity of modernist exploration and documentary address«²⁹. In documentaries, reality is constructed and authored, not simply recorded. »It was precisely the power of the *combination* of the indexical representations of the documentary image and the radical juxtapositions of time and space allowed by montage that drew the attention of many avant-garde artists to film.«³⁰ The fourth element, rhetorical strategies, I am tempted to call »the educational impulse«: the will to change film as a medium and the will to change the world as this transformative impulse is a key feature of the avant-garde. Of course, rhetorics in Nichols' view can also lead in other directions: »Like the other three elements, rhetoric does not necessarily lead to documentary film. As a persuasive strategy it also supports overt propaganda, all advertising, and some forms of journalism.«³¹

Nichols, rightly shying away from essentialist notions such as »birth« or »origin«, locates what he terms »documentary's historical moment« in the second half of the 1920s. Documentary's »moment« begins to take shape in the Soviet Union while Grierson is the key figure in translating the Soviet experiments to a British context. The more radical attempts at change are turned into issues of nationality and citizenship, transforming the revolutionary constructivist spirit into a social-conservative reformism: »Grierson's commitment to government and corporate sponsorship as the only viable means of institutional support required an act of separation from the more radical potentialities of the modernist avant-garde and the particular example of the Soviet cinema.«³² Thus, revolutionary energy is turned into citizen's duty and the imaginary (and publicly stated) genealogy of the documentary is transposed in an act of hagiography from Vertov and Eisenstein to Flaherty. Consequently, Nichols objects to Flaherty as the godfather of documentary because he »lacked [...] the orator's sense of social persuasiveness [...] Flaherty had the right sense of drama and conflict but the wrong sense of

modernity«. ³³ In fact, Nichols sees the shift to Flaherty as an evasive action and claims that Grierson's extensive discussions of Flaherty allowed him to gloss over the fact that he was indeed heavily indebted to Soviet cinema. The acknowledgement of a Soviet influence would have led him into trouble with his corporate and state sponsors and thus he deferred to Flaherty the function of an »origin« when really he meant Eisenstein and the Soviet school of filmmaking. Grierson's neoconservative model of society put him in the position of a mandarin overseeing public opinion (as the masses could not be trusted):

Grierson's famous definition of documentary as »the creative treatment of actuality« must be coupled with his less well-known definition of propaganda as »the constructive management of public affairs« if we are to locate his attacks on the modernist avant-garde effectively. [...] Griersonian documentary promises the mastery of events through participatory rituals suited to the citizen-subject. Modernism exposes such participatory rituals as just that: *rituals*. The modernist avant-garde thwarted the illusion of mastery that comes with realism and narrative. ³⁴

As the modernist avant-garde produced objects that stressed the traumatic nature of the modern experience they failed to instill in the viewer a sense of solidarity with existing structures and institutions which Grierson actively sought.

Interestingly enough, Guy Gauthier ³⁵ has proposed a model that is comparable in some respects when referring to the four winds of the documentary in the interwar period, namely the storm of popular cinema, the lukewarm wind of social institutions (funding), the thin air of the avant-garde exhibition outlets (unnecessarily limiting himself here to ciné-clubs and specialised theatres as I believe that this field was much wider ³⁶), and the gentle breeze of the laboratories. Even though Gauthier's scheme is different from Nichols' the direction seems to be similar: as a definition proper (with conditions regulating the affiliation to a specific category) is hardly achievable because non-fiction, *Kulturfilm*, educational film and industrial film all share many features and it is nearly impossible to distinguish a travelogue from an expedition film or colonial filmmaking activities, to mention only a few cases. Therefore, both Nichols and Gauthier try to reconceptualise the documentary as the crossroads of several discourses and filmmaking techniques, both intrinsic and extrinsic to the film. Contrary to a traditional definition which opposes the documentary diametrically to the feature films these approaches try to stress the similarity, contiguity and proximity of other filmmaking practices to the documentary, thus locating the documentary genealogically within a wider force field. As a result, Gauthier is able to conceptualise Jean Vigo's *A PROPOS DE NICE* (FR 1929/30) at the convergence of three different strands: the fascination with montage mostly indebted to the Soviet revolutionary cinema, the dreamlike states of the surrealist group, and the social topography of a place that would become more prominent in the course of the 1930s with more »realist« films. A film that fits in the same categories and even

adds a dose of expedition filmmaking is Luis Buñuel's *LAS HURDAS / TIERRA SIN PAN* (ES 1932/33) which also defies traditional categories of avant-garde and documentary. Maybe here is a continuation and transformation of the travel adventure to be found: by fusing the colonialist expedition with surrealist strangeness in terms of subject matter and by imbuing the conventional structure with constructivist montage and stark juxtapositions films such as *LAS HURDAS*, *SOL' SVANETII* (SU 1930, Mikhail Kalatozonov, ›Salt for Svanetia‹) or *TURKSIB* (SU 1929) are avant-garde transformations of the earlier, all too often conservative or reactionary genre.

Now, while I am very much in agreement with Nichols and while I consider his article to be one of the most important contributions to the study of documentary film in recent time, I would like to add another element: the coming of sound. Sound as technology and as medium on the one hand gave an easier handle to persuasive strategies, on the other hand it increased the national sentiments connected to the cinema. A rhetorical discourse was easier with sound as it usually required an amount of language that could become tedious as intertitles. Spoken language also increased ideas of nationality connected to the cinema.³⁷ My focus on John Grierson's *DRIFTERS* and Walter Ruttmann's *MELODIE DER WELT* is meant to show two different reactions to synchronised sound film (even though *DRIFTERS* is silent) paradigmatic of wider issues that were at stake in this media transition.

6.4 Steam, Waves, and Working Men: Structure & Style

Eine Generation, die noch mit der Pferdebahn zur Schule gefahren war, stand unter freiem Himmel in einer Landschaft, in der nichts unverändert geblieben war als die Wolken, und in der Mitte, in einem Kraftfeld zerstörender Ströme und Explosionen, der winzige gebrechliche Menschenkörper.
Walter Benjamin (1933)³⁸

With Bill Nichols' categories in mind let us return to the two films that straddle the boundary of silent and sound film, of documentary and avant-garde, of commissioned and independent film. By examining the four categories proposed we can get a clearer sense of how the films position themselves in relation to the trends and lines of flight relevant to the key year 1929 in which they were produced. Both *DRIFTERS* and *MELODIE DER WELT* clearly partake of the sense of realism and indexicality offered by the photographic camera image, Nichols' first category. Both revel in spectacular sights and present the spectator with a variety of attractive images that must have been unknown to most contemporary spectators. Ruttmann boasts with faraway and exotic places, with strangely looking buildings, musical instruments and diversions, with customs and entertainments of cultures from places still largely unknown at that time. A large measure of the excitement for the audience is to be found in the attraction of seeing sights unknown and

spectacular. Grierson's film, despite being »closer to home«, exhibits a similar added value offered by the indexical. The thorough and detailed presentation of a fisherboat's trip offers ample opportunity for spectacular sights such as the fishes caught up in the net underwater or the storm during the hauling of the nets. Despite their differences, both films clearly indulge in the indexical power of the photographic image in reproducing sights and events that must have been unknown and fascinating to most spectators. Yet, this power of the indexical had been a mainstay of earlier travel films and actualities and it can therefore only be a necessary condition, not a sufficient condition for documentary's definition.

In terms of narrative, Nichols' second category, both *DRIFTERS* and *MELODIE DER WELT* present a highly structured texture with much more internal coherence and dynamic than the views or travelogues of early cinema. Both films consist of three parts. Ruttmann's film opens with a short prologue in which the sailor and his girl-friend descend from the darkness of an attic room to the light of the harbour where they bid farewell to each other. Yet, this fragment of a story is in the course of the film largely abandoned, even though we have occasional glimpses of the sailor edited somewhat arbitrarily into the footage from the trip. The first part deals with architecture, traffic, religion, and war, the second part shows images of children, sailing and rowing, hunting and agriculture, and sports while the third part is concerned with women, languages, food, dance, music, theatre, entertainment and work.³⁹ John Grierson's *DRIFTERS* follows one fishing boat from a British harbour out to an overnight fishing trip and then returns to its port the next evening after a long and tiresome hauling of the nets. The last part of the film links this exemplary trip to the larger forces of a food industry that connects the whole Empire. A similar tripartite structure as in *MELODIE DER WELT* can be found in Grierson's film: the narration presents two consecutive days and the intervening night. On the first day the ship goes out to sea and casts its nets, at night the sailors eat and rest while the true drama unfolds underwater where fish get caught up in the nets, and the next day presents the hauling of the nets and the bustling atmosphere of the harbour where the catch is being sold. Both films try to make sense of the spectacular images by means of a recognisable structure, i.e. narration, thus according to extrinsic and intrinsic rules. The films attempt to give the audience a system of understanding something that was unknown to them.

The style of narrative in both films is more radical than in most documentaries: neither in *DRIFTERS* nor in *MELODIE DER WELT* do we have a human protagonist in the conventional sense. Now, while this is not unusual for many documentaries dealing with issues that cannot be portrayed solely through one person, the films under investigation here are special insofar as we never get acquainted with any of the persons being shown in the films. Both films radicalise the modernist impulse of the avant-garde directed against conventional and melodramatic narrative centred on characters. Yet, both films still present a recognisable narrative structuring their material through a three-act division not

altogether untypical of classical narrative. It is therefore the mediation of modernist abstraction through narrative structure (the classical three-act division) that characterises both films.

Probably the most important feature of both films is what Nichols has termed »modernist fragmentation«, i.e. the degree to which those films employ aesthetic and formal devices innovated by the avant-garde. In Ruttmann's *MELODIE DER WELT* the transitions between sections and the organisation within appears heavily based on formal criteria of similarity of line, shape, form and movement, preoccupations from his early abstract films of the first half of the 1920s. Already in the opening of Ruttmann's previous film *BERLIN, DIE SINFONIE DER GROSSSTADT* (DE 1926/27) abstract moving shapes had transformed into glimpses caught from a train window approaching the big city, thus marking a transition from pure abstraction to more concrete representations. Ruttmann was fond of recognising abstract patterns in photographically produced images. Some examples from *MELODIE DER WELT* might clarify this: the architecture section, the first after the prologue with the parting of the ship, begins when a sailor climbing up a ladder to the mast top is intercut first with a man and then with an ape climbing up a palm tree. The structure of the palm tree's trunk is then after a closer shot likened to a pillar which has a similar look and texture, at least in the photographic images. This process of replacement via metonymy and metaphor takes place mainly on a formal level and is less concerned with a relationship on a representational level, rather with parallels in terms of surface appearance. The transition from the agriculture segment to the sports segment moves from a rice field in a high angle shot to a stadium seen from a similar perspective which through their terrace structure and slow movement (water in the rice field, people in the stadium) resembles the field structurally. The sports segment ends on planes flying loops in formation followed by a shot of seagulls, both filmed against the sky, thus giving the images a very similar visual impression. The seagulls in turn lead back to the ship on its world trip for a brief transition before the next thematic session starts. It is this chain of images – planes and seagulls flying in the sky marking a metaphorical substitution while the seagulls lead to the ship through their metonymical contiguity – that is characteristic of Ruttmann's film. This is a typical stylistic trend pioneered in *Neue Sachlichkeit*. Especially in photography an obsession is discernible with natural phenomena that – at a specific angle and at a specific closeness, distance or magnification – resemble human-made structures. Typical proponents of this technique in the second half of the 1920s are Karl Bloßfeldt⁴⁰ and Albrecht Renger-Patzsch⁴¹ who visually likened grass to columns or cacti to religious buildings in Egypt. Even though outside reality is used as raw material in this approach, it is nevertheless not representational reality that appears on the screen:

Auf der Höhe der klassischen Moderne entwickelt die Neue Sachlichkeit das Gegenständliche als eine spezifische Form ästhetischer Abstraktion, die sie dem expressiven Ausdruck entgegenstellt: Statt sie subjektiv zu verformen, nimmt sie das Gegenständliche der Wahrnehmung als eine strenge Formvorgabe, die übersteigert und verabsolutiert werden kann.⁴²

Accepting the objectiveness of perception as a formal given also describes Grierson's style in a very accurate manner. In the way that both Ruttmann and Grierson adopted the concrete representation of outside reality as the starting point for aesthetic abstraction they are typical proponents of their time. These modernist elements – which should not just be limited to fragmentation as a specific technique – were shared by many artists around 1930. They do not provide us with distinguishing features between the two films.

Ruttmann often breaks up continuous action by intercutting disparate material, yet there is always a relation to be found: ever more rapid and closer shots of traffic (cars, trams, pedestrians, carriages) with its accompanying noise on the sound track are mixed with shots of an African banging on a drum. The similarity is here provided by sound as the drum gives a very similar sound to the city noise. In another instance a man dressed in traditional Japanese attire and shooting an arrow with a longbow is intercut with Africans throwing spears and arrows hitting a target. In a way this is a reversed Kuleshov effect because the spectator is first led to believe that we are seeing a match-on-action cut from the shootist to the target, yet when seeing Africans throwing a spear followed by another arrow hitting the same target, this relationship breaks down. The repeated series of the bowman and the target only reinforces the doubts about the spatial and causal contiguity of these two shots. The film foregrounds the artificial nature of the spatial coupling of two consecutive shots which are by convention being understood by the audience as presenting contiguous spaces. This destruction of an illusion that the more traditionally minded cinema builds on is typical of the avant-garde as a whole. Shattering conventionalised illusion is seen as a radical political weapon. In fact, Ruttmann almost never employs a shot-reverse shot pattern in a classical way. Even if he does so as when we see a Japanese woman smiling off camera and we get in the next shot the sailor of the *Resolute* smiling, background and lighting are so different that the thought of a real contiguity does not cross one's mind. Most probably, the Japanese woman was filmed during the trip while one could speculate that the sailor was recorded on a later occasion during the preparation of the film in Germany. Often two similar activities are mixed as when we see an Asian family serving and eating a meal with people in other cultures filling plates with food and eating. While this hints at a resemblance – an imagined unity that must have appealed to Ruttmann's avant-gardistic sensibility – it also breaks up the action itself into its constituent parts. Isolating smaller parts has been a preoccupation of the classical avant-garde as much as claiming the unity of life and

art, the ultimate aim of avant-garde activity, yet *MELODIE DER WELT* also hints at the incompatibility of these two objectives.

Despite its clear narrative which could easily be told in a conventional classical film style, *DRIFTERS* uses the simple story for driving home a number of points about fishing within the larger social context. The film starts off in a relatively slow tempo, at least in montage speed as the ship gets ready and leaves the harbour. The first intense sequence depicts the labour of casting the nets. The film rhythmically puts the working men together, but often just presents activities – a knot is being made, a rope runs through a winch, a buoy lands on the water, a net falls into the sea – without identifying a human protagonist as the agent of the action. Grierson thus presents work as something impersonal or at least depersonalised to which the sailors have no direct relationship anymore. On the one hand this depersonalised style creates an ideal or exemplary representation: *DRIFTERS* does not present any specific ship with specific sailors (we never learn the boat's name nor the name of any of the fishermen), but it is one ship that acts as a substitute for the countless other boats (we get short glimpses of a large number of fishing boats on some occasions that hint at this hidden multitude behind this one boat) and one trip that fills in for the countless trips of countless boats. On the other hand, Grierson presents a kind of Marxist version of labour under the conditions of modernity in the way that the fishermen on the ship do neither get individualised as they would in a humanistic argument nor do they fuse with their occupation like masters of craftsmanship. Even when showing the ship's crew at the dinner table we are presented with shots of the table with hands reaching or when presenting shots of men coming down the stairs these are being cut before we see the face, leaving out any distinguishing marks. Eating and social activity becomes a part of the fishing job like mending nets or jolting about the nets to free the fishes. Or, put differently: eating becomes a function of the main activity of the sailors, that is: catching fish.

While the fishermen sleep at night the film presents the drama of the sea that is one of the most impressive sequences of the film. Congers and catfish take advantage of the herring shoals already trapped in the net and make themselves free with the catch. We see the panicking herrings, a catfish with a victim in its mouth and many impressive submarine images which were shot in a tank at the Plymouth Marine Biological Research Station.⁴³ This underwater drama is the most obvious evidence that the trip is much less unified than it appears at first sight as the film was shot in many different places and only put together at the editing table. The bird scenes were shot in one place, the ship's cabin was a constructed set, and when their fishing trips were unsuccessful Grierson's team even bought loads of herring that would be put by hand into the nets that were subsequently hauled from the water to give the impression that the catch was plenty.⁴⁴ Grierson had learned Kuleshov's important lesson from the Soviet montage films: shots executed at

different places and times could be combined in order to create the illusion of a contiguity of the space represented in those shots.

The counterpart to the casting of the nets – and in some sense even more climactic as a storm is brewing and the sea is heavy – is the hauling of nets full with fishes which have to be shaken from the nets into the hold. The repetitiveness of this activity is stressed by long series of shots that mirror the laborious and monotonous nature of the work. Afterwards the ship returns to its port and the modern machinery of selling, transporting and transporting the fish to other places is being presented. On the market we see the auctioneer who is being characterised by the bell in his hand, but we never get a proper shot of his face. Again, Grierson abstracts from any concrete character and instead opts for a style in which the function of individuals overrides their individuality. The film achieves a very symmetrical structure of two days and the intervening night, with the impressive shots of the fishes functioning at the same time as a division between casting and hauling, yet also in its natural drama as a climax.

In Ruttmann's film activities or persons are often likened to animals. Children playing tag are intercut with pigeons on Venice's St. Mark's square and a sumo wrestler looking angrily into the camera as he gets ready for his fight is followed by a shot of a tiger hissing frontally at the spectator. A scene of a violent fight of two men is intercut with battering rams colliding at full speed. This parallelism is also employed on the sound track: in the language section we see two men in Arabic-style attire in front of what appears to be a mosque in a heated argument. They literally go at each other's throat while on the sound track we hear the barking of dogs. This technique is somewhat reminiscent of Eisenstein's intellectual montage in which he comments on certain screen actions by cutting to extra-diegetic material. Transposing this idea to sound and therefore creating a sound juxtaposition could have been directly taken from Eisenstein's, Alexandrov's and Pudovkin's manifesto on sound film with which Ruttmann was surely familiar.⁴⁵ In the war section images of battles, soldiers and military machinery accompanied by battle noise is contrasted twice with a woman emitting a stark scream and subsequently even more starkly with a cemetery and an almost inaudible wind on the soundtrack. No such instance of extraneous reference or stark juxtaposition can be found in *DRIFTERS* which is very sparse and almost laconically minimalist in the way we neither get to know any of the fishermen nor get any film material outside of the herring fishing business. In fact, the film is shot in such a way that we do not even get proper views of the fishermen who are not treated as characters of interest by the film. The shots of the fishermen's villages are the only instances of a reality outside of herring fishing that the film shows and they have a very precise function: to show that their old houses are the only remnants of a past way of life that the fishermen have left behind. In fact, Grierson treats the fishermen very much like the modern industry that employs them: they are workers responsible for specific tasks and as individuals they are completely

replaceable. Apart from the boy that wears his cap sideways who works in the hold and the occasional glimpses we get from the captain on the bridge the persons on the boat cannot be distinguished. The fishermen occupy a functional position, much like the steam boat or the nets: necessary for the fishing, yet also utterly replaceable and therefore not interesting as individuals. The distance between Grierson and his self-proclaimed idol Flaherty becomes very clear here: Flaherty would have chosen a family or a family-like group, thereby providing personal identification to the audience, and have them reenact a traditional way of fishing and living that they only know from their forefathers' stories. While one could criticise Grierson for this lack of interest in the workers he is arguably criticising the alienated relationship between the worker and his work in an abstract Marxist sense. The single worker is replaceable just like a cog in a machine and the relationship of the worker to his work is equally impersonal – one could read Grierson's film as a scathing attack on the alienation of the worker under the conditions of modernity, yet again Grierson is celebrating the machine-like precision and the functional perfection of the shipping business.

After this lengthy discussion of modernist elements to whose aesthetics' both films are heavily indebted let us turn to Nichols' fourth element that he considers to be a necessary condition for the emergence of the documentary: a sense of social persuasion. I believe that this is the factor where we can begin to see how Grierson diverges from Ruttmann. So far we have seen some stylistic and narrative differences, but no fundamental incongruity between the two films. What *MELODIE DER WELT*, though, seems to lack is a clear sense of (social or political) purpose. In his disinterestedness towards the material from different cultures Ruttmann scans the shots for parallelisms, similarities and structural repetitions without attempting to create a clear sense of the forces of history shaping the life and culture of the people depicted. By contrast, *DRIFTERS* makes very clear in the beginning that it is concerned with herring fishing under the conditions of modernity. The very first title right after the opening credits and before we have seen any image of fishermen or fish reads: »The herring fishing has changed. Its story was once an idyll of brown sails and village harbours, – its story is now an epic of steam and steel.« Then follows immediately the second title: »Fishermen still have their homes in the old-time villages – But they go down, for each season, to the labour of a modern industry.« Contrary to what Ruttmann does – seeing formal similarity everywhere – and contrary to what Flaherty would have done – presenting an unchanging and a-historical timeless way of fishing – Grierson consciously chooses to present fishing not as a romantic endeavour, but as a modern industry. With announcing change in the first sentence and then juxtaposing a past time (»an idyll of brown sails and village harbours«) to a present state (»an epic of steam and steel«) – and the second titles underlines this temporal structure when contrasting »old-time villages« with a »modern industry« – the film opens up a horizon of expectation that puts the audience's mind in a historical

mood. And even though we do not see, hear or read a lot of the old way of fishing the film properly opens with images of traditional villages. This way, the film reinforces the contrast with what the rest of the film will show, namely the modern business of fishing. In this opening – and we should remind ourselves that the first couple of minutes of a film are always decisive – the emphasis is firmly put on the transformative nature of modernity. Even though the film in the main body does not particularly stress this contrast between tradition and modernity, it nevertheless remains »an epic of steam and steel« as it just presents the modern business and does not even refer back to something like »the good old times«.

What Ruttmann achieves with his parallelisms between different cultures, people, animals and activities is the conjuring up of an imaginary »harmony of the world«. ⁴⁶ Everything is in sync and the artistic task is to track down the hidden resonances and bring them to light. Despite this conscious take on similarity and the connections being thus forged around the globe, the film nevertheless very seldomly sees connections at a deeper level. While DRIFTERS in its final part shows how the fish is sold, stored and shipped linking the fishing business to a much larger context of the globalised food industry, MELODIE remains with its connections very much on the surface of things. While similarities can be found everywhere, no structural dependencies are laid open by Ruttmann's film. This concentration on formal similarity and the absence of structural dependencies was criticised by Siegfried Kracauer who was never deeply impressed by Ruttmann's films anyway:

Im Gegensatz zu den Kultur- und Operettenfilmen änderten die Querschnittfilme während der präfaschistischen Jahre ihren Charakter. Sie wurden zu Vehikeln eines aufgesetzten Optimismus, der ihrer Stimmung früher fremd war. Dieser neue Optimismus machte sich energisch in Ruttmanns frühem Tonexperiment DIE MELODIE DER WELT [...] geltend, einem Querschnittsfilmm, den er aus dem Material montierte, das ihm die Hamburg-Amerika-Linie zur Verfügung gestellt hatte. [...] Während BERLIN, so neutral der Film auch war, immer noch von der Verhärtung mechanisierter menschlicher Beziehungen ausging, demonstriert DIE MELODIE DER WELT eine völlig unkritische Neutralität, die ein globales Einverständnis mit der Welt nahelegt. [...] Ruttmanns] ›Weltmelodie‹ ist bar jeden Inhalts, weil sein Interesse am Ganzen der Welt auf Kosten des besonderen Inhalts der versammelten Melodien geht. ⁴⁷

Kracauer's criticism of the film is well-taken and one could argue that Ruttmann's film looks back in style and structure to the heyday of the silent avant-garde film, much like Pudovkin's DEZERTIR imitates the silent Soviet montage film at a time when the paradigm had already shifted elsewhere. DRIFTERS on the other hand took freely from silent cinema, but it also looked forward as it inaugurated a film style that would prove to become one of the most influential.

Even though average shot length is problematic as a marker for stylistic development *per se*, it nevertheless serves as numerical evidence for an impression

of the rapidity of editing of a film. Ruttmann's film is fast-paced to the point of being frantic: with a running time of 48 minutes it contains 847 shots, making the ordinary shot length close to 3.4 seconds. Grierson's film in itself is neither slow nor static, but by contrast with 612 shots for a running time of just over 60 minutes and an average shot length of just under six seconds it is much less rapidly edited. In its montage *MELODIE DER WELT* thus intensifies the typical shot length of silent cinema: in the period of the classic silent film between 1917 and 1928 Hollywood films (and European films emulating this style) usually contained 500-800 shots per hour, the average shot length being five to seven seconds. In the transitional period, i.e. in early sound film – and Ruttmann's film doubtlessly belongs in this category – this increased to eleven seconds or 300 shots per hour. By contrast, the Soviet montage cinema equalled a shot length of two to four seconds or 900 to 1500 shots per hour with the most rapidly edited films having an average shot length of under two seconds – for example *POTEMKIN* or *DEZERTIR*.⁴⁸ It is quite obvious, not only from this piece of empirical evidence, that the Soviet montage film provided the main model for Ruttmann. His turn from abstraction (*OPUS I-IV*) to a more concrete reality outside – *BERLIN* marks the transition here – coincides with the triumph of *POTEMKIN* in Berlin and a wider cultural shift from abstraction to a highly codified form of realism as in *Neue Sachlichkeit*.⁴⁹ Even though being an early sound film, *MELODIE DER WELT* followed the model of Soviet silent montage cinema in its rapidity and style of editing.

Grierson was similarly influenced by the revolutionary cinema of the Soviet Union, yet he gave it a somewhat different inflection when he »tamed« the frantic style and toned down the fast cutting to a style that outwardly can be located somewhere between montage and classical cinema. Even though Grierson's film is silent, his style already anticipates sound film whereas Ruttmann was turning as a model to silent cinema in an early sound film. In a way, Ruttmann became a victim of his own success with *BERLIN. DIE SINFONIE DER GROSSSTADT* which had been an international hit not only on the avant-garde circuit, but also in regular cinemas. The ensuing boom of city symphonies must have confirmed his belief that he was on the right track with his cross-section and his montage style based on formal similarity. Quite logically, *MELODIE DER WELT* attempts stylistically to transpose this style to the sound film and thematically to transfer it to the world.

Grierson's true achievement lies probably in the process of combining different models into his own style, in his capability of adaptation and adjustment. Grierson was not an innovator himself, but a brilliant moderator. He took from Flaherty a sense of storytelling and drama, from the Soviets the clash of images and stark juxtapositions in montage, from the French a certain lyricism that can be glimpsed only occasionally in *DRIFTERS* (in the nightly scenes with the fishes caught in the net), yet shows up more forcefully in later films that came out of his filmmaking unit and that he supervised like *SONG OF CEYLON* (GB 1934/35, Basil Wright), *COAL FACE* (GB 1936, Alberto Cavalcanti), or *NIGHT MAIL* (GB 1936,

Harry Watt / Basil Wright), from journalism an idea of public relations and persuasion, and from sociology the idea of building and forming a public consensus on specific topics.

Having discussed both films at length it is time for an interim result of my examination. Both *DRIFTERS* and *MELODIE DER WELT* appear very similar not only on first sight, but also on a closer examination. Both revel in the indexical capability of the photographic image when presenting spectacular scenes from a boat's trip, both use a strict and codified narrative patterning and both employ stylistic elements typical of modernist aesthetics, like fragmentation or abstraction of concrete reality. Only in relation to Nichols' fourth category do the two films begin to differ when *DRIFTERS* shows a clearer sense of social responsibility, historicity and modern public relations; *MELODIE DER WELT* by contrast focuses much stronger on formal and aesthetic aspects typical of a depoliticised and aestheticised version of *Neue Sachlichkeit*. Yet, for a deeper understanding of the contiguities, contingencies, similarities and differences other factors have to be considered. In keeping with my aim of contextualising filmmaking I believe that we should turn to the contexts of the two films in order to better understand where they come from and what they try to achieve. It is in matters of production policy and exhibition strategy that we can see most clearly how Ruttmann and Grierson both come out of the avant-garde, but move in different directions.

6.5 Authenticity and Modernity: The Politics of Dependency

Nothing seems now more significant of the period than that, at a time so crucial, there was no eager sponsorship for world thinking in a country which still pretended to world leadership. [...] In the light of events, how much on the right lines Tallents was and how blind were the people who defeated his great concept! For documentary the effect was important.
John Grierson (1942)⁵⁰

By the sheer power of habit and having been quoted so often, Grierson's famous definition of the documentary as »the creative treatment of actuality«⁵¹ has lost some of its paradoxical edge.⁵² As Ian Aitken has argued, this paradox should be explained by taking into account Grierson's background in idealist philosophy.⁵³ For Grierson, the claim to reality was different from the treatment of the »phenomena«; while the real denoted a more abstract (and in some sense a »more real«) reality that went beyond the actual object itself, the phenomenon constituted for Grierson the surface, the perceivable and recordable data and material at hand which could be examined to access the real, but one should nevertheless never mix it up with the »real« itself. Thus, actual raw (non-fiction) material had to be treated (shot, selected, ordered, edited, narrated, voiced over) in creative ways in order to reach a deeper truth that lay beneath the surface of things. Modern media like film were thus offering the means to gain access to this deeper truth hidden behind the

appearance of things. However far apart the directors of *DRIFTERS* and *MELODIE DER WELT* were in their filmmaking practice, in their theoretical texts, in their political affiliations, and in their choice of subjects, this idea of aiming to uncover a truth that lies beneath or beyond a single image was shared by Ruttmann and Grierson. Both used non-fiction material (in contrast for example to a large part of Russian montage cinema), both were interested in social aspects of modernisation (unlike Flaherty), both subordinated the representation of people to some deeper truth that they were aiming at uncovering. Furthermore, the idea of structuring non-fiction material into a coherent whole using a rhetorical strategy to a specific political or social end lies at the heart of the documentary film in a Griersonian tradition; yet, this description also fits *MELODIE DER WELT* and most of Ruttmann's other work.

The problem of how a deeper truth can be accessed is closely related to the question of abstraction and realism which was an important debate for avant-garde circles and modernist aesthetics.⁵⁴ The second half of the 1920s witnessed a shift in artistic practice which has often been described as a movement from expressionism to a new sobriety (*Neue Sachlichkeit*). From a slightly different angle one could give a somewhat modified account rather fitting my purposes (and less fetishistically concentrated on giving names) that would rather explain this shift as part of a larger debate about what constituted mediat(is)ed authenticity. Expressionism projected an inwardly constructed jaggedness into the environment and surrounding objects; the reasons for this harsh graphic style have often been seen as a reaction to contemporary experiences such as World War One, an intensified pressure to modernisation, an explosive push forward in technology and new working methods (Taylorisation, Fordism) – in short: the Benjaminian »chock« experience became the foundational metaphor for the authentic expression of the modern condition in Expressionism. *Neue Sachlichkeit* by contrast took objects and environs at face value, but tried to move them away from the everyday experience by searching for unexplored angles and perspectives, by either moving very close towards them or very far away, by collaging or montaging them into unexpected contexts. Both artistic *modi operandi* had some common ground in their goal of estranging (in the way Viktor Sklovskij and the Russian formalists theorised *ostranenie*) everyday experiences and objects, in their rejection of conventional realism (of the 19th Century). Yet, the manner to achieve this was markedly different. Expressionism and *Neue Sachlichkeit* played out very different versions of authenticity. Under the conditions of modernity, it was authenticity that became the ultimate vanishing point for artistic activity because only in a radical subjectivity (and authenticity always denotes such a unchangeable core of »true self«) could the artist demonstrate an independence that was otherwise unobtainable to her/him. Whereas every public move was always compromised by being dependent on forces outside, authenticity promised an interior identity that defied outside interference. Thus, the question of realism and authenticity is always

connected to the problem of artistic independence.⁵⁵ Therefore, I will turn next to the question of in/dependence was hotly debated in avant-gardistic circles of the time.

One of the most crucial issues for the avant-garde and the independent cinema movement was the question of independence, or rather: the question on whom dependency was acceptable because true independence was not achievable. Consequently, neither *DRIFTERS* nor *MELODIE DER WELT* emerged in a vacuum of disinterested aesthetic creation. Ruttmann's film was jointly produced by the shipping line Hapag and the film syndicate Tobis-Klangfilm which in turn was to a large extent backed by the German electrical industry (Siemens & Halske, AEG). These are hardly the backers one would expect from somebody who was one of the central figures of the European alternative cinema movement and was invited to foreign countries by workers' film club and oppositional circles to present his *BERLIN*-film. Hapag, the Hamburg-Amerika Linie⁵⁶, was an instrumental part of the German effort to rule the seas (and lands) around the world. It was an important company since the mid-19th Century and when the German emperor Wilhelm II claimed »a place at the sun« for the German people it became part of the German imperialist scheme. First established to carry migrants to the United States, the long-time director Albert Ballin realised at the turn of the century that the company's future was in tourism. Hapag took the logical step and was one of the first companies to move into the field of cruises and picturesque sea tours. The modernisation (read: mediatisation) on board was only a logical next conclusion: Besides having lots of luxury service on its vessels, Hapag ships had their own newspaper printed aboard and the first cinema was opened on the newly constructed *Imperator* in 1912.⁵⁷ The company director Ballin was a close friend of Wilhelm II and Hapag's ambition to rule the seas with its fleet directly reflected the German Kaiser's wish to construct a world-wide German *Reich* similar to the British Empire. Soon after World War One which temporarily marked the end of the German ambitions to being a super-power Hapag changed from the receiving end of the film industry to the production side: between 1922 and 1931 at least 31 films were made with money provided by the Hapag and under its auspices. Some of these films were one-reelers, brief travel films advertising the destinations of the tours and the luxury aboard the huge vessels. Yet, Hapag got more ambitious: In 1924 the first four-reeler was produced that showed a trip from Hamburg to New York (*MIT DER HAPAG VON HAMBURG NACH NEW YORK*) and a 1926 feature length film presented the sights and wonders of the United States (*AMERIKA, DAS LAND DER UNBEGRENZTEN MÖGLICHKEITEN*), tying in with the popular vogue of *Amerikanismus*, the fascination in the 1920s with all things American⁵⁸, while also referring to the then popular genre of the travel-adventure film. At roughly the same time, an agreement with Ufa was struck giving the film company access to the short non-fiction subjects that Hapag had produced while the ship cinemas provided an additional outlet for Ufa-films.⁵⁹ But Hapag's biggest success in terms

of publicity was meant to be *MELODIE DER WELT*, in this context a product of Hapag's self-image as a company investing in modernisation and technological progress while also touching on issues of colonial and imperialist discourses.

The 1920s and 1930s are especially fascinating decades because different frames of reference are overlapping in complicated ways. Besides the modernism of the avant-garde movements which lay claim to highly distinct and recognisable styles (cubism, Dada, expressionism, surrealism, *Neue Sachlichkeit*) the large field of popular culture succumbed to a modernity characterised by record players and urban entertainment, dance halls and Chaplin-mania, Josephine Baker and revue girls, department stores and tourism. These phenomena went along with a modernisation in technology, but they can never be easily told apart. While the technological modernisation changed the meaning of work, it also was partly responsible for reducing working hours and increasing productivity, thus giving people in industrialised countries leisure time and spare money to attend mass culture which in turn proved partly a fascination for the modernists, partly it was a facet of society that modernism reacted against. Tourism was an important factor of technological as well as cultural and social developments in the inter-war period. Film itself was a product of technological progress, but it also contributed to the mass culture in the emerging urban centres, thus in its presentation of images of city streets and mass entertainment it provided a *mise-en-abyme* of its conditions of possibility. Now, when Hapag ventured into film production it tried to cash in on its image in a similar fashion as a company deeply imbricated in all things modern while also pushing the envelope with technological progress.

While Hapag dealt in transportation and tourism, Tobis-Klangfilm was a technological-electrical company. This German-Dutch-Swiss joint venture, had a surprisingly experimental approach to filmmaking in the early years 1928-30⁶⁰: The French branch had René Clair and his brother Henri Chomette under contract, both key figures of the French *ciné-clubs* of the mid-1920s, the German Tobis placed their stake on Ruttmann, *eminence gris* of the abstract film, und Alexis Granowsky, Soviet *émigré* and experimental theatre director, while also producing the film programme for the modernist new music festival at Baden-Baden. This strategy of consciously seeking out and employing avant-gardists that was temporally limited to the very first years had a triple functions: Firstly the company was hoping for films that would cross relatively easy national borders as the avant-garde in the second half of the 1920s was decidedly *international*. The avant-garde had demonstrated their experience in addressing a trans-national audience. This was all the more important as foreign films met resistance in many countries because sound films increased (via spoken dialogue) the national markers present in a film. As the Tobis – with its headquarters in Amsterdam and studios in Berlin, Paris, and London, later also in Madrid, Vienna and Lisbon⁶¹ – saw itself as a decidedly European venture this strategy appeared logical. Secondly, the film industry resorted to these filmmakers as a kind of *Research & Development-*

department. What the industry expected from the avant-garde was prototypes that could subsequently go into serial production. Thus, Tobis approached them for their *innovative potential*. The success of Clair's films seems to originate in the attempt to create a line of production: a successful prototype, *SOUS LES TOITS DE PARIS* (FR 1929/30) was not just copied in France by Clair and others (*LE MILLION*, FR 1930; *À NOUS LA LIBERTÉ*, FR 1931), but also in Portugal with *A CANÇÃO DE LISBOA* (PT 1933, José Augusto Cottinelli Telmo).⁶² And thirdly, one crucial difference of the Tobis to Ufa and other large studios, is to be found in the origin and identity of Tobis which was in technology and not in film production or exhibition. Tobis came from an innovative and experimental initiative of inventors who turned to film production while Ufa was a production company who had to cope with new technological developments in order to defend its position. The *constructivist* spirit of the avant-garde is much closer to an *engineering* triple jump of »problem – insight – solution« than to the sentimental stories of the film industry. Put briefly: the company culture of Tobis was surely closer to an avant-garde spirit of innovation and experiment than to the conservative company culture of Ufa. Similar thoughts must have animated Philips in these years who commissioned Ivens, Richter and George Pal with advertisements and image films. One could summarise the attraction that the avant-garde had to offer for the industry around 1930 in three key words: internationalism, innovation, and engineering.⁶³

John Grierson's reformist ideas about society figured large in his life and work; he is mainly remembered in film history as an organiser, propagandist and lobbyist while also being responsible for the term »documentary« in its current use. Grierson coordinated and led the activities of a group of young filmmakers being employed by the British government and other semi-official institutions while also accepting commissions from the industry. Grierson in fact actively sought out the state and private companies as sponsors and was well aware of the precarious position that experimental-minded filmmakers found themselves in:

Indeed, it is a curious comment on our art that the only freedom given to directors since has also been by propagandist groups: by Shell, the B.B.C., the Ministry of Labour, the Ceylon Government, the Gas Light and Coke Co., and by certain shipping, creosoting and radio firms in Europe. It is, of course, a relative freedom only, for State propaganda has its own ideological limits. This, however, can be said for it: the freshness and even the difficulty of its material drives the director to new forms and rich perspectives.⁶⁴

A distant, but still discernible echo of Joris Ivens' statement on the documentary as avant-garde film can be heard in Grierson's plea for industry commissions despite the political differences between the conservative reformer Grierson and the radical revolutionary Ivens. In his 1931-article Ivens had argued that work within the film industry was slavery while industrial and commissioned films provided a relative

freedom because the filmmaker only had to deal with outsiders to the cinema.⁶⁵ Propaganda is a key word for understanding commissioned films in the 1920s and 1930s as it had not yet taken on its negative connotations that cancelled out all previous association the term had carried. After World War Two propaganda was applied almost exclusively in negative ways, but in the interwar period it was a staple of the avant-garde to use the term as meaning promotional and activist in its many senses.

Grierson consciously sought out sponsors for his films – he never made a film for the film industry, but he instead worked towards creating an organisation that did not need the industrial structures. In keeping with the avant-garde attempts at building up a vertically integrated formation, the Griersonian institutions were not just concerned with producing films, but also ventured into distribution and exhibition, publishing and theorising, lecturing and teaching. Grierson had avidly observed the shortcomings and successes the avant-garde screening circles of the 1920s: he had learnt his aesthetic lesson from the different films screened in the *Film Society* and he had realised the necessity of vertical integration to remain functional over a longer period of time. Yet, he must have understood the problematic nature of the dependency on the film industry. Grierson therefore created a wholly autonomous film unit in which not every meter of film was open to discussion, but Grierson only had to report to his superiors at regular intervals.

6.6 Exotic adventures and social engineering

Man wird auch weiterhin dem Publikum fremde Länder vorsetzen, damit es im eigenen nichts merkt.
Siegfried Kracauer (1929)⁶⁶

In 1929 a young critic and aspiring filmmaker who had just finished his first medium length film complained about the state of the cinema in general and about the poor treatment of the real in particular:

Apart from the work of the Russians, the cinema has done very little for the world of the genuine. There was Flaherty with *NANOOK* and *MOANA*. Then Schoedsack and Cooper with *CHANG*, and in between some excellent travel films like *ARCTIC SKIES*, *STELLA POLARIS* and *VOYAGE AU CONGO*. But in all these natural films the cinema has, for the sake of an easy romance, gone primitive. No one, to my knowledge, has gone forth on a wild expedition to the coal mines of Durham, or adventured under banners of publicity to Wolverhampton. No one for that matter has taken a tuppenny ride to Silvertown.⁶⁷

At that time a typical non-fiction film screened in the cinemas had an exotic subject. The exotisation implicit in the *documentaires* – as the French called their expedition films – leads in a very different direction from what the documentary »proper« became, yet the genealogy of the term refers to travel and foreign places.

Of course, the author of the text just quoted is none other than John Grierson writing for the magazine *The Clarion*. His charge that the cinema »has gone primitive« is a double reproach as it refers to the exotic subjects to which he objected, but also more importantly to the style of filmmaking which still used models that had not changed much since the beginning of the cinema. Their attraction is to be found less in its documentary value but rather in its presentation of amazing feats (like stunts) and overwhelming sights and sites.⁶⁸ The travel adventure film exhibits in certain ways the address of the cinema of attraction that was continued in the avant-garde cinema.⁶⁹ In this respect, the documentary was a turn away from earlier filmmaking practices, but also from the avant-garde in the same direction as classical film style with its emphasis on psychological or social motivation, continuity editing, a coherent time-space frame, and an overall dramaturgy.

Until recently, film history has been largely oblivious to the fact that one of the most popular genres of the 1920s was the expedition film, presenting trips to exotic places, be it Africa, Asia, Latin America or the arctic landscape. The genre of the »expedition film« or »travel adventure film« provides an important element for the emerging documentary film and was a popular genre as a short film, but also at feature length throughout the 1920s. Only very few of these films remain in the memory (and archives) of film history, even though only a brief look into the specialised press and cinema programmes before the introduction of sound demonstrates the ubiquity of this film form. Exotic and expedition films form a broad development all through the silent period.⁷⁰ While it has sometimes been claimed that these were early documentaries, not only did they resort to staging scenes for pictorial, nostalgic or colonialist purposes, but some of the most important protagonists making these films, ventured in the second half of the 1920s in a different direction from the evolving documentary: Robert Flaherty's trajectory from *NANOOK OF THE NORTH* (US 1922) through *MOANA* (US 1926) and *WHITE SHADOWS IN THE SOUTH SEA* (US 1928, with W.S. Van Dyke) to *TABU* (US 1930/31, with F.W. Murnau)⁷¹ resembles that of Merian C. Cooper's and Ernest B. Schoedsack's development from *GRASS* (US 1925) through *CHANG: A DRAMA OF THE WILDERNESS* (1927) to *KING KONG* (US 1933). The development went into a growing fictionalisation in which the exotic and the unknown formed only a picturesque backdrop to an adventure or love story. The increasing popularisation, yet also the increasing cost of production forced the explorer-filmmakers either into the direction of fictionalised accounts of journeys that adhered more strictly to models from fiction. The alternative route taken by many avant-garde artists, perhaps most successfully and most consequently by John Grierson, led to the sponsorship of the industry or the dependency on government institutions.

While the Americans such as Flaherty or the Schoedsack/Cooper team opted for bigger productions, often under the banner of Hollywood studios, filmmakers in Europe rather turned to the industry, preferably steel or automobile,

but also electrical or chemical, for support, a niche they were sharing with the avant-garde. Many companies such as the car manufacturer Citroën or the steel magnate Stinnes financed expeditions which were set up as media events and the journeys not only resulted in films, but also in newspaper reports, books, theatre shows and other media products.⁷² Erik Barnouw has discussed this trend:

A more authentic project [than Schoedsack's and Cooper's *CHANG*] was the French film *THE BLACK CRUISE* (*LA CROISIÈRE NOIRE*, 1926) by Léon Poirier – like Murnau, a temporary fugitive from fiction. Sponsored by Citroën, it recorded an unprecedented automobile journey from the northern to the southern reaches of Africa, and on to the French island colony of Madagascar. The feature-length project provided occasion for countless vignettes of tribal and village life. Again, no individual portraits emerge, and the expedition's interest remains superficial, with stress on the bizarre. Yet the record of such a journey inevitably offered documentary values, and preparations for a similar Citroën-sponsored Asian journey, from Lebanon to Indochina, were begun in 1929. Titled *THE YELLOW CRUISE* (*LA CROISIÈRE JAUNE*) the film did not reach completion until many years later.⁷³

This brings another aspect of the instability of the documentary in the late 1920s to the foreground: the contiguity of the documentary to other formats. Barnouw uses »documentary value« as a phrase directly borrowed from Grierson who had coined this phrase in respect to Flaherty's *MOANA* (US 1926). Yet, one could also open up other contexts into which the French cruise films fit. Is this a sponsored film by Citroën, a long advertisement, an industrial film, a commissioned film, a travelogue of African places, a fiction film with a car as a protagonist – and therefore a forerunner of Disney's VW Beetle film *THE LOVE BUG* (US 1968, Bill Walsh) – or a documentary? My answer to this question would be: all of it to different degrees and in different ways, depending on the context in which one wishes to consider the film. Yet, today's predominance of the documentary as an umbrella term for many films which are non-fictional gives it such retrospective power. But demarcation lines were more fluid in the late 1920s when the term documentary was first used, albeit not as a generic term, but rather as a description as to how a certain film was made. It is exactly this shift from method to genre, from descriptive to normative demarcation that is at stake in this retrospective labelling. Yet, the documentary as it came into existence, took the manner of production from the expedition films, but it followed the avant-garde in its model of self-organisation. By moving outside the confined circles of the commercial film industry Grierson was able to stabilise his filmmaking practice until a model simultaneously broad enough to allow for variation and narrow enough to allow for recognisability emerged.

So far the list of exotic travel films is exhaustive as one could add a number of films that have become more prominent in recent years. This list will also demonstrate the contiguity of the avant-garde to the documentary as it was put together from different practices. *CLAIRENORE STINNES – IM AUTO DURCH ZWEI*

WELTEN (DE 1929), just like the Citroën-sponsored travel films, likewise brought a car, this time an Adler, on a trip around the world and showed the images collected along the way.⁷⁴ Incidentally, this film was made by Clairenore Stinnes, the oldest daughter of steel magnate Hugo Stinnes who had in the mid-1920s attempted to venture into big-time film production; ultimately, Abel Gance's costly NAPOLÉON (FR 1925-27) brought the company down.⁷⁵ An aeronautical version of this proto-feminist safari can be found in the film work of Elly Beinhorn, MIT ELLY BEINHORN ZU DEN DEUTSCHEN IN SÜDWEST-AFRIKA (DE 1933) and other films.⁷⁶ Beinhorn in turn was partly copying the extraordinary success that pilot Ernst Udet had with books, lecture tours, radio appearances and last but not least with films, most notably in the »Kulturspielfilme« of Arnold Fanck that walk the thin line between documentary and fiction: DIE WEIßE HÖLLE VOM PIZ PALÜ (DE 1929), STÜRME ÜBER DEM MONTBLANC (DE 1930) and SOS EISBERG (DE 1932/33).⁷⁷ Germany's particular brand of daring adventurers who also seeped into big-budget production – Hans Albers plays a character modelled on Udet in the Ufa-production F.P.1 ANTWORTET NICHT (DE 1932, Karl Hartl) – address the problem of forced modernisation. Explorers with technologically advanced machines conquer a hostile environment by sheer willpower.

This subgenre is actually much larger than normally assumed. Charles Musser has discussed a number of films including the already mentioned LA CROISIÈRE JAUNE (FR 1934), the Citroën-sponsored trip through Asia.⁷⁸ The basic structure of this type of film, whether to call it »exotic travel«, »expedition« or »travel adventure« remains stable: triumphant Westerners with advanced technology go to far-away and »uncivilised« places, preferably with an extreme natural environment, to conquer those places symbolically. Guy Gauthier has also discussed the cycle of films produced by Citroën starting with LA PREMIÈRE TRAVERSÉE DU SAHARA EN AUTOCHENILLES (FR 1923, Paul Castelnau, »The first crossing of the Sahara with a caterpillar vehicle«), then followed by LE CONTINENT MYSTÉRIEUX (FR 1924, »The mysterious continent«) and LA TERRE DE FEU (FR 1927, »Country of fire«) before the CROISIÈRE-cycle followed.⁷⁹ In fact, Gauthier suggests to see these films in the context of France's mythology of the desert in general and the Sahara more specifically. Here a context is opened up to the African desert trip of André Gide and Marc Allégret, but also Pierre Benoit's novel *L'Atlantide* (1919) and its two contemporary adaptations by Jacques Feyder (FR 1921) and G.W. Pabst (DE 1932). An Austrian variation on this genre is DURCH AFRIKA IM AUTOMOBIL (AT 1929) on an expedition by count László Almásy and prince Ferdinand Liechtenstein, an aristocratic Safari (photo and rifle) through Sudan and Egypt.⁸⁰ Other important entries in this series are PAMIR, DAS TAL DES TODES (DE/SU 1929, Vladimir Snejderov) and VOYAGE AU CONGO (FR 1927, Marc Allégret) following André Gide's expedition across Africa. Reviewing this film the avant-garde magazine *Close Up* positively distinguished Gide's film from the majority of travel films which are criticised because they »are like so many

rather boastful travellers, out merely to astonish; they want to exploit the extraordinary and can more or less easily achieve it through distorting the aspect of things at will.«⁸¹ Not coincidentally, the French exotic travel film is especially strong in this overlap of avant-garde, non-fiction and experiment as the French term denoting this genre, *documentaire*, inspired Grierson to use it in English, yet for another type of non-fiction film.

Not coincidentally, a number of those working in the genre of exotic adventure film are the same people we come across in avant-garde circles: two protagonists of the mountain film come from the encounter of exploring, mountaineering, experiment and fiction – Arnold Fanck was considered an ally around 1930 by the avant-garde activists and Leni Riefenstahl graduated from experimental dance into Fanck's magic mountains and she collaborated on her directorial debut *DAS BLAUE LICHT* with Béla Balász as screenwriter.⁸² That the popularity of the genre was not lost on contemporary observers is visible in a parody on expedition films made in avant-garde circles. Adrian Brunel's *CROSSING THE GREAT SAGRADA* (GB 1924), a »great voyageogue« produced by a »Mr. Spoof« as the title cards ironically promise, is a parody of contemporary travel films consisting mainly of found footage from touristic and expedition film and made by a founding member of the London *Film Society*.⁸³ The Stinnes-clan had demonstrated their fascination with a different kind of cinema when financing the disastrous *NAPOLEON*-adventure of Abel Gance before Clairenore Stinnes filmed her car trip and certainly Allégret and Gide belong to an avant-garde tradition, but also made the expedition film *VOYAGE AU CONGO*. Also in France, André Sauvage not only co-directed *LA CROISIÈRE JAUNE* with Léon Poirier, he also made mountain climbing films that were screened within the circles of the specialised avant-garde cinemas and *ÉTUDES SUR PARIS* (1929), one of the many city symphonies of the French capital.⁸⁴ Even Ivor Montagu, key figure of the London *Film Society*, has made a stint into the travel genre:

WINGS OVER EVEREST, a survey of the 1933 flying expedition financed by the flamboyantly patriotic Lady Houston (benefactor, too, of the 1931 Schneider Trophy Context). The title lies tucked away in Montagu's filmography, but we ignore it at our peril (luckily the film has recently been restored by the National Film Archive). »This was unique in the history of film and documentary«, its co-director recalled with a smile; the uniqueness, moreover, lay more in the explorers than in Everest. Film rights had been granted to Gaumont British with stiff conditions: every gesture, every word that Montagu re-staged in the studio had to match the authentic gesture and work used by Clydesdale (the chief pilot) and his doughty colleagues. The result, for Montagu, was »the most perfect picture of the English governing class that has ever been seen.«⁸⁵

In fact, these films simultaneously portray the region of travel and the maker. In this way, Flaherty's *NANOOK OF THE NORTH* (US 1922) could be fitted into this history of travel adventure films. As the film was financed by the French fur

company *Reillon Frères* this sponsored and commissioned film was also a documentation of their reach – and Flaherty's filmmaking style mirrors the magical hunting capabilities projected on Nanook. After all, expedition filmmaking is akin to hunting, creating an allegorical relationship between Flaherty and his subject.⁸⁶

Mediat(is)ed authenticity, which I have discussed above as the key to notions of realism, is not only connected to questions of independence, but this issue can also play part on another field, namely that of colonialism and technology. Klaus Kreimeier has argued that authenticity developed from the usage of advanced optical technology and the fetishisation of a specific idea of precision: »aus dem Umgang mit einer avancierten Technik der optischen Industrie und der Fetischisierung eines im Zuge der Entwicklung der Naturwissenschaften durchgesetzten Präzisionsbegriffs [ist] der moderne Diskurs über mediale Authentizität entstanden...«⁸⁷ Ruttmann's engineer-like precision concerning his montage and the technological developments which he – literally in his patents to advance the filmmaking process, metaphorically in his theoretical concept of the laboratory⁸⁸ – attempted to push forward led to the discourse of authenticity which Kreimeier describes. This deeply modernist conception of things – a precise craftsmanship operating with exact media machinery is capable of uncovering the true nature of things – is not only typical for Ruttmann's work from his early abstract OPUS-films to his later documentaries for fascist Germany, but also characteristic for the Griersonian documentary project of the 1930s.

And indeed also *MELODIE DER WELT* could be fitted into this field of discourse, as the film exists within the then popular genre of the exotic expedition film. The official brochure to the film claims that it aims at finding the uniting idea of a shipping line that encompasses the globe:

die Zusammenfassung zu finden, die Idee, der eine den Erdball umspannende Schifffahrtslinie dient. Wenn das Schwert ruht, reichen sich Forschung und Wirtschaft die Hand. Der Mensch blüht auf unter den wärmenden Strahlen des Friedens. Ist aber nicht Wurzel des Streites so oft nur Mißverstehen des anderen? Unkenntnis wirkt Haß, Verständnis wirkt Liebe.⁸⁹

Despite this claim to the peace of people the idea of subjugating the whole world first to the eye of the camera, then to the Ruttmanesque montage is at heart a colonial one; all processes, things and humans are subjected to one master principle. In a universalising gesture coupling the accessibility of mass culture with the Eurocentrism of the touristic ethnography Ruttmann first converts a city into a symphony, then the whole world in a melody. Ruttmann himself has argued that film as a medium is in need of one single concept because of its inherent structure: »Der Film, der sich aus verschiedenartigsten künstlerischen und technischen Elementen zusammensetzt, wird immer nur ein filmischer Film sein, wenn er wie eine große symphonische Dichtung alle kontrapunktischen, optischen und akustischen Gesetze in seiner Partitur vereinigt.«⁹⁰ This essentialising view of the

medium was typical of the modernist avant-garde of the 1920s; the thrust was to fit disparate parts together to a homogeneous whole, to subjugate the whole world to one formal principle. Yet, even the globetrotters of cinema found this gesture of totality already moulded by colonialism.

If we follow this thought and consider Ruttmann as a »Kulturfilmer«, in the sense of the Ufa *Kulturfilm*-department⁹¹, then Ruttmann – like the expedition filmmaker Martin Rikli whom Kreimeier was referring to in the quote above – could be seen as a result of Germany's forced modernisation: »eine besondere Ausprägung der verspäteten und dann um so rasanteren Industrialisierung in Deutschland – ein Abkömmling jener Epoche, die die Kaiser-Wilhelm-Institute und die industriefinanzierten Forschungsgesellschaften vor 1914 hervorgebracht hat.«⁹² If we consider Ruttmann within this (national) context of exaggerated imperial ambition in terms of industrial development and the acquisition of colonies, then Grierson forms an interesting comparison. The Empire Marketing Board where Grierson first found employment was set up to support the global connections of the Empire. Brian Winston has described this set-up as a colonial enterprise:

Grierson's first major job was an attempt to ›sell‹ the British Empire, by establishing a film production programme at the Empire Marketing Board (EMB). The Empire was becoming at that time an object of derision to much progressive opinion. Only some engaged in the [...] search for ›national efficiency‹ continued to embrace imperialism as a species of necessary reform of ›backward‹ societies. [...] It is far from being an accident that the documentary film in the service of the selling of the Empire (albeit unfortunately at exactly the moment of its formal disappearance) was Grierson's initial supposedly radical ›social purpose‹ in the cinema.⁹³

Again an unexpected proximity of Grierson and Ruttmann lights up: for both of them film was a means for achieving other goals, not a purpose in itself; seen in this perspective both were rather modernisers than modernists. Thus, the reproach of being overtly formalist that has often been levelled against Ruttmann becomes obsolete as his formal obsession becomes the way to deal with the social implication of the increasing modernisation.

Grierson's specific achievement was not so much any specific film or aesthetic programme, but rather the machinery that he constructed around the films: He was not only an active filmmaker and supervisor of other people's films, the unit also achieved the establishment of government support (lobbying), the training of a relatively large group of filmmakers (teaching), the keeping together of a core group of workers, the obtainment of sponsorship from the industry, the construction of a circuit of non-theatrical distribution, the establishment of magazines and of a critical tradition. In short, Grierson (used as a shorthand for the documentary film movement) succeeded in coupling aesthetic preoccupations (film as art) with an instrumental use of cinema (education, reform, propaganda), thus creating a new kind of cinema (in terms of production methods as well as formal

features) and a new kind of public (distribution and exhibition patterns, theoretical framework). In this sense, Grierson in fact succeeded in completely restructuring the cinema not only in aesthetic terms, but also in their institutional aspects, a field that had been occupied by the avant-garde before.

In a way, Grierson combined the reporting style of the exotic adventure film with the subject matter of the everyday and the quotidian that had been discovered by the avant-garde for one of the most successful genres of the 1920s and early 1930s: the city symphony and the newsreel. Together with the broad material basis that the cross-section film used, these were the main influences on the emerging documentary.

If we follow the lead of the concept »engineer« we can also see why Robert Flaherty who was adopted by Grierson as his imaginary father for the documentary movement has always had such a precarious position and has sometimes even been rejected for the tradition of the documentary form: Flaherty was a wholly romantic individual, utterly uninterested in social engineering or the living conditions for the working masses or the conditions of modernity in general. The negative view of Western influence and civilisation in *WHITE SHADOWS IN THE SOUTH SEAS* (US 1928, W.S. van Dyke / Robert Flaherty) can be put down to Flaherty's influence. The film presents the denigration of a Tahitian community due to their contact with Western traders. Flaherty was fascinated with the atavistic, even a-historical, struggle between man (and I am deliberately using the male here) and nature. As this fight was hard to find in the industrialised countries, Flaherty thus had to move to remote corners of the globe in order to find people and vistas not tainted too much by modernity's transforming power.⁹⁴ Yet, Flaherty's project is only imaginable within the frame of another deeply modern concept, i.e. colonialism:

Flaherty's was to be largely an imperial film-making career. It was to be almost entirely spent in the far-flung corners of empire or domestic backwaters, in the pay of governments or exploitative commercial interests. The mystery is how untainted by this is his reputation – as if the cinema were too puny, its pantheon too insecure, to support the vicissitudes suffered by other imperial artists – Kipling, say. Flaherty's explorer stance, although remarked on, is deemed to be without import. It is not even defended (as is Riefenstahl's fascism); it is ignored. No mistake must be made about this imperialism, though, for Flaherty was not a man to rise above his time.⁹⁵

Thus, it seems to be hard to get away from modernity and modernisation when thinking about the documentary, not the least because the technology itself is a true product of that period. Flaherty tried to dodge these issues by moving out to far away places, but he never truly succeeded as his commission as well as his technology always betrayed any effort to present an imaginary state of innocence.

While Ruttmann's purpose lay in his artistic and social experiments; thus it comes as no coincidence that he returned over the course of his career at different

moments to films belonging to the tradition of public health education, social engineering and eugenics⁹⁶: In 1926 he made the promotional film DER AUFSTIEG for the exhibition GeSoLei (*Gesundheitspflege, Soziale Fürsorge, Leibesübungen* – health care, social welfare, physical exercise) trying to educate the population towards a more healthy life style; in 1931 Ruttmann signed the feature-length FEIND IM BLUT, educational film about the dangers of venereal disease and his very last film dealt with dangers of and provisions against cancer, EIN FILM GEGEN DIE VOLKSKRANKHEIT KREBS (DE 1941). In this perspective, Ruttmann was not, as he is often seen, an artist of the cross-section and a proponent of *Neue Sachlichkeit*, but rather a social reformer, public health educator and social engineer. Flaherty's purpose, as just demonstrated, was his rejection of modernity, his search for an authentic ideal of people struggling with their natural environment.

6.7 Minuet of a small town: Locating the avant-garde in its (national) context

...les films documentaires nous le montrent comme une forme de microscope grâce auquel nous percevons dans le domaine réel ce que nous ne percevrions pas sans lui. Dans un documentaire, dans un film scientifique, la vie nous apparaît avec ses mille détails, son évolution, tout ce que l'œil ne peut suivre ordinairement.
Germaine Dulac (1925)⁹⁷

The programme has become a focus of filmhistorical investigation in the past ten to 15 years, especially in the study of early cinema⁹⁸, yet the avant-garde is also a fruitful field for considering the context in which films have been screened.⁹⁹ Since films are partly determined by their context, it is necessary to look into different facets: my discussion of modernity and the production policy was aimed to uncover the open and the hidden dependencies of Ruttmann and Grierson while the previous part about the exotic in relation to the cinema wants to locate their filmic practices within certain generic and stylistic frameworks of the 1920s. The following remarks about the screening context are meant to specify how contemporary spectators made sense of the two films.

Before turning to DRIFTERS and MELODIE DER WELT, let me briefly return to Ruttmann's previous film, BERLIN, DIE SINFONIE DER GROSSSTADT. The film was preceded on its premiere and also in subsequent screenings in major cities across Germany on the »first run-circuit« by a programme of short films from the years 1905 to 1910 entitled KINTOPP VOR 20 JAHREN and described as a »hilarious retrospective to the time when the cinema was young«.¹⁰⁰ These films were aimed to demonstrate the »progress« that the cinema had made in the intervening 20 years, the development in the meantime and the achievements of film culture. This framing gesture only makes sense when thinking about the cinema in historical terms and the avant-garde in its rhetoric of advance towards a brighter future surely

had a sense of historical calling. Of course, the films were meant to be laughed at and ridiculed as specimen of a primitive age that the present day has left behind, but as critic Willy Haas, lucid as ever, remarked, this was not without its dangers:

Voran gingen kurze Kintoppfilme, etwa zwanzig Jahre alt. Mit dem damals üblichen Erklärer. ›Von Stufe zu Stufe‹; ›Mutter, dein Kind ruft!‹; ›Pariser Modeschau‹; ›Pikantes mit Damenunterhosen und Badekostümen‹. Um das Jahr 1910. Das Publikum quietschte vor Freude.

Ein Hauptspaß – aber ein böser Spaß. Ein plebejischer Spaß. Das Hohngelächter über das Gestern; das Triumphgelächter: wie herrlich weit wir's gebracht haben... Und ein gefährlicher Spaß.

Morgen – in zwanzig Jahren – wird man über den Film ›Berlin, die Symphonie einer Großstadt‹, noch mehr lachen. Man wird es noch viel weiter gebracht haben. Der pompöse Titel wird sehr belustigend wirken. ›Das Menuett einer Kleinstadt‹ – wird irgendein Filmkritiker in zwanzig Jahren ironisch sagen.¹⁰¹

More than the amused spectators Haas is highly aware of his own historical situatedness. Especially the avant-garde which had projected the spatial metaphor of the military into the temporal realm should have been wary of the a-historical arrogance implicit in the opening programme for BERLIN. The avant-garde by conception needed the mainstream to follow, yet by becoming popular with the masses the avant-garde had to find a new path to follow. Thus, a cycle of innovation and proliferation of certain features is characteristic of the avant-garde and its becoming out-of-date is to be expected as Willy Haas clearly saw.

The premiere of Ruttmann's following film *MELODIE DER WELT* was of national significance for at least two reasons: Ruttmann had by virtue of the international success of *BERLIN* turned from an avant-garde outsider into one of the celebrated innovators of the German film. Secondly, the film was one of the first German sound films to be completed and screened; as the conflicts with the US industry were mounting and the press coverage was enormous the film was anticipated with an equal measure of hope, pride and fear. Already weeks and days before one can find announcements in the press about the upcoming »historical day«¹⁰² while the premiere itself showed »every sign of an event« and with *tout Berlin* in attendance.¹⁰³ The film was opened by an address by Hapag director Wilhelm Cuno (German chancellor in the inflation period 1922-3), filmed and projected in order to demonstrate the new sound system (even though he was present in person).¹⁰⁴ After the show, Hapag and Cuno invited the premiere audience into the hotel *Esplanade*, one of Berlin's best and most expensive hotels, for a reception. It was not so much an artistic or cultural event, but rather a social and political one that surpassed many ordinary film premieres of big productions and the reports in the press are overflowing with superlatives:

Selten hat die Weltstadt Berlin ein gesellschaftliches Ereignis derartigen Stils erlebt. Die Auffahrt der Autos zu dieser mit höchster Aufmerksamkeit erwarteten Premiere

war derart, daß die Polizei in der Umgebung des Nollendorfsplatzes umfassende Verkehrsumleitungen vornehmen mußte. Das Theater selbst bot ein festliches Bild, wie man es selbst bei einer Gala-Oper selten gesehen hat. Die repräsentativste Gesellschaft der Reichshauptstadt, darunter die markantesten Köpfe der Wirtschaft, der Politik, der Presse, hatten sich eingefunden.¹⁰⁵

The intersection of politics, economy and art in *MELODIE DER WELT* turned it into such an event that was comparable to the most important premieres in Weimar film culture. The struggle against the American sound systems and the joint efforts of Hapag and Tobis backed by the large electronic companies turned the film into a national event. It is ironic to see that the film had very few successors in aesthetic term who would continue Ruttmann's frantic montage.

By contrast, *DRIFTERS* premiered in the classic and solemn surroundings for alternative British film culture: the London *Film Society*. In this case it is quite ironic to see that Grierson's film which now seems like the prototype for a very fruitful branch of filmmaking premiered in a context that appears marginal and somewhat ghettoised whereas Ruttmann's film was an important social event, but the film had very few, if any, obvious emulators and epigones. *DRIFTERS* was programmed alongside *THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER* (US 1926-28, Melville Webber / J.S. Watson Jr.), a US amateur production¹⁰⁶, Walt Disney's *THE BARN DANCE* (US 1929) and Eisenstein's *POTEMKIN*.¹⁰⁷ The context of both Disney and Eisenstein appear quite significant in retrospect. Grierson himself had prepared Eisenstein's film for its British release and I have recounted in detail Nichols' argument that Grierson consciously downplayed the influence of Soviet revolutionary cinema on the British documentary movement in order to moderate it outwardly. What Grierson took from the avant-garde was not only a tamed version of his energy and revolutionary force, but also the realisation that winning the state as a patron guarantees a steady production and output. Disney's animation on the other hand had fascinated intellectuals and filmmakers from the very beginning: like Chaplin and the music hall, animation proved to be one of those cultural expressions where modernism and modernity met in a fruitful way. Animation fascinated a mass public as well as intellectuals.¹⁰⁸

Grierson's achievement can be seen in the context of British »alternative film culture« on the verge of making a leap into the mainstream: within the circles of the Film Society and the journal *Close Up*, the two crucial institutions and taste makers, calls had been voiced for some time for an improvement of the British cinema. British films were seen as either unimaginative and patriotic or as derivative of Soviet, German or French models, the leading countries in producing films that were considered to be innovative. Both avenues, traditional and conservative British films or copies of foreign models, were rejected by the key figures influenced by modernism's movement towards medium specificity. What was being asked for was an adaptation of those leading international movements for a British context. It was Grierson who was able to reconcile Britishness with

a measure of modernist experimentation and to arrive at a film style and media concept that found its backers in government institutions and that could also gather public support. Grierson's programme can be summed up: »evolution as opposed to revolution, moderation as opposed to radicalism, and a commitment to mapping out areas of modern Britain overlooked within the commercial cinema«. ¹⁰⁹ By combining these two elements he was capable of winning support from both the intellectual taste-makers that would also give him support from newspapers and also from the government circles who sought not only approval from the high-brow press, but also audience success. For the British public, Grierson did come at the right moment and he did combined several trends towards his own unique blend of filmmaking: somewhat experimental in form, borrowing montage from the Soviets, abstraction from *absoluter Film* and *cinéma pur* and a certain poeticism from French traditions, very British in its subject matter, and all couched within topics of industrialisation and the negotiations of modernity for society at large. Yet again, the logic and logistics of production and distribution were borrowed from the avant-garde – a model that proved to be crucial in creating a steady base.

6.8 Conclusion

*Es wird eine der revolutionären Funktionen des Films sein,
die künstlerische und die wissenschaftliche Verwertung der Photographie,
die vordem meist auseinander fielen, als identisch erkennbar zu machen.*
Walter Benjamin¹¹⁰

When thought about in more abstraction, Grierson's and Ruttmann's programmes – the term »programme« is meant to describe the public positioning as well as the hidden assumptions – were quite similar: both stood in opposition to the commercial film industry, both used non-fiction material, but had an abstracted and poetic sense of montage in which the underlying truth would shine up that the surface appearance of things was hiding from direct view. Both were fascinated by the exotic as much as by the quotidian, both were visionaries striving for a different kind of cinema. Both graduated from their own national cinema culture and came to wider prominence; in this process, both developed influential models for making films, but also for being funded, for institutional support and for creating a steady base of support.

The crucial difference between these two key figures lies in their institutional ramifications, their media strategies as one could call them. While Ruttmann – even though rhetorically calling for artistic collaboration and a constructivist ethics – stayed a lonesome artist-activist in a romantic vein, Grierson had a very clear sense of how to negotiate and manipulate a public sphere and how to manoeuvre in a bureaucratic administration. Grierson's greatest feat was not an artistic achievement in itself, but rather the media concept he developed, the institutional support he garnered and the duration during which he kept his

operation rolling. Grierson had found a niche that he enlarged into a veritable building in which he could work on his media concept which needed the state (or state affiliated institutions) as a reference point. Even though Ruttmann also finally turned to the state (in Nazi Germany) he did not develop a concept of how to collaborate and how to create a certain measure of freedom within the system of state or industry commissions. Grierson, it could be argued, was in a certain sense a successor to the avant-garde of the 1920s who tried to develop alternative ways of producing, distributing and exhibiting cinema. Grierson's different film units worked on a concept of how to integrate certain ideas and theories of propaganda, social control, change and reform into a filmmaking practice. He was capable of sustaining support for this conception of media activism, while Ruttmann failed to construct his own support network. For that reason his work for the Nazis is all the more tragic because they had a very determined idea of what cinema was and should be. They could easily integrate a talent like Ruttmann's and keep him under control whereas Ruttmann apparently had no strategy how to deal with the context in which he was working. For that reason, film history has usually noted him down as one of the »traitors« who seemingly were left-wing in the 1920s, but then chose to work for the Nazis. The Griersonian movement by contrast was thoroughly »on the good side« and played a decisive role in bringing a genre into existence, changing public opinion about the cinema, winning a world war and altering film culture as a whole.

I have tried to avoid auteuristic arguments and art historical approaches because I believe that the avant-garde very much saw itself as a radical socio-political revolutionary movement, not so much as a purely aesthetic style. Even though Grierson diverged in important respects from the avant-garde his approach with a closely-knit unit of practitioners was clearly aimed against idiosyncrasies, original creation and overstated individualism. By adapting and moderating the avant-garde goals Grierson's group was able to overcome the tensions that riddled the avant-garde. In fact, one can also read the aporias suggested in chapter two (in/dependence; abstraction/realism; sound/silence; fascism/communism) not as binary oppositions, but rather try to make them productive by understanding the avant-garde and the documentary as moments of intersection and transition. These particular filmmaking styles are pointing towards and singling out a seismic shift where the tectonic movements of discourses become visible as through a looking glass in certain movements and configurations of the avant-garde. The source of energy and inspiration for the avant-garde is therefore neither a singular creative genius nor a collective of different temperaments, but rather the technological, economic, social, and cultural ruptures and seismic shocks that create fissures and crevices in the smooth surfaces on and in which the avant-garde was able to thrive for some time. The avant-garde answered to the widespread realisation between the world wars that the modern world left nothing as it was. The activists were highly susceptible to seismic shifts and vibrations as they were looking for a way to deal

with a radically changed situation. Quite logically, they were often absorbed or co-opted by the larger political movements of the time such as communism or fascism. Grierson's radicalism can be seen in his clear and conscious realisation that there was no way out of the impasse of a dependency of some sort, so the most honest solution was to be taken under the wing's of state institutions. By pronouncing one's own dependency already in the name of the institution Grierson put his cards on the table for everybody to see.

What remains is the issue of sound. While *MELODIE DER WELT*, one of the first feature-length sound films in Germany, put sound to innovative use it also cast a nostalgic look back to the heyday of the silent film avant-garde in structure and style. It used the structure of the »city symphonies« and adapted it to a trip around the world; it built groups of images through semantic similarity and within the section it used structural similarity for its rhythms and rhymes. *DRIFTERS*, on the other hand, was silent, but looked forward to one possibility how alternative film culture transformed itself (and be transformed by forces outside of its sphere of influence) in the 1930s. Grierson's film dealt with how modernity reshaped a traditional job like that of a fisherman and his film exhibits neither romantic longing for the lost ways of fishing nor does it use experimentation as a structural feature for the sake of itself. Juxtaposing and unusual editing have a very clear effect in *DRIFTERS* as the whole structure of the film is subordinated to a rhetorical idea. I am aware that this is retrospective reasoning using knowledge unavailable in 1929, but I believe that this moment focuses several branching plots and developments into a singular moment that allows us to disentangle the often complicated motions, coincidences and decisions. One could therefore – counter-factually, but also logically – claim that *MELODIE DER WELT* is a silent film with sound while *DRIFTERS* by comparison is a sound film which is silent.

¹ Kenneth MacPherson: »As Is«. In: *Close Up*, vol. 5, no. 6, Dec. 1929: 447.

² See the collection of essays by Jan Distelmeyer, Erika Wottrich (eds.): *Tonfilmfrieden – Tonfilmkrieg. Die Geschichte der Tobis vom Technik-Syndikat zum Staatskonzern*. München: edition text + kritik 2003.

³ See chapter four for a discussion of the event culture of the avant-garde at Baden-Baden, Stuttgart and La Sarraz.

⁴ Still the best account of the introduction of sound in Europe can be found in Karel Dibbets: *Sprekende films. De komst van de geluidsfilm in Nederland 1928–1933*. Amsterdam: Cramwinckel 1993. Other useful studies include Harald Jossé: *Die Entstehung des Tonfilms. Beitrag zu einer faktenorientierten Mediengeschichtsschreibung*. Freiburg, München: Alber 1984 and Wolfgang Mühl-Benninghaus: *Das Ringen um den Tonfilm. Strategien der Elektro- und Filmindustrie in den 20er und 30er Jahren*. Düsseldorf: Droste 1999.

⁵ Joris Ivens: »Documentary: Subjectivity and Montage«. Lecture at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, December 13, 1939. Reprinted in and quoted after Kees Bakker (ed.): *Joris Ivens and the Documentary Context*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 1999: 250-260, here 250.

⁶ Jamie Sexton: *The Emergence of an Alternative Film Culture in Inter-War Britain*. Norwich: University of East Anglia 2001 [Unpublished PhD thesis]: 180.

⁷ See chapter two on the »Aporias of the avant-garde«.

⁸ See Ernst Bloch: *Werke. IV: Erbschaft dieser Zeit*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1985: 104ff.

⁹ The most thorough collection of texts and documents on the life and work of Walter Ruttmann is Jeanpaul Goergen: *Walter Ruttmann. Eine Dokumentation*. Berlin: Freunde der Kinemathek 1989. Other books on Ruttmann's career are Adrianus van Domburg: *Walter Ruttmann en het beginsel*. Purmerend: Nederlands Filminstituut 1956 and Leonardo Quaresima (ed.): *Walter Ruttmann. Cinema, pittura, ars acustica*. Calliano: Manfrini 1994.

¹⁰ See William Uricchio: *Ruttmann's BERLIN and the City Film to 1930*. New York: New York University 1982. [Unpublished PhD thesis]

¹¹ In fact, painter-filmmaker Laszlo Moholy-Nagy claims to have already in 1921 written a scenario dealing with the chaotic images of a metropolis, but the film was never produced. The idea is reproduced in *Film-Kurier*, vol. 7, no. 109, 9.5.1925. After Ruttmann's film came out, Moholy-Nagy complained indirectly about the theft of the idea. See LMN: »film im bauhaus. eine erwiderng«. In: *Film-Kurier*, vol. 8, no. 296, 18.12.1926.

¹² MELODIE DER WELT is often labelled the first German sound film, but this claim raises complicated issues of what is meant when we talk about a »sound film«, of what does constitute the »German-ness« of the film, and finally the distinction of short film, medium length and feature (as the film is with a running time of under 50 minutes too short for some of today's definitions of »feature length«). For these reasons I have opted for a more cautious and reserved formulation.

¹³ There is an abundance of material on Grierson and the documentary movement. For an affirmative overview of his biography and activities see Forsyth Hardy: *John Grierson. A Documentary Biography*. London: Faber and Faber 1979. A somewhat more critical approach is taken by Jack C. Ellis: *John Grierson. Life, Contributions, Influence*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press 2000. On the documentary film movement see Elizabeth Sussex: *The Rise and Fall of British Documentary. The Story of the Film Movement Founded by John Grierson*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 1975 and Paul Swann: *The British Documentary Film Movement, 1926–1946*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1989. For a study of the theoretical, philosophical and intellectual foundations of the movement see Ian Aitken: *Film and Reform: John Grierson and the Documentary Film Movement*. London: Routledge 1990. On a critical reassessment see Brian Winston: *Claiming the Real. The Documentary Film Revisited*. London: British Film Institute 1995.

¹⁴ Erik Barnouw: *Documentary. A History of the Non-Fiction Film*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1993²: 72f.

¹⁵ Andrew Buchanan: »Director's Notebook«. In: *Cinema Quarterly*, vol. 1, no. 3, Spring 1933: 163.

¹⁶ For a productive discussion of how to deal with this distinction see Thomas Elsaesser: »Realität zeigen: Der frühe Film im Zeichen Lumières«. In: Ursula von Keitz, Kay Hoffmann (eds.): *Die Einübung des dokumentarischen Blicks. Fiction Film und Non Fiction Film zwischen Wahrheitsanspruch und expressiver Sachlichkeit 1895–1945*. Marburg: Schüren 2001: 27–50.

¹⁷ Bill Nichols: »Documentary Film and the Modernist Avant-Garde«. In: *Critical Inquiry* 27 (Summer 2001): 580–610, here 583–5.

¹⁸ See John Grierson: »Directors of the 'Thirties« and »First Principles of Documentary«. In: Forsyth Hardy (ed.): *Grierson on Documentary*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 1966: 38–58, especially 55ff. and 78–89, especially 80f.

¹⁹ See Martin Loiperdinger: »World War I Propaganda and the Birth of Documentary«. In: Daan Hertogs, Nico de Klerk (eds.): *Uncharted Territory. Essays on Early Non-Fiction Film*. Amsterdam: Nederlands Filmmuseum 1998: 25–31.

²⁰ Charles Musser: »The Silent Film: Documentary«. In: Geoffrey Nowell-Smith: *The Oxford History of World Cinema*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1996: 86–95. Musser moreover claims that early non-fiction films »had ›documentary value‹ but did not necessarily function within ›the documentary tradition« (88), here borrowing Grierson's expression of »documentary value«.

²¹ See for example the essays collected in two volumes by the Amsterdam film museum, Daan Hertogs, Nico de Klerk (eds.): *Nonfiction from the Teens*. Amsterdam: Nederlands Filmmuseum 1994, Daan Hertogs, Nico de Klerk (eds.): *Uncharted Territory. Essays on Early Nonfiction Film*. Amsterdam: Nederlands Filmmuseum 1997. See also the essays collected in two volumes of the year book *KinTop*. Frank Kessler, Sabine Lenk, Martin Loiperdinger (eds.): *KinTop 4: Anfänge des dokumentarischen Films*. Basel, Frankfurt/Main: Stroemfeld/Roter Stern 1995. and Frank Kessler, Sabine Kenk, Martin Loiperdinger (eds.): *KinTop 5: Aktualitäten*. Basel, Frankfurt/Main: Stroemfeld/Roter Stern 1996.

²² Tom Gunning: »A Quarter of a Century Later: Is Early Cinema Still Early?«. In: Frank Kessler, Sabine Lenk, Martin Loiperdinger (eds.): *KINtop 12: Theorien zum frühen Kino*. Frankfurt/Main, Basel: Stroemfeld / Roter Stern 2003: 17-31.

²³ Erik Barnouw: *Documentary. A History of the Non-Fiction Film*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1993².

²⁴ Siân Reynolds: »Germaine Dulac and French documentary film making in the 1930s«. In: John Izod, Richard Kilborn (eds.): *From Grierson to the Docu-Soap. Breaking the Boundaries*. Luton: University of Luton Press 2000: 71.

²⁵ Bill Nichols: »Documentary Film and the Modernist Avant-Garde«. In: *Critical Inquiry* 27 (Summer 2001): 580–610, here 582.

²⁶ *Ibid.*: 582.

²⁷ *Ibid.*: 581.

²⁸ *Ibid.*: 589.

²⁹ *Ibid.*: 591f.

³⁰ *Ibid.*: 595, italics in original.

³¹ *Ibid.*: 599.

³² *Ibid.*: 600.

³³ *Ibid.*: 600f.

³⁴ *Ibid.*: 604f.

³⁵ Guy Gauthier: »Die ›vier Winde‹ des französischen Dokumentarfilms. Seine Entwicklung zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen«. In: Peter Zimmermann, Kay Hoffmann (eds.): *Triumph der Bilder. Kultur- und Dokumentarfilme vor 1945 im internationalen Vergleich*. Konstanz: UVK 2003: 189–202.

³⁶ See chapter three on the distribution and exhibition circuits and networks.

³⁷ See Petr Szczepanik: »Undoing the National: Representing International Space in 1930s Czechoslovak Multiple-Language Versions«. In: *Cinema & Cie. International Film Studies Journal*, no. 4, Spring 2004: 55-65.

³⁸ Walter Benjamin: »Erfahrung und Armut«. In: W.B.: *Gesammelte Schriften. II.1*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1977: 213-219, here 214. [»A generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath these clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human body.«, trans. Harry Zohn, *Illuminations*: 84]

³⁹ The title for the first act announces »Ausfahrt in die Welt / Ihre Bauten / Ihre Strassen / Ihre Gottesverehrung / Ihr Kriegslärm«, the title for the second act is missing, while the third act deals with »Morgen der Frau / Sprachen der Welt / Mahlzeiten / Tanz und Musik / Schauspiel-Rummel / Arbeit und Heimkehr«.

⁴⁰ Karl Bloßfeldt: *Urformen der Kunst. Photographische Pflanzenbilder*. (edited with an introduction by Karl Nierendorff). Berlin: Ernst Wasmuth n.y. [1928]. See also Walter Benjamin: »Kleine Geschichte der Photographie«. In: W.B.: *Gesammelte Schriften. II.1*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1977: 368-385, here 372.

⁴¹ See Albert Renger-Patzsch: *Die Welt ist schön*. München: Kurt Wolff 1928.

⁴² Hermann Kappelhoff: »Eine neue Gegenständlichkeit. Die Bildidee der Neuen Sachlichkeit und der Film«. In: Thomas Koebner, Norbert Grob, Bernd Kiefer (eds.): *Jenseits der ›Dämonischen Leinwand. Neue Perspektiven auf das späte Weimarer Kino*. München: edition text + kritik 2003: 119-138, here 121. [»At the peak of classical modernity the ›New Sobriety‹ develops the world of

objects as a specific form of aesthetic abstraction, counterposing it to expressive expression: instead of deforming subjectively, it takes the object of perception as a strict form that can be exceeded and absolutised.«, my trans.]

⁴³ Forsyth Hardy: *John Grierson. A Documentary Biography*. London: Faber and Faber 1979: 52.

⁴⁴ See Forsyth Hardy: *John Grierson. A Documentary Biography*. London: Faber and Faber 1979: 51f. Yet, these staged scenes of the catch did not prove to be satisfactory, so the film crew stayed on until they were lucky enough to witness a real big catch.

⁴⁵ The article was first published in Russian in: *Zhizn iskusstva*, no. 32, 1928: 4-5, and in German as »Achtung! Goldgrube! Gedanken über die Zukunft des Hörfilms« on 28 July 1928 in the trade paper *Lichtbildbühne*, an article with which Ruttman was surely familiar. In English it was published as »The Sound Film. A Statement from U.S.S.R.«. In *Close Up*, vol. 3, no. 4, October 1928: 10-13.

⁴⁶ On the unity and harmony of the world see Holger Wilmesmeier: »Die Einheit der Welt. Harmonisierung von Natur und Technik im Geiste des Übermenschen – eine ikonographische und rhetorische Spurensuche«. In: *Das kalte Bild. Neue Studien zum NS-Propagandafilm*. Marburg: Schüren 1996. (Augen-Blick. Marburger Hefte zur Medienwissenschaft; Heft 22): 6-38.

⁴⁷ Siegfried Kracauer: *Von Caligari zu Hitler. Eine psychologische Geschichte des deutschen Films*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1979, 218f. [»Unlike the *Kulturfilme* and operettas, cross-section films changed their character during the pre-Hitler years. They became vehicles of an over-all optimism alien to their previous moods. This new optimism vigorously asserted itself in Ruttman's early sound experiment, *DIE MELODIE DER WELT* [...], a cross-section film he made from materials put at his disposal by the Hamburg-Amerika Line. [...] While *BERLIN*, neutral as it was, still dwelt upon the harshness of mechanized human relations, *WORLD MELODY* manifests a neutrality that is completely indiscriminating and implies wholesale acceptance of the universe. [...Ruttman's] »world melody« is void of content, because his concern with the whole of the world leads him to disregard the specific content of each of the assembled melodies.«, 208f.]

⁴⁸ David Bordwell: *Narration in the Fiction Film*. Madison, WI / London: University of Wisconsin Press / Methuen 1985: 168, 186, 238f. See also Barry Salt: *Film Style & Technology: History & Analysis*. London: Starwood 1992²: 144ff. and passim.

⁴⁹ For a description of different forms of *Neue Sachlichkeit* and realism in relation to film see Norbert M. Schmitz: »Zwischen »Neuem Sehen« und »Neuer Sachlichkeit«. Der Einfluß der Kunstphotographie auf den Film der zwanziger Jahre«. In: Michael Esser (ed.): *Gleißende Schatten. Kamerapioniere der zwanziger Jahre*. Berlin: Henschel 1994: 79-94.

⁵⁰ John Grierson: »The Documentary Idea: 1942«. In: Forsyth Hardy (ed.): *Grierson on Documentary*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 1966: 181.

⁵¹ As quoted by Forsyth Hardy in his edited volume of Grierson writings: *Grierson on Documentary*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 1966: 13.

⁵² See Brian Winston: *Claiming the Real. The Documentary Film Revisited*. London: British Film Institute 1995, part 1.

⁵³ See Ian Aitken: *Film and Reform. John Grierson and the Documentary Film Movement*. London, New York: Routledge 1990. (Cinema and Society).

⁵⁴ See chapter two on the aporias of avant-garde for an extended discussion of abstraction and realism.

⁵⁵ A stimulating discussion of these issues around photography and film can be found in Norbert M. Schmitz: »Der Film der Neuen Sachlichkeit. Auf der Suche nach der medialen Authentizität«. In: Ursula von Keitz, Kay Hoffmann (eds.): *Die Einübung des dokumentarischen Blicks. Fiction Film und Non Fiction Film zwischen Wahrheitsanspruch und expressiver Sachlichkeit 1895–1945*. Marburg: Schüren 2001, 147–168.

⁵⁶ The company's original name was *Hamburg-Amerikanische Packetfahrt Actiengesellschaft*, established in 1847. On the history of the company see Susanne Wiborg, Klaus Wiborg: *1847–1997. Unser Feld ist die Welt*. Hamburg: Hapag-Lloyd 1997.

⁵⁷ My account of the Hapag's engagement in film activity relies on Michael Töteberg: »Die Sehnsucht unserer Zeit. Exotik und Tourismus: Die Reisefilme der Hapag«. Unpublished manuscript.

⁵⁸ A useful study examining the German view of the US before 1920 is Deniz Göktürk: *Künstler, Cowboys, Ingenieure. Kultur- und mediengeschichtliche Studien zu deutschen Amerika-Texten 1912–1920*. München: Wilhelm Fink 1997.

⁵⁹ Ufa-Vorstandsprotokolle, protocol no. 209 from the meeting on 12 Dezember 1927.

⁶⁰ Another example on the intersection of industry and avant-garde during the early sound period: In March 1930 René Clair and Sergej Eisenstein were sharing the large studio at the complex in Epinay; Clair was finishing the work on *SOUS LES TOITS DE PARIS* (1929/30) while Eisenstein, Grigorij Alexandrov and Eduard Tissé shot *ROMANCE SENTIMENTALE*. See anon.: »Eisenstein macht seinen ersten Tonfilm. Besuch bei der französischen Tobis«. In: *Film-Kurier*, no. 65, 15.3.1930.

⁶¹ For a detailed discussion of the European dimension of the Tobis see Malte Hagener: »Unter den Dächern der Tobis. Nationale Märkte und europäische Strategien«. In: Jan Distelmeyer (ed.): *Tonfilmfrieden/Tonfilmkrieg. Die Geschichte der Tobis vom Technik-Syndikat zum Staatskonzern*. München: edition text + kritik 2003: 51–64.

⁶² See the thorough filmography of Tobis for some production cycles, Hans-Michael Bock, Wiebke Annkatrin Mosel, Ingrid Spazier (eds.): *Die Tobis 1928–1945. Eine kommentierte Filmographie*. München: edition text + kritik 2003.

⁶³ This does not imply that Tobis is an experimental company, yet the openness of Tobis from 1928 until early 1930 towards innovation is astonishing when compared to other production firms facing similar problems. See also Thomas Elsaesser, Malte Hagener: »Walter Ruttmann: 1929«. In: Stefan Andriopoulos, Bernhard Dotzler (eds.): *1929. Beiträge zur Archäologie der Medien*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 2002, S. 316–349.

⁶⁴ John Grierson: »Summary and Survey: 1935«. In: *Grierson on Documentary*. (edited with an introduction by Forsyth Hardy). London: Collins 1946, 102–120, here 114.

⁶⁵ See the text Joris Ivens: »Quelques réflexions sur les documentaires d'avant-garde«. In: *La revue des vivants*, no. 10, 1931: 518–520. Reprinted translation in and quoted from: »Notes on the Avant-garde Documentary Film«. In: Kees Bakker (ed.): *Joris Ivens and the Documentary Context*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 1999: 224–226. See my discussion of the text in chapter two.

⁶⁶ S. Kracauer: »Exotische Filme«. In: *Frankfurter Zeitung*, no. 390, 28.5.1929. Reprinted in S.K.: *Werke 6.2. Kleine Schriften zum Film 1928–1931*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 2004: 251–254, here 253. [»One will continue offering foreign countries to the audience, so it does not notice anything at home.«, my trans.]

⁶⁷ John Grierson in: *The Clarion*, August 1929. Reprinted in and quoted after Forsyth Hardy (ed.): *John Grierson on the Movies*. London, Boston, MA: Faber & Faber 1981: 28–31, here 30.

⁶⁸ See Nico de Klerk: »The Moment of Screening. What Non-Fiction Films Can Do«. In: Peter Zimmermann, Kay Hoffmann (eds.): *Triumph der Bilder. Kultur- und Dokumentarfilme vor 1945 im internationalen Vergleich*. Konstanz: UVK 2003: 291–301.

⁶⁹ The *locus classicus* of the convergence of early cinema is Tom Gunning: »The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde«. In: Thomas Elsaesser (ed.): *Early Cinema. Space, Frame, Narrative*. London: BFI 1990: 56–62.

⁷⁰ An overview for Germany is provided by the essays collected in Jörg Schöning (ed.): *Triviale Tropen. Exotische Reise- und Abenteuerfilme aus Deutschland, 1919–1939*. München: edition text + kritik 1997.

⁷¹ Flaherty's return to the »documentary impulse« was due to Grierson's insistence that Flaherty would work for his Film Unit; it was thus Grierson's »invention of a tradition« (and his move away from Soviet film practice effectively silencing this important source of inspiration) that put Flaherty firmly on the map of the documentary as we know it today.

⁷² An early example of this exotic *Medienverbund* dating back to the 19th Century that also points forward to the experience economy of the late 20th Century is provided by the Hagenbeck-Umlauff-family in Hamburg. See Hilke Thode-Arora: *Für fünfzig Pfennig um die Welt. Die Hagenbeckschen Völkerschauen*. Frankfurt, New York: Campus 1989. A typical proponent from the 1920s is Colin Ross. See Bodo-Michael Baumunk: »Ein Pfadfinder der Geopolitik. Colin Ross und seine

Reisefilme«. In: Jörg Schöning: *Triviale Tropen. Exotische Reise- und Abenteuerfilme aus Deutschland, 1919–1939*. München: edition text + kritik 1997: 84–94.

⁷³ Erik Barnouw: *Documtary. A History of the Non-Fiction Film*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1993²: 50.

⁷⁴ See for a contemporary review Karl Sabel: »Der Reisefilm der Clairenore Stinnes. Uraufführung in Essen«. In: *Film-Kurier*, vol. 13, no. 63, 16.3.1931. See for the Berlin premiere –g.: »Im Auto durch zwei Welten«. In: *Film-Kurier*, vol. 13, no. 96, 25.4.1931. See also Jeanpaul Goergen: »Dokumentarischer Idealbeweis«. In: *Filmblatt*, vol. 8, no. 23: 10–14.

⁷⁵ See for Stinnes' film strategy Daniel Otto: *Filmwirtschaft und schwerindustrielle Unternehmensstrategie in der Weimarer Republik. Das Beispiel der Westi-Gesellschaft von Hugo Stinnes*. Bochum: Ruhr-Universität 1993. [Unveröffentlichte Diplomarbeit]

⁷⁶ See Jeanpaul Goergen: »Dokumentarischer Idealbeweis«. In: *Filmblatt*, vol. 8, no. 23: 10–14.

⁷⁷ On the cross-media marketing strategies of Udet see Jörg Schöning: entry Ernst Udet. In: Hans-Michael Bock (ed.): *CineGraph – Lexikon zum deutschsprachigen Film*. München: edition text + kritik 1984ff.: inst. 7, 1.10.1986.

⁷⁸ Charles Musser: »Sound Cinema: Documentary«. In: Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (ed.): *The Oxford History of World Cinema*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1996: 322–333, here 322f.

⁷⁹ Guy Gauthier: »Die ›vier Winde‹ des französischen Dokumentarfilms. Seine Entwicklung zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen«. In: Peter Zimmermann, Kay Hoffmann (eds.): *Triumph der Bilder. Kultur- und Dokumentarfilme vor 1945 im internationalen Vergleich*. Konstanz: UVK 2003: 189–202.

⁸⁰ See Philipp Stiasny: »Gut gebrüllt, Löwe!«. In: *Filmblatt*, vol. 8, no. 23: 26–29. The film was shown at the Giornate del Cinema Muto in Sacile in 2003.

⁸¹ Jean Prevost: »André Gide and Marc Allégret's Voyage au Congo«. In: *Close Up*, vol. 1, no. 1, July 1927: 38–41, here 38.

⁸² See Rainer Rother: *Leni Riefenstahl. Die Verführung des Talents*. München: Wilhelm Heyne 2002: 20–44; see Lutz Kinkel: *Die Scheinwerferin. Leni Riefenstahl und das »Dritte Reich«*. Hamburg, Wien: Europa-Verlag 2002: 10–44 on her career pre-1933; see Jürgen Trimborn: *Riefenstahl. Eine deutsche Karriere. Biographie*. Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag 2002: 36–60 on her dance career, 61–100 on her acting career with Fanck, 102–122 on her directorial debut DAS BLAUE LICHT.

⁸³ See for an account by the director Adrian Brunel: »Experiments in Ultra-Cheap Cinematography«. In: *Close Up*, vol. 3, no. 4, October 1928: 43–46. See also Jamie Sexton: »Parody on the Fringes. Adrian Brunel, Minority Film Culture and the Art of Deconstruction«. In: Alan Burton, Laraine Porter (eds.): *Pimple, Pranks and Pratfalls: British Film Comedy Before 1930*. Trowbridge: Flicks Books 2000.

⁸⁴ For more on the life and work of André Sauvage see Philippe Esnault: »André Sauvage, cinéaste maudit«. In: *La revue du cinéma*, no. 394, May 1984: 92–94; Philippe Esnault: »Sauvages«. In: *Cinématographe*, no. 112, July 1985: 63–67; Dominique Païni, Eric LeRoy: »Les archives du film (CNC): la collection André Sauvage«. In: *Cinémathèque*, no. 2, Nov. 1992: 124–129; Alain Virmaux: »Cinémemoire 96: Deux mécomptes (A. Sauvage et J. Duvivier)«. In: *Jeune cinéma*, no. 244, summer 1997: 53f.

⁸⁵ Geoff Brown: »Table Tennis over Everest. Ivor Montagu will be eighty on 23 April.« In: *Sight & Sound*, Spring 1984: 98.

⁸⁶ See William Rothman: »The Filmmaker as Hunter. Robert Flaherty's NANOOK OF THE NORTH«. In: Barry Keith Grant, Jeannette Sloniowski (eds.): *Documenting the Documentary. Close Readings of Documentary Film and Video*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press 1998. (Contemporary Film and Television Series): 23–39.

⁸⁷ Klaus Kreimeier: »Mechanik, Waffen und Haudegen überall. Expeditionsfilme: das bewaffnete Auge des Ethnografen«. In: Jörg Schöning: *Triviale Tropen. Exotische Reise- und Abenteuerfilme aus Deutschland, 1919–1939*. München: edition text + kritik 1997, 47–61, here 48. [the modern discourse of mediated authenticity has emerged from the employment of advanced technology of the optical industry in connection with the fetishised idea of precision which was pushed through in conjunction with the development of the natural sciences«, my trans.]

⁸⁸ For a discussion of the concept »laboratory« in Ruttmann's writings see Elsaesser, Hagener, »Ruttmann«. In: Andriopoulos, Dotzler, 1929, op.cit., 327f.

⁸⁹ Heinrich Mutzenbecher: *Melodie der Welt. ein Präludium zum ersten deutschen Tonfilm*. Hamburg: Hapag n.y. [1929]: 2. [»to find the common element, the idea which a globe-circling shipping company is in the service of. When the sword is resting, research and economy are getting together. The human being blossoms under the warm beams of peace. But is not the root of strive only misunderstanding others? Lack of knowledge produces hatred, understanding creates love.«, my trans.]

⁹⁰ Walter Ruttmann: »Auch Eisen kann Filmstar sein. S. Pfannkuch im Gespräch mit Walter Ruttmann«. Undated newspaper clipping, Ruttmann archive, Filmmuseum Frankfurt. Reprinted in and quoted after: Jeanpaul Goergen: *Walter Ruttmann. Eine Dokumentation*. Berlin: Freunde der Kinemathek 1989, 92f. [»The film that consist of different artistic and technical elements can only be a filmic film if it, like a great symphonic composition, unites all contrapuntual, optical and acoustic laws in its score.«, my trans.]

⁹¹ A useful introduction is given by Michael Töteberg: »Wie werde ich stark. Die Kulturfilm-Abteilung«. In: Hans-Michael Bock, Michael Töteberg (eds.): *Das Ufa-Buch*. Frankfurt/Main: Zweitausendeins 1992, 64–67.

⁹² Kreimeier, »Mechanik...«. In: Schöning, *Triviale Tropen*, op.cit., 55. [»a marked specimen of the belated, but then all the more rapid industrialisation of Germany – a descendant of that period which brought forth the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Institute and the research societies sponsored by the industry.«]

⁹³ Brian Winston: *Claiming the Real. The Documentary Film Revisited*. London: British Film Institute 1995, 33f.

⁹⁴ Indeed, Flaherty did not only travel in space, but he also urged the subjects of his films to time travel. Thus, for *NANOOK OF THE NORTH* and for *MAN FOR ARAN* he had the portrayed people re-enact ways of dressing, hunting and living that they had given up many years before the filming.

⁹⁵ Brian Winston: *Claiming the Real. The Documentary Film Revisited*. London: British Film Institute 1995, 20.

⁹⁶ For films of the Weimar Republic dealing with sex education and exploitation see Malte Hagener (ed.): *Geschlecht in Fesseln. Sexualität zwischen Aufklärung und Ausbeutung im Weimarer Kino*. München: edition text + kritik 2000.

⁹⁷ 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: Éditions Expérimental 1994: 62-67, here 65. [»...the documentary film is a kind of microscope which helps us to perceive aspects of reality which we would not perceive without it. In a documentary film, in a scientific film life appears in its thousand details, in its processes, in everything that the eye normally cannot see.«, my trans.]

⁹⁸ See for a collection of essays on this format Frank Kessler, Sabine Lenk, Martin Loiperdinger (eds.): *Kintop. Jahrbuch zur Erforschung des frühen Films. 11: Kinematographen-Programme*. Frankfurt/Main, Basel: Stroemfeld/Roter Stern 2002. See for a crucial case study that contains many examples Ivo Blom: *Jean Desmet and the Early Dutch Film Trade*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2003. See for a more theoretically inclined discussion Thomas Elsaesser: *Filmgeschichte und frühes Kino. Archäologie eines Medienwandels*. München: edition text + kritik 2002: passim, especially chapter 3 (»Wie der frühe Film zum Erzählkino wurde«): 69-93.

⁹⁹ A consideration of the specific screening and programming strategies of the Dutch *Filmliga* see Tom Gunning: »Ontmoetingen in verduisterde ruimten. De alternatieve programmering van de Nederlandsche Filmliga«. In: Nico de Klerk, Ruud Visschedijk (eds.): *Het gaat om de film! Een nieuwe geschiedenis van de Nederlandsche Filmliga 1927-1933*. Amsterdam: Bas Lubberhuizen / Filmmuseum 1999: 217-263.

¹⁰⁰ See for example *Film-Kurier*, vol. 9, no. 230, 29.9.1927.

¹⁰¹ Willy Haas: »Film-Kritik. Berlin, die Symphonie der Großstadt«. In: *Film-Kurier*, vol. 9, no. 226, 24.9.1927. [»To start with, short films, about twenty years old. Including the narrator as it used to be. »From step to step«; »Mother, your child is calling!«; »Parisian fashion show«; »Piquanterie with lady's

panties and bathing suit«. Around the year 1910. The audience squealed with delight. / A big fun – but a mean fun. A plebeian fun. The mocking laughter about yesterday; the triumphant laughter: how far we have made it... And a dangerous fun. / Tomorrow – in twenty years time – one will laugh even more about the film BERLIN, SYMPHONY OF A BIG CITY. One will have made it even further. The pompous title will be met with derision. »The menuet of a small town« - some film critic will say ironically twenty years from now.«, my trans.]

¹⁰² Anon.: »Historischer Tag des deutschen Tonfilms: Uraufführung »Melodie der Welt««. In: *Film-Kurier*, vol. 11, no. 60, 9.3.1929. [»Only seldomly has the world city Berlin seen a social event of such style. The driving up of cars for this eagerly awaited premiere was of such manner that the police had to redirect the traffic everywhere around Nollendorplatz. The theatre itself offered a festive attire as even an opera gala can seldomly boast. The most representative society of the Imperial capitol, including the most marked heads of economy, politics and press, was in attendance.«, my trans.]

¹⁰³ See the lead article »Der Film der Hapag. Der Ruttmann-Film im Mozartsaal«. In: *Film-Kurier*, vol. 11, no. 63, 13.3.1929.

¹⁰⁴ This speech is missing in existing prints of MELODIE DER WELT.

¹⁰⁵ anon.: »Melodie der Welt«. In: *Lichtbild-Bühne*, 13.3.1929. See also anon.: »Die »Melodie der Welt«. Grundsätzliches zum ersten großen deutschen Tonfilm«. In: *Kinematograph*, vol. 23, no. 61, 13.3.1929.

¹⁰⁶ See Bruce Posner (ed.): *Unseen Cinema. Early American Avant-Garde Film 1893-1941*. New York: Anthology Film Archive 2001: 113-130.

¹⁰⁷ See *The Film Society Programme. (Fifth Season). The 33rd Performance*. Sunday, November 10th, 1929 at 2.30 P.M. at the Tivoli Palace, Strand. Reprinted in Council of the London Film Society (ed.): *The Film Society Programmes 1925-1939*. New York: Arno Press 1972: 128-131.

¹⁰⁸ See Esther Leslie: *Hollywood Flatlands. Animation, Critical Theory and the Avant-Garde*. London, New York: Verso 2002.

¹⁰⁹ This development is sketched in Jamie Sexton: »Grierson's Machines: DRIFTERS, the Documentary Film Movement and the Negotiation of Modernity«. In: *Canadian Journal of Film Studies / Revue canadienne d'études cinématographiques*, vol. 11, no. 1, Spring 2002: 40-59, quote on page 54.

¹¹⁰ Walter Benjamin: »Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit« (Dritte Fassung). In: W.B.: *Gesammelte Schriften. Band I.2*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1977: 471-508, here 499. [»To demonstrate the identity of the artistic and scientific uses of photography which heretofore usually were separated will be one of the revolutionary functions of the film.«, trans. Harry Zohn, *Illuminations*: 236]