FILM CULTURE
IN TRANSITION

FILM SOCIETIES
in GERMANY *and* AUSTRIA 1910-1933

TRACING *the* SOCIAL LIFE *of* CINEMA

MICHAEL COWAN

Amsterdam University Press

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Cover illustration: Report on a summer party of the Kinogemeinde with members in costume and décor imitating the set of *Das Modell von Montparnasse* (1929), *Mein Film*, 1929

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Introduction: What Was a Film Society? Towards a New Archaeology of Screen Communities

Abstract
Theoretical introduction outlining both the scope of the book and the larger theoretical implications, in dialogue with media archaeology, histories of sociability, useful cinema studies and laboratory science. The introduction makes the case for bracketing assumptions about arthouse cinema when dealing with the early history of film societies, showing that they arose from a much broader context of voluntary associations at a time when cinema became an urgent question on account of its mass popularity. Film societies came in many forms, but they all sought to influence the development of cinema by inculcating forms of sociability around cinema: teaching people not only what to watch, but how to watch, what to know about the cinema, and how to interact with film culture more broadly. Hence, a key argument here is that film societies need to be seen as *productive* frameworks, not simply the result of associations between pre-existing cinephiles.

Keywords: film societies, media archaeology, useful cinema, voluntary associations, imaginary media, history of the self

Why a book on film societies today, in the age of 'post-cinema'? This question implies another one: What is—or what *was*—a film society anyway? Not long ago, the answer to the latter question might have appeared self-evident; film societies are those arthouse groups that flowered shortly after WWII as spaces where devoted cinephiles can come together and share their passion for cinema around a steady supply of quality films, typically in a cinematheque. More recently, the beginnings of what is often called the 'film society movement' have been pushed further back, with several

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studies illuminating the rise of cinephilic groups in the interwar period, with bases in specialty cinemas such as the Studio des Ursulines in Paris or the Filmtheater de Uitkijk in Amsterdam.[1] Still newer studies are expanding our geographical view of film studies to examine film cultural activity beyond Western Europe.[2] And other work is problematizing the (traditionally laudatory) approaches to European film club activity itself by examining its gender and class politics.[3] At the same time, other scholars are examining how cinephilic sociability is transforming today in the context of online forums, where collective film appreciation and discussion no longer require a common physical space, and anyone with an internet connection can watch, interpret and debate films.[4] But despite this expansion in multiple directions, most work on film societies still shares at least one assumption: namely that the film society as an institution presupposes a fundamental shared attachment to independent arthouse cinema, or as one recent handbook puts it, "un cinéma de qualité non inféodé aux puissances d'argent."[5]

There is good reason to revisit this narrow definition at a time when communities around screen media are, in fact, starting to look very different. Today, social media groups, campus clubs for VR and augmented reality,

1 See Christophe Gauthier, *La Passion du cinéma : cinéphiles, ciné-clubs et salles spécialisées à Paris 1920 à 1929* (Ecoles des Chartes : Association Française de Recherche sur l'Histoire du Cinéma, 1999); Malte Hagener, *Moving Forward, Looking Back: The European Avant-Garde and the Invention of Film Culture 1919–1939* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), esp. pp. 77–121; Hagener (ed.), *The Emergence of Film Culture. Knowledge, Production, Institution Building, and the Fate of the Avant-Garde in Europe, 1919–1945* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2014).

2 See for example Greg de Cuir Jr., "Early Yugoslav Ciné-amateurism: Cinéphilia and the Institution of Film Culture in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia During the Interwar Period," in *The Emergence of Film Culture,* ed. Malte Hagener (Oxford: Berghahn, 2014), 162–80; Lars Gustav Andersson, "Interwar Film Culture in Sweden: Avant-Garde Transactions in the Emergent Welfare State," in *The Emergence of Film Culture,* 227–49; Rielle Navitski, *Transatlantic Cinephilia: Networks of Film Culture Between Latin America and France 1945–1965* (forthcoming at University of California Press).

3 See especially the work of Annie Fee, e.g. "Gender, Class and Cinpheilia: Parisian Cinema Cultures 1918–1925," PhD diss. (University of Washington, 2015).

4 See Girish Shambu, *The New Cinephilia* (Montreal: Caboose Books, 2014). On the Dutch Filmliga, see Tom Gunning, "Encounters in Darkened Rooms: Alternative Programming of the Dutch Filmliga 1927–1931," in Hagener (ed.), *The Emergence of Film Culture,* 72–118.

5 "Ciné-Club," in *Dictionnaire du cinéma,* ed. Jean-Loup Passek (Paris : Larousse, 2001), 260. Another recent handbook locates the origin of the film society, in standard fashion, in 1920s France with arthouse groups such as the Club des amis du septième art (CASA, founded 1921). See "film society," in *A Dictionary of Film Studies,* ed. Annette Kuhn and Guy Westwell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 173. As I will show, however, film societies preceded this "origin" by at least a decade, a fact that only becomes visible if we relinquish the ingrained association of film societies with arthouse film.

associations for 'serious gaming' and data visualization societies are likely shaping people's experience of screen media to a greater extent than the traditional arthouse film club, which survives mostly as a relic of a mode of screen experience that has become historical.[6] But this shift is not simply about how we understand media communities in the present. We can also ask if the film society itself ever *was* as monolithic an institution as we sometimes assume.

This book seeks to widen the view considerably. Examining the emergence of film societies in the German-speaking world in the early twentieth century—a context that, while certainly not marginal on the scale of global film cultures, has nonetheless received less attention than France, Holland and the UK—it approaches early film societies not as institutions inherently or inevitably about artistic appreciation, but as media associations, indeed *new media* associations.[7] Early film societies, the book argues, helped to train spectators to interact with emergent screen media in different ways. The last sentence also implies a further conceptual and methodological shift. Rather than seeing the film society as a conglomeration of people with a pre-given passion for—and self-evident ideas about—cinema, we need to see it as a *productive* framework. Film societies, the book argues, helped to produce subjectivities: to teach people how to think about the cinema and how to interact with it. They helped people learn not only what to watch, but also *how* to watch, how to love (and sometimes hate) the movies, how to engage with film culture more broadly and how to manage their own exposure to a new and evolving medium.

My endeavor to revisit the film society with these different historiographical questions in mind stands in dialogue with several recent changes in the discipline of film history. First, the rise of attention to 'useful cinema' means

6 On data visualization societies, see for example Elijah Meeks, "Introducing the Data Visualization Society," *Medium* 20 February 2019: https://medium.com/data-visualization-society/introducing-the-data-visualization-society-d13d42abobec. On VR and AR clubs, which are becoming an increasingly popular phenomenon in American universities in particular, see for example Mella Robinson, "Stanford Has its Own Virtual Reality Club," *Business Insider* 2 June 2016: https://www.businessinsider.com/rabbit-hole-vr-stanford-2016-5?r=US&IR=T; Madeleine O'Keef, "BU's AR/VR club members immerse themselves in new technologies," *BU Today,* 28 March 2019: https://www.bu.edu/articles/2019/exploring-augmented-and-virtual-reality-technology/. On serious gaming societies, see the webpage of the Serious Games Society (https://seriousgamessociety.org/) and the Serious Games Association (https://www.seriousgamesassociation.org/)

7 I use the term 'new media' here in the sense outlined by Lisa Gitelman and Geoffrey Pingree of studying old media "in terms that allow us to understand what it meant for them to be new." Lisa Gitelman and Geoffrey Pingree, "Introduction: What's New About New Media," in *New Media: 1740–1915,* ed. Lisa Gitelman and Geoffrey Pingree (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003).

that we no longer take for granted the assumption, once a prerequisite for the legitimation of academic Film Studies, that film history is first and foremost a history of auteurs, styles and aesthetic movements.[8] Research into the long traditions of scientific, educational, industrial and advertising film has brought into view entire sectors of forgotten film activity, which are often just as consequential for our current media universe as the history of art and aesthetics.[9] But while research into these domains has focused mostly on production and technology, they also came with their own forms of sociability, which means that film societies, too, were by no means limited to the arthouse scene. If we reconsider film societies from the vantage of useful cinema studies, a series of questions arise: What aspects of historical film societies can we see anew today? What social phenomena can we see anew *as* 'film societies'? And how might we reassess the film society's relevance as a historical institution, especially in cinema's early decades? This book seeks to address some of these questions by examining four paradigms of the film society in the early twentieth century and the ways in which they grappled with the new medium. Chapter 1 begins with the so-called 'cinematographic study societies' of the 1910s, the first voluntary associations designed expressly to probe the possibilities of the new medium—and which located those possibilities primarily in its contributions to public knowledge. Chapter 2 then examines the 'technological' societies that emerged in the early 1920s to conceptualize and legitimate an understanding of cinema as a national industry and a 'profession' with similar status to other professional

8 I borrow the term "useful cinema" from Charles Acland and Haidee Wasson, *Useful Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

9 Thomas Elsaesser long promoted the study of such films under the title S/M filmmaking (surveillance and military, science and medicine, sensing and monitoring, storage and memory) to underscore their functions as precursors to the kinds of digital images that affect our world today. See for example Elsaesser, "What's Left of the Cinematic Appartus, or Why We Should Retain (and Return to) It," *Recherches sémiotiques* 31 (2011), 41. Key programmatic publications on useful cinema include Acland and Wasson's *Useful Cinema,* as well as Patrick Vonderau and Vinzenz Hediger (eds.), *Films that Work: Industrial Film and the Productivity of Media* (Amsterdam University Press, 2009); Yvonne Zimmermann, *Schaufenster Schweiz: Dokumentarische Gebrauchsfilme 1896–1964* (Zürich: Limmat 2011); David Orgeron, Marsha Orgeron and Dan Streible (eds.), *Learning With the Lights Off: Educational Film in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Patrick Vonderau, Bo Florin and Nico de Clerk (eds.), *Films that Sell: Moving Pictures and Advertising* (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2017); and most recently Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson (eds,), *Film's Military Industrial Complex* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018). Other studies have shown that these "other" sectors were by no means self-enclosed enclaves, but also intersected with the work of canonical film movements, particularly the avant-garde. See for example my own book *Walter Ruttmann and the Cinema of Multiplicity* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014).

realms. The third chapter then turns to the more familiar model of the film society as a cinephilic association dedicated to appreciation of the seventh art—though I argue that such artistic appreciation, far from following from spontaneous experience, had to be learned through the assimilation of practices in and beyond the movie theater. Finally, I turn, in chapter 4, to the politicized groups that emerged the late 1920s to interpret film—in Germany and elsewhere—as a powerful mass medium and to train people to manage their interactions with it.

While this expanded take on the historical film society thus has something to contribute to useful cinema studies, it also stands in dialogue—as the title of this introduction suggests—with another recent direction in film and media historiography: media archaeology. Media archaeology has long been arguing that we need to attend not only to the 'winners' of media history—i.e. those phenomena often assumed to be the inevitable outcomes of media advancement—but also the ephemeral or marginal developments, those 'dead ends,' which might just as easily have come to define our media universe, and which can assume renewed relevance today as sedimented forms of media interaction begin to frazzle.[10] Like many media archaeological objects, film societies were, for the most part, highly ephemeral appearances—most lasting only a few years at best—which came in a wide array of forms, particularly in the early decades when cinema's calling had yet to be determined. Hence, one objective of this study is to restore to the history of film societies its 'diversity' (in Siegfried Zielinski's sense), rather than taking the dominant arthouse model for granted and simply tracing another genealogy of that model.[11]

Of course, one might question the dialogue with media archaeology here, given that this book is about social and cultural formations rather than technological apparatuses. But this would be to ignore that media archaeology is itself hardly a monolithic field. While so-called 'Berlin School' theorists such as Friedrich Kittler and Wolfgang Ernst (who have been canonized as pioneering media archaeologists though they never described themselves as such) tended to attribute historical agency to technologies, scholars such as Kelly Gates, Lisa Gitelman and Jonathan Sterne have argued, each in their own way, for a much more complex relation between technology

10 See Jussi Parikka, *What is Media Archaeology?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012).

11 Drawing on Stephen J. Gould's efforts to bypass teleological thinking in geological history, Zielinski sought to restore a sense of the "great diversity [of historical media], which either has been lost because of the genealogical way of looking at things or was ignored by this view." Siegfried Zielinsky, *Deep Time of the Media: Towards and Archaeology of Hearing and Seeing by Technical Means* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 7.

and culture, showing for example that culture (discourses, expectations, protocols for media uses, etc.) played a crucial role in determining not only how certain technologies evolved, but also how they become desirable and useful in the first place.[12]

Film societies represent a key form of cultural agency in the history of cinema, and one that did not simply follow technological developments, but often helped to create the space in which certain technologies became intelligible and desirable. For example, early educational film clubs were some of the first to articulate a need for projectors that could be paused, long before such projection technologies became a widespread reality, and the same groups—combined with advertising societies—helped to establish the cultural framework in which portable projection devices (for classrooms, exhibitions, shop-windows, etc.) could become a desideratum.[13] Perhaps more important, for my purposes here, is the phenomenon media archaeologists often describe as 'imaginary media,' which includes not only media technologies that were never realized, but also all of those social 'imaginaries' that surround existing media.[14] As I will discuss further below, film societies were a key place for articulating various social imaginaries of cinema, and rather than measure them by their real-world 'success' or 'failure,' we would do better to understand what they imagined cinema to be, why they did so and what legacies those imaginaries have for us.[15]

A third postulate of media archaeology relevant to a new history of film societies is that an exploration of film need not—and should not—even begin with the advent of film as such. Rather, just as research on early cinema (and the media archaeology influence by it) has jettisoned the search for

12 For representative publications, see Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: The Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Lisa Gitelman, *Always Already New: Media, History and the Data of Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008); Kelly Gates, *Our Biometric Future: Facial Recognition Technology and the Culture of Surveillance* (NY: NYU Press, 2011).

13 See Michael Cowan, "Taking it to the Street: Screening the Weimar Advertising Film," *Screen* 54:4 (2013), 463–79; Cowan, "Interactive Media and Imperial Subjects: Excavating the Cinematic Shooting Gallery," *Necsus: European Journal of Media Studies,* 2018, no 1, 17–44.

14 See especially Eric Kluitenberg, *Book of Imaginary Media. Excavating the Dream of the Ultimate Communication Medium* (Rotterdam: NAI Publishing, 2006); Kluitenberg, "On the Archaeology of Imaginary Media," in *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, Implications,* ed. Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka (Oakland: U. of California Press, 2011), 48–70.

15 Here I am drawing on a point first put forward by Malte Hagener, who wrote of the cine-club movement of the late 1920s: "[D]espite the disappearance of many ciné-clubs' activities in the course of the 1930s, they created something more durable than ephemeral events. What was at stake was not only a new public, but a new way of viewing films and a new way of thinking about film." Hagener, *Moving Forward, Looking Back,* 119.

'beginnings,' attending instead to the complex links between film and other technological media that preceded it (and continued to thrive alongside cinema), so we can also examine the gradual emergence of film societies from other forms of sociability that had long accompanied industrial modernity in the nineteenth century. In other words, as much as early film societies looked forward (to the cinephilic clubs of European arthouse film), they also looked *backward*.[16] In particular, they could draw on a long tradition of what social historians call 'voluntary associations'—ranging from amateur hobby clubs to professional societies—which helped to fill some of the gaps in social regulation left by the process of modernization (or what the sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies famously characterized as the transformation of "community" into "society") and the concomitant retreat of traditional bonds (family, church, village, etc.) as people and information became more mobile.[17]

Film societies took up residence within this social context, and while we can distinguish them from other groups by their (more or less) exclusive focus on film, they were still one type of voluntary association among others. In the German-speaking world, the term for such associations was *Verein,* and they were part of a highly regulated sphere—*Vereinskultur*—that provided the framework for middle-class (and in many cases also working-class) social life around 1900, from political causes to charity groups to heritage societies. Early film societies in Germany followed the rules imposed upon such associations by the *Reichsvereinsgesetz* (Law on Voluntary Associations) of 1908*,* for example by publishing statutes, electing a management board, informing (in certain cases) the authorities of meetings and often gaining entry to the official registry of associations (*Vereinsregister*). But they also followed other conventions of voluntary associations, such as the maintaining of a home base (*Vereinsheim*) where discussion could take place (often the specialty cinema and/or its adjacent café). And like many existing *Vereine*, they understood their mission as one of regulating

16 For an analogous argument about early cinema more broadly, see André Gaudreault, "The Culture Broth and the Froth of Cultures of So-Called Early Cinema," in *A Companion to Early Cinema,* ed. André Gaudreault, Nicolas Dulac and Santiago Hildago (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2012), 15–31.

17 There is a copious body of literature on voluntary associations. For overviews, see R. J. Morris, "Clubs, Societies and Associations," in *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750–1950. Volume 3: Social Agencies and Institutions,* ed. F. M. L. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 395–445; Robert T. Anderson, "Voluntary Associations in History," *American Anthropologist,* 73, no. 1 (1971) 209–22. For a good discussion of the function of voluntary associations within the process of modernization, see Alan R. H. Baker, *Fraternity Among the French Peasantry: Sociability and in the Loire Valley, 1815–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 42–52.

and 'elevating' the leisure time of their members by providing frameworks for self-cultivation vis-à-vis the new medium of cinema. In the words of one foundational study on voluntary associations, such groups served "to facilitate the transition of individuals and societies to participation in the modern world."[18]

Another convention of *Vereinskultur* that strongly influenced early film societies had to do with gender. One of the key accomplishments of the 1908 law was to guarantee, for the first time, the right of women to participate in voluntary associations devoted to politics or public affairs. Previously, women had been relegated mostly to separate 'women's' clubs focused, at least ostensibly, on domestic activities, moral causes or charity.[19] And yet, even after the 1908 law went into effect, gendered assumptions about public vs. domestic spheres remained entrenched. Accordingly, early film societies, too, were understood mostly as a space for men, though this was by no means exclusive, a point I will return to sporadically in the chapters that follow.

It is surely no coincidence that this associational culture turned toward cinema when it did in the 1910s, since this was the very moment when cinema was moving out of the fairground and into urban centers to become a major new leisure institution for the middle classes. This process provoked a deep-seated skepticism towards cinema in Germany (by the so-called 'cinema reform' movement), but also numerous efforts to regulate this new leisure institution by elaborating shared templates for interacting with it and influencing the direction it took. Not unlike people confronting the recent digital turn, those involved with early film societies tended to see themselves as living through a major media revolution, and one of the main objectives of any film society was to help to navigate that shift: to both adapt members to the new medium of cinema and steer the medium in the desired direction. For the educational groups mentioned above, film became part of a visual turn that would utterly change the way knowledge was transmitted and assimilated. For professional groups, it was recognized as a key national industry that would help to rehabilitate Germany's international standing after the Great War. For the cinephilic groups that emerged in the 1920s, film was a new art form that required specific forms of competence to be appreciated and understood. And for later political film societies, film was quickly replacing newspapers as the most powerful mass medium for

18 Anderson, "Voluntary Associations in History," 216. See also David H. Smith, "The Importance of Formal Voluntary Organizations for Society," *Sociology and Social Research* 50 (1966), 483–92.
19 See Nancy Ruth Reagin, *A German Women's Movement: Class and Gender in Hanover 1880–1933* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 17.

forging shared political ideologies and the terrain on which the great battle of ideas and social models would be waged.

Examining such groups side by side, the differences between them can stand out, as I hope they will in the chapters below. But this book on the social life of cinema is also interested in the continuities between these different social formations. The earliest scientific and educational film societies may not look much like their arthouse or political descendants at first glance, but they helped to institute many of the protocols that would continue to characterize film society activity for decades to come. One of the most basic continuities resided in the dialectical relation of the film society to the developing film industry, where the organization of movie-goers (or in some cases film producers) was intended to influence the direction that the industry at large would take. As already noted, film societies arose at a moment when cinemas were going mainstream. That is, they accompanied and reacted to the oft-cited transformation of the 'cinematograph' into the 'cinema' understood as an institutional form of mass leisure activity.[20] Within that context, these were self-consciously *prescriptive* undertakings (which usually included manifesto-like opening statements in their journals), designed to influence consumer demand and thereby change the habits of film producers and distributors. To put that differently, they sought not simply to bring together people already passionate about film, but also to *make* people take interest in film and to shape the expectations, tastes and behavior of filmgoers in ways that would force the industry to listen.

Though they might have conceived of this mission in different ways, nearly all of them described it as a mission to promote 'quality' film and thereby to 'elevate' cinema. This goes almost without saying for the well-known arthouse groups, which sought to legitimate the cinema as a seventh art. Thus the arthouse society at the center of chapter 3, the Viennese Kinogemeinde (Cinema Community), could identify one of its central goals as "die *Hebung* [...] des Lichtbildwesens in Österreich" (elevation of cinema in Austria).[21] But thirteen years earlier, the statutes of the Viennese Kosmos Klub für wissenschaftliche und künstlerische Kinematographie (Cosmos Club for Scientific and Educational Cinema) sounded a remarkably similar note when they stated that the group sought to promote all initiatives "die der Erhebung

20 I borrow the distinction between "cinematograph" and "cinema" from André Gaudreault. See Gaudreault and Marion, *The End of Cinema? A Medium in Crisis in the Digital Age* (NY: Columbia University Press, 2015), 34.

21 "Die Kinogemeinde ist konstituiert! Eine würdige und hoffnungsvolle Gründungsversammlung," *Mein Film,* no. 44 (1926), 4.

und Veredelung der Kinematographie dienen" (which promote the elevation and ennoblement of cinematography).[22] Similarly, the group I examine in chapter 2, the Deutsche Kinotechnische Gesellschaft (German Cinema Technological Society), inspired by the American Society of Motion Picture Engineers, sought to help the German film industry towards the "Hebung der eigenen Erzeugnisse" (elevation of its own products).[23] Of course, the content of these various calls for "elevation" might have differed from group to group, along with the understanding of quality film, which migrated from educational to artistic, technological and/or ideological criteria. But they shared a certain relational position vis-à-vis the industry. Most of them also shared certain strategies, such as encouraging members to name and shame distributors who included too many 'bad' films, cinemas that showed films under suboptimal conditions or equipment manufacturers who failed to take sufficient pride in their work. The basic idea was summed up already by the editors of the film society journal *Kastalia* in response to a reader's letter in 1914: "Wenn jemand rasch und gründlich die Kinoprogramme reformieren kann, so ist es das Publikum selbst" (If anyone can reform cinema programs quickly and thoroughly, it is the public itself).[24] In this way, film societies involved their members in a collective mission to *take hold* of the medium and its development.

A second defining feature of film societies was a tension between the desire to work within the existing industry and a desire to institute alternative circuits. This feature is familiar from numerous idealized accounts of independent cinema, encouraged already in the 1920s by the organizers of the famous Congress of Independent Film in La Sarraz (which was attended by various artistic and political film societies from North America and Europe). But here too, 'independence' was not only a question of art, nor did it begin with the avant-garde. Take, for example the phenomenon of independent cinemas or 'specialty' screening spaces. I have already mentioned the most famous examples (Studio des Ursulines in Paris, Filmtheater de Uitkijk in Amsterdam). But such institutions had precursors in the 1910s, known in German as *Musterlichtbühne* (model projection theaters). Often funded by local councils seeking to bypass profit-driven distribution companies, these specialty cinemas were promoted as curatorial spaces that would protect audiences from harmful films and direct them towards the good. Such spaces

22 Otto Theodor Stein, "Kinematographische Studiengesellschaften," *Film und Lichtbild* 2 (1913), 139.

23 "Was wir wünschen," *Die Kinotechnik* 2, no. 1 (January 1920), 6.

24 "Redaktionelles," *Kastalia* 2, no. 1 (1913), 14.

were already the subject of some debate, as observers such as Otto Theodor Stein warned that too much segregation from the world of entertainment film would harm efforts to influence film production at large.[25]

But specialty cinemas weren't simply about film screenings. The desire for a dedicated space also illustrates another point of continuity between early and later film societies: the desire to shape *how* members saw films and how they approached film in a larger sense. Film societies were nothing if not frameworks for generating sociability, and as I hinted above, this sociability was highly regulated. A key role here was played by the verbal (rather than visual) element of film society activity, which could range from expository 'lectures' to group discussions to social interactions that took on a much more ludic form. But in every case, the verbal helped to train film society members in ways of seeing and ways of relating to film. In this sense, film societies were never about watching film naively, but about learning how to watch movies. The preponderant role of speech is evident in the earliest film societies, which were still navigating the line between illustrated lectures and film screenings. But the film society is one place where the lecture far outlasted its demise in most mainstream cinema screenings, and lectures would go on to play a major role in the arthouse and political groups of the 1920s such as the Volksverband für Filmkunst (Popular Association of Film Art) analyzed in Chapter 4, which wanted their members to understand the machinations of the film industry rather than being swept up by cinema's seductive powers. And a certain type of lecture remains a key part of 'film society' screenings today, where the classic film introduction still serves to prepare audiences for what they are about to see.

Lectures and discussion were part of an evolving mission to train certain types of film viewing and certain competencies. But of course, the verbal here was not limited to live speech. Many film societies—and nearly all the ones discussed here—also ran print journals, where they typically published minutes, news, announcements, as well as various lectures that had first taken place in film society meetings. The line between the official film society and the larger readerly community is often blurry, which is why any study of the film society must also be a study of publishing and print culture. Part of the mission of these journals was precisely to model the kinds of competencies desired in potential members. This happened through the sheer choice of articles, but also in the institution of film criticism, which developed throughout film society publications, from the early lists of recommended "quality films" to the diverse forms of film criticism

25 See Otto Theodor Stein, "Musterlichtbühnen," *Film und Lichtbild* 2, no. 2 (1913), 19–22.

elaborated by different film groups in the 1920s, and which will be explored frequently in the chapters below. In many instances, journals also allowed for readers themselves to participate in film criticism, as well as many other forms of written interaction with journal editors and with each other. In this way, society journals came to function as a kind of heightened version of the newspaper in Benedict Anderson's famous model: through simultaneous reading and written exchange, readers could gain a sense of belonging to a community of shared values and tastes. But to do so, they also had to learn its rules and its protocols and be able to demonstrate certain competencies in film viewing and film knowledge.

All of this suggests that film societies are not best understood as aggregate groups of pre-formed film aficionados. These were social frameworks for learning how to relate to cinema: how to love the movies, how to behave in movie theaters and how to watch with trained eyes, but also—and beyond film watching—what to read and know about the cinema, how to judge film technology, how to become a political film-consumer, and so on. And this is the final point of continuity I would underscore here. Film societies taught audiences the shared protocols for a kind "care of the self" vis-à-vis the new sphere of screen media that came increasingly to pervade everyday life from the 1910s.[26] In this way, they offered templates for the development of *a cinematic self.* This pedagogical dimension—which happened through the combinations of word and image in meetings, through events and in the pages of society journals—was a key point of continuity from the earliest knowledge communities to the political and artistic groups of the late 1920s.

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Having discussed my overall approach to film societies during cinema's first decades, I want to use the remaining space of this introduction to propose three theses about film societies, each with methodological implications that also inform the research in the following chapters. I will call these theses *relations*, *productions* and *ideas*. The first (properly 'interdisciplinary') thesis is that we should always look for *relations* when studying social

26 The phrase is obviously borrowed from Michel Foucault, who used it to describe ancient philosophical societies. But Foucault's analysis of the role of embodied practices in the service of group belonging is well suited to thinking about film societies and indeed to many types of voluntary association devoted to self-betterment. For Foucault's discussion of the concept, see Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981–1982,* trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); *The History of Sexuality, vol. 3, The Care of the Self,* trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1988).

formations such as the film society. Such groups were never monadic or self-sufficient entities (even and perhaps especially when they spoke in the name of artistic or medium 'specificity'), but always stood in relation to other groups: not only to other film societies, but also other *kinds* of social and professional communities or formations. Often, they imported questions, assumptions and models formulated within these other spheres into the realm of 'cinematographic study.' Hence, we can learn something about the how and why of a group's approach to cinema by asking: Where did its spokespeople (e.g., the contributors to its journal) come from? What professional training did they bring with them? What else did they write? And what questions did they look to cinema to answer? In short, we can borrow an idea from Greg Waller here, who has suggested that we stop asking *what cinema is* and instead ask *what company cinema has kept* and what fields of association have been brought to bear on it.[27]

As I discuss in the chapters below, the writers for early film society journals came largely from the world of education and popular science, and they looked to cinema to answer pedagogical questions formulated in that other domain: for example, how to create a more 'experiential' form of pedagogy to counter the increasing proliferation of abstract knowledge that no individual could possibly assimilate. Members of technological societies, on the other hand, came largely from the professional spheres of manufacturing and engineering (such as the Verein Deutscher Ingenieure / Association of German Engineers), which is perhaps why the Deutsche Kinotechnische Gesellschaft was the first group to approach cinema so thoroughly as an *industry*—the term being understood here not so much in the sense of workers and trades (as we would speak of 'media industries' today) but in the sense of a national manufacturing sector that needed to be rationalized and standardized no less than other spheres of machine manufacture. A political group like the Volksverband für Filmkunst, for its part, found an obvious model in the long tradition in left-wing cultural organizations, including the Volksbühne (People's Stage) movement from the late nineteenth century, but also lesser-known workers' associations including lending libraries, musical associations and the socialist sports clubs that dotted German cities in the late 1920s.[28] At the same time, many

27 Gregg Waller, "Beyond Fan Magazines and Trade Journals: Motion Picture Discourse in Periodicals of the 1910s," unpublished presentation at the Society of Cinema and Media Studies, 1 April 2016.

28 For an insightful discussion of the tradition of workers' associations in Germany in relation to an emotional history, see Sabine Hake, *The Proletarian Dream: Socialism, Culture and Emotion in Germany 1863–1933* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2017), 155–77.

writers for Volksverband für Filmkunst came from the world of journalism (including pioneers of undercover investigative journalism like Leo Lania), which perhaps explains why they understood cinema—more than any previous group—first and foremost as a *mass medium*, one crucial to influencing the world view of the working classes. In each of these cases, film became an object of interest because it seemed to answer—at that moment in its development—questions that had emerged elsewhere. Hence, reconstructing those questions is one of the central tasks in researching these various societies. This doesn't mean ignoring the inevitable questions of cinematic specificity, but we need to understand how the ways in which various groups understood cinema's specific qualities depended less on any inherent traits of cinema than on exogenous factors. That is, it all depended on what these groups were looking for.

The second thesis, building on the previous discussion, is that we should see film societies as *productive* organizations in a sense akin to Foucauldian productive power. This means that we need to identify and analyze the mechanisms by which film societies sought to produce subjectivities, habits and ways of relating to the cinema. This goes for overtly pedagogical groups like Kastalia and the Kosmos Klub für wissenschaftliche und künstlerische Kinematographie (Chapter 1), but it goes no less for cinephilic and avant-garde groups of the 1920s. Identifying such mechanisms is not always easy. Some forms of pedagogy, like the lecture before a screening, are obvious starting points. But there were also many less obvious ways of modeling and inculcating models of self-cultivation, such as the many contests run by the new cinephilic magazines of the 1920s, which offered a more ludic type of pedagogy to legitimate certain forms of film knowledge to viewers and allow them to demonstrate it in their submissions. Thus, in order to research film societies, we need to learn to read between the lines, as it were, seeking out those moments in which the protocols and film society pedagogy were being worked out in ways that might not be apparent at first glance.

There is an important caveat to make here. Claiming that film societies sought to produce certain forms of knowledge and comportment vis-à-vis film does not mean that we can posit whether such productions were 'successful.' Like all questions relating to historical audiences, the question of how film society members and audiences thought, felt or acted is fraught with difficulties. In some cases, we can form a good idea of who the members of a given film club were (when film societies published member lists with the members' professional affiliations). This might tell us something about what kind of people were interested in film societies, but not how audiences actually behaved within the group. Occasionally, one also finds telling

anecdotes, such as the newspaper reports of screenings by the Volksverband für Filmkunst documenting audience interjections or the spontaneous singing of *The International* (Chapter 4). We can also glean some information from the kinds of participatory activities mentioned above, such as reader letters, reader-authored film discussions or submissions to prize contests. But it is crucial to remember that such audience input was carefully curated by spokespeople and magazine editors, and we simply cannot extrapolate from it assertions about how audiences felt or behaved, or whether they actually followed all of the precepts of a given film society. We should, instead, be asking *why* certain letters and texts were selected for highlighting (for example in order to model a desired mode of engaging with film for other members). That question undergirds a more realistic research objective: not to posit what people really did or thought, but to reconstruct the kinds of *templates* of knowledge, affect and behavior—in short, the blueprints of cinematic selves—these groups elaborated in their regulated social spheres. To put this in terms of the 'imaginary media' discussion outlined above, what kind of engagement with cinema was being *imagined* within these groups and why?

Attention to this imaginary dimension leads to my third and final thesis: Film societies were one of the spaces—not the only one, but a key space—where *ideas* of cinema were worked out. I borrow the term "idea of cinema" from Francesco Casetti, who famously asked whether the "idea of cinema" familiar from canonical film theory could survive the "relocation" of cinema onto digital platforms.[29] I would take issue, however, with Casetti's use of the singular here. Already in his reading, the "idea of cinema" turns out to harbor a patchwork of different ideas about film experience, ranging from the modernist view of cinema as a machine for perceptual stimulation to Eisensteinian constructivism to the idea (generally associated with Bazin) of film as a phenomenological revelation of the real.[30] And the need for plurality becomes all the more apparent if we factor in those seeming 'dead-ends' or subsidiary directions that I have been considering here: cinema as experiential education, cinema as national technology, cinema as mass medium and political force, and so on. The key point for me—and the reason for studying film societies—is that such regulative ideas were not

29 See Francesco Casetti, "The Relocation of Cinema," *Necsus,* 2012, no. 2, 5–34.

30 Casetti himself acknowledges this plurality in his essay in a parenthetical remark, but then still insists that there is a common 'core' of modernist cinema experience being challenged in the digital era: "(I ought to write 'ideas' in plural because of the variety of experiences that cinema elicited. Nevertheless, I use the singular to underline the core of this variety, the common ground of different experiences.)"

only, and not primarily, the inventions of individual theorists. Rather, they became paradigms for thinking about film through the kinds of discussions and negotiations at work in collective formations like film societies.

Not all these ideas could emerge at the same time, and it is likely no coincidence that the paradigms I consider in this book came onto the scene when they did. Educational cinema was a logical framework for film societies seeking to legitimate cinema in the 1910s, at the height of the movement for visual instruction. And even if there were many individuals writing on film technology before the founding of the Deutsche Kinotechnische Gesellschaft in 1919, it is surely no coincidence that technological film societies arose in the wake of WWI. This was a period when German industry, suffering under the Versailles reparations agreement, became the focal point for efforts to rehabilitate the national reputation on a world stage. While there was some attention to art in early film societies, particularly in the area of *Kunsterziehung*,[31] it was not until the mid-1920s, with the institutionalization of the star system and the rise of national auteurs, that the appreciation of film art could gain sufficient intelligibility and legitimacy to become a focus for a film society. (And not surprisingly, the Viennese Kinogemeinde saw as its central mission the legitimation of film art next to the powerful world of Austrian theater.) Finally, the idea of cinema as a political medium, while it had some precursors in sporadic writings on film and mass psychology,[32] could in many ways only happen after WWI, when the propagandistic powers of cinema had been discovered and exploited. But the left-wing political groups of the late 1920s were also reacting—as they never ceased to repeat—to the increasing consolidation of power of the cinema industry, which seemed to be concentrating in a few powerful monopolies now in the hands of reactionary media moguls like Alfred Hugenberg (who purchased UFA in 1927, just one year before the Volksverband für Filmkunst was founded).

In each case, certain practices already existed, and ideas were already in the air. Film societies did not invent them. But they did draw attention to cinema as a central vector of those ideas. They worked to attach those ideas to the cinema, making cinema into an urgent object of study for anyone interested in education, art, technology or politics. Here, we might borrow a term from one of the opening editorials from *Die Kinotechnik,* which

31 See for example Alois Wurm, "Kunsterziehung und Geschmackssinn," in *Bild und Film* 1, no. 1 (1912), 1; Friedrich Felix, "Film im Zeichenunterricht," *Film und Lichtbild* 2, no. 5 (1913): 80.
32 See for example Herman Duenschmann, "Kinematograph und Psychologie der Volksmenge. Eine sozialpolitische Studie," *Konservative Monatsschrift* 69, no. 9 (1912), 920–30.

described the journal's (and hence also the society's) effort to gather 'film engineers' into a self-conscious community as a process of "crystallization":

> *Die Kinotechnik* wurde in einer glücklichen Stunde geboren: ihre Zeit war gekommen, der Boden für sie war bereit. Der Stand der deutschen Kinoingenieure war in seinen Leistungen und in seiner geistigen Reife weit hinausgewachsen über den Durchschnitt des technischen Mittelmaßes. Es fehlte ihm fraglos an einem geistigen Zentralorgan, an einem Kristallisationspunkt, an einem Zusammenhalt.[33]
>
> The journal *Die Kinotechnik* was born at a propitious moment: the terrain had been prepared and its time had come. The profession of German cinema engineers had developed far beyond the average technological sphere in its achievements and intellectual maturity. But that profession lacked a central organ, a point of crystallization, a form of cohesion.

Film societies sought, consciously, to act as frameworks for such processes of condensation and crystallization. By bringing people together—physically in a common meeting space and virtually in the pages of a shared journal—they would 'give body' to ideas floating loosely in various contexts and with various sources. They would forge these multiple associations into a particular "idea of cinema," and in the process influence the public's view of what cinema is—or more precisely what it could and should be—and how people should relate to cinema: what questions they should ask of it and what answers they should seek.

Studying such processes of crystallization is also difficult, partly because it demands that we maintain a rigorous view of film societies not as static objects but as *projects*, as phenomena in constant formation and evolution. (And many of the terms inevitably used in this study, such as "organization," "association" or "social formation," have unhelpful overtones of stasis.) Here we might take a methodological cue from yet another relatively recent field: laboratory studies. This field, which first emerged in the 1980s, might have little to do with cinema and media on the face of things. But it is relevant to a topic like this one because it has sought to drive home a view of laboratories as spaces of epistemological production, rather than spaces for the 'discovery' of objective facts. In doing so, laboratory studies draws attention to the *process* and *conditions* of knowledge production, including all of the contingent cultural, social and political factors that inevitably

33 "Was wir erreichten," *Die Kinotechnik* 2, no. 5 (May 1920), 173.

influence the physical and epistemological work in the laboratory. And to do this, it must also keep its eye squarely focused on what Karin Cetina calls "unfinished knowledge," knowledge in a fluid or gaseous state before it condenses into seemingly self-evident truths.[34]

Analogously, film societies can be seen as metaphorical laboratories for the production of ideas of cinema. Such ideas are not objective qualities of a technology and never the result of self-evident or spontaneous experiences, but historically and geographically situated. In order to approach film societies as laboratories in this sense, we need to study those historical and cultural contexts, as well as the "real-time" processes by which ideas of cinema were crystallized and legitimated.[35] What can documents like meeting minutes, protocols, screening reports and letters tell us about how certain habits were encouraged, certain forms of knowledge legitimated, certain tastes prescribed, certain experiences modeled, and so on? What conceptual associations came to shape a given idea of cinema? What competing associations or ideas were eliminated? And how might a given film society's remit have changed over time? These are the kinds of questions that arise when we take the film society not as a self-evident and static social formation resulting when like-minded people get together, but as an evolving project for the production of subjectivities and ideas.

The three keywords outlined above—*relations*, *productions* and *ideas*—answer different research questions. Looking for relationalities can help us identify where a given film society was coming from, what historical and social spaces it came to inhabit and what assumptions it might have adopted. Examining productive power tells us something essential about what a film society was doing: how it sought to influence its members, as well as film audiences and film culture more broadly. And following the process by which ideas of cinema crystallize can reveal something about where a film society was headed—not in the sense of a teleological or inevitable trajectory, but in the sense of what its legacy came to be, how it ended up among the winners or on the trash heap and why it might or might not be relevant for us today.

As stated at the outset, not all these models of cinema and movie-going came to dominate our understanding of the 'film society' (or of cinema as such, for that matter), but all of them survive in one form or another, and

34 Karin Knorr Cetina, "Laboratory Studies: The Cultural Approach to the Study of Science," *Handbook of Science and Technology Studies: Revised Edition,* ed. by Sheila Jasanoff, Gerald E. Markle, James C. Petersen & Trevor Pinch (London: Sage, 1995), 140.

35 See Cetina, "Laboratory Studies," 141.

film historians can chart their subsequent migrations. For instance, the educational paradigm that crystallized in early cinematographic study societies didn't disappear with WWI, even if most of the film societies following this model did. There were important educational film societies still in the 1920s, especially in the orbit of the Kulturfilm movement, such as the Filmliga in Berlin (founded 1921), the Munich Studiengesellschaft für das Film- und Kinowesen (Study Society for Film and Cinema Industry, founded 1919) and the Stuttgart Kinogemeinde (Cinema Community, 1921).[36] And the educational paradigm would go on, after WWII, to migrate into television (where educational programming peaked in the 1970s and 80s), only to merge back into cinema with the arrival of IMAX theaters and urban science centers in the late twentieth century, which is partly why there is such renewed interest in the tradition of scientific film in our field today. The idea of cinema as a national industry, on the other hand, has remained fairly stable, even if it does not occupy the radar of most film studies scholars. Indeed, the Deutsche Kinotechnische Gesellschaft, the most formalized of the groups studied here, was also the only one to outlast the 1920s, and it still exists today, having merged with the Society of Television Engineers in 1972 to become the Fernseh- und Kinotechnische Gesellschaft (Society for Television and Cinema Technology).[37]

As we know, ideas about arthouse cinema and political cinema became the mainstay of most academic Film Studies in the 1970s. But their monopolistic importance even for mainstream filmgoing has weakened, and there are signs that their status as the self-evident object of academic film studies is similarly losing ground. Most self-proclaimed 'film societies' today still follow that model, and they tend to exist around institutions that cling to the vision of film as art (universities, cinematheques, arthouse theaters, etc.). But historically, film societies were something more complex. More than associations of cinephiles, these were projects for coming to terms with a new and evolving medium and 'laboratories' for crystallizing various ideas of cinema, undergirded by protocols of knowledge, affect and spectatorial comportment. If we wish to understand their legacy today, we cannot limit

36 On the Filmliga, see Konrad Lange, *Das Kino in Gegenwart und Zukunft* (Stuttgart: Ferdinand Enke, 1920), 180–87, 345–50. On the Munich group, see "…und immer wieder das Kino," *Kinematograph* 13, no. 671; on the Stuttgart group, see "Kino-Gemeinde in Stuttgart," *Der Lehrfilm* 2, no. 8 (1921), 19. Even the Berlin Cinematographic Study Society had a short-lived resurgence after WWI. See "Kinematographische Studien-Gesellschaft," *Der Lehrfilm* 2 (1921), 18.

37 The Fernseh- und Kinotechnische Gesellschaft is still the major professional body of film and television scientists, engineers and technicians in Germany and holds a bi-annual conference rotating through the major cities of the German-speaking world.

ourselves to the narrow understanding of the auteurist film club. We might do better to think about the kinds of societies mentioned at the outset of this introduction: gaming societies, VR societies, and so on. Those societies may not share the film society's letter, but they do share a certain spirit: namely the desire to make sense of our own media experience and shape its future, which once again feels multiple and indeterminate.

In exploring the early film society's role in coming to terms with the new medium of cinema, this book makes no pretention to offer a full account of every film society operating in Germany and Austria between the 1910s and the 1930s, and anyone looking for an exhaustive *mapping* of the phenomenon (in the manner of Christophe Gauthier's study of French ciné-clubs of the 1920s) will be disappointed. Rather, the book is structured according to four case studies already suggested above, each one examining a prominent "idea of cinema" that could only emerge at a given historical moment. The first chapter examines the educational film study societies of the 1910s, focusing in particular on the way in which these societies drew on the legacy of amateur science societies to propose a template of a cinema and cinema-going based on self-cultivation and popular knowledge acquisition. Chapter 2 then turns to the professional societies that arose in the wake of WWI, asking how these groups helped to solidify the idea of cinema as a national industry. Here I focus in particular on the Deutsche Kinotechnische Gesellschaft (German Cinema Technological Society), examining how the group's technological imaginary of film as a profession resonated with a context where 'technology' and the figure of the engineer were highly overdetermined in the national imaginary. Chapter 3 then turns to the more familiar idea of cinema as an art form, which did not fully take root in the German-speaking world until the mid-1920s. Focusing on a rich but little-known Viennese group, the Kinogemeinde (Cinema Community), the chapter examines how the cinephilic clubs of the 1920s offered a participatory form of pedagogy, teaching audiences, through ludic activities, to love the cinema and approach it as an artform (specifically an art of performance). Chapter 4 then examines the 'political' turn of the late 1920s, focusing on the famed Volksverband für Filmkunst (or Volks-Film-Verband, as it was commonly known) founded in 1928, which helped to institute the idea of cinema as a mass medium. The Volks-Film-Verband has received more attention than any other group examined in this book, but I hope my reading can offer new insights into the ways in which competing factions of the group came to see cinema as the key battleground in their efforts to train the public to be suspicious of increasingly powerful media industries.

By thus emphasizing the diversity of film societies in the early twentieth century, this book seeks to make contributions to several fields at once. Beyond the contributions to German film history, the study also stands in obvious dialogue with recent studies of film culture—with its attention to networks and nodes of film knowledge—such as those of Malte Hagener and Yvonne Zimmermann.[38] In addition, as indicated above, it contributes to studies in useful cinema and media archaeology, while pulling both of those subfields more in the direction of a social and cultural history of cinema than has heretofore been the case. In addition, since all of these societies sought to institutionalize particular forms of film knowledge, the book contributes a subfield that might best be described as the genealogy of Film Studies, or in the words of one recent German publication as "pre-academic Film Studies" (*vorakademische Filmwissenschaft*).[39] Beyond Film Studies, however, I hope this book might make film and media societies interesting for historians of sociability, not only of voluntary associations, but also historians of publics and public spaces more broadly.[40] On account of the prevalence of film journals in film society activity, the book also maintains a strong link to histories of print, particularly newer histories emphasizing the interplay between print, knowledge and models of sociability.[41] Finally, the book seeks to contribute to 'histories of the self' in the broader sense by examining how film societies offered templates for creating a certain kind of self appropriate to an increasingly saturated media universe: one visible in the ways in which people were taught to watch cinema, to relate to it affectively, or to resist its seductive power.

38 See especially Hagener, *Moving Foreward, Looking Back*; Hagener (ed.), *The Emergence of Film Culture;* Yvonne Zimmermann, *Hans Richter and the Transatlantic Exchange of Film Culture* (forthcoming).

39 See Rolf Aurich and Ralf Foster (ed.), *Wie der Film unsterblich wurde. Vorakademische Filmwissenschaft in Deutschland* (Berlin: Text + Kritik, 2015). See also Lee Greiveson and Haidee Wasson, *Inventing Film Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

40 See for example Brian Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee: The Emergence of the British Coffee House* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011); Paul Yachnin and Bronwen Wilson (eds.), *Making Publics in Early Modern Europe: People, Things, Forms of Knowledge* (New York/London: Routledge, 2010).

41 See e.g. Andrew Piper, *Dreaming in Books: The Making of the Bibliographic Imagination in the Romantic Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Chad Wellmon, *Organizing Enlightenment: Information Overload and the Invention of the Modern Research University* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015).

1. The Knowledge Community: The Birth of the Film Society from the Spirit of Amateur Science

Abstract
This chapter examines the rise of the first "cinematographic study societies" in the 1910s and shows how the concerns of amateur science (experiential learning in an era of increasingly specialized and abstract knowledge) were crucial to their interest in cinema, which they helped to render meaningful as a medium of education. The chapter draws both on histories of science and histories of print publics to show how the first wave of film societies understood their mission in analogy to previous associations for popular learning (reading societies, amateur science, amateur photography). Several groups from Germany and Austria are discussed, with extended attention to the Kosmos Club for Artistic and Scientific Cinematography (founded 1912), which had its base in Vienna and a journal (*Film und Lichtbild*) from Stuttgart.

Keywords: visual education, amateur science, useful cinema, book history, amateur cinema

Where to Begin?

Where to begin a history of the film society? The question has no single correct answer. One could, for instance, examine any number of groups that used cinema or reported on it early on, such as the Berlin-based Gesellschaft zur Verbreitung der Volksbildung (Society for the Dissemination of Popular Education), founded in 1871, which took a growing interest in film in the early twentieth century as part of its popular educational program.[1] But it still

1 The group's activities were frequently reported on in the journals I cite in this chapter. See for instance "Wanderkino," *Film und Lichtbild* 1, no. 6 (1912), 84; "Neues," *Kastalia,* 1, no. 4 (1912), 10.

Cowan, M., *Film Societies in Germany and Austria 1910–1933: Tracing the Social Life of Cinema*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2023
DOI 10.5117/9789463725477_CH01

makes sense, pragmatically, to begin this story in a different way: not with any groups that came to use moving images while pursuing other interests, but with the emergence of groups devoted, more centrally, to the study of cinematography, however the latter might have been conceived. This starting point is intended to signal not so much a question of qualitative medium specificity as one of *urgency*. Delimited in this way, the 'film society' can be understood as a form of sociability that arose when people came to see cinema as an increasingly unavoidable question, the importance of which merited the formation of a distinct associational community with the remit to study its uses, its technology and its potential futures.

Such groups were, not by chance, a product of the period around 1910. As we know, this is the historical moment when the 'cinema' emerged from the 'cinematograph,' i.e., when a novel technology became the focal point of a system of popular entertainment that we would still recognize today.[2] This process was marked, in Germany and elsewhere, not only by the rise of narrative features, but also by the rapid proliferation of fixed movie theaters in both middle-class and working-class neighborhoods. (A favorite expression of German commentators was that cinemas were now "shooting up from the ground like mushrooms."[3]) Hence, we should hardly be surprised to see the simultaneous emergence of other key film cultural phenomena, such as the first major cinema exhibitions.[4] And the period also witnessed the first proliferation of more or less formalized associations dedicated to questions of cinema, such as the Kastalia association (founded 1912 and named after the famed Castalian Spring from ancient Greece) and the Kosmos Klub für wissenschaftliche und künstlerische Kinematographie (Cosmos Club for Scientific and Artistic Cinematography, 1913) in Vienna, the Verein Bild und Wort (Association for Image and Word, 1912) in Dresden,[5] the Gesellschaft für wisseschaftliche und Schulkinematographie (Society for Scientific and Educational Cinematography, 1913) in Stuttgart,[6] the Kinematographische Studiengesellschaft (Cinematographic Study Society, 1913) in Berlin and the Gesellschaft für Kinofreunde (Society for Friends of Cinema, 1914) in

2 See André Gaudreault and Philippe Marion, *The End of Cinema? A Medium in Crisis in the Digital Age* (NY: Columbia University Press, 2015), 34.

3 See for example O. D. "Der Worte sind genug gewechselt," *Film und Lichtbild* 2, no. 4 (1913), 65.

4 In the German-speaking world, the first major cinema exhibitions took place in 1912 in Berlin ("Kino-Ausstellung") and Vienna ("Erste Internationale Kino-Ausstellung").

5 For a mention, see "Zeitschriftenschau," *Kastalia* 1, no. 2–3 (1912), 13.

6 See "Eine Gesellschaft für wissenschaftliche und Schulkinematographie," *Film und Lichtbild* 2, no. 2 (1913), 34.

Hamburg Altona.[7] These groups—many of which also founded key film journals of the period—were reacting less to the existence of film technology than to the emergence of cinema as an increasingly popular form of mass entertainment. And this is also the reason why cinema—and cinema audiences—became an urgent question for them: on account of cinema's sheer influence on mass leisure time. Together, these groups ushered in a period of intense discussion about cinema's potentials before most of them were cut short by World War I.[8]

But there is a caveat to be made here. Delimiting 'film specific' societies is not as clear-cut a task as my previous paragraph suggested. Many, if not most, of these groups had more of a hybrid remit; the Bild und Wort group in Stuttgart, for example, was in reality more of multi-media group, which sought to "help cinematography (together with slides, gramophones and related technologies) achieve the efficacity it merits as a factor in popular education."[9] Moreover, many other groups also merit a place in this chapter, even within my (admittedly artificial) parameters of cinema-specific groups. For example, the Volksverein für das katholische Deutschland (Popular Society for Catholic Germany), founded in 1890, may not have been created for the purpose of examining cinema (or its technological 'precursors'), but the group did come to see cinema as one of its principal areas of activity. As a result, it played a key role in the milieu of early film societies examined below, not least of all through its creation of one of the crucial film journals of the period, *Bild und Film* (1912–15), as well as the best-known distribution center for educational film, the Lichtbilderei GmbH. in Mönchen-Gladbach. Should we exclude such groups from a project on the early history of 'film societies'? A strict taxonomizing approach might call for it, but this would miss the very prominent role these groups also played in the film society scene of the 1910s (a role they would continue to play since the Volksverein für das katholische Deutschland would still be promoting film causes in the 1920s, making them a key competitor for a group like the Volks-Film-Verband

7 The Hamburg group appears to have been the initiative of Willi Warstat. For a mention, see Warstat, "Aus dem Kampfe um die Kinoreform," *Die Grenzboten* 73 (1914), 127–32. See also Warstat, "Zur Reform des Kinowesens," in *Film und Lichtbild* 2, no. 1 (1913), 1. These various groups knew of each other's existence and considered themselves part of a larger movement, and there were occasional initiatives to—as one observer described it—"unite to form a large-scale organization" of film societies. Fritz Elsner, "Die Kinofrage," *Die Neue Zeit* 32, no. 18 (1914), 671–73.

8 All of these societies turned their attention to patriotic screenings and events in August 1914 in an effort to remain relevant, but most of them were disbanded by the end of the year. None of the journals outlasted 1915.

9 "Zeitschriftenschau," *Kastalia* 1, no. 2–3 (1912), 13.

discussed in chapter 4). Any insistence on the purity of film 'specificity' would also miss one of the key points worth emphasizing here: namely that film societies did not appear all at once, but only emerged gradually from other kinds of groups. As I will explore below, even the more 'cinema-specific' societies within this list had roots, some still highly active, in other kinds of societies. And this relationality, as argued in my introduction above, is a crucial part of what we ought to be examining.

The mention of Volksverein für das katholische Deutschland also brings me to another key point of contextualization. For the emergence of film societies coincided with that other better-known phenomenon in Germany: the 'cinema reform' movement, for which *Bild und Film* (the journal of the Volksverein für das katholische Deutschland) was perhaps the single-most important publication. Indeed, the societies mentioned above had a precursor in what might well be the first identifiable film society in the German-speaking world: Hermann Lemke's Kinematographische Reformvereinigung (Cinematographic Reform Association), founded in Storkow in 1907 and later linked to Lemke's journal *Die Lichtbildkunst in Schule, Wissenschaft und Volksleben* (*Projection Art in Schools, Science and Popular Life*, 1912).

Like the film societies examined in this chapter, cinema reformers reacted to the institutionalization of cinema, which they believed to be provoking a genuine public crisis in morality and mental health and which they sought to control through state intervention.[10] And there were many links between the film reformers and the first film societies. Indeed, some film societies of the 1910s, such as the Erste Österreichische Schul- und Reformkino-Gesellschaft (First Austrian Society for School Film and Cinema Reform) still operated more in the tradition of cinema reform. But most of these societies also strove to distinguish their mission from the more negative assessments with which cinema reform—with its focus on the 'dangers' of

10 There is a growing body of intermittent scholarship on cinema reform in English. See for example, Michael Cowan, "Theater and Cinema in the 'Age of Nervousness': *Der Andere* by Paul Lindau (1893) and Max Mack (1913)," *Cinema & Cie* 5 (2004), 65–91; Scott Curtis, *The Shape of Spectatorship: Art, Science and Early Cinema in Germany* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015). Andreas Killen, *Homo Cinematicus: Science, Motion Pictures and the Making of Modern Germany* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 65–103. For a recent reading emphasizing the positive side of cinema reform (and hence has some affinities with my reading of early film societies here), see Frank Kessler and Sabine Lenk, "The Kinoreformbewegung Revisited: Performing the Cinematograph as a Pedagogical Tool," in *Performing New Media, 1890–1915*, ed. Kaveh Askari, Scott Curtis, Frank Gray, Louis Pelletier, Tami Williams and Joshua Yumibe (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 163–73.

cinema—had become associated.[11] To the 'cinephobia' of the reformers, one might say, early film societies opposed a proto-cinephilic passion for cinema, which sought to cultivate 'quality' cinema and create the space in which it might develop.[12]

Or rather, one might say that, as in any period, cinephobia and cinephilia were deeply intertwined here, since these film societies shared many of the reformers' assumptions about the current state of entertainment film.[13] But as they never ceased to repeat, they sought to redeem cinema for a specific goal: namely that of knowledge and education. For example, the editors of *Film und Lichtbild,* the home journal of the *Kosmos* film club*,* repeatedly stated that their mission was to go beyond reformist complaints about cinema's "harmful excesses" (schädliche Auswüchse) in order to harness the "undeniable advantages of cinematographic technology for various branches of science."[14] Taking this focus on knowledge as my cue, I want to use this chapter to examine how the earliest film societies in Germany and

11 Numerous titles of articles from cinema reform, such as Robert Gaupp's "Die Gefahren des Kinos" (1912), emphasized this aspect. For a representative sample of primary texts, see *The Promise of Cinema: German Film Theory 1907–1933,* ed. Anton Kaes, Nicholas Baer and Michael Cowan (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), especially chapter 7: "Moral Panic and Reform," 215–54.

12 On "cinephobia" in the early twentieth century, see Francesco Casetti, "Why Fear Matters: Cinephobia in Early Film Culture," *Screen* 59:2 (2018), 145–57. Casetti's article shows well that the discourse of German cinema reformers, during what he calls the "golden age" of cinephobia, was in fact present throughout Europe.

13 As Sarah Keller has pointed out, cinephobia and cinephilia have always co-existed. See Keller, "Cinephobia: To Wonder, to Worry," *Lola* 5 (November 2014). http://www.lolajournal.com/5/cinephobia.html; see also Sarah Keller, *Anxious Cinephilia: Peril and Pleasure at the Movies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020). Casetti similarly describes cinephilia and cinephobia as obverses of one another, always existing in a certain complicity (Casetti, "Why Fear Matters," 153.

14 *Film und Lichtbild* 1, no. 1 (1912), 1. Another article for the journal went further, proclaiming: "It has become boring, really boring. For years, we have been hearing the same alarmist phrases about 'cinema as a public danger' repeated ad infinitum. Jurists and pedagogues vie to see who can produce the most damning judgments of cinema. State and local councils compete for the most punitive taxes and restrictive operating rules, designed to make life difficult for all of the cinemas shooting out of the ground like mushrooms. […] But the cinematograph is here. Despite all the efforts of its detractors and philistines, it will not disappear again, and every effort to eradicate it is wasted labor. […] A genuine improvement of [of cinemas] is achievable by working with competent experts of cinematography and not by excluding them, let alone going to battle against them." "'Der Worte sind genug gewechselt…'," *Film und Lichtbild* 2, no. 4 (1913), 65–66. An article for *Kastalia* argued, perhaps more realistically, that the goal of film societies should be to find a "golden mean" (*goldenes Mittelweg*) between condemnation and praise. See R. R. Wien, "Die Stellung der Presse zur Kinofrage," *Kastalia* 1, no. 2–3 (1912), 9. All of this went against the tendencies towards censorship. As another writer put it: "The only way

Austria helped to institute an ideal of educational cinematography designed to respond to a particular problem of knowledge: namely its increasing specialization and abstraction, to which cinema, as I will argue, seemed to offer a counterweight of *experiential* knowledge acquisition.

Early Film Societies and the Question of Knowledge

In one of the first articles to conceptualize the "cinematographic study society" (as he called it generically), the school teacher Otto Theodor Stein—an astute observer of the film culture of the late Wilhelmine period and a frequent witness in this chapter—commented on the sheer novelty of such initiatives in 1913: "For millions of educated people today, the very idea that one should 'study' cinema still seems utterly ridiculous."[15] Accordingly, as Stein observed, these societies were concerned above all to create public awareness of the importance of cinema for what he called "our public life" ("unser öffentliches Leben").[16] While this emphasis on "public life" could include art and entertainment, it was understood above all in terms of knowledge transmission. Indeed, nearly all of these clubs were founded by teachers and scientists. Symptomatic here is the aforementioned Kinematographische Studiengesellschaft, launched in 1913 by the Berlin astronomer Friedrich Simon Archenhold, who also ran the Treptow Observatory and edited the popular astronomy journal *Das Weltall.* Archenhold's new film club, which almost certainly recruited members from the already existing Verein von Freunden der Treptow Sternwarte (Society for Friends of the Treptow Observatory), held regular screenings with lectures and audience discussions in the observatory lecture hall, as well as at Berlin theaters such as the Mozartsaal and Cines Palast am Zoo (forerunner of the better-known Ufa-Palast).[17] (Figure 1)

to fight the excesses of cinema culture is with the help of films themselves." "Die Kino-Krise," *Film und Lichtbild* 2, no. 3 (1913), 32.

15 O. Th. Stein, "Kinematographische Studiengesellschaften," *Film und Lichtbild* 2, no. 9–10 (1913), 140. Not everyone was happy with the academic resonance of the term "study society." Wilhelm Richter, perhaps thinking of Lemke's group in Storkow, argued a year later in the same journal that such societies should rally under the banner of *Kinoreformverbände* (cinema reform associations), which would acknowledge their close proximity to cinema reform groups. Wilhelm Richter, "Kinoreformverbände," *Film und Lichtbild* 3, no. 4 (1914), 34–35.

16 Stein, "Kinematographische Studiengesellschaften," 139.

17 Archenhold published the group's goals and statutes in his own astronomy journal *Das Weltall.* See "Kinematographische Studiengesellschaft E.V. zu Berlin Treptow Sternwarte," *Das Weltall* 13 (1912–13), 350–52. As Archenhold explained in a later reminiscence, the Treptow

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INHALT.

Die Grundsteinlegung und Einweihung des Neubaues der Treptow-Sternwarte.

In der Geschichte der Treptow-Sternwarte ist die Einweihung des Neubaues am 4. April 1909 eins der wichtigsten und denkwürdigsten Ereignisse. Länger

Letzte Aufnahme gelegentlich des Stiftungsfestes des „Vereins von Freunden der Treptow-Sternwarte" vor dem Eingang des alten Holzbaues.

als ein Jahrzehnt hatte der von der Berliner Gewerbe-Ausstellung herrührende Holzbau, der sich um das massiv fundamentierte große Fernrohr gruppierte,

Figure 1: Friedrich Simon Archenhold (4th from the right on front row) with the "Friends of the Treptow Observatory" at the inauguration of the new Treptow Observatory building, 1909

This is also a good place to recall how strongly this mission of cultivating cinema's potentials for 'public life' was coded as a male undertaking. That's not to say that none of these groups counted women among their members; coming after the 1908 reform laws on voluntary association, they could and in most cases—including Archenhold's above-mentioned group—certainly did. Nor is it to ignore the contributions of early women scholars to elaborating cinematic knowledge. The pioneering journal *Bild und Film,* for example, features writing by numerous women—some still well-known today, others less so—who contributed to early film scholarship: Emile Altenloh, Hilda Blaschitz, Bertha Göring, Luise Hartmann, Itha Kraft, Malwine Rennert, Amalie Righi, Dagmar Waldner and others. But the first cinematographic study societies were still operating in an associational culture in which public life was understood as a sphere organized and run by men. Symptomatic, here, is a satirical article run by *Film und Lichtbild* in June 1913, describing an imaginary "Kinoklub junger Damen" (Cinema Club for Young Ladies). Written by one of the journal's frequent contributors, Friedrich Felix, the article reveals its misogynistic humor already in its title, referring as it did to something the author would have considered a sheer contradiction in terms. In it, Felix reproduces—feuilleton-style—an imaginary discussion in a newly established 'women's film club.' Discussing their desire to use film for instructing young mothers in "things worth knowing" (*Wissenswerten*), the women start by calling for scientific film lectures on maintaining the kitchen and preparing food, replete with "theoretical explanations and statistical comparisons."[18] But their attention quickly drifts toward their own viewing practices in entertainment cinemas, where (as we learn) they have little interest in film narratives or film technology but a strong predilection for images of beautiful furniture, knick-knacks, interiors and jewelry. Eventually, things take a more political turn, when one of the women calls on the club to advocate for more films on

Observatory had already begun to screen films, such as *Der Rhein von der Quelle bis zur Mündung* (1912), several months before the founding of the Kinematographische Studiengesellschaft, and the motivation for founding a film society was largely to create a demand for such films and thereby see more of them made. See Archenhold, "Der Treptower Sternwarte und der Kulturfilm," in *Das Kulturfilmbuch,* ed. Edgar Beyfuß and Alexander Kossowsky (Berlin: Chryselius und Schulz, 1924), 343–46. See also "Eine kinematographische Studiengesellschaft," *Film und Lichtbild* 2 (1913), 34. On the group's screenings, see Erich Reicke, "Die Vorführungen der 'Kinematographischen Studiengesellschaft', Berlin-Treptow im Winter 1913/14," *Film und Lichtbild* 3, no. 4 (1914), 63. This is not to argue that film societies like this were the first to organize educational screenings. For precursors, see for example "Wissenschaft und Lichtspiele," *Bild und Film* 1, no. 2 (1912), 49–50.

18 Friedrich Felix, "Kino und Frauenfrage: Aus einem Kinoklub Junger Damen," *Film und Lichtbild* 2, no. 6 (1913), 87–88.

"the social and legal position of women,"[19] and another takes the subversive idea a step further:

> Perhaps you can even find someone who will give lectures, with or without films, on how to systematically bring men to do whatever we wish. Then women's film clubs can make a practical contribution everywhere with men's help and—the first step to a social transformation would be accomplished.
>
> Vielleicht finden Sie noch jemanden, der Vorträge hält mit oder ohne Lichtbilder, wie man die Männer systematisch dazu bringt, das zu tun, was wir wollen. Dann werden überall mit ihrer Hilfe die Damenkinoklubs praktische Arbeit leisten und—der erste Schritt zu einer sozialen Wandlung wäre gleichzeitig getan.[20]

The detail "with or without films" is telling here. In the end, Felix's imaginary female film club—in sharp contrast to the 'serious' business of groups like the Kosmos Klub or the Kinematographische Studiengesellschaft—reveals itself as not being a film society at all, but rather a pretext for a project of women's emancipation, here mocked as a subversive reflection of cinematic *femmes fatales*.

In one of the few existing scholarly treatments of early cinematographic study societies, William Uricchio saw them as a kind of pre-WWI archaeological precursor to the interwar Kulturfilm scene.[21] But while such links are no doubt justified, they should not lead us to approach these early film societies simply as part of a separate track of educational film history. To be sure, some of these clubs were conceived primarily as initiatives to integrate cinema into school curricula, while others operated for popular audiences in the tradition of German *Volksbildung* (popular education). But they also explored cinema's uses for entertainment, and all shared a mission to influence the development of the film industry as such, whose future was still up for grabs in the 1910s. For instance, the very first line of the statutes of Archenhold's Kinematographische Studiengesellschaft lists as the group's goals both the creation of scientific and educational films and the "ennoblement of popular entertainment film" (die Veredelung

19 Ibid., 88.

20 Ibid., 89.

21 See William Uricchio, "The *Kulturfilm*: A Brief History of an Early Discursive Practice," in *Before Caligari: German Cinema 1895–1920,* ed. Paolo Cherchi Usai and Lorenz Codelli (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 364.

des Volksunterhaltungsfilms).[22] And even a group like Kastalia, which understood its remit to lie primarily in school curricula, could list as one of its goals the "Einflussnahme auf das öffentliche Kinematographenwesen" (influencing of public cinematographic industry).[23]

In this sense, these early groups bear many of the hallmarks of the later cine-clubs we will encounter in subsequent chapters. Like their arthouse descendants from the 1920s onward, they sought to identify and promote 'quality' films and proper screening conditions. Groups such as Kastalia and the Kosmos Klub regularly published lists of the best films of the season, as well as extended reviews. While those reviews tended to favor educational films such as the microscopic films of Jean Comandon or Gaumont's *La Vie aquatique* (1912),[24] they could also include fictional and dramatic films (e.g. historical films, social problem films, children's genres, and so on).[25] In the case of Kastalia, the society's President Joseph Kopetzky and Vice President Adolf Mahel—both fulltime school teachers in Vienna—personally spent over 20 hours a week in Viennese cinemas in order to identify and discuss the best offerings in the *Filmrundschau* (film review) section of the journal.[26] According to one published report from the journal, it was grueling work to wade through so many bad films to get to the good ones: "Watching films for the film review section absorbs all the energies of a capable man. But this doesn't mean that it's enjoyable. Sixty per cent of films do not merit the time it takes to watch them."[27]

Like later film societies, moreover, these groups also sought to create networks for circulating quality films outside the parameters of profit-driven

22 "Kinematographische Studiengesellschaft E.V. zu Berlin Treptow-Sternwarte," 350.

23 *Statuten der "Kastalia." Österreichische Gesellschaft für wissenschaftliche und Unterrichtskinematographie in Wien* (Vienna: Verlag des Vereins, 1912).

24 For a report on *La Vie aquatique* (German: *Das Leben im Meer*), see *Kastalia* 1, no. 4 (2012), 9; for reviews of Comandon, see "Filmneuheiten," *Kastalia* 1, no. 4 (1912), 14; "Der Film 'Das Blut'," *Film und Lichtbild* 2, no. 6 (1913), 96–97.

25 Interestingly, the reform-oriented journal *Bild und Film* was most invested in the criticism of dramatic films from its first issues onward. See for example Alexander Elster, "Zur Frage einer Kinokritik," *Bild und Film* 2, no. 10–11 (1913), 261–62. See also Helmut Diederichs, *Anfänge deutscher Filmkritik* (Stuttgart: Verlag Robert Fischer & Uwe Wiedleroither, 1986), 101–27. But even journals more narrowly focused on science and education also reviewed fiction films. See e.g. Carl Eugen Mayer, "Unsere Kinder und das Kinotheater," *Kastalia* 2, no. 2 (1913), 9; Friedrich Felix, "Ein Film gegen den Mädchen- und Kinderhandel," *Film und Lichtbild* 3 (1914), 58–60. In September 1913, *Film und Lichtbild* introduced a new film discussion section ("Filmschau") with discussions of "new films on the market that are scientifically valuable and artistically impeccable." See "An unsere Leser," *Film und Lichtbild* 2 (1913), 137.

26 See "Verwaltungsbericht," Kastalia 2, no. 7 (July 1913), 4.

27 "Filmschau," *Kastalia* 2, no. 9 (1913), 6.

distribution; this in turn gave rise to some of the first film archives in Germany, of which the Lichtbilderei GmbH in Mönchen-Gladbach is the best-known (though hardly the only) example. These were also the first groups to call for and create specialty cinemas—known as *Musterlichtbühnen* (model movie theaters)—to show programming not available in industry cinemas: institutions such as the Altonaer Lichtbildtheater in Hamburg, the Fata Morgana cinema in Dresden and two specialty cinemas in Vienna: the Universum Kino (founded by the Kastalia group in 1913) and the Kosmos theater (created by the Kosmos film club in 1914).[28] And like cinephilic communities everywhere, they sought to cultivate space for *discussion*: both face-to-face discussion in specialty cinemas and mediated discussion through the journals that served as their mouthpieces.

Early film societies understood these various endeavors as part of an effort to create a kind of feedback loop vis-à-vis the nascent film industry, where the 'elevation' of mass tastes would reshape consumer demand, which in turn would exert an influence on film producers and distributors, thereby elevating the industry as a whole. Such a model was hardly new or unique to film societies, as Stein observed in another programmatic article:

> Societies of art lovers have managed to awaken an interest in works of fine art in many members of the public who otherwise attend only to their day jobs. Why would it then not be possible for similar societies to take shape in all major cities, which would awaken an interest for the offerings of the cinematograph in people who have thus far shown none? With the growing love for 'living pictures', the members could exert a beneficial influence on the cinematographic theaters and offer many useful tips to the creators of cinema images.[29]

28 For a description of Kastalia's *Universum Kino,* see "Zur Eröffnung des 'Universum,'" *Kastalia* 2, no. 2 (1913), 2. For an extended history of the Kosmos cinema, which lasted well into the post-WWII period, see Robert Gokl and Peter Payer, *Das Kosmos-Kino. Lichtspiel zwischen Kunst und Kommerz* (Vienna: Verlag für Gesellschaftskritik, 1995). Such specialty cinemas—sometimes known as "Gemeindekinos" since they were often funded by local councils—were central to Kinoreform debates more broadly. Willi Warstat devoted an entire book to the question: *Kino und Gemeinde* (Mönchen-Gladbach: Volksverein Verlag, Lichtbühne-Bibliothek, 1913). See also O. Th. Stein, "Musterlichtbühnen. Ein Beitrag zur praktischen Kinoreform," *Film und Lichtbild* 2.2 (1913), 19–22; "Kinematographische Studiengesellschaften," 140; "Private Musterbühnen oder Gemeindekinos?," *Bild und Film* 2, no. 11–12 (1913), 271–73.

29 O. Th. Stein, "Der Siegeszug des Kinematographen," *Film und LIchtbild* 2 (1913), 151. Such ideas anticipate tactics of art house clubs in the 1920s, which regularly encouraged audiences to influence cinemas by telling them when they weren't up to standard, when they weren't

> Haben es die Vereinigungen der Kunstfreunde verstanden, viele ledeglich ihrer Tagesarbeit nachgehende Bürger für die Schöpfungen der bildenden Kunst zu gewinnen, warum sollte es da nicht möglich sein, daß sich in allen größeren Städten ähnliche Vereinigungen bilden, die das Interesse der bisher Teilnahmslosen auf die Darbietungen des Kinematographen lenken? Die Mitglieder könnten mit der wachsenden Liebe für das 'lebende Bild' die Leistungen der Kinematographentheater vorteilhaft beeinflussen und auch den Schöpfern von Kinobildern manche beachtungswerte Fingerzeige geben.

This idea of feeding back to the industry through the shaping of consumer demand would become foundational for the way in which subsequent film societies would understand their mission, including all of the societies discussed in this book. But it also inaugurated a foundational tension, within film societies, between working within the available industrial conditions and creating counter-circuits—a tension visible here, for example, in the discussion around specialty cinemas, which observers such as Stein worried might segregate film societies from the larger world of entertainment film.[30]

That these early film clubs conceived their project of 'elevating' cinema primarily in terms of science and education might distinguish them from their later counterparts in the arthouse scene. But it could draw on a decades-old tradition of scientific film and photography, one still being developed in the 1910s by numerous scientific filmmakers discussed in these journals, such as the French medical expert Jean Comandon, the Italian physiologist Osvaldo Polimanti or the German ballistics expert Bruno Glatzel. (Figure 2) Scott Curtis has explored how such filmmaking worked to create what he calls "expert modes of viewing."[31] But a parallel development was also taking place: namely a broad-based discovery, in one field after another, of cinema's uses for popular education. This, too, had many precedents, as popular science had been undergoing a pictorial turn for decades in illustrated publications, exhibitions, scientific theaters and slide lectures.[32] But the use of moving images for popular science received

showing quality films or when screening conditions were incorrect. On this point, see Michael Cowan, "Learning to Love the Movies: Puzzles, Participation and Cinephilia in Interwar Film Magazines," *Film History* 27, no. 4 (2016), 1-45.

30 Stein, "Musterlichtbühnen," 19–22; Stein, "Kinematographische Studiengesellschaften," 140; Stein, "Private Musterbühnen oder Gemeindekinos?," 271–73.

31 See Curtis, *The Shape of Spectatorship,* 6.

32 For an overview of the visual turn in popular nineteenth-century science, see e.g. Bernard Lightman, *Victorian Popularizers of Science: Designing Nature for New Audiences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). For the importance of slide lectures and scientific photography

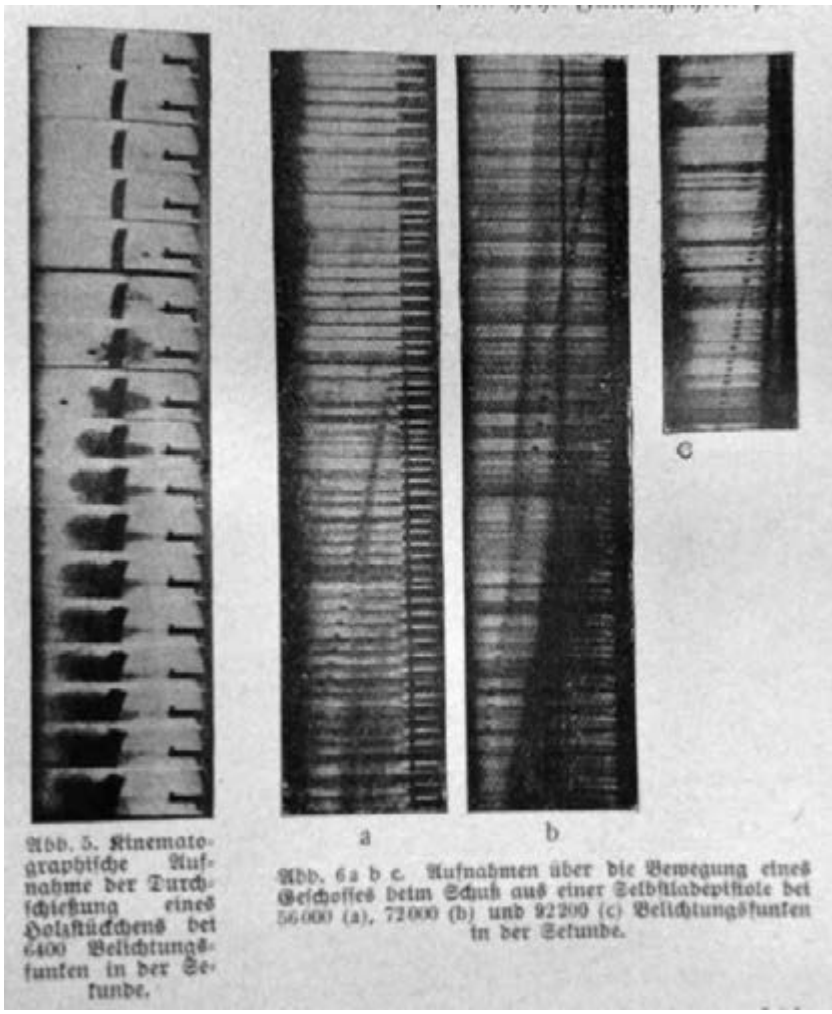


Figure 2: Bruno Glatzel, excerpts from ballistics films, *Film und Lichtbild,* 1913

a new impetus around 1910 from the rapid proliferation of entertainment cinemas.

A good example can be seen in the case of the Urania, Germany's best-known popular science institute, which had been offering audiovisual lectures in its 750-seat theater (replete with projection apparatuses, moving

in Germany, see especially Christian Joschke, *Les yeux de la nation. Photographie amateur et société dans l'Allemagne de Guillaume II (1888–1914)* (Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 2014), 201–27. For literature on the visual in science more broadly, see also Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2007), 420, note 2.

panoramas and multifarious lighting effects) since its founding in 1888.[33] (Figure 3) In 1911, the Urania opted to introduce film into its program of illustrated lectures in explicit reaction to the competition from movie theaters. As the institute's governing board explained in its annual financial report from the same year:

> The unprecedented increase of cinematographic theaters in Berlin has exerted an adverse influence on our society's financial operations this year. However, we believe that this will only be a temporary phenomenon, since there are currently numerous efforts to bring the excesses of the cinematographic industry and the resulting degradation of public taste under control and to help serious motion pictures to achieve the place they undoubtedly merit in education.[34]

> Die ausserordentliche Zunahme der Kinematographentheater in Berlin hat auf den Geschäftsabschluss unserer Gesellschaft einen nachteiligen Einfluss ausgeübt. Wir glauben aber, dass dies nur eine vorübergehende Erscheinung sein wird, insofern sich gegenwärtig zahlreiche Bestrebungen geltend machen, die den Auswüchsen des Kinematographenunwesens und der dadurch bewirkten Geschmacksverflachung des Volks zu steuern und der ernsten Bewegungsphotographie diejenige Stellung im Unterrichtswesen zu schaffen suchen, welche ihr zweifellos gebührt

Despite such prognostications of the cinema's immanent reform, the Urania's managers were well aware of the need to reckon with an audience increasingly accustomed to filmic entertainment. The first use of film occurred in three lectures for the 1910–11 season by Wilhelm Berndt and Ludwig Heck—both from the Berlin Zoological Institute—with the titles: "Secrets of Living Nature" ("Geheimnisse der belebten Natur"), "Scenes of Ocean Life" ("Aus dem Leben des Meeres"), and "Living Images of Animals from Near and Far" ("Lebende Tierbilder von nah und fern").[35] The lectures integrated several films from scientists such as Commandon and groups such as the Neue Photographische Gesellschaft, as well as wildlife films such as those of British filmmaker Cherry Keaton and films

33 See Franz Bendt, "Die Neue Berliner Urania," *Die Gartenlaube,* 1896, no. 38, 634.

34 *Bericht des Vorstandes der Gesellschaft Urania für das Geschäftsjahr vom 1. April 1910 zum 31. März 1911* (Berlin: Urania, 1911), 5–6.

35 For records of the lectures, see *Gesellschaft Urania. Bericht des Vorstands für das Geschäftsjahr vom 1. April 1911 bis 31. März 1912* (Berlin: Urania, 1912), 5, 7. Berndt would go on to provide screenplays and scientific advice to numerous films created in the Ufa Kulturabteilung in the 1920s.

Figure 3: Urania Theater with moving panorama, 1896.

undertaken by the Zoological Institute itself. Writing two years later for *Film und Lichtbild,* Berndt published several articles reflecting on his own learning process while creating films and film lectures for the Urania: how he learned to make science entertaining while avoiding anything that might smack of sensationalism (for example animal violence or scenes of

mating),[36] but also how he learned to edit his own films such that "from this jumble of nearly indecipherable actions there could emerge a little drama [...], in which biological comedy and tragedy could achieve clear expression."[37]

This kind of popularization of science through film shaped the terrain in which early film societies operated. One of the striking features of these societies' journals is that nearly all of their contributing writers came from elsewhere. This includes the field of art and aesthetic theory (Kunstwissenschaft), from which many writers for *Bild und Film* brought their expertise, but also Biology, Botany, Chemistry, Engineering, Ethnography, Geography, Mathematics, Military Science, Physics, Work Science and other fields. What these contributors shared was a conviction that cinema had, as one writer put it in 1912, a newfound *Kulturmission*: a mission to enhance 'public life' through popular education, contributions to public service (for example in so-called "accident films"),[38] vocational training (e.g. in career aptitude films),[39] and many other areas.[40] In short, film was destined not only to shore up the knowledge-claims of experts, but also to make expert knowledge accessible. And it was this understanding of film's public mission that created the horizon of expectation in which the first cine-clubs could emerge.

Precursors: Amateur Science

But we can also look back further. As already suggested, cinephilic communities were hardly the first sort of '-philic' community in modernity with a shared passion for something. On the contrary, they formed part of a long tradition of voluntary associations—from learned societies to athletic clubs—which had served as frameworks of modern sociability throughout

36 Wilehlm Berndt, "Aus der Praxis der biologischen Kinematographie," *Film und Lichtbild* 2, no. 1 (1913), 3–4.

37 Wilhelm Berndt, "Höhere Tiere als Filmobjekte," *Film und Lichtbild* 2, no. 2 (1913), 30. The editors of *Film und Lichtbild* agreed on the need for scientific films to be pleasurable, describing his lectures as "humorvoll" and "leicht faßlich." See "Vermischtes," *Film und Lichtbild* 2, no. 1 (1913), 16.

38 See for example "Filmschule fürs praktische Leben," *Film und Lichtbild* 1, no. 4 (1912), 44–46.

39 See for example "Der Kinematograph im Dienste der Berufswahl," *Kastalia* 2, no. 1 (1913), 11–12.

40 For a good list of uses imagined at the time, see Leonard Birnbaum, "The Cultural Mission of Cinematography" (1912), in: *The Promise of Cinema,* 526–29.

the nineteenth century.[41] Such clubs helped to organize social relations and provide templates for social interaction in a context where (following the influential analyses of Ferdinand Tönnies) local communities were increasingly giving way to a bureaucratized and anonymous "society."[42] But they also provided, especially in their more educational variants, key templates and programs of self-cultivation and self-betterment.[43] By the time the first film clubs arrived on the scene, this tradition had developed into a highly regulated system of voluntary associations, covering areas from science to athletics to hobbies and heritage culture, which sought to organize and 'elevate' the leisure time of the middle classes. Within this context, film societies represented one type of *Verein* among others, and they generally followed the same protocols as other voluntary associations—for example by registering with local governments, publishing statutes and following strict rules regarding membership, management boards and the like.

Though the activities of film societies have many antecedents from the world of voluntary associations, three specific types of association deserve mention for my purposes here. First, film society efforts to forge an infrastructure for the circulation of 'quality' films were prefigured by any number of bibliophilic communities, such as book clubs, reading societies and lending libraries.[44] Indeed, one can still hear the language of the lending library (*Bücherei*) in the name given to the most prominent educational film distributor, the Lichtbilderei GmbH around *Bild und Film*.[45] Like other similar archives from the time, the Lichtbilderei provided not

41 See R. J. Morris, "Clubs, Societies and Associations," in *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750–1950. Volume 3: Social Agencies and Institutions*, ed. F. M. L. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

42 Tönnies' volume was first published in 1887 under the title *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft. Abhandlung des Communismus und des Sozialismus als empirischer Kulturformen* (Leipzig: Fues, 1887). See also Alan R. H. Baker, *Fraternity Among the French Peasantry: Sociability and in the Loire Valley, 1815–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 49.

43 On this point, see Dieter Hein, "Formen gesellschaftlicher Wissenspopularisierung," in *Wissenskommunikation im 19. Jahrhundert,* ed. Lothar Gall und Andreas Schulz (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2003), 147–71.

44 See e.g. James van Horn Melton, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 104–10.

45 One can find similar references scattered through the discussions of these groups. For example, one of the news items reported in *Film und Lichtbild* in January 1913 described the call of one G. W. Bredt to found an *Ikonothek* with images and films of print galleries, museums, works of architecture, sculpture and applied art. See "Für eine 'Ikonothek'," *Film und Lichtbild* 2, no. 1 (1913), 16. Most of these journals also reported on an initiative by the Gesellschaft zur Verbreitung der Volksbildung to construct a *Wanderkino* (traveling cinema) with educational content. See "Der Wanderkino," *Bild und Film* 1, no. 3 (1912), 88; "Wanderkino," *Film und Lichtbild* 1, no. 6 (1912), 84.

only films, but also complete audio-visual lectures, as well as projection apparatuses for slides and moving images.[46] (Figure 4) In so doing, it drew on the cultural legacy of the reading club in an effort to forge a counter-model to entertainment cinema, in which film would help to construct a critical public sphere rather than contributing to the increasing consumerization of leisure time.[47]

Of course, circulating flammable films and fragile glass slides posed greater infrastructural challenges than books, which might help to explain why so few of these societies managed to create lasting institutions.[48] But there was still a clear historical analogy here: lending libraries arose in the eighteenth century to manage a problem of accessibility at a time when the cost of books was still prohibitive,[49] but as print matter expanded in the nineteenth century, reading clubs increasingly took on a curatorial function, helping readers sift through the ever-expanding mass of books and magazines. Analogously, early repositories for projected images understood their role as a combination of making visual materials accessible for amateur groups (at a time when few educational films were circulating) and curating 'quality' materials.[50] (For example, Kastalia partnered with the Erste Österreische Schul- und Reformkino Gesellschaft to order copies of all films that received that stamp of "quality" in Kopetzky and Mahel's weekly viewings in Viennese cinemas.[51]) In this sense, as Otto Theodor Stein noted, the term

46 For slide show categories, see Josef Weigl, "Die Lichtbilderei GmbH in M. Gladbach," *Bild und Film,* 1, no. 1 (1912), 9. For film categories, see "Die Filmverleih-Zentrale der 'Lichbilderei GmbH in M. Gladbach,'" *Bild und Film* 1, no. 1 (1912), 28. See also Joseph Popp, "Lichtbildervorträge aus der Lichtbilderei GmbH M. Gladbach," *Bild und Film* 2, no. 1 (1912), 29.

47 In this sense, early film societies sought to insert cinema into the tradition of critical societies in Enlightenment tradition described by Jürgen Habermas. See Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere,* trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989).

48 Most of the film societies covered in this chapter maintained some sort of film "archive" for members' use. But practical considerations often made the circulation of films difficult. For example, a report from Kastalia in 1912 stated that the group's archive would be used primarily by members who wished to "study precisely each individual frame" of the film, suggesting that most users were not, in fact, projecting films. "Bericht über die Versammlung des Vereins 'Kastalia'," *Kastalia* 1, no. 1 (1912), 10.

49 See e.g. David Allan, *A Nation of Readers: The Lending Library in Georgian England* (London: British Library, 2008), 25; Ina Ferris, *Book-Men, Book Clubs and the Romantic Literary Sphere* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

50 As the head of slide lectures at the Lichtbilderei, Joseph Popp, put it: "Only the best is good enough for the people. Following this principle, the Lichtbilderei sets itself the goal of offering only model lectures from competent experts." See Joseph Popp, "Lichtbildervorträge aus der Lichtbilderei GmbH M. Gladbach," *Bild und Film* 2, no. 1 (1912), 28.

51 See "Verwaltungsbericht," 4. On the difficulty of obtaining educational materials, see for example Archenhold, "Der Treptower Sternwarte und der Kulturfilm," 343.

Figure 4: Advertisement for the Lichtbilderei GmbH, *Bild und Film*, 1912

"film archive" itself was something of a misnomer, since the predominant goal here was to facilitate access to quality films for viewing and discussion, with preservation coming as an afterthought.[52]

52 "Archiv ist ja eigentlich hier überhaupt zu viel gesagt, da man sich Archive in der Dauer ihrer Bestände zeitlich weniger begrenzt zu denken pflegt, als sie ein Filmarchiv je gewährleisten

Second, in their particular engagement with film technology, these groups found an obvious precursor in amateur photography clubs. The notion of amateur *cinematography* was only beginning to become intelligible around 1910, partly because the institutionalization of a film industry was still in its early stages. Early film societies were some of the first to conceptualize 'amateur' filmmaking as a category and promote it as a practice. But these clubs weren't merely analogous to their counterparts in amateur photography; in many ways, they *were* still photographic societies, since they were concerned with still images as much as film. One can hear this hybrid remit in the titles of journals such as *Bild und Film* and *Film und Lichtbild*, which also ran articles on topics such as stereoscopy and amateur slide production.[53]

But the connection to amateur photography also concerned these groups' public mission. As Christian Joschke has shown, amateur photo societies such as the Berlin Gesellschaft von Freunden der Photographie (1887) provided one of the best models of a feedback loop, in which self-taught photographers sought to elevate the visual culture of their time, both through artistic and scientific photography.[54] Early film societies understood this link, as Stein observed in another programmatic article: "Amateur cinematography must contribute to solving problems of cinema no less than amateur photography has done in its own domain."[55] This notion of a feedback loop, from amateur to professional production, also prefigures the self-understanding of the avant-garde, whose 'laboratory' experiments were specifically understood as a means to influence the wider industry.[56]

könnte. Sagen wir also ruhig, ein Filmlager." Stein, "Kinematographische Studiengesellschaften," 139.

53 See for example Walter Böttger, "Stereoskopbilder," *Film und Lichtbild* 1, no. 5 (1912), 56–61; P. Langbein, "Ein Stereoskopbild des Mondes," *Film und Lichtbild* 2, no. 7 (1913), 106; Alfred Streißler, "Die Herstellung von Diapositiven," *Film und Lichtbild* 2 (1913), 41–43, 63–65, 98–100. As Stein remarked, the vast majority of lectures at the time *did* still use still images (Stein, "Kinematographische Studiengesellschaften," 140).

54 See Joschke, *Les yeux de la nation,* 139–85, 201–27.

55 Otto Theodor Stein, "Amateurkinematographie," *Film und Lichtbild* 2, no. 3 (1913), 36. Specifically, he argued that, in the face of the increasing dominance of entertainment cinema, amateur filmmaking would help develop "the numerous possibilities for the use of cinematography in all areas of public life" (ibid.). See also Wilhelm Richter, "Kinematographische Reformverbände," *Film und Lichtbild* 3 (1914), 55: "[Amateur cinema] is doubtlessly called upon to achieve significant results and perhaps to show new paths. Anyone with a faint idea of the history of photography up to now will easily acknowledge this."

56 See for example *The Promise of Cinema,* Chapter 3: "Avant-Garde and Industry," 450–82, especially László Moholy-Nagy, "The Artist Belongs to the Industry," 467–70.

Finally—and to come to the 'precursor' I wish to discuss more deeply here—the approach to cinema as a question of knowledge in the public sphere found a forerunner in popular scientific associations, which had proliferated in the late nineteenth century along with mass produced periodicals. Recent projects have approached such groups under the heading of "citizen science," emphasizing the role they played in bridging the widening chasm between expert and lay knowledge through the promotion of amateur participation in the world of science.[57] In the German context, similar ideas took shape against the backdrop of debates about disciplinary specialization—a problem that preoccupied thinkers from Georg Simmel to Siegfried Kracauer to Georg Lukács (in his essay on reification). Simmel thematized the issue in his lectures on the "Conflict of Modern Culture," where the growing mass of specialized knowledge exemplified the phenomenon of an "objective culture" increasingly divorced from the integrative needs of individual subjects. For Simmel, such specialization had resulted in the loss of a universal regulative idea. Whereas Medieval culture had been held together by the Church, the Renaissance by the ideal of Secular Nature and the Enlightenment by the Rule of Reason, contemporary society, he wrote, only had specialized domains:

> Today, if one were to ask educated people what idea governs their lives, most of them would give a *specialized* answer relating only to their occupation. One would not hear any cultural idea governing them as whole people and guiding all their specialized activities.[58]

In part, Simmel was grappling here with a constitutive trait of modern professionalism, which Talcott Parsons would later define as the "specificity of function" undergirding the division of intellectual labor in complex societies. But this critique of specialization also looks back to a fundamental transformation of knowledge that had taken place a century earlier with the emergence of the modern research university. And here again, if we follow Chad Wellmon's arguments, the trail leads us back to print culture. According to Wellmon, it was precisely in reaction to the excess of printed

57 See Gowan Dawson, Chris Lintott and Sally Shuttleworth, "Constructing Scientific Communities: Citizen Science in the Nineteenth and Twenty-First Centuries," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 20, no. 2 (2015), 246–54.

58 Georg Simmel, "The Conflict of Modern Culture" (1918), in *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings,* ed. David Frisby (London: Sage, 1998), 80.

books—and the ensuing impossibility for any individual to assimilate all of the knowledge circulating in print—that specialized research emerged as the new framework for serious intellectual work. That transformation helped to reorganize the university into a space of self-enclosed disciplines, but it also produced a new template of the self: what Wellmon calls the "disciplinary self" devoted to the deep pursuit of a single knowledge area in dialogue with peer specialists.[59]

However, this transformation towards specialization was not without its ambivalence. Indeed, it was partly in reaction to the rise of disciplinary specialization that popular or amateur science emerged. The latter promised to translate expert knowledge into lay terms, but also to offer lay-people an *overview* of knowledge in a world that was increasingly resistant to such holistic thinking.[60] If any term could serve as a key word in this context, it is surely that of "Kosmos," which shows up in the titles of several popular science journals of the late nineteenth century.[61] The term also clearly looks back to the best-known book of popular science in the nineteenth century: Alexander von Humboldt's magnum opus *Kosmos. Entwurf einer physischen Weltbeschreibung* (*Cosmos: A Sketch of a Physical Description of the World*). Based on public lectures delivered at the University of Berlin in 1827–28, Humboldt's immensely influential study grappled centrally with the problem of specialization and the question of mediating individual experience and expert knowledge. Humboldt sought to bring together the entire spectrum of specialist research about the earth and the universe, while also offering an accessible first-person account, grounded in his own experience of traveling the world. In this sense, *Kosmos* could look back to the early modern Cosmographia genre

59 See Chad Wellmon, *Organizing Enlightenment: Information Overload and the Invention of the Modern Research University* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 234–62.

60 This is precisely where amateur photography came in. As Joschke has shown, the interest in amateur photography was especially strong among Berlin learned societies and scientific groups, who worked closely with photography societies such as the Freie photographische Vereinigung to forge a public sphere equally opposed both to the popular visual entertainment of the time and to the increasing abstruseness of academic knowledge. A key figure here was Franz Goerke. As head of the *Freie photographische Vereinigung* and director of the Berlin International Exhibition of Amateur Photography in 1986, Goerke was an avid promotor of scientific photography. This—and his connections to the learned societies of Berlin—helped to secure Goerke a position as director of the Urania in 1897. See Joschke, *Les yeux de la nation,* 216–32.

61 Examples include *Kosmos. Zeitschrift für angewandte Naturwissenschaften* (founded 1857) and *Kosmos. Zeitschrift für einheitliche Weltanschauung auf Grund der Entwicklungslehre* (founded 1877).

(e.g. the *Cosmographia* of Sebastian Münster, 1544), with its emphasis on travel and first-hand experience.[62] But Humboldt's study was also invested in a particular claim to totality in an era marked by the expansion of the visible universe through microscopic and telescopic research, as well the "deep time" ushered in by modern geology.[63] Hence, he described the goal of his study—in passages clearly resonating with Romantic philosophies of nature—as that of uncovering a unitary force underlying all of the newly observable phenomena. As he put it in the general introduction: "[My object is to] prove how, *without detriment to the stability of special studies*, we may [...] arrive at a point of view from which all the organisms and forces of nature may be seen as one living active whole, animated by one sole impulse."[64] As Humboldt explicitly states elsewhere, this claim to totality is precisely what distinguished his project from the eighteenth-century encyclopedia, with its arbitrary collection of knowledge areas. Indeed, the very term *Cosmos*, which Humboldt traced back to Pythagoras, was meant to convey the book's promise of underlying connection.[65] Rather than providing a mere accumulation of facts, *Kosmos* strove to reconcile the sciences of its time, along with several dichotomies in the state of knowledge: the dichotomy between empirical observation and deductive reasoning, between sensory experience and abstraction, between materiality and intellect and between enchantment and disenchantment.

62 See Jan Dirk Müller, "Erfahrung zwischen Heilssorge, Selbsterkenntnis und Endeckung des Kosmos," *Daphnis. Zeitschrift für Mittlere Deutsche Literatur* 15 (1986), 307–42.

63 Humboldt had a lot to say about the expansion of the visible universe through scientific instruments. See for example the following passage from the introduction: "And if [astronomy] have set limits to the great nebula to which our solar system belongs, it has only been to show us in those remote regions of space, which appear to expand in proportion to the increase of our optic powers, islet on islet of scattered nebulae" (Humboldt, Alexander von. *Cosmos: A Sketch of the Physical Description of the Universe, Vol. 1.*Trans. E. C. Otté. London: Henry G. Bohn, 1864, 20). Similarly, on microscopy, he writes: "The series of organic types becomes extended or perfected, in proportion as hitherto unknown regions are laid open to our view by the labours and researches of travelers and observers [...] and as microscopes are made more perfect and are more extensively and efficiently employed" (ibid., 21). On microscopy, see also ibid., 351. On geology and expansion of time, see ibid., 5.

64 Ibid., 36, my italics. Humboldt's study is full of this kind of ambivalence about scientific specialization. Another passage in the introduction reads: "If [...] in the present age, which is so strongly characterized by a brilliant course in scientific discoveries, we perceive a want of connection in the phenomena of certain sciences, we may appreciate the revelation of new facts, whose importance will probably be commensurate with the attention directed to these branches of study" (ibid., 29). On the importance of forces, see ibid., 32: "[We ought], in our pursuit of science, to strive after a knowledge of the laws and the principles of unity that pervade the vital forces of the universe." See also ibid., 44–46.

65 Ibid., 36, 51.

Humboldt's book helped to shape the horizon of expectation in which subsequent popular scientific societies would operate. Institutions such as the Berlin Humboldt Akademie (founded in 1878) and the Urania Society itself (founded a decade later) explicitly traced their public missions back to Humboldt's lectures.[66] At the same time, by the turn of the century, popular science societies were acutely aware of their distance from Humboldt's holistic aspirations. A good example can be seen in one of the most prominent popular scientific associations of the early twentieth century: the Kosmos Gesellschaft der Naturfreunde (Society for the Friends of Nature). The society was founded in 1903, largely as a publishing venture, by the new editors of the Franckh'sche Verlag in Stuttgart (later renamed as the Kosmos Verlag), who sought to capitalize on the growing interest in natural sciences and technology. That venture paid off, as the Kosmos Society grew to more than 100,000 members by 1912, all of them maintaining a paid subscription to its journal *Kosmos. Handweiser der Naturfreunde* (*Kosmos: Guidebook for Friends of Nature*).[67] The journal explicitly referenced Humboldt, alongside Goethe and similar figures, in the visual layout of its masthead. (Figure 5) But the society was also quite conscious of their *distance* from the Humboldtian project. As the founding editorial of the *Kosmos* journal put it:

> Alexander von Humboldt, the author of the famous *Kosmos,* is seen as the last universal intellectual who could still master the entire range of natural sciences of his time. Today this is no longer possible; even the most astute and tenacious researchers are forced to limit their work to certain branches of science. In order not to lose sight of the whole amidst this unavoidable specialization, it has become necessary to found an organ such as the *Kosmos* journal, which offers a continuous overview of other areas.[68]

66 See for example Wilhelm Petrasch, *Die Wiener Urania. Von den Wurzeln der Erwachsenenbildung zum lebenslangen Lernen* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2007), 14.

67 For more on the Kosmos society and the journal, see Ina Pfitzer, "Das 'Verlangen nach einer Bereicherung und Vertiefung wissenschaftlicher Kenntnisse'. Die Zeitschrift Kosmos. Handweiser für Naturfreunde—ein Beispiel erfolgreicher Leserbindung," in: *Das bewegte Buch: Buchwesen und soziale, nationale und kulturelle Bewegungen um 1900,* ed. Mark Lehmstedt and Andreas Herzog (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1999), 349–68. See also Klaus Taschwer, "Vom Kosmos zur Wunderwelt: Über populärwissenschaftliche Magazine einst und jetzt," in: *Öffentliche Wissenschaft: Neue Perspektiven der Vermittlung in der wissenschaftlichen Weiterbildung* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2006), 80–81.

68 "Moderne Bildung," *Kosmos. Naturwissenschaftliche Literaturblatt* 1, no. 1 (1904), 2. The quote continues: "With our *Kosmos,* we strive to offer such an organ: for the educated, it should be a guide through the rich world of scientific literature; for all those who wish to fill the gaps

1912 Heft 2

Goethe

Kosmos

Handweiser für Naturfreunde

herausgegeben vom Kosmos, Gesellschaft der Naturfreunde, Stuttgart

A.v.Humboldt

Neue Sterne.

Astronomische Umschau.

Von Camille Flammarion, Paris. Mit 3 Abbildungen.

Zu Beginn des Jahres 1911 wurden die Sternwarten durch das Aufblitzen eines neuen Sterns in dem kleinen Sternbild der Eidechse, zwischen Schwan und Andromeda wieder einmal in Aufregung versetzt. Von einem Punkte des Himmels, an dem man bis dahin kein irgendwie auffallendes Gestirn bemerkt hatte, sandte plötzlich eine unverhoffte Lichtquelle ihre feurigen Strahlen in die uferlosen Gebiete des Weltraums hinaus. Es war das erste astronomische Ereignis des neuen Jahres, wichtig genug, um für alle Zeiten in den Annalen der Himmelskunde vermerkt zu werden.

Die neue Sonne, die da plötzlich am Himmel aufgeleuchtet war, wurde am 30. Dezember 1910 von dem bekannten Entdecker zahlreicher veränderlicher Sterne, W. T. E. Espin, auf dessen Privatsternwarte in Tow Law bei Durham in England zuerst aufgefunden. Fernrohre und Spiegelteleskope, Spektroskope und photographische Kameras wurden alsbald nach der Stelle des Himmels gerichtet, wo der neue Stern stand, und noch heute bildet das seltsame Gestirn den Gegenstand eifrigsten Interesses. Freilich ist das Licht des Sterns inzwischen fast zur zehnten oder elften Größe gesunken, und seine anfängliche röthliche Färbung hat einem mehr bläulichen Tone Platz gemacht. Schwache Vergrößerungen zeigen das Objekt ein wenig verwaschen, in sechsstarken Instrumenten bemerkt man an ihm jedoch keinen Unterschied gegen die zahllosen gewöhnlichen Sterne der Umgebung. Die prismatische Zerlegung seines Lichtes läßt freilich das Außergewöhnliche der Erscheinung sogleich erkennen: sie zeigt kein buntes Regenbogenband in der üblichen Farbenfolge, sondern einige wenige farbige Linien — im wesentlichen das Abbild eines jener seltsamen planetarischen Nebel, in deren Zustand anscheinend auch unsere „Nova" gegenwärtig übergegangen ist.

In der Tat gibt es kaum etwas Merkwürdigeres, etwas Überraschenderes, als dieses seltene und daher um so seltsamere plötzliche Aufblitzen von Sternen, die auf dem dunklen Grunde des Himmels unerwartet erscheinen, sodann einige Zeit einen Teil des Firmaments mit ihrem Licht erhellen, um sich schließlich wieder im Dunkel der Nacht zu verlieren.

Zur Zeit ihrer Auffindung glänzte die „Nova Lacertae" im Lichte eines Sterns 8. Größe und war infolgedessen schon in einem gewöhnlichen Opernglase sichtbar (Abb. 1). Anfang Januar erhob sie sich bis zur 7. Größe, um jedoch recht bald bis zur 8. und schließlich 9. Größe abzunehmen. Gegenwärtig, Anfang 1912, stellt sie ein gänzlich unauffälliges Objekt 10. bis 11. Größe dar.

In der Absicht, die Geschichte des neu aufgetauchten Gestirns nach früheren photographischen Aufnahmen der Sternwarten näher zu verfolgen, haben die Astronomen recht bald Spuren einer früheren Existenz des Sterns auf den Platten gefunden, allerdings zunächst in Gestalt eines kaum sichtbaren feinen Pünktchens, das niemand aufgefallen war. So stellte W. Wolf auf Grund des reichen Plattenmaterials der Sternwarte in Heidelberg fest, daß der Ort der Nova in früheren Jahren von einem schwachen Sternchen 13. oder 14. Größe eingenommen war, wie die Aufnahmen vom 9. Januar 1894 und vom 15. Juli 1904 beweisen. Auch Barnard konnte die Nova mit einem winzigen Sternchen 14. Größe identifizieren, das sich auf Aufnahmen der Yerkessternwarte vom 11. Oktober 1893, vom 7. August 1907 und vom 22. und 24. Aug. 1909 abgebildet fand. Am 22. Mai 1910 zeigt ein von

Abb. 1. Nördlicher Teil der Eidechse bei + 51° Äquatorabstand mit der Stellung der Nova unter den benachbarten Sternen 4. bis 7.5. Größe.

Kosmos IX, 1912. 2. 4

Figure 5: *Kosmos. Handweiser für Naturfreunde* with Goethe and Humboldt on Masthead, 1912

> Alexander von Humboldt, der Verfasser des berühmten "Kosmos," gilt uns als der letzte universelle Geist, der noch das gesamte Gebiet der

in their scientific knowledge through educational reading, it should be an aid and promoter, leading them to independent observation."

> Naturwissenschaften seiner Zeit zu beherrschen vermochte. Heutzutage ist dies nicht mehr möglich; auch die scharfsinnigsten und ausdauerndsten Forscher sehen sich genötigt, sich auf gewisse Zweige und Abschnitte zu beschränken. Um bei dieser notwendig gewordenen Spezialisierung das ganze nicht aus den Augen zu verlieren, ist ein solches Organ, das eine fortwährende Übersicht auch der anderen Gebiete ermöglicht, ein bedürnis geworden.

But the spread of expert culture was not the only factor setting the journal's readers apart from Humboldt's world. Just as critical was the technological revolution unleashed by the natural sciences themselves, which had transformed daily life in the intervening decades since the 1830s. Hence, the opening editorial also rehearses all of the recent technological feats in railways, shipping, telegraphy, telephony, electricity, chemical industries, hygiene and medicine.[69] It was here that the journal's program of popular science sought to intervene:

> It is rightly considered a sign of deficient education when someone knows nothing about Dante or Homer, about Goethe's *Faust* or the works of our greatest composers. Yet one can still observe daily that even people considered to be highly educated are unable to explain the simplest phenomenon of nature or the technological devices they use every day, such as thermometers or electric streetcars.[70]

> [Man betrachtet] es mit Recht als ein Zeichen mangelhafter Bildung, wenn jemand nichts von Homer oder Dante weißt, Goethes "Faust" oder die Werke unserer großen Tondichter nicht kennt, während man alle Tage wahrnehmen kann, daß selbst als hochgebildet geltende Personen die gewöhnlichsten Naturerscheinungen und ebenso technischen Einrichtungen, deren sie sich alle Tage bedienen, wie z.B. ein Thermometer oder die elektrische Straßenbahn, nicht zu erklären vermögen.

Despite its name, then, the Kosmos Society for Friends of Nature was not a 'back to nature' movement. On the contrary, it was profoundly concerned with the technological world and with cultivating a readership that would strive to understand the technologies made possible by science. "Nature,"

69 Ibid., 1.
70 Ibid., 2.

that is, referred to the *natural sciences*, an overview of which readers ought to aspire to.

More broadly, the Kosmos Society sought to promote a particular ethics of self-cultivation. If the society's members could no longer hope to achieve Humboldt's expansive mastery of science, they could still use the mechanisms and media of popular education to actively shape a personality. Hence the opening editorial of the *Kosmos* journal also touted "the importance of study in and of itself," regardless of any use-value:

> Research in natural sciences, and the participation in such research through study [...] influence one's outlook on life and one's character, elevating thought to a higher level. Absorbing oneself in the natural sciences strengthens the intellect, the temperament and the will.[71]

Thus the model of the universal intellectual gives way here to a model of amateur self-cultivation, where knowledge acquisition was understood as a form of work on the self.[72] The Kosmos Society for the Friends of Nature promoted such self-cultivation both through the journal and through so-called *Kosmos Bändchen,* short illustrated booklets covering significant areas of scientific knowledge, such as *Die Abstammung des Menschen* (*The Descent of Man,* 1904) by Ernst-Haeckel-disciple Wilhelm Bölsche; *Streifzüge im Wassertropfen* (*Forays in a Drop of Water,* 1907) by Raoul Francé, head of the microscopy club Mikrokosmos; or *Welt der Planeten* (*World of the Planets,* 1910) by astronomer and Urania co-founder Max Wilhelm Meyer. (Figure 6) Just as significantly, they pioneered more experiential forms of hands-on knowledge acquisition, such as the *Kosmos Baukasten,* a kind of amateur laboratory allowing for experimentation with chemistry, electricity, microscopy, astronomy, wireless technology, and so on. (Figure 7) Such forms of popular education show us a template of self-cultivation specific to amateur science groups, defined by shared knowledge, shared aspirations and above all shared practices. Thus if the print revolution had introduced the disciplinary self, groups such as Kosmos helped to construct a different kind of ethics of the self, based not around the acquisition of discipline-specific expertise, but around experiential engagement with scientific knowledge more broadly.

71 Ibid., 1

72 For more on the broader context of self-cultivation in the German-speaking world, see my study *Cult of the Will: Nervousness and German Modernity* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008).

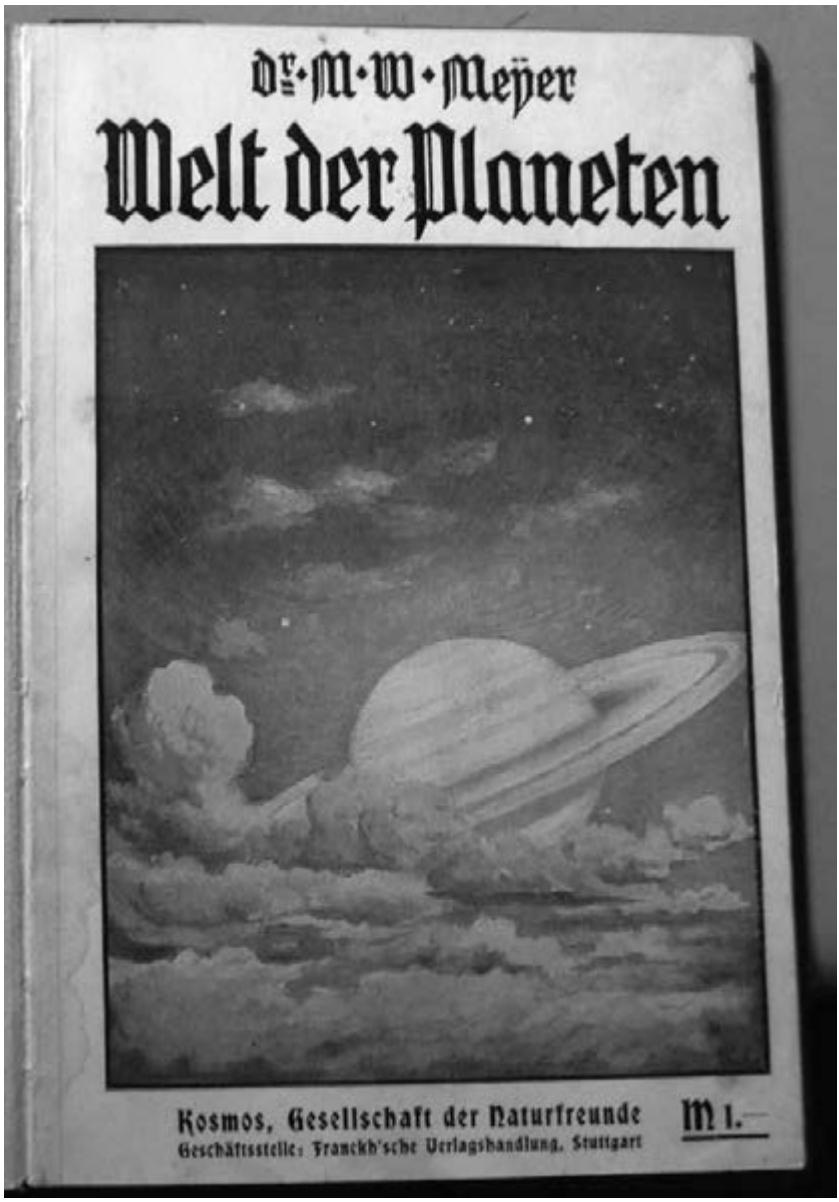


Figure 6: Max Wilhelm Meyer, *Welt der Planeten*. Book from the Kosmos Bändchen series, 1910, cover

Figure 7: Advertisement for a Kosmos Baukasten für Elektronik, 1923

The Emergence of the Scientific Film Society

This program of self-cultivation still exists today, not least of all in the thriving business of the Urania Society and the Franckh'sche publishing house—now known as Kosmos-Verlag—which still specializes in forms of experiential knowledge acquisition for young audiences. But it also provided the key cultural framework into which many of the first film societies emerged.[73] A good example, for my purposes here, is the Kosmos Klub für wissenschaftliche und künstlerische Kinematographie (Cosmos Club for Scientific and Artistic Cinematography). If the club's name recalled the Kosmos Gesellschaft der Naturfreunde, this was hardly by chance. The film club was originally founded in 1912 by the Viennese filmmaker and schoolteacher Alto Arche under the name of Wiener Kinematographie Klub (Viennese Cinematography Club). But it changed its name to Kosmos less than a year later in a conscious effort to associate itself with the culture of amateur science promoted by Frankh'sche publishing house—adopting the publisher's magazine *Film und Lichtbild* as its official organ and opening a specialty cinema, appropriately named the Kosmos Theater, in Vienna's 7th District.[74] (Figure 8) Member lists for the Kosmos film club show that its adherents—which despite being mostly male, also included several women—came from various areas of middle-class professional life. There were teachers and university lecturers, especially among the scientific steering committee, but also accountants and bank clerks; electricians, engineers and architects; public officials and attorneys; hairdressers, tailors and salespeople, as well as printers, artists and theater set designers.[75] What held this group together, I believe, was a familiarity with the protocols of scientific self-cultivation—and the conviction that projected images had a key role

73 There were, in fact, many references to Humboldt's *Kosmos* in early initiatives of educational film, such as August Kade's "Scientific Theater Kosmographia," which existed in various forms from at least as early as 1905 before finding a fixed home in Dresden in 1910.

74 The Kosmos Klub was hardly alone in seeing this link to amateur scientific clubs and journals. References to amateur science abound in other film journals. See for example Adolf Mahel, "Die Mikrokinematographie," *Kastalia* 1, no. 5 (1912), 4. That link did not stop the Kosmos film club from trying to assert a monopoly over its name when another scientific society was founded under the name "Kosmos" in Vienna in 1914. See Alto Arche, letter to the KKNÖ Statthalterei (Lower Austrian Imperial Governor's Office), dated 18 March 1914, Vereinsakt for Kosmos Klub für wissenschaftliche und Künstlerische Kinematographie, 473 / 1938.

75 Member lists were regularly published in the group's newsletter in *Film und Lichtbild*. See "Mitteilungen des 'Kosmos' Klub für wissenschaftliche und künstlerische Kinematographie," *Film und Lichtbild* 2, no. 9 (1913), 138.

Heft 8.

Film und Lichtbild

Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche und technische Kinematographie und Projektion

Organ des „Kosmos", Klub für wissenschaft. u. künstl. Kinematographie in Wien

Mitteilung des „Kosmos",
Klub für wissenschaftliche und künstlerische Kinematographie in Wien.

Unsere Ziele.

Figure 8: *Film und Lichtbild* with the first minutes of the Kosmos Klub für wissenschaftliche und künstlerische Kinematographie, September 1913

to play here. Indeed, the club's first report in *Film und Lichtbild* sounds a note almost identical to the opening editorial of the *Kosmos* science journal a decade earlier:

> The development and spread of technology and natural sciences has provoked massive upheavals in every area of our cultural life in recent years. Dirigibles, airplanes, modern steamships, the feats of explorers in the North and South Pole, color photography, stereoscopic photography and other arts are just a few examples from most recent memory. The goal of our club is to use the projected image to help audiences

> understand these accomplishments, as well as the life and culture of our Earth.[76]
>
> Die Entwicklung und Ausbreitung der Technik und der Naturwissenschaften hat im Verlauf der letzten Jahre große Umwälzungen auf allen Gebieten unseres kulturellen Lebens im Gefolge gehabt. Das lenkbare Luftschiff, die Flugmaschine, die modern Riesendampfer, die erfolgreiche Forscherarbeit, der Nord- und Südpolarfahrer, die Erschließung der Kultur Ostasiens, die Farbenphotographie, die Plastik der Photographie und andere Künste sind nur wenig Beispiele für die neusten Ereignisse. Wir wollen versuchen, das Verständnis für diese Errungenschaften und für Leben und Kultur unserer Erde durch das *Lichtbild* näher zu bringen.

Passages like this reveal a lot about the status of cinematography for these groups: film was an example of the latest accomplishments of science worthy of knowing about (alongside related phenomena such as color photography), but it was also a particularly powerful *means* of learning about science and technology more broadly. Hence the members of the Kosmos film club were encouraged both to learn about film technologies and to use film to practice group learning about natural sciences (thus demonstrating again the inevitably 'hybrid' nature of these early groups).[77] To this end, like their counterparts at the Lichtbilderei GmbH, the club offered members fully furnished lectures, as well as a "Kosmos Projector" for creating their own events with slides and film.[78] And it also offered frequent courses to teach members to use cinematographic equipment.[79]

76 "Mitteilungen des 'Kosmos' Klub für wissenschaftliche und künstlerische Kinematographie," *Film und Lichtbild* 2, no. 8 (1913), 121.

77 Stein quite explicitly saw film societies as having a double remit: the study of "cinema for its own sake" and of "cinema in the service of other [scientific and educational] goals." Stein, "Kinematographische Studiengesellschaften," 140.

78 Order coupon, *Film und Lichtbild* 1, no. 6 (1912), insert after p.84. The group also staged its own public cinematic evenings, such as one from October 1913 in the Ronacher Theater, in which Arche showed and commented the film *Reise um die Welt*, which he had edited together from footage shot by one Lieutenant Reinelt. This was essentially an early compilation film and a precursor to better-known travel films fro the 1920s by Colin Ross, Walter Ruttmann and Lola Kreutzberg. A report on the screening published in *Kastalia* had this to say: "Der Film 'Die Reise um die Welt' ist deshalb interessant, weil er uns zeigt, wie man aus verschiedenen bekannten Filmteilen einen neuen Film unter einem Gesamttitel zu einem Ganzen vereinen kann." "Die Reise um die Welt," *Kastalia* 2, no. 10 (1913), 11.

79 See "Mitteilungen des Kosmos-Klub für wissenschaftliche und künstlerische Kinematographie in Wien," *Film und Lichtbild* 3, no. 5 (2014), 65.

The Kosmos Klub was hardly the only film society to assume a readership that had internalized an ethics of scientific self-cultivation. Kastalia, founded a year earlier, integrated this ethics into its very title. (Figure 9) The term was chosen after the ancient Castalian Spring where the Greek muses had once bestowed knowledge and wisdom on worthy aspirants. According to the opening editorial from Kastalia Vice President Adolf Mahel, just as the ancient Greeks had to train both "mind and body" (*Geist und Körper*) to gain entry into the Castalian Spring, so lay people today must cultivate knowledge and beauty: a process for which there is "no better means than the cinematograph!" (kein besseres [Mittel] als der Kinematograph!]. To this end, members were also asked to practice a strict hygiene of moving images, exposing themselves to quality films while avoiding sensational dramas and "tasteless trick films devoid of all humor."[80]

Such was the community of cinematic self-cultivation these groups strove to instantiate. Like their predecessors in popular science, they sought to forge a sense of community belonging, often by means of a common journal aimed at a lay public. The contributors to these journals clearly understood that they were writing for lay audiences in the tradition of popular science and often reflected on this task explicitly in their articles. For example, the author of a piece on scientific stereoscopy for *Film und Lichtbild* explained: "In accordance with the goals of the Franckh'sche publishing house, I have chosen a few texts here that make it easier for readers to work their way into this exciting material."[81] Many articles were, in fact, summaries of longer studies, presented in more accessible terms.[82] There were also numerous rubrics designed to help readers determine what was worth knowing or watching. In addition to the standard lists and reviews, issues contained reports on significant events, articles on developments in the world of

80 Adolf Mahel, "Kastalia!," *Kastalia* 1, no. 1 (July 1912), 1–2. Kastalia's founding statutes describe the group's goals of facilitating films specifically in the areas of history, geography, natural sciences, literary history and art and aesthetics (*Statuten des Kastalia,* 11).

81 Walter Böttger, "Stereoskop-Bilder," 56.

82 For example, Bruno Glatzel's article "Über Geschoß-Kinematographie," published in 1913 in *Film und Lichtbild,* offered a more accessible summary of Glatzel's and Arthur Korn's book *Handbuch der Phototelegraphie und Teleautographie* (1911) concerning their use of ultra-rapid spark flashes for ballistics photography and even recycled the same illustrations. Glatzel thematizes the simplifying work of his article in several places, for example: "Ohne im Einzelnen auf die technische Anordnung einzugehen, mag hier nur so viel bemerkt werden, daß das Verfahren in sehr einfacher Weise gestattet, die Funkenfrequenz innerhalb der Grenzen von 200 und 100,000 zu verändern." Bruno Glatzel, "Über Geschoß-Kinematographie," *Film und Lichtbild* 2, no. 4 (1913), 57.

Figure 9: Cover of *Kastalia. Öst. Zeitschrift für wissenschaftl. und Unterrichtskinematographie*, cover image, January 1914

scientific or educational film,[83] descriptions of key figures, discussions of significant books,[84] and occasional reports on topics in film history.[85] The

83 *Film und Lichtbild* did this through a section called *Vermischtes*. See for example *Film und Lichtbild* 2, no. 1 (2013), 14–15. *Kastalia* had a section called *Neues*. See for example *Kastalia* 1, no. 4 (1912), 10–11.

84 See for example "Kinematographische Literatur," *Kastalia* 2, no. 1 (1913), 13.

85 Historical articles were still sporadic in journals like *Film und Lichtbild* and include mostly a few contributions by Paul Liesegang, who would acquire a more prominent role in the pages of *Die*

journals also included more participatory rubrics, such as letters columns, where readers could find answers to various queries (e.g. where to acquire quality educational film material, how to program educational film screenings, how to avoid flicker, etc.).[86] And there were regular invitations to readers to signal good films or contribute topics for coverage in the journal,[87] as well as ubiquitous calls for readers to recruit more members to the cause.

In distinction to industry film journals, which were aimed at the operators of the new movie theaters, these educational journals explored cinema in its widest variety of dispositival potentials. Readers could learn about everything from panoramic cinema for geography lessons to cinematic shooting galleries for military training to Erwin Papperitz's diaphragmatic projections for teaching planar geometry.[88] (Figure 10) Not surprisingly, writing on amateur uses of cinema was especially popular. Readers could find reports on devices such as the Cinéphote apparatus for creating animated family portraits,[89] the Salonkinematograph of Georges Bettini (which used glass slides not unlike Charles Urban's Spirograph to project moving images safely in the home),[90] or the Pathé KOK projector for schools, also known as the "Kino in der Westentasche."[91]

Such reports looked back to the world of amateur photography, but they should also be understood as part of a broader cultivation of hands-on amateur knowledge in these journals, which stood in close proximity to amateur science. Many articles assumed a reading public of aspiring amateur scientists, such as one by Dr. Willy Zeese from *Film und Lichtbild,* which showed readers how to harness living organisms from local ponds for microscopic

Kinotechnik (see Chapter 2). See for example Liesegang, "Die Entwicklung des Kinematographen," *Bild und Film* 1, no. 2 (1912), 38–43; "Marey, der Begründer der modernen Kinematographie," *Film und Lichtbild* 1 (1912), 70–72.

86 See for example "Briefkasten," *Film und Lichtbild* 2, no. 2 (1913), 34.

87 See for example "Zum Geleit," *Film und Lichtbild* 2, no. 1 (1913), n.p.; "An unsere Leser," *Film und Lichtbild* 2, no. 9/10 (1913), 137.

88 On panorama cinematography, see "Panoramakinematographen," *Bild und Film* 2, no. 11–12 (1913), 258; Hans Goetz. "Kinematographische Rundpanoramen, *Film und Lichtbild* 2, no. 3 (1913), 37–41. On the shooting galleries, see Richard Schuster, "Förderung der Schießausbildung durch die Kinematographie," *Film und Lichtbild* 1, no. 6 (1912), 79–83; Friedrich Felix, "Lebende Zielscheiben," *Film und Lichtbild* 3, no. 8 (1914), 121–22. On Papperitz's devices, see Erwin Papperitz, "Kinodiaphragmatische Projektionsapparate," *Bild und Film* 2, no. 2 (1913), 22–25; "Die Kino-Ausstellung in Wien," *Kastalia* 1, no. 4 (1912), 6; Otto Theodor Stein, "Kinodiaphragmatische Projektion von Prof. Dr. Papperitz," *Bild und Film* 1, no. 4 (2012), 94–95.

89 See Yvonne Montmollin, "Der Cinéphote," *Film und Lichtbild* 1, no. 3 (1912), 28

90 See Friedrich Felix, "Der Platten-Kinematograph Bettini," *Film und Lichtbild* 1, no. 5 (1912), 52–54; Stein, "Amateurkinematographie," 36.

91 See "Die Kino-Ausstellung in Wien," *Kastalia* 1, no. 4 (1912), 7.

Figure 10: Page from Hans Goetz, "Kinematographische Rundpanoramen," *Film und Lichtbild,* March 1913

cinemaphotography.[92] (Figure 11) The idea of going out and discovering the life in a drop of water from your back yard was a well-known motif of popular science books such as Wolfgang Kuhlmann's *Aus der Wunderwelt*

92 Willy Zeese, "Bemerkungen zur Herstellung von lebenden Präparaten für mikroskopisch-kinematographische Aufnahmen von Wassertieren," *Film und Lichtbild* 2, no. 4 (1913), 60–63.

eines Wassertropfens, which appeared in the *Kosmos Bändchen* series in 1910—cueing readers about the kinds of astonishment (Wunder) they ought to experience on seeing their own everyday world in microscopic scale. And it would go on to form a mainstay of early scientific cinema.[93] *Film und Lichtbild* clearly addressed a readership familiar with such publications when they ran adverts for microscopes alongside ads for microscopic cameras and similar film equipment. Such juxtapositions underscore the epistemic affinities, noted by Tom Gunning and others, between telescopes, microscopes and photographic technologies in their ability to visualize the invisible in a cosmos that had expanded beyond the limits of human perception.[94] But they can also tell us a lot about what was happening on the ground, if we ask the question not of what cinema 'is,' but rather—to invoke Greg Waller's formulation here again—*what company cinema has kept*. In the present context, film societies kept company with the world of amateur science, and if the story of early film societies includes figure like Kosmos Klub founder Alto Arche, it also includes people like Raoul Francé, editor of the journal *Mikrokosmos* (published by the Kosmos Verlag), founder of the Mikrokosmos Verein and author of numerous popular books on the life of plants and the microscopic life of bacteria in water drops, which taught hundreds of readers to develop their passion for uncovering the 'secrets' of nature.[95]

93 Kastalia's Universum Kino, for example, included a film titled *Was im Teiche lebt* in its program for March 1914. See "Das Aprilprogramm für Volksschulen," *Kastalia* 3, no. 3 (1914), 33. And the same motif would show up in many Kulturfilms of the 1920s such as *Eine Welt im Wassertropfen. Mikroskopische Naturaufnahmen* (Otto Storch, 1920) and *Die Wunderwelt des Teiches* (UFA, 1930). On the drop of water motif, see also Oliver Gaycken, *Devices of Curiosity: Early Cinema and Popular Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 5.

94 See especially Tom Gunning, "Invisible Worlds, Visible Media," in: *Brought to Light: Photography and the Invisible 1840–1900,* ed. Corey Keller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 51–63. This was a frequent motif in the clubs and journals. See for example Paul Sorgenfrei, "Das modern Kulturtheater," *Kastalia* 3, no. 4 (1914), 39: "Dank der Eigenart des kinematographischen Apparates ist es allein imstande, […] das sonst dem menschlichen Auge Unsichtbare sichtbar zu machen, den Mikro- und Makrokosmos in seine großen, geheimnisvollen Walten vor aller Augen zu führen."

95 Francé's group was clearly on the map of early film societies like Kastalia. As Adolf Mahel put it in an article on microscopic cinema, "Years ago, the Stuttgart publishing house Kosmos managed, with the help of the well-known botanist R. H. Francé, to create a movement that tremendously popularized the use of microscopes. An autonomous association was founded under the title Mikrokosmos, which attracted members from all of the educated social classes. Microcinematography most certainly also has a great future, and we will make it our mission to publish as often as possible interesting news from this area in word and image." Mahel, "Die Mikrokinematographie," 5. Francé would have a further influence on avant-garde artists of the 1920s such as László Moholy-Nagy. See Oliver A. I. Botar, "László Moholy-Nagy's New Vision and the Aestheticization of Scientific Photography in Weimar Germany," *Science in Context* 17:4 (2004), 525–56.

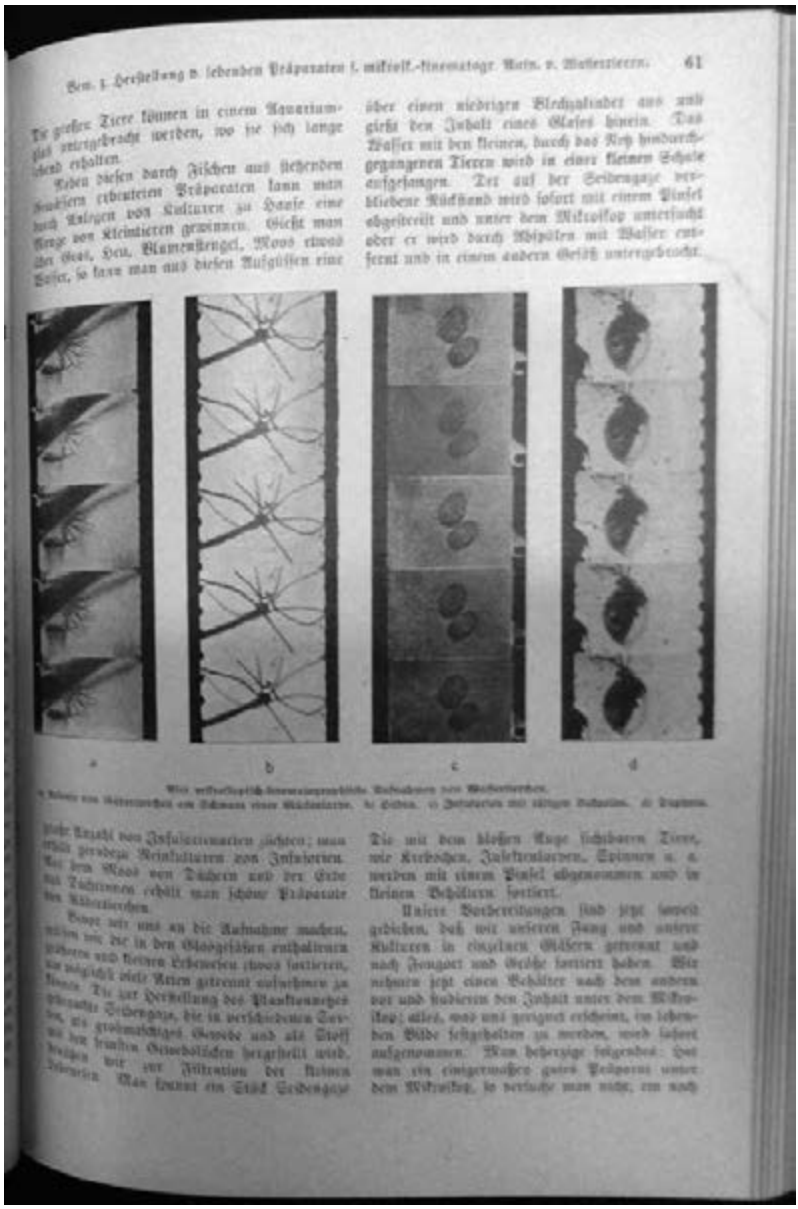


Figure 11: Page from Dr. Zeese, "Bemerkungen zur Herstellung von lebenden Präparaten von mikroskopisch-kinematographischen Aufnahmen von Tieren," *Film und Lichtbild,* April 1913

More broadly, these film societies kept company with a hands-on experimental culture, in which so many of the writers for the early film journals also participated. Wilhelm Berndt, for example, in addition to

Figure 12: "Der elektrische Mensch," from Hanns Günther, *Experimentierbuch für die Jugend* (1912)

lecturing at the Urania and contributing articles to journals such as *Film und Lichtbild,* also published books on the emerging practice of home aquariums.[96] Another writer for the journal, Hans Günther, also authored several popular "experimenting books" such as *Experimentierbuch für die Jugend*. (Figure 12) And yet another regular, Alfred Neuburger, would go on to publish *Heitere Wissenschaft des ergötzlichen Experimentierbuchs,* in which young readers could emulate the work of professional laboratories in

96 See Wilhelm Berndt. *Das Süß- und Seewasser-Aquarium. Seine Einrichtung und Seine Lebenswelt.* Der Naturforscher. Thomas' Sammlung von Anleitungs-, Exkursion- und Bestimmungsbüchern (Leipzig: Theodor Thomas Verlag, 1911). Berndt also published a book on animal evolution for lay readers, whose title recalls Goethe's "Metamorphosen der Pflanze": *Metamorphosen der Tiere: Gestaltwandel, Anpassung, Entwicklung.* Wege zum Wissen (Berlin: Ullstein, 1926).

the amateur mode, with everything from optical illusions to psychological tests to the fabrication of their own homemade color organs and spirit photographs.[97]

Film societies emerged partly within this milieu of amateur science, and in many ways, that milieu helped to shape the idea of cinema they helped to institute. This includes the kinds of astonishment explored at length by Gunning and Oliver Gaycken, though I would add, as suggested above, that such affective experience, far from being a spontaneous reaction to cinema, was modeled for readers again and again in publications like the *Kosmos Bändchen* and the writings on scientific cinema that took up similar themes. But it also includes other traits. First among these was the idea that film could allow viewers to go out and see *life* unfold in its authentic habitats. In an educational context, this meant transporting viewers beyond the walls of classrooms, lecture halls and teaching labs. As Fritz Seitz put it in the very first article for *Film und Lichtbild*: "Laboratory experiments only show animals languishing in an artificial environment, which can no more offer an image of life than the lion enclosed behind the bars of a zoological garden!"[98] Cinema, it was hoped, would solve this problem, as Richard Rote put it in another article for *Kastalia* appropriately entitled "Wanderlust": "If you can't come to nature, we'll bring it to you and place it before your eyes."[99]

Secondly, cinema was valued for its remarkable explanatory ability, particularly its capacity to show *processes* rather than snapshots of static results. Thus, the opening editorial of *Kastalia* could explain that moving images allowed audiences not only to experience the *results* of research, "but also to see and experience (miterleben) the 'how' that led to those results: […] How the bee gathers honey and builds cells, how the silk moth produces its silk, how life develops in a drop of water, how the plant grows."[100] This

97 See Alfred Neuburger, *Heitere Wissenschaft des ergötzlichen Experimentierbuchs* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1925), 53, 71, 81, 127.

98 F. Seitz, "Kinematographische Bilder aus der Nordsee," *Film und Lichtbild* 1, no. 1 (1912), 2.

99 Richard Rothe, "Wanderlust," *Kastalia* 1, no. 4 (1912), 6. Here, we also see a precursor to the pathos of documentary, from Vertov's notion of capturing life "unawares" to the discourse around direct cinema, where portable cameras and sound equipment would allow documentarians to take leave of the artificial studio.

100 Mahel, "Kastalia!," 2. This ability to show the *how* and *why* (in addition to the *what*) was also one of the central criteria for judging the quality of an educational film. Thus one review of travel films from *Kastalia* included the passage: "Most geographical films are usually nothing but photographs of objects, devoid of all life, even if we see the trees swaying back and forth or water flowing or people and vehicles moving along. A truly good film should not only allow us to recognize landscapes, but also show *why* they appear this way and not some other way to our eyes. It should also show how people live in this place, their morals and customs, their industry

interest in conveying processes also extended to technology, especially in the many discussions of what we would now call the industrial film.[101] As another writer stated in a passage with interesting affinities to the Marxist idea of commodity fetishism: "Technological films show us the fabrication of those products (Fabrikaten) that are delivered as finished commodities into our homes."[102]

This repeated emphasis on process also points to a broader notion of cinematic specificity taking shape within these exchanges. In the framework of amateur science, going behind static appearances meant above all revealing a world *in motion.* Thus in one article that received particularly widespread attention in these early film society journals, the Berlin doctor Eduard Bäumer claimed that the greatest contribution of motion pictures to knowledge lay in their potential to convey that all perceptions of stasis are an illusion and that the entire physical world, organic and inorganic, is one of perpetual becoming.[103] Such an argument recalls the Bergsonian

and intellectual life." "Der wissenschaftliche Film," *Kastalia* 2, no. 8 (1913), 6. Or as another article by Mahel put it, "The projected slide (Glasbild) is a recording of a fact; the projected film (Lichtbild) also shows the *why* and *how*." Adolf Mahel, "Skioptikon und Kinematograph," *Kastalia* 2, no. 2 (1913), 5.

101 Industrial film figures recurrently throughout the pages of the journals in question. One of the first acclaimed examples was a film produced for Siemens-Schuckertwerke shown in 1911 at the annual trade fair in Turin. One writer praised that film for its ability to "place technological processes in their entire development before our eyes, which could not be shown through the exhibited objects alone." "Der Kinematograph im Dienste des Ausstellungswesens. Eine Reminiszenz von der Turiner Ausstellung 1911," *Film und Lichtbild* 1, no. 3 (1912), 18. See also K. Hiemenz, "Technische Kinobilder der Siemens-Schuckertwerke," *Bild und Film* 2, no. 6 (1912), 137–39.

102 One particularly glowing review of a 1913 film for the German Postal System, for example, praised the film's ability to show viewers the entire interlocking network of workers, technologies and transport involved in postal delivery: "Rarely are senders or recipients of letters aware of how many hands their letter went through before reaching its goal. It is the merit of the Society for Scientific Films and Slides […] to have captured the path of a typical letter on film." "Der Reichspostfilm," *Film und Lichtbild* 2, no. 2 (1913), 30–31. Such ideas about the explanatory power of moving images also informed these groups' particular—if guarded—interest in animation. Though they almost universally panned the trick film tradition for its reveling in illusion, they did take great interest in the potentials of animation for illustrating *processes* otherwise unavailable to direct observation. Several journals ran articles on Emil Cohl's animated battle maps, which could facilitate the teaching of military strategy. See for example "Die Schlacht von Austerlitz im Film," *Film und Lichtbild* 1 (1912), 33–35. There were also discussions of animated weather maps, animated statistics and the animated geometry films created by Professor Ludwig Münch. See for example H. Goetz, "Kinematographie und Meteorologie," *Film und Lichtbld* 1, no. 6 (2012), 72–73; Goetz, "Mathematische Films," *Film und Lichtbild* 3 (1914), 35–36.

103 See Eduard Bäumer, "Kinematograph und Erkenntnislehre," *Die Zukunft* 20, no. 1 (1911), 7–10; reprinted in modified form as "Der Kinematograph im Dienste der philosophischen Naturbetrachtung," *Film und Lichtbild* 1, no. 5 (2012), 49–52. The article was also discussed by the

debates about the cinematographic mechanism of thought (though reversing Bergson's rejection of cinematography),[104] but it also looks back, I think, to Humboldt's cosmology of forces. And it forms a key intellectual framework for the development of later *Kulturfilms* such as the 1925 *Wunder der Schöfpung* (*Wonder of Creation*) or the 1926 *Blumenwunder* (*Wonder of Flowers*), where the static world of natural perception turns out to conceal a relentless force of transformation.[105]

But above all, cinema appealed to the world of popular science on account of its *experiential* quality. Much has been written about the early use of cinema for visual education or *Anschauungsunterricht*.[106] What I want to emphasize here is how closely the discourse on *Anschauung* was bound up with the idea that cinema could convey something akin to hands-on *experience:* that it could provide a space in which lay people might actively participate in the process of research.[107] Film, in this understanding, could make viewers feel as if they themselves were discovering the things seen on screen. As one schoolteacher from Hagen put it in an article for *Film und Lichtbild,* "Pupils experience the nature of the ocean, of the Sahara Desert, of the primal forest, as *if it were the result of their own research*."[108] Here, too, cinema kept intellectual

Kastalia group (which mistakenly identifies the writer as Eduard Bräuner). See "Zeitschriften-Schau," *Kastalia* 1, no. 4 (1912), 13. An English translation of Bäumer's article is available in *The Promise of Cinema,* 78–81. Interestingly, Bäumer ended his original article with a reference to Archenhold's Kinematographische Studiengesellschaft: "A new society founded in Berlin has established as its mission the task of employing the cinematograph for science. Only their achievements will reveal whether they intend to fulfill the wishes expressed here" (*Promise of Cinema,* 81).

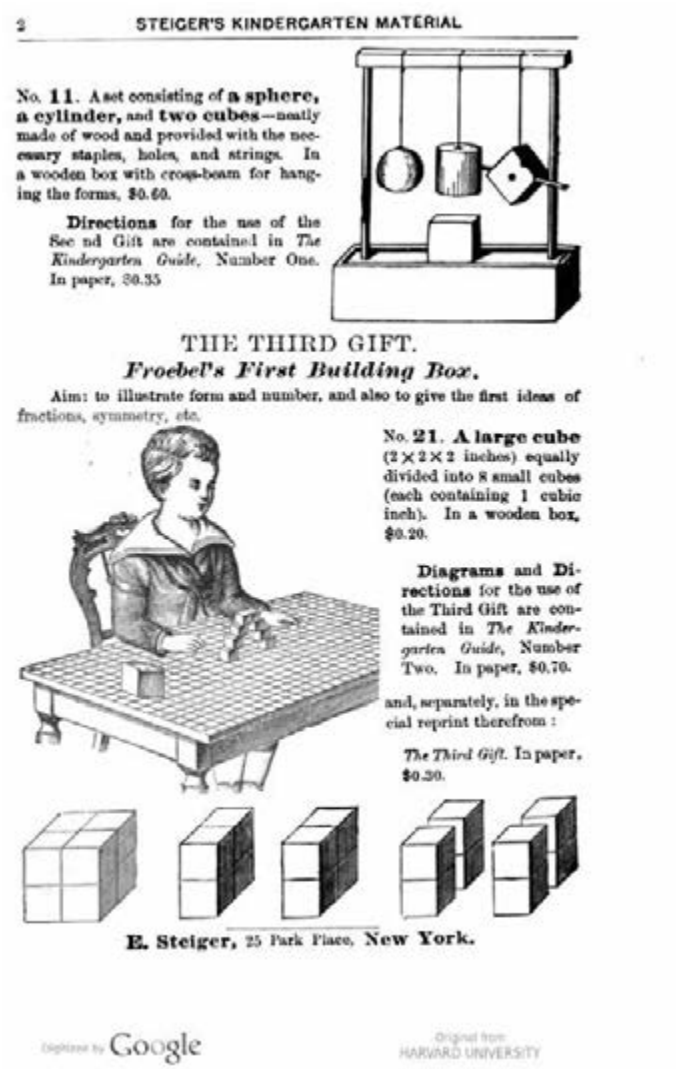
104 Bäumer did not reference Bergson in his article, but he was a disciple of another philosopher of motion: Constantin Brunner, who had made famous his so-called "motion doctrine" in his 1908 book *Die Lehre von den Geistigen und vom Volke* (Berlin: Karl Schnabel Verlag, 1908).

105 Janet Janzen has shown how the interest in dynamic plants in early twentieth-century film culture connected to a much broader revival of romantic philosophy, which in many ways created the intellectual conditions in which time-lapse photography could emerge and develop. See Janzen, *Media, Modernity and Dynamic Plants in the Early 20th Century* (Leiden: Brill 2016).

106 For a good contextualization, see Curtis, *The Shape of Spectatorship,* 176–93.

107 Here, cinema would catalyze the kinds of experimental learning promoted by the turn-of-the-century *Lebensreform* movement. As the opening editorial of *Kastalia* put it: "Since Pestalozzi, our entire pedagogy is focused on creating a *living* education. Visual experience, concrete examples, experiments and direct observation of nature are the foremost tools in modern efforts to present educational materials in ways that [...] help pupils appropriate and assimilate everything they learn." Mahel, "Kastalia!," 1.

108 Ernst Lorenzen, "Kinematographie und Schule," *Film und Lichtbild* 1, no. 3 (1912), 23 (my italics). This question of vicarious participation in the research process was critical: as much as educators wanted children and lay audiences to gawk at the wonders of science, they also wanted them to experience the activity of research and discovery itself. Thus another discussion


2 STEIGER'S KINDERGARTEN MATERIAL

No. 11. A set consisting of **a sphere, a cylinder,** and **two cubes**—neatly made of wood and provided with the necessary staples, holes, and strings. In a wooden box with cross-beam for hanging the forms, $0.60.

Directions for the use of the Second Gift are contained in *The Kindergarten Guide*, Number One. In paper, $0.35

THE THIRD GIFT.

Froebel's First Building Box.

Aim: to illustrate form and number, and also to give the first ideas of fractions, symmetry, etc.

No. 21. **A large cube** (2 × 2 × 2 inches) equally divided into 8 small cubes (each containing 1 cubic inch). In a wooden box, $0.20.

Diagrams and **Directions** for the use of the Third Gift are contained in *The Kindergarten Guide*, Number Two. In paper, $0.70.

and, separately, in the special reprint therefrom:

The Third Gift. In paper, $0.30.

E. Steiger, 25 Park Place, **New York.**

Figure 13: Catalogue Advertisement for Froebel's Third Gift, block set, 1877

company with numerous forms of experiential pedagogy such as the Kosmos Baukasten. Yet another writer for *Film und Lichtbild* compared filmic learning to the famous *Fröbelspiele* (Fröbel gifts), precursors to today's building blocks

of underwater films could claim: "The moving image shows us not only *what* forms of magic, surprise, secrets and life the ocean conceals. It also shows us *how* the researcher lifted the thousands of veils, the work of the deep sea expedition, the capturing of plankton and fish, etc." Ad. Elmáh, "Das Meer," *Kastalia* 2, no. 4 (1913), 9.

first introduced by Friedrich Fröbel in one of the foundational programs of hands-on knowledge acquisition.[109] (Figure 13)

Like amateur science, then, cinema was understood as a prime catalyst for a kind of sensory learning, in which amateur viewers could take part vicariously in the activity of research and discovery. This also suggests that early theorists understood cinema spectatorship as an *embodied* affair. Where later apparatus theorists such as Jean-Louis Baudry would emphasize spectatorial immobility and the isolation of vision in the interest of comparing film watching to dream work, the epistemology of these early film societies saw film—in a way that partly resonates with phenomenological theorists today—as a medium that could use haptic vision to activate other forms of sensory-motor experience.[110] This was a key part of cinema's power, and it was demonstrated (for example) in the widely discussed experiments of the Italian psychologist Mario Ponzo, which showed that cinema's images could provoke synesthetic illusions in the auditory, tactile and even olfactory register.[111]

Governing Spectatorship: The Visual and the Verbal

At the same time, these groups were well aware that the kind of pedagogical experience they sought to promote was anything but spontaneous. On the contrary, if cinema was to become the 'quality' medium they envisioned, viewers had to be taught *how* to watch and experience projected images. At the heart of this training stood an effort to work out—both conceptually and practically—the relation between images and words. If all of these groups shared one conviction, it was that they were standing at the cusp of a media shift: the world was going visual (or experiential),

109 See F. Lambrecht, "Handarbeiten im Lichtbilde," *Film und Lichtbild* 1, no. 5 (1912), 54.

110 See Baudry, "The Ideological Effects of the Basic Apparatus," trans. Alan Williams, *Film Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (Winter 1974–75), 45. Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 53–85.

111 Ponzo's experiments were originally published in Italian as "Di alcune osservazioni psicologiche fatte durante rappresentazioni cinematografiche," *Atti della Reale accademia delle scienze di Torino* 46, no. 15a (1910–11), 943–48. An English translation is available in *Early Film Theories in Italy,* ed. Francesco Casetti, Silvio Alovesio and Luca Mazzei (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 273–76. For discussions of Ponzo's experiments in German periodicals, see Albert Hellwig's review of Ponzo in *Bild und Film* 2, no. 5 (2012), 78. See also Albert Hellwig, "Illusions and Hallucinations During Cinematographic Projections" (1914), in: *The Promise of Cinema,* 45–47; Richard Rothe, "Farbenhören und Tönesehen," *Kastalia* 2, no. 9 (1913), 4–5. For a more recent discussion of Ponzo, see also Casetti et. al., *Early Film Theories in Italy,* 257–59.

and this transformation would change the way in which knowledge was created, transmitted, experienced and assimilated. The opening editorial of *Kastalia* offers a case in point. There, Vice President Mahel celebrates "Gutenberg's invention," in particular, for helping to bring the fruits of the "Castalian Spring" to all classes over the entire earth.[112] But print learning, he suggests, would only be a prelude to the extraordinary power of cinema to make knowledge-acquisition into a living, experiential undertaking. As Mahel put it, "Letters only have flickering life, and even the most tasteful lecture by a school teacher or professor [...] can never achieve the value of a first-person experience."[113] Such references to Gutenberg abound in these journals, alongside numerous allusions to a famous citation from Edison, according to which every school would soon have its own projector and film collections.[114] In short, these groups understood themselves—a full decade before Béla Balázs—to be in the midst of a transition from a Gutenbergian to an Edisonian universe.[115]

Not unlike the discourse on the digital shift today, this perceived media shift gave rise to any number of fantasies about cinema's utopian educational potential. One article for *Kastalia* likened cinema to the famous *Nürenberger Trichter* (Nuremberg Funnel), popularized by baroque authors in the early days of print as a kind of cornucopian fantasy of boundless and effortless learning (in which knowledge pours into the learner's head as if through a funnel).[116] But such cinephilic desires never existed apart from

112 "The Castalian Spring still flows on today! Since Gutenberg's invention, the muses have taken up residence with rich and poor alike, in the North and the South, the East and the West." Mahel, "Kastalia!," 1.

113 Ibid.

114 The original quote is from *Motion Picture World* (1909). For citations, see "Bericht über die Versammlung des Vereines 'Kastalia'," *Kastalia* 1, no. 1 (1912), 9; "Erziehung durch Wandelbilder," *Kastalia* 2, no. 5 (1913), 4.

115 For Balázs's commentary on the change from print to visual culture, see *Der sichtbare Mensch* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001), 16. Indeed, though I am focusing on the question of knowledge here, other writings anticipate Balázs's arguments about the mimetic power of filmic images of beautiful bodily movement even more closely. Thus one article from *Kastalia* titled "Von der Schönheit der Bewegung" could claim: "Durch die Vorführung schöner Bewegungen und wirkungsvoller Rhythmen wird das Gefühl dafür wachgerufen und auf den Beschauer übergeleitet. Sobald das Gefühl wachgerufen ist wird auch der Drang zum Selbstschaffen ausgelöst." Richard Rothe, "Von der Schönheit der Bewegung," *Kastalia* 1, no. 2 (1912), 2.

116 Mahel, "Skioptikon und Kinematograph," 6. The motif of the Nürenberger Trichter is often traced back to Georg Philipp Harsdörffer's poetry anthology: *Poetischer Trichter / Die Teutsche Dicht- und Reimkunst / ohne Behuf der Lateinischen Sprache / in VI Stunden einzugiessen* (Nürenberg, 1647). But the metaphor also appeared in other instructional writings of the time, such as Wilhelm Schickard's *Der Hebraische Trichter / Die Sprach leucht einzugiessen / das ist /*

cinephobic anxieties. Not unlike contemporary critics of PowerPoint and online MOOCS, writers worried that the increasing dominance of projected images had the potential to transform the institution of the lecture into mere entertainment.[117] As another writer for *Film und Lichtbild* asked sarcastically in 1914: "How long will it be before we see Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* or Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* flicker across our screens? Perhaps with Asta Nielsen in the title role. Filmed on location. With hair-raising suspense. And all in color."[118]

More broadly, these early clubs shared many of the anxieties of the cinema reform movement. They worried, first of all, about the cinema's power to titillate viewers, even in supposedly educational films. This accounts for the occasional controversies that erupted around certain titles such as a Pathé film *Reisen und große Jagden im Inneren Afrikas* (Travels and Great Hunts in the African Interior), which was rumored to show an indigenous woman being killed by a lion.[119] Like other reformers, moreover, these groups worried about the effects of placing spectators together in darkened theaters. As Mahel put it in *Kastalia*: "Darkness loosens discipline."[120] Hence, it is no surprise that early film societies took great interest in emerging forms of 'daylight' projection, which they saw as crucial to the development of both educational cinema and amateur cinema in the home. As Stein acknowledged in another programmatic article on the topic of daylight projection, the very appeal of entertainment cinema, coming in the wake of Wagner's theatrical

Unterweisung / wie ein teutscher Leser / ohne Lateinischen Behelff / die H. Sprache behend erlernen möge. So clar und einfältig / daß es auch ein Knap kan fassen (Leipzig, 1629). See also Hans Recknagel and Rolf Veit: "Wagenseils Nürnberger Trichter. Zur Geschichte einer Redensart." *Mitteilungen der Altnürnberger Landschaft e.V.,* Heft 1, 2001, 571–81.

117 Max Flesch, "Lichtbildtheater in Volksvorlesungen," *Film und Lichtbild* 3, no. 2 (1914), 21.

118 Karl Ettlinger, "Anders rum!!," *Film und Lichtbild* 3, no. 3 (1914), 34. Not unlike critics of educational technologies today, these groups also pondered the idea that teachers as such might be replaced by automatic recording technologies: "This is already being exploited by clever business people: they offer finished slide lectures with the appropriate images for purchase. Another step and we could let the lecture itself be spoken into a phonograph. Listeners can then play it back and spare themselves the lecturer altogether: a sound film theater as the newest form of popular lecture. Is one not justified in fearing that by systematically privileging lectures with projected images, we will forget the technique of lecturing itself?" (Flesch, "Lichtbildtheater in Vorlesungen," 34)

119 The debate was between Otto Theodor Stein, who accused the film of showing the scene, and Konrad Wolter, editor of the *Erste Internationale Filmzeitung* (and later an important figure in the Deutsche Kinotechnische Gesellschaft), who sided with Pathé, denying the existence of the shot. Stein accused Wolter of being a paid shill for Pathé. See Stein, "Schund- oder Lehrfilm," *Film und Lichtbild* 3, no. 5 (1914), 13–14.

120 Mahel, "Skioptikon und Kinematograph," 5.

transformations, resided partly in the "sense of mystery produced by the darkness of the projection space."[121] But rather than following on the heels of Wagner, these groups sought to create a counter-cinema of daylight, which would allow for visual interaction between members of the room, for the blending of film images and other types of visual material and for the coordination between the eye and the hand taking notes or making sketches.[122] Such a vision of cinematic sociality was quite distinct from later art house film societies, which would celebrate the darkened movie theater precisely for its ability to facilitate collective dreaming (see Chapter 3). By contrast, early film clubs envisioned cinema as the medium of a learned collectivity, where knowledge exchange would take place in the rational light of day. Indeed, in contrast to the title of the best-known recent study on educational film, these societies rarely imagined educational cinema as a process of "learning with the lights off," but rather one of projecting with the lights on.[123]

More broadly, these societies shared the reformers' concerns about cinema's psychological effects. To be sure, film's educational potential was

121 Otto Theodor Stein, "Kinematographische Vorführungen bei Tageslicht," *Film und Lichtbild* 2, no. 5 (1913), 76

122 In Stein's words, daylight projection offered "the possibility to work at any [...] time for researchers as well as teachers, also for amateur cinematographers and for the family" (ibid., 75). On note-taking, see for example Flesch, "Lichtbildtheater in Volksvorlesungen," 20: "Der Lichtbilder wegen findet der Vortrag im verdunkelten Saal statt. Damit wird die Möglichkeit der Fixierung des Vortrags in Notizen aufgehoben, es kann nicht mitgeschrieben werden. Die Hörer sind ganz auf ihr Gedächtnis angewiesen." On question and answer, see for example, Adolf Sellmann, "Der Film als Lehrmittel," *Bild und Film* 2, no. 10 (1913), 233: "Auch ist mehr Helligkeit und Licht der Vorführung erforderlich, wenigstens dann, wenn gleichzeitig während der Vorführung des Films gefragt und geantwortet werden soll." On drawing classes, see for example Friedrich Felix, "Film im Zeichenunterricht," *Film und Lichtbild* 2 (1913), 80. There were occasional exceptions to this call for daylight screenings. Hermann Häfker, for example, called for a mode of darkened educational screening in terms that succinctly anticipate apparatus theory, albeit championing the hiding of all technological conditions: "Sicher ist, daß der Beschauer sich des eigentlichen technischen Zusammenhangs im Augenblick des Genusses weder bewußt ist, noch es sein will. Jede Erinnerung an Apparate usw. stört. [...] Wir können an Platos Gleichnis denken: wir sitzen in einer dunklen Höhle, deren Eingang wir den Rücken zukehren, und schauen in seinen Spiegel, der uns halbwirklich zeigt, was draußen im Wirklichkeitslicht zugeht. Das gilt vom Lichtbild in einem verwandten Sinne wie von der Kinematographie. Jedenfalls arbeitet unsere Phantasie darauf hin, uns den Aufenthaltsraum, die Apparate und ihre Bedeutung möglichst vergessen zu machen vor der Lichtwelt, die auf der Leinwand vor uns erscheint. Darauf muß demnach auch die Vorfürhungskunst hinarbeiten." Hermman Häfker, "Geschmackvolle Lichtbildvorführung," *Bild und Film* 2, no. 11–12 (1913), 253.

123 See David Orgeron, Marsha Orgeron and Dan Streible (eds.), *Learning With the Lights Off: Educational Film in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

inseparable from its sheer sensory force, which exerted a more powerful influence over attention, affect and memory than still images—let alone writing—possibly could. As Mahel put it, "Just as man tames the power of water, forcing it to power his mills, so the cinematograph takes hold of our attentive force, compelling it to set the delicate gears of knowledge and understanding into movement."[124] Members of the Kastalia group, most of whom were schoolteachers, demonstrated this again and again in the various questionnaires they conducted with their pupils. The teacher Joseph Ramharter recounted one such exercise in 1913, in which he asked his middle school class to write an essay explaining what drew them into the cinema. Most of the pupils answered in terms of content, recounting their preference for war films, crime thrillers and erotic dramas such as the Asta Nielsen vehicle *Afgrunden* (1910). But Ramharter gleaned a different lesson from the exercise: "Just how tenaciously these impressions remain lodged in the child's naïve mind is shown by the respondents' ability to recall these suspenseful dramas in minute detail, even months after having seen them."[125] It was precisely this power over sensory, affective and mental faculties that early film societies sought to harness for educational purposes. As another writer for *Kastalia* put it: "Projected images compel audiences to pay attention, and the material thus seen never fails to engrave itself upon memory."[126] The leaders of *Kastalia* were highly attuned to such questions of perception, which even informed their programming schedule, which explicitly called for the screening of educational films during the morning hours (when children were supposedly most receptive).[127]

124 Mahel, "Skioptikon und Kinematograph," 7

125 Josef Ramharter, "Unsere Kinder und die Kinotheater," *Kastalia* 2, no. 2 (1913), 12. For a similar questionnaire, see Eduard Golias, "Kino und Kinderpsyche," *Kastalia* 2, no. 3 (1913), 4–6. Questionnaires like this were part of a broader context of research on images in education. Images were understood to activate children's emotions, and a great deal of study was carried out in view of capitalizing from this emotional power. One experiment frequently discussed in the film journals was carried out by the psychologist Rudolf Schultze, who filmed children without their knowledge as they observed images. Schultze's experiment was meant to pinpoint the transition from attention to emotion by studying children's faces. See "Die Kinematographie auf der internationalen Ausstellung für Buchgewerbe und Graphik zu Leipzig," *Kastalia* 3, no. 5–7 (1914), 57. Emotions were also a critical point of intervention, for example in the so-called "Tierschutztag" introduced by Kastalia, which included numerous animal films designed to develop children's capacity for what one writer called "man's noblest and most beautiful feeling: sympathy." Josef Ekhart, "Die ethische Bedeutung des Tierschutztages," *Kastalia* 2, no. 5 (1913), 1.

126 Carl Eugen Mayer, "Im Dienste des Flugrades," *Kastalia* 2, no. 2 (1913), 10. For a similar argument, see Adolf Mahel, "Der Kinematograph als Unterrichtsfaktor," *Kastalia* 1, no. 4 (1912), 3–5.

127 See "Das Arbeitsprogramm des Kastalia," *Kastalia* 1, no. 5 (1912), 2.

But even as they recognized the power of projected film, these groups all agreed that the visual reception of such projections needed to be governed. As Joseph Kopetzky, founder of *Kastalia,* put it succinctly in another piece for the journal: "Vision, as the most noble of entry ports towards the soul, […] the richest collector of impressions, must also be influenced and guided in a beneficial manner, if it is to fulfil its highest calling."[128] Governing vision meant first of all controlling what images people exposed themselves to, and the first goal of all of these film societies was to influence audience choice. *Film und Lichtbild,* for example, declared its mission to provide counterweight to the abundant "trash [*Schund*], which people are rightly trying to keep away from their eyes."[129] Beyond this question of exposure, two common goals stand out. First, these groups constantly emphasized the need to alternate moving images with still images. All film lectures should include what Mahel called "Ruhepunkte" or "resting points" for audiences to replenish visual energy, assimilate what they had seen and study certain aspects up close.[130] Often, writers called for slides to be projected prior to the screening of films in order to show viewers where to focus their attention. Numerous were reports such as the following from *Film und Lichtbild* on a screening of deep-sea films by the Cologne Society of Natural Scientists: "Since rapid moving images often leave no time for the recognition of details, the screening was preceded by slides, in which the lecturer could show audiences what to look for."[131] This emphasis on still images also explains the keen interest these groups took in projectors that could be paused (a technology that was only just starting to become viable).[132] As another writer

128 Joseph Kopetzky, "Kind und Kino," *Kastalia* 1, no. 5 (1912), 5–6.

129 Untitled editorial, *Film und Lichtbild* 1, no. 3 (1912), 17.

130 Mahel, "Skioptikon und Kinematograph," 6. As one writer for *Bild und Film* put it: "I would consent to the use of film in teaching […] only under the following condition: namely that one employs film and slides simultaneously. This demand comes from the fact that the impressions afforded by the cinematograph are too quick and therefore too superficial, and that precisely at the present time, school must promote a calm and contemplative lingering over objects." K. Roswald, "Der Film im erdkundlichen und naturwissenschaftlichen Unterricht," *Bild und Film* 2, no. 9 (1913), 205.

131 Otto Janson, "Bilder aus dem Leben des Meeres im bewegten Lichtbild," *Film und Lichtbild* 2, no. 6 (1913), 99. Similarly, a practitioner of statistical films explained that showing animated statistics with no stopping points proved detrimental to the audience's ability to study and memorize what they were seeing: "Practical experiments, which I carried out according to examples from real life, revealed that all the rules of mnemonics fail due the speed of this kind of visualization [through moving images]." Friedrich Felix, "Statistische Lichtbilder," *Film und Lichtbild* 1, no. 6 (1912), 83–84.

132 It is difficult to ascertain how successful pausing mechanisms for school projectors were, but it is clear that these groups *wanted* machines that could be paused. After encountering the

put it: "At any moment, the film must be able to be transformed into a still slide."[133]

Above all, however, these groups insisted on maintaining a Gutenbergian dimension to govern the influence of images through words. Thus the opening editorial for *Kastalia,* even as it celebrated cinema's sensory power when compared to bookish learning, underscored the need for film and speech to work together:

> Eye and ear should be placed simultaneously in the service of understanding [...] The ear should hear what the eye leaves in silence, and the eye should see what the word conceals. Such collaboration breaks all of the shackles that make it so difficult for the mind to comprehend the material in a way that is conscious, durable and propitious to further learning.[134]

> Aug und Ohr sollen gleichzeitig in den Dienst der Auffassung gestellt werden. [...] Das Ohr hörend, was das Auge verschweigt; das Auge sehend, was das Wort verbirgt. Solches Zusammenarbeiten sprengt alle Fesseln, die dem Gehirn das bewußste und bleibende, fruchtbare Erfassen des Gelernten so schwer [...] machen.

Like still images shown before the lecture, speech helped to govern spectators' visual attention and assure the pedagogical effect. As Wilhelm Berndt put it in his discussion of Urania lectures: "It goes without saying that such complex films—especially microscopic films—require the presence of spoken words if they are to have any pedagogical value at all."[135] This emphasis on speech surely had a particular resonance for the members of film societies, many of whom were themselves practicing lecturers. If they were not working in educational institutions, they were likely delivering popular lectures within any of the numerous voluntary associations that characterized early twentieth-century leisure culture. Conditions

Pathé KOK projector at the 1913 Kino-Kongress in Berlin, Friedrich Lambrecht reported on the apparatus as follows: "If one turns the motor off, everything continues working as before, but the filmstrip stands still, and the individual image can be used like a slide." F. Lambrecht, "Vom Kinokongress und von der Kino-Ausstellung Berlin, *Film und Lichtbild* 2, no. 2 (1913), 26.

133 Sellmann, "Der Film als Lehrmittel," 233. Other writers argued that such pausing mechanisms would also allow filmmakers to reduce film prices since they could remove some film in places where an educational film would be paused for an explanation. See Erich Reicke, "Der Film im Geschichtsunterricht," *Film und Lichtbild* 3, no. 3 (1914), 46.

134 Mahel, "Kastalia!," 2. Or as Joseph Kopetzky put it in another article the same year, "Es muß der Gesichtssinn durch den Hörsinn unterstutzt werden." Kopetzky, "Kind und Kino," 7.

135 Wilhelm Berndt, "Aus der Praxis der biologischen Kinematographie," 4.

here were uncertain; a lecture might take place in a museum, a school, an associational office or a local pub, which might or might not have the requisite infrastructure in terms of light, sound and electricity. Hence, journals often published guidelines for lecturers, covering everything from technical issues to mental preparation to strategies for directing audience attention.[136] One also finds repeated references to bad lecturers, who fail to use speech to reinforce knowledge.[137] A good example can be seen in a review of a screening of the Kinematographische Studiengesellschaft at the Berlin Cines-Palast in 1913 published in *Film und Lichtbild*. While the reviewer praised the group's efforts, he chastised president Archenhold for a thoroughly shoddy performance at the pulpit:

> Archenhold's explanations of the films almost always distract from the images. During Burlingham's descent into the Vesuvius crater, Mr. Archenhold tells the audience about *his* experiences at Vesuvius; during a film of Niagara Falls, he thinks he can entertain his listeners with speculations about what a lovely refreshing stream this would be for a giant; he speaks of phosphorus rather than sulphureous vapors, refers to Norway when the image shows Stockholm […]. But even more questionable is the fact that Archenhold abstains from any *critique* of the films on the screen, preferring witty remarks to objective explanations. One should not be creating the impression that film study societies approve unconditionally of everything shown in these films. […] All of this requires thorough preparation, but it is the only way to train the public in *critical vision*. Only through the contradiction emerging from such critique can we influence film producers and cinema owners: this is not achieved by filling audiences' heads with the impression that we already have films of good quality.[138]

136 See for example P. M. Grempe, "Praktische Maßnahmen für Projektions-Vorträge," *Film und Lichtbild* 3, no. 5 (1914), 73; Paul Beusch, "Zu Psychologie und Technik des Lichtbildvortrags," *Bild und Film* 2, no. 1 (1912), 10–12; "Aphorismen für Kinoredner," *Bild und Film* 2, no. 8 (1913), 192; "Wie benutzt man Lichtbilder-Vortragstexte?," *Bild und Film* 2, no. 11–12 (1913), 262–64.

137 See for example "Fehler im Kinobetrieb," *Kastalia* 1, no. 2–3 (1912), 10–11.

138 Reicke, "Die Vorführungen des 'Kinematographischen Studiengesellschafts'," 63. One could list many similar examples. Another article pointed out that, since travel lectures often dealt with foreign lands, "people with knowledge of the foreign language often smile sympathetically, when they hear the lecturer give utterly false translations of the titles of these foreign places to the uneducated audience." O. Oltmanns, "Das Vortragswesen in der Projektionskunst," *Film und Lichtbild* 3 (1914), 119. As one writer for *Kastalia* put it, "It is […] absolutely necessary that the lecturer masters all of the textual material, and above all that he knows the projected film material in the most minute detail. For only in this way can he direct the audience's attention to

> Archenolds Erklärungen zu den Films lenkten fast immer vom Bilde ab. Beim Burlinghamschen Einstieg in den Vesuvkrater erzählt Herr Archenhold von *seinen* Erlebnissen am Vesuv, beim Niagara glaubt er seine Zuhörer durch die geistreiche Vorstellung zu ergötzen, welch' ein schöner kalter Wasserstrahl das für einen Riesen wäre? Er spricht von phosphorhaltigen statt von schwefelhaltigen Dämpfen, von Norwegen in Stockholm. […] Aber bedenklicher scheint es noch, daß Herr Archenhold sich jeder Kritik der dargebotenen Films enthält und lieber zu witzig sein sollenden Bemerkungen greift, als zu sachlichen Erklärungen. Es darf nicht der Eindruck aufkommen, als fände alles, was in diesen Vorführungen geboten wird, den vollen Beifall der Studiengesellschaft. […] Das alles verlangt allerdings eine gründliche Vorbereitung, ist aber der einzige Weg, das Publikum zu kritischem Sehen zu erziehen. Erst der Widerspruch, der sich aus solcher Kritik ergibt, wird Fabriken und Kinobesitzer beeinflussen, nicht eine Vorstellung, die in so und so viele Köpfe den Eindruck erweckt: wir haben jetzt schon Films von guter Qualität.

Reviews like this tell us much about how these groups understood the role of speech. Important here is not simply the task of telling audiences what to look for, but also that of teaching audiences *how to see*—and specifically how to see with 'critical' eyes, which would be as adept at recognizing the bad as they were at appreciating the good.

Today, we might call such critical vision 'media literacy,' and similar discussions abound in these journals. For example, in the aforementioned report on the classroom questionnaire by Josef Ramharter, the author reports with approval that some of his pupils had already internalized an ethics of what he called "kritisches Beobachten" ("critical observation"). And this was one of Ramharter's central goals: to train discerning spectators, who would not only learn from good films, but also learn to arm themselves against the seductions of the entertainment industry:

> When a young mind has been enlightened in this way, it will cease approaching cinematic offerings naively, as if they were *true* revelations. Rather, it will recognize how the whole has been edited together to create

what the film is visualizing and explain it. During the projection, the lecture must correspond precisely to the images on the screen, and since it is no easy task to organize one's explanations in such a way that they always fit with the current image, the lecturer should remain in contact with the projection booth through an electric cable and a telephone." Walter Thielemann, "Der Film und das gesprochene Wort," *Kastalia* 3, no. 4 (1914), 38.

> an artificial comedy, with the goal of generating maximum profits through maximum sensation. Once the child's belief in the truth of represented events has been shaken, then critical observation can assert itself, and we have already achieved a great deal.[139]
>
> Ein junges Gemüt, entsprechend aufgeklärt, wird nicht mehr unbefangen den kinematographischen Darbietungen entgegentreten und sie als wahre Offenbarungen auffassen, sondern in dem Ganzen eine zusammengestückelte Komödie erkennen, die nur zum *Zwecke des Gelderwerbes* möglichst sensationell zusammengestellt ist. Ist einmal der Glaube an die Wahrheit des Dargestellten wankend gemacht, dann setzt auch schon das *kritische Beobacthen* ein und damit ist schon viel gewonnen.

The lecturer's speech was a key tool for educating viewers in such critical observation, but no less so was that of audiences themselves. As Mahel explained elsewhere, one of the tenants of the Kastalia film education program was to have pupils practice mutual critique of each other's viewing experience after every film screening, identifying where their viewing experience coincided, but also what they failed to see and what they perceived wrongly.[140]

And if speech was crucial to the training of such media literacy, all the more important, in these groups' minds, was the written word—in particular the very writing they were modeling in their journals. As much as film societies wanted to 'elevate' cinema, they also sought to elevate *film criticism* (which often consisted of paid promotion disguised as disinterested film reviews).[141] Hence, these societies thought a lot about how the activity

139 Ramharter, "Unsere Kinder und die Kinotheater," 14.

140 In many ways such practices anticipated current 'peer learning' exercises: "Since children first have to be schooled in how to watch, every child at first sees differently according to his talents. Hence in every class, film screenings must be followed by discussions in which children practice mutual critique. This oral critique is followed by the writing of a free-form essay—short, concise and substantive—on what they saw. Then comes the critique of the essays, once again in mutual discussion: they point out what this or that person missed in the image, what was perceived wrongly, where their perception overlapped. […] But that's not all. The next step should be a mutual critical discussion between all the classes of the same pedagogical level who saw the same film together. And once again, the goal is to identify what pupils failed to see, what they saw wrongly and where their perceptions overlapped—also how the pupils judge the material they saw. In sum: mutual critique within each class and mutual critique between all classes." Adolf Mahel, "Neue Bahnen," *Kastalia* 3, no. 5–6–7 (1914), 52–53. In some cases, advanced school children were also chosen to deliver lectures. See Thielemann, "Der Film und das gesprochene Wort," 38.

141 On this point, see for example "Fehler im Kinobetrieb," 11. For more on the emergence of journalistic standards in early film criticism, see especially Diederichs, *Anfänge der deutschen Filmkritik*.

of journal reading might interact with film watching. They called for a systematic collaboration between journals and cinemas, where in-depth reporting could both prepare readers for what they would see in a given week and deepen their knowledge of films that went by too quickly on the screen.[142] In summary, just as science was becoming more visual, so film itself needed to be made more verbal, with speech and print helping viewers to watch correctly, to assimilate material and to shape memory of it afterwards.

Conclusion: Constructing Cinematic Selves

More broadly, we might say that the writing in these journals served to model for readers *how to be a cinematic self* and how to cultivate one's passion for cinema: what kinds of films to seek out; how to experience them with the requisite blend of affect, understanding and critique; what to know about film culture more broadly; and how to comport oneself before the screen. This, as I have suggested, links these film clubs and societies to the subsequent history of communities of shared cinephilic passion. One could, of course, see these early clubs as an anomaly or as the vestige of a dying tradition, which clung to the film lecture precisely at a moment when mainstream cinema was heading in a different direction. Or one might see their focus on the educational potential of film as a precursor to educational television or the utilitarian branch of cinema that would find its niche in what the Germans today call *Filmdidaktik*. But it's important to recall that such specialized domains had not yet separated themselves out in the 1910s. While these societies may have striven to create an 'independent' cinema, they did so, as pointed out above, with a view to influencing industry standards as a whole. Moreover, though the content of film societies might have changed in the ensuing decades, the Gutenbergian dimension has remained central to their brand of cinephilia to the present day. This goes for 1920s cine-clubs with their journals, lectures and audience discussions, their specialty cinemas and alternative programming. (For example, as I will discuss in Chapter 3, the Viennese art-house club Kinogemeinde, founded

142 Thus *Kastalia* introduced a youth section (*Jugendbeilage*) during its first year with the following explanation: "Es wird gewiß für die Kleinen von Interesse sein und ungemein erzieherisch wirken, wenn sie z. B. das im Kino Geschaute in ihrer Zeitschrift durch einen Aufsatz erklärt, oder durch eine einschlägige Geschichte erläutert finden, oder wenn ihnen umgekehrt eine fachgemäße Vorbereitung für das demnächst zu Schauende geboten wird." "Unsere künftige Jugendbeilage," *Kastalia* 1, no. 4 (1912), 10.

in 1926 in emulation of the Parisian cine-clubs, operated out of the same Kosmos Kino founded in 1913 by the Kosmos Film Club discussed above.) But the verbal dimension also resurfaces, in varying forms, in the 1950s cinephilia of the *Cahiers* and in the performance art scene of the 60s, and it retains a central place in most university film screenings today, where experts still edify us with introductions and guided audience discussions. And of course, the history of cinephilia would be unthinkable without the supplementary force of writing, which still forms the glue of cinephilic sociability in the Internet age (even if that writing has gone digital), shaping and reshaping the way we experience films, what we know about them and what values we share.[143]

All of this is to say that cinephilia has remained a project of self-cultivation, even if our understanding of what it means to be a cinematic self has changed. As I will argue in chapter 3, cinephilia is not so much about encountering the magic of films naively, as it is about cultivating certain competencies for interacting with film culture. That doesn't make cinephilia any less exhilarating, but it does mean that we might need to broaden our scope when thinking about its history and genealogy. That history comprises a changing series of templates for cinematic selves, one that emerged in the German-speaking world as the first film societies tried to understand cinema's place within a culture of popular science—and one whose future in the digital era may or may not remain attached to the paradigm of film art.

143 See Girish Shambu, *The New Cinephilia* (Montreal: Caboose, 2015), Kindle Edition.

2. The Professional Community: Conceptualizing the Film Industry in the Deutsche Kinotechnische Gesellschaft

Abstract

This chapter examines the first self-conscious society of film professionals in Germany, the German Cinema Technological Society (DKG, founded by Guido Seeber in 1919 under inspiration from the American Society of Motion Picture Engineers), which also helped to found the first German film schools. Situating the DKG's technological focus within larger discourses around technology in the wake of WWI and the Versailles Treaty, the chapter draws on methodologies from the sociology of professions to show how the DKG worked to render intelligible a certain idea of the film "industry" through performative rituals, thereby legitimating the film-technological sector as a key contributor to national prosperity. It also shows how their understanding of the film industry (one based on technological manufacture) came into conflict with another, emerging model of the industry based on trades and labor.

Keywords: history of technology, sociology of professions, film schools (history), Versailles Treaty, film industry, exhibitions

Beyond Audience Studies

The previous chapter examined how the first film clubs sought to manage the rapidly expanding world of entertainment film through an appeal to the protocols of amateur science and—as a result—helped to forge an 'idea of cinema' as an institution of self-betterment. Though most of the film club initiatives discussed in the last chapter were cut short by the war, the educational framework they helped to initiate would continue into the

Cowan, M., *Film Societies in Germany and Austria 1910–1933: Tracing the Social Life of Cinema*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2023
DOI 10.5117/9789463725477_CH02

interwar period with the rise of the Kulturfilm movement, spawning groups such as the Bilderbühnenbund Deutscher Städte in Stettin and the Filmliga in Berlin (founded 1921), as well as other regional education groups such as the Munich Studiengesellschaft für das Film- und Kinowesen (founded 1919) and the Stuttgart Kinogemeinde (1921).[1] Even the Kinematographische Studiengesellschaft was briefly rekindled in 1920 (before being folding back into Archenhold's Verein der Freunde der Treptow-Sternwarte sometime in the early 1920s).[2] As we saw, such groups stood in a dialectical relation with the evolving world of commercial film entertainment in their effort to create a feedback loop, whereby amateur groups would show the way for the film industry at large. That idea, as we know, would come to inform the self-understanding of later film societies as well as the avant-garde, while the debate around the respective value of specialty and mainstream cinema would find its way into many arthouse cine-clubs.

But what happens if we turn the focus around to examine the other side of that dialectic? It is perhaps not surprising that, as the production and distribution of entertainment expanded, groups aspiring to professional status would emerge in an effort to manage not only the relation of audiences to cinema, but also the self-understanding of those working in film production itself. Of course, one could argue that such formations were there from the beginning, at least in a more diffuse manifestation. After all, the first German journal to publish on film, *Der Komet,* billed itself the "Official Organ for the Interests of Owners of Attractions of Every Kind," and the first journal dedicated to cinema, *Der Kinematograph,* bore the subtitle, "Official Organ for the Entire Art of Projection."[3] Even if they weren't linked to any official film societies, then, these journals already understood themselves as mouthpieces for a community of operators of attractions and later projection theaters. But the wider world of the film manufacture would have to wait until after the war to see the rise of the first organized societies of film 'professionals.'

1 The Stettin and Berlin groups are discussed in detail in Konrad Lange, *Das Kino in Gegenwart und Zukunft* (Stuttgart: Ferdinand Enke, 1920), 180–87, 345–50. On the Munich group, see "…und immer wieder das Kino," *Kinematograph* 13, no. 671, n.p. On the Stuttgart group, see "Kino-Gemeinde in Stuttgart," *Der Lehrfilm* 2, no. 8 (1921), 19.

2 On the activities of the Kinematographische Studiengesellschaft in the early 1920s, see "Kinematographische Studien-Gesellschaft," *Der Lehrfilm* 2, no. 8 (1921), 18. On the name, see Simon Friedrich Archenhold, "Der Treptower Sternwarte und der Kulturfilm," in *Das Kulturfilmbuch,* ed. Edgar Beyfuß and Alexander Kossowsky (Berlin: Chryselius und Schulz, 1924), 345.

3 Similarly, the *Erste Internationale Filmzeitung* billed itself as the "Central Organ for all Cinematography."

In this chapter, I want to examine one of the first such societies, the Deutsche Kinotechnische Gesellschaft (hereafter: DKG), founded in 1920. Through an in-depth analysis of the DKG, the chapter aims in part to answer the question why such associations of film professionals arose when they did. But it also seeks to explore how they operated and why—and what idea of cinema they sought to render intelligible. Intuitively, one is inclined to see the rise of professional film production societies as the inevitable result of an expanding industry, a process in which professional functions within that industry were becoming increasingly specialized, complex and intertwined. This conception is not wrong, and managing such professional complexity was indeed one of the purviews of a group like the DKG. Still, it would be a mistake to understand these groups simply as reactions to the de facto existence of a film industry (even if I've used that term in my own study in previous chapters); on the contrary, as I argue here, they had an eminently performative function inasmuch as they helped to produce the cultural and intellectual framework in which the very concept of a 'film industry' could become meaningful. This was indeed the mission of the Deutsche Kinotechnische Gesellschaft, and the following chapter explores the features and mechanisms—some explicit, some less so—by which the DKG sought to forge the idea of the film industry as a coherent and collaborative *national* community.[4] It also considers how the DKG's idea of the film industry as a realm of technological manufacture came to be overshadowed by another idea of the 'industry' focused more on economics, where questions of labor, trades and crafts came to the fore as the obverse to an to increasingly powerful group of film conglomerates such as the UFA.

Like so many of the societies in this period, the Deutsche Kinotechnische Gesellschaft grew out of a journal, *Die Kinotechnik: Monatsschrift für die gesamte Wissenschaft und Technik der theoretischen und praktischen Kinematographie.* (Figure 14) Launched in September 1919 by cinema pioneer and inventor Guido Seeber, along with Konrad Wolter and Willi Böcker (both editors of the long-standing *Erste Internationale Filmzeitung*), *Die Kinotechnik* would attract the participation of many other prominent personalities from the world of film technological production, including Oskar Messter (a key

4 By including those less explicit features, the chapter also takes up one of the goals of research on voluntary associations outlined by Alan Baker: namely to understand not only the "manifest" functions of associations (as they appeared to members), but also the "latent" functions (as they appear to subsequent observers). See Alan R. H. Baker, *Fraternity Among the French Peasantry: Sociability and in the Loire Valley, 1815–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 48.

DIE

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MONATSSCHRIFT · FÜR · DIE · GESAMTE · WISSENSCHAFT UND · TECHNIK · DER · THEORETISCHEN · UND · PRAKTISCHEN

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Jahrgang 1919 Berlin, im September 1919 Heft 1

Was wir wollen

Die Industrie, deren Gegenstand es ist, kinematographische Filmstreifen mit bildlichen Wiedergaben unterhaltenden oder wissenschaftlichen Inhaltes herzustellen sowie die zur Aufnahme, Wiedergabe und Fabrikation der Filme erforderliche Apparatur zu schaffen, die Kino-Industrie, ist in der verhältnismäßig recht kurzen Zeit ihres Bestehens zu einem der mächtigsten und wirtschaftlich wichtigsten Erwerbszweige aller Kulturstaaten, so auch Deutschlands geworden. Die Filmindustrie ist nicht älter als rund 25 Jahre. Dennoch sind bereits viele Milliarden, ist schon ein großer Teil des Weltvermögens in den Fabriken und Einrichtungen investiert, die Filme herstellen oder öffentliche Kinovorführungen veranstalten.

Diese Erscheinung bedeutet einen in gleicher Art noch nie gesehenen Triumph der Technik. Denn die Technik schuf diese Weltindustrie in kaum einem Vierteljahrhundert. Dem technischen Können der Kinofachleute vertraute man die Millionen an. Die Technik des Filmpraktikers haftet für ihre Verzinsung und Amortisierung.

Bei dieser Sachlage ist es kaum zu verstehen, daß es bislang keine Zeitschrift gab, die es sich zur Aufgabe stellte, alle die unendlich vielen Erfahrungsergebnisse, die Gedanken, Verbesserungsvorschläge, die Mitteilungen, Anregungen und Fragen zu sammeln, die sich aus der täglichen berufsmäßigen Beschäftigung mit der Filmherstellung ergeben; es bestand bis heute kein Organ, in dem der Kinofachmann durch Vertreter der reinen Wissenschaft über die grundlegenden theoretischen Fragen seines Berufes unterrichtet wurde und durch seine Berufsgenossen Näheres über die Resultate ihrer Arbeiten erfuhr; es gab keine Zeitschrift, in welcher der Filmfachmann den reichen Schatz seines eigenen praktischen Wissens andern zum Nutzen veröffentlichen konnte, und in der er mit Gewißheit darauf rechnen durfte, wirklich zu solchen Lesern zu sprechen, die seinen Ausführungen das verständnisvolle Interesse des Fachgenossen entgegenbringen.

Figure 14: *Die Kinotechnik*. First page of first issue, September 1919

pioneer filmmaker and inventor), Carl Forch (who headed the film technology section of the Royal Patent Office), the film engineer Arthur Lassally and the film historian and projection expert Paul Liesagang. Though it would take another six months before the editors of *Die Kinotechnik* inaugurated the DKG (in May 1920), the sense of mission already stood front and center from the first page of the first issue. The opening editorial, entitled "Was

wir wollen" ("What We Want"), proudly described cinema as a "triumph of technology" ("Triumph der Technik"), potentially worth millions to the national economy.[5] And as a similar editorial in the second issue explained, that technological domain required its own brand of professional expertise, or *film science*: "In Germany, people wish to produce scientific films, but *to date, we have no science of film*" ("In Deutschland will man wissenschaftliche Filme herstellen, aber *eine Wissenschaft des Films kennen wir bisher nicht*").[6] It was this "science of film" that the group around *Die Kinotechnik* sought to work out, not only as a body of theoretical knowledge, but also—as I explain further below—as the discipline of a professional community and an infrastructural system. This focus on a science of film also made the DKG the first film society to cultivate a form of 'medium specificity', albeit one understood in terms of technological rather than aesthetic criteria.

The new journal—soon be accompanied by a yearly publication of the *Kinotechnisches Jahrbuch,* which they described as the "handbook for all cinema professionals"—would be devoted to elevating the quality of German film technology in all of its forms. (Figure 15) To that end, it would strictly avoid publishing the type of film criticism that was standard fare in popular film magazines: "We will not publish any belletristic articles, nor expositions of fiction films or film criticism of an aesthetic variety."[7] Instead, the editors promised a journal entirely focused on the world of film *behind* the screen: a journal by and for experts, a place where professionals from the domains of film technological production (including camera and projector manufacturing, but also optical lenses, photographic developing, lighting technologies and related fields, as well as experts in patents and economic aspects) could exchange ideas in the service of a broader mission: that of elevating German cinema technology.

Initially headed by Messter and Seeber, the DKG's board included—in addition to Wolter, Forch and Böcker—major industry players such as Hans Rolle (head of the photo-chemical department of the UFA), the cameraman Karl Freund, Kurt Waschneck from the Projektions-A.G. Union (PAGU) film company and Emmanuel Goldberg (head of the camera company and Zeiss subsidiary ICA in Dresden), as well as the academics Otto Mente (head of the photochemical laboratory at the Technische Hochschule in Charlottenburg) and Adolf Miethe (professor for photography and photo-technology at the Technische Hochschule). It would go on to attract directors such as Joe

5 "Was wir wollen," *Die Kinotechnik* 1, no. 1 (1919), 3.
6 "Was wir brauchen," *Die Kinotechnik* 1, no. 2 (1919), 4
7 "Was wir wollen," 4.

Figure 15: *Kinotechisches Jahrbuch* 1922/1923, cover

May, industrial producers such as Heinrich Ernemann and figures from the Kulturfilm scene such as Curt Thomalia and Alexander Kossowsky, as well as a wide array of professionals from manufacturing, scientific and legal professions with an involvement in cinema.[8]

The Revolt of the Cinema Engineer

While the goal of 'elevating' the film industry linked the DKG to other societies in this study, the group's specific focus on technology clearly differed from the focus on films and audiences typical of other film societies. We might begin, then, by asking where the focus on technology came from and why it took hold when it did. As the opening editorial of *Die Kinotechnik* readily acknowledged, there had been many isolated publications

8 For a list of members in 1922, see "Die Mitglieder der Deutschen Kinotechnischen Gesellschaft," in *Kinotechnisches Jahrbuch 1922/1923* (Berlin: Hackebeil, 1923), 37–44.

on technology since the early days of cinema, first and foremost by the very authors that would contribute to the journal. Nonetheless, placing technology at the forefront of a *collective* endeavor was something new and, I would argue, something that could only take shape fully in the wake of WWI. It is worth recalling that the journal's first issue came only three months after the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, which had imposed a severe program of reparations and shackled German industrial production. It is only within this context that one can understand the force of the appeal to industrial technology as a key to national prosperity. Many of the initial articles in *Die Kinotechnik,* such as Hans Rolle's "Kino und Kohlennot" (one of many articles discussing the difficulties of securing sufficient electricity immediately after the war), specifically reference the current dilemma for industrial production in Germany, and the journal would repeatedly represent its mission of elevating German film technology as a contribution to overcoming the country's national humiliation after the war: "We would like the German film industry to demonstrate its resolve to restore the world reputation of German production, which has been ceded to other nations in recent years" (Wir wünschen, daß die deutsche Kinoindustrie [...] den Beweis dafür erbringt, daß sie entschlossen ist, der deutschen Arbeit den Ruf in der Welt wiederzuerobern, den diese heute an andere Nationen hat abtreten müssen).[9] And the group would go on to be swept up in the nationalist fervor of the Rhein occupation.[10]

But if the post-WWI context helps to explain the nationalist affect surrounding this investment in technological production, the DKG also drew on a longer established framework of legitimacy for its endeavors. Social historians following Edwin T. Layton have examined the so-called 'revolt of the engineers' in American society in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: a phenomenon in which 'engineers'—a term and concept that arose in the wake of large-scale industrial transformation—sought to elevate engineering to the status of a profession and academic science on par with medicine and law, to forge an ethics of social responsibility free from corporate interests and to assert their legitimacy in solving the problems

9 "Was wir wünschen," *Die Kinotechnik* 2, no. 1 (1920), 5. See also for example, A. Weber's discussion of the Treaty of Versailles in "Einblicke und Ausblicke," *Die Kinotechnik* 3, no. 3 (1921), 87–89. See also the introduction to the first Kinotechnisches Jahrbuch, which complained that the "the deplorable behavior of peoples who supposedly made peace with us several years ago still make it very difficult for us to have any peaceful and friendly exchange with science and technology beyond our borders." "Zum Geleit," *Kinotechnisches Jahrbuch 1922/1923* (Berlin: Hackebeil, 1923) 5.

10 See for example "Zum Neuen Jahr," *Die Kinotechnik* 5, no. 1 (1923), 7.

of industrial society.[11] In Germany, a similar historical development can be traced, though the German engineering profession faced a greater challenge to reconcile its struggle for legitimacy with German traditions of *Kultur*.[12] Perhaps the most influential group here was the Verein Deutscher Ingenieure (VDI, founded 1856), which was instrumental in making engineering into a university science by successfully lobbying to have technical colleges (*technische Hochschulen*) recategorized as universities in 1899. The figure of the engineer also took on a special status in early Weimar culture, as avant-garde artists such as László Moholy-Nagy and groups like the Bauhaus increasingly used the figure of the engineer—and related metaphors like the 'laboratory'—to reconceptualize their own artistic activity as a form of expertise that would help to regulate industrial society.[13]

In many ways, the DKG understood the science of cinema it sought to inaugurate on the model of engineering science and the work of the Verein Deutscher Ingenieure. The goal, from the first issues onwards, was to create a German "Kinoingenieur" (cinema engineer) or "Kinotechniker" (cinema technician), understood as an expert who would combine theoretical knowledge with practical know-how and who would master the various branches of the science of cinema technology and lead technological development.[14] As they put it in the second issue of *Die Kinotechnik:* "We require the universally educated theoretician, the practitioner who has harnessed his experience between machines and film drums, and for whom the entire extended realm of his exceptionally widespread field of activity has been unified by science into a well-balanced, self-contained whole" (Wir brauchen den universal gebildeten Theoretiker, den zwischen Maschinen und Filmtrommeln groß

11 See Edwin Layton, *The Revolt of the Engineers: Social Responsibility and the American Engineering Profession* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

12 Jeffrey Herf, "The Engineer as Ideologue: Reactionary Modernists in Weimar and Nazi Germany," *Journal of Contemporary History* 19, no. 4 (1984), 631–48. Herf's article tends to suggest that the entire engineering profession in Germany stood under the aegis of "reactionary modernism," reconciling technology with the rejection of French and American rationalism. This is not entirely true, and certainly not for a group like the *Deutsche Kinotechnische Gesellschaft,* which, far from rejecting the American model, looked to it again and again in their efforts to establish a German film technological profession (a point elaborated further below).

13 See Frederic J. Schwartz, "The Eye of the Expert: Walter Benjamin and the Avant Garde," *Art History* 24, no. 3 (2001), 401–44; Michael Cowan, *Walter Ruttmann and the Cinema of Multiplicity* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014).

14 See for example "Der große Katechismus des Kinotechnikers," *Die Kinotechnik* 3, no. 1 (1921), 10: "[Der Kinotechniker] ist seiner Identität mit dem Optiker, dem Photochemiker, dem Elektriker, dem Ingenieure, kurz mit dem Physiker und Chemiker, mit dem Gelehrten voll bewußt. In Deutschland ist die Identität von Kinematographie und Wissenschaft wieder zur klaren Erkenntnis des Kinotechnikers im besten Sinne des Wortes geworden."

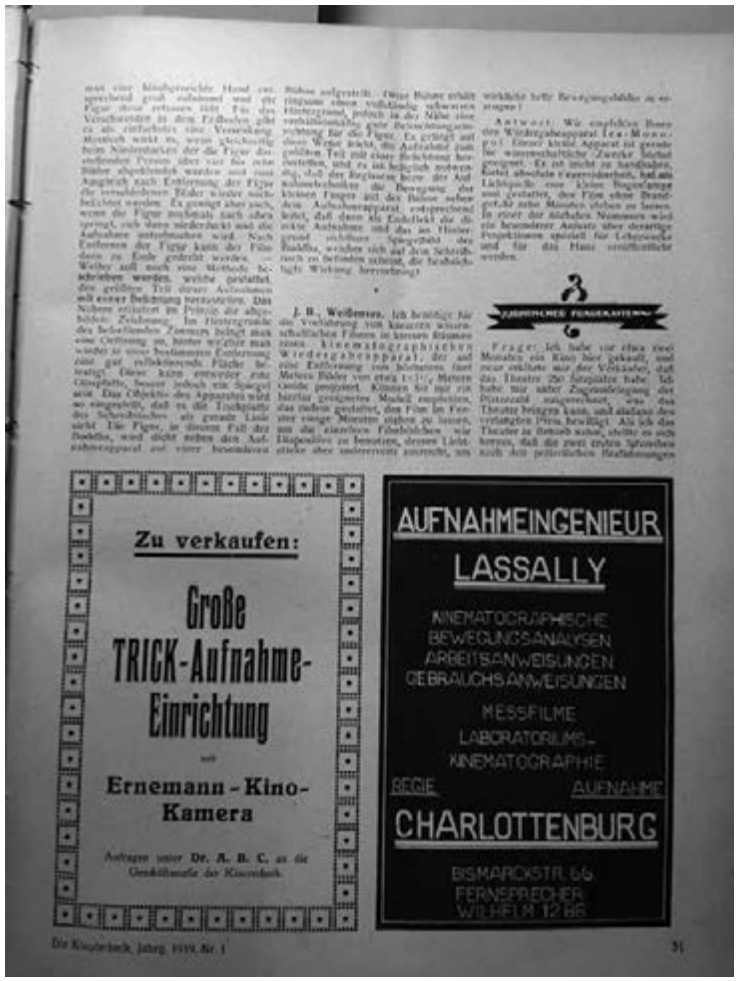

Figure 16: Advertisement for Arthur Lassally, *Die Kinotechnik* (1919)

gewordenen Praktiker, dem die Wissenschaft das gesamte ausgedehnte Reich seines ungemein weitverzweigten Arbeitsgebietes zu einer schönen, geschlossenen Einheit führt).[15] Even when referring to more specialized roles, moreover, the group rarely opted for familiar terms like *Kameramann,* preferring 'industrial' descriptions such as *Aufnahme-Techniker* or *Aufnahmeingenieur*, as one of the group's prominent members, Arthur Lassally, described himself.[16] (Figure 16)

15 "Was wir brauchen," 5.

16 See for example the discussion of "Aufnahme-Techniker" (filming technicians) in the lead article to issue 3, "Was wir fordern," *Die Kinotechnik* 1, no. 3 (1919), 3.

The centrality of technology and the figure of the engineer to the self-understanding of the Deutsche Kinotechnische Gesellschaft should be kept in mind when trying to understand the group's repeated calls to elevate the German film industry. For their understanding of film industry was not the one familiar to contemporary film studies scholars, focused on artists, employees and tradespeople (actors, scriptwriters, directors, producers, managers and distribution networks). While the group did take an interest in certain practitioners (e.g., camera operators, projectionists, film development specialists, lighting technicians), the DKG's industrial imaginary was focused much more acutely on models of factory production and mechanical engineering. If this realm included cameras and projectors, it also included raw materials (e.g., coal for electricity), chemical compounds (e.g. gun cotton for cellulose), glass fabrication and machine parts. *This* is the aspect of the DKG's understanding of the film 'industry' that made it analogous to other areas of national industrial production, while also legitimating the group's call to have it led by theoretically trained engineers. As the editors put it in the opening editorial of the second issue:

> The great boom of the entire German industry before the war, for which it was rightly feared abroad, was due entirely to the close collaboration of science and technology. The most solid foundation of any industry remains a science engaged in research and consulting.
>
> But an inglorious exception to this gratifying and even irrefutably essential state of affairs is the German *film industry.*
>
> Which German film factory possesses, alongside its economic, organizational and artistic leaders, a scientist, a photo-chemist or a physicist?
>
> Where in the German film industry are the leading chemists, the engineers, who exert a genuine influence on the production, quality and processing of materials?[17]

> Den gewaltigen Aufschwung, den die gesamte deutsche Industrie vor dem Kriege genommen, und infolge dessen sie mit Recht vom Auslande gefürchtet war, verdankt diese lediglich der engen Zusammenarbeit von Wissenschaft und Technik. Das solideste und festeste Fundament einer jeden Industrie ist und bleibt die forschende und beratende Wissenschaft.
>
> Eine unrühmliche Ausnahme von diesem erfreulichen, sogar unabweisbar erforderlichen Zustande bildet die deutsche *Film-Industrie.*

17 "Was wir brauchen," 3.

> Welche deutsche Filmfabrik besitzt neben ihrer kaufmännischen, organisatorischen und künstlerischen Leitern an ihrer Spitze einen Wissenschaftler, einen Photo-Chemiker oder Physiker?
>
> Wo sind in der deutschen Filmindustrie die leitenden Chemiker oder Ingenieure, die einen tatsächlichen Einfluß auf die Fabrikation, auf die Beschaffenheit und Verarbeitung des Materials besitzen?

Such an imaginary of the German film industry as a collaboration of science and technology, in which professional film technicians and representatives of the new science of film would lead the development of film-technological production rather than serving as company employees, formed the basis for the group's understanding of its mission. Hence this was a mission not only to elevate technical quality, but also to elevate the status of the 'film engineer' to that of a professional in line with other engineers.

Indeed, not only did the German film industry lag behind other German industries, in the minds of the DKG's founders, but it also lagged behind other national film industries, particularly in the United States, which both the journal and the DKG repeatedly held up as a model of a national film industry that had recognized the value of cinema to a nation's economic well-being. Again and again, the group called for the imitation of American spirit and the American model.[18] And its members reserved particular praise for the Society of Motion Picture Engineers (founded 1916) as a model for their own endeavors.[19]

This was, then, an idea of cinema that sought to conceive of it first and foremost as a realm of national technological production, one in which the transformation of raw materials was guided by the know-how of expert engineers, one whose health was vital to the health of a defeated nation and one that needed to be overhauled from the ground up under the aegis of expert scientists. In this sense, the DKG understood its own function as a film society less in analogy with other (audience-focused) film societies than in analogy with other *industrial* societies. In this respect, one of the journal's lead editorials, published four months before the founding of the DKG, is telling: "In Germany, we have societies for ship-building, research in natural sciences and chemistry, as well as many other professional scientific

18 On the 'American' spirit of initiative, see for example, "Die 3. ordentliche Sitzung der Deutschen Kinotechnischen Gesellschaft," *Die Kinotechnik* 2, no. 10 (1920), 382.

19 See "Was wir wünschen," 6. The group even reached out to the SMPE in 1920 in an effort to collaborate directly, though there was little response from the American side. See "Die 3. ordentliche Sitzung der Deutsche Kinotechnische Gesellschaft," 380.

organizations. But cinema engineers have yet to come together to form a professional society."[20] This is not to say that the DKG was unaware of other kinds of film societies. Among other things, they undertook a brief collaboration with the Filmliga in Berlin, an educational film society in the tradition of pre-war 'cinematographic study societies,' founded to promote Kulturfilms and quality fiction films, and the DKG was well aware of the emerging idea of cinema as an art form. Indeed, those two conceptions of cinema—as technology and as art—would stand in constant tension throughout the Weimar years.[21] But it is to say that the conception of film as a vital national industry was something qualitatively new after 1919 and something that owed a lot to the political and economic conditions of the postwar settlement.

Performing the Professional Community

Forging a new film industry wasn't simply an empirical project, aimed at changing the science and infrastructure of film production. It was also a social and cultural project, involving an effort to change the mentality and imaginary of those involved in such production. The first and most important task here was the effort to create a community of like-minded professionals, conscious of their participation in a shared mission. The journal's editors described this as a process of *crystallization*, in which the diffuse desires for an improved film technological industry would gain solid form through the common forum of the society and its journal. As they explained in the May 1920 issue in a discussion of the founding of the DKG:

> *Die Kinotechnik* was born at a propitious moment: the terrain had been prepared and its time had come. The profession of German cinema engineers had developed far beyond the average technological sphere in its achievements and intellectual maturity. But that profession lacked a central organ, a point of crystallization, a form of cohesion.[22]
>
> Die *Kinotechnik* wurde in einer glücklichen Stunde geboren: ihre Zeit war gekommen, der Boden für sie war bereit. Der Stand der deutsche

20 "Was wir wünschen," 6.

21 That tension has been explored from another angle in Thomas Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany's Historical Imaginary* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2000), 106–42.

22 "Was wir erreichten," *Die Kinotechnik* 2, no. 5 (May 1920), 173.

> Kinoingenieure war in seinen Leistungen und in seiner geistigen Reife weit hinausgewachsen über den Durchschnitt des technischen Mittelmaßes. Es fehlte ihm fraglos an einem geistigen Zentralorgan, an einem Kristallisationspunkt, an einem Zusammenhalt.

Though these lines refer specifically to the intended function of the journal, the reference to crystallization here also describes the mission the editors held out for the new society: a process of solidification, in which gaseous or liquid molecules come together into a highly organized structure. And despite the description of a 'prepared terrain' in the quote above, this process of 'crystallization' was far from spontaneous. On the contrary, the group sought to forge a sense of community of film engineers through a number of performative measures.

First and foremost were the performative mechanisms of *Die Kinotechnik* itself. During the journal's first year, each issue began with a manifesto-like editorial bearing prescriptive titles such as "Was wir wollen" (What We Want, issue 1), "Was wir brauchen" (What We Need, issue 2), "Was wir fordern" (What We Demand, issue 3), "Was wir vorschlagen" (What We Recommend, issue 4), and so on. With their programmatic quality, such exhortations embodied what Mary Ann Caws has called the "we-speak" of manifestos, a performative mode that commands a 'you' to join the 'we' of the proclaimed community in its mission against and implicit 'them' (in this case existing practices of film-technological production).[23] Like contemporary avant-garde manifestos, these editorials are loud and direct, interpellating readers into a collective project of reform.[24] Indeed, the editors themselves commented on this quality in their discussion of the founding of the DKG as they looked back over the first eight issues of *Die Kinotechnik*: "Our will was always turned towards a single goal: to win the ears of all our readers. And for this, it is necessary to blast the trumpets rather than purring softly. *Die Kinotechnik* belted out its command to come together rather than whispering" (Unser Wollen war dabei immer auf das eine Ziel gerichtet: das Ohr Aller zu gewinnen. Und dazu bedarf es eher schmetternder Trompetenstöße als eines sanften Gesäusels. Die *Kinotechnik* hat zum Sammeln geblasen und nicht geflüstert).[25] Like a war trumpet, then, such editorials demanded

23 See Mary Ann Caws, "The Poetics of the Manifesto: Nowness and Newness," in *Manifesto: A Century of Isms,* ed. Mary Ann Caws (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), xxi.

24 Ibid. xxi.

25 "Was wir erreichten," 174.

a response from readers, telling them not only 'what we want,' but also what you (the reader) *should* want.

Like other film society journals, moreover, *Die Kinotechnik* sought to encourage the direct engagement of readers in the professional community on offer through participatory rubrics. There was, first of all, the standard letter column, to which the editors gave the provocative title "Technological Question Box" (*Technischer Fragekasten*). The title suggested that this was a space for those working in the sector of technological production to pose questions and seek answers about things happening behind the screen. Readers submitted questions about techniques for creating trick shots or color effects, but also about camera lenses, photo-developing chemicals, lighting strategies, film storage conditions, optimal paint for film screens, methods of projecting in daylight, patents and many other topics. While the Technological Question Box no doubt served its ostensible purpose of allowing professional readers to seek advice, it also served a performative purpose, suggesting that here were members of the industry engaged in a common dialogue and exchange, mutually elevating one another rather than existing in competition—in short, suggesting a community of like-minded professionals through its very structure.

But the Technical Question Box was only one of many rubrics designed to do just that. Another good example is the rubric entitled "A Good Idea" (*Eine gute Idee*), introduced in the first issue of *Die Kinotechnik,* in which film technicians were invited to share effective solutions they had found to common problems. A kind of 'best practice' messaging board, the "Good Idea" rubric encouraged members to understand themselves not as competitors, but as co-participants in a larger mission of elevating the national cinema industry through the sharing of technological know-how. In practice, while some readers did contribute, most of the "good ideas" in fact came from Seeber and Wolter themselves, who showed readers, for instance, how best to film letters and newspapers, how to dry film faster, how to improve film scissors, how to make effective scenery backdrops and so on. But regardless of the *level* of reader participation, such a rubric was important precisely because of the way it produced an impression, and likely a feeling, of group participation, a framing that addressed readers—whether or not they actually contributed—as professionals benefiting from mutual aid.

This performance of community extended in analogous fashion to the society itself, and the founders of the DKG clearly thought carefully about how to structure the society's activities in a way that would encourage identification with a community of professionals. One of the first requirements for membership was to hold a lecture in one's given area of expertise

at a society meeting, and each meeting began with the rotating lecture by a member, followed by group discussion and often a collective film screening. (Most lectures were subsequently published in the following issues of *Die Kinotechnik*.) Rotating through the various areas of expertise in this way, the group promoted a vision of mutual exchange of expert knowledge on every aspect of the film industry from the construction of filmstrips and lenses to techniques of film development and copying, projection speeds, lighting technologies, trick cinematography, color techniques, soft focus, illnesses in the film industry, daylight screens, 3D film, fire safety and many more topics. There were also lectures on contemporary exhibitions, film production in other countries (especially the United States) and the history of cinematography. But beyond their immediate topic, such lectures and discussions served to crystallize the feeling of a professional bonding, one in which specialization was supplemented by the sharing of knowledge and one in which members learned to see themselves as belonging to a larger formation of film engineers and film scientists. This sense of togetherness was further supplemented through social rituals, particularly the regular social "beer evenings" (*Bierabende*) after the official meetings, which were instituted shortly after the group's founding with the express purpose of developing a sense of "personal contact" (*persönliche Fühlungnahme*) between members.[26] Looking back three years later, the group would write that the beer evenings had helped to foster "friendly relations and the lively exchange of ideas, which substantially promotes a sense of unanimity, mutual understanding and mutual aid in the industry, both in questions of production and business" ("freundschaftlicher Verkehr und ein lebhafter Gedankenaustausch, der die Einigkeit, das gegenseitige Verständnis und das Sichaufeinandereinstellen der Industrie in fabrikatorischen sowie geschäftlichen Fragen wesentlich fördert").[27]

In addition, there was a clear effort to promote a sense of community belonging in the choice of meeting places. The group had a home base at the Photochemical Department of the Technological University (Technische Hochschule) in Charlottenburg (where both Mente and Miethe worked). (Figure 17) But they also conspicuously rotated meetings within Berlin to include premises of various key film industrial branches. There were meetings at the headquarters of various film companies (Deulig, Ufa, Europäische Film-Allianz), but also in the factories of relevant industrial concerns such

26 See "Die Deutsche Kinotechnische Gesellschaft. 4. Ordentliche Sitzung," *Die Kinotechnik* 2, no. 11 (1921), 423.

27 "Jahresbericht des geschäftsführenden Vorsitzenden," *Die Kinotechnik* 5, no. 5 (1923), 181.

Figure 17: Laboratory at the Photochemical Department of the Technische Hochschule zu Berlin, 1903

as C.P. Goetz (a specialist for optical lenses that also constructed projectors) and relevant cultural institutions such as the Urania Scientific Theater.[28] Like the other factors listed above, such a rotating format (in addition to various group excursions into factories for cinema technology), sought to promote a sense of community in its very form by 'mapping out,' as it were, the key sites of the larger industry to which group members were asked to see themselves as belonging.

If all of these performative measures sought to produce a sense of participation and stake in a common mission, that mission was furthered by one of the key topics on which the group focused its energies during the first few years: that of standards. Standards were, of course, on the agenda in the film industry internationally in the postwar period. Indeed, the DKG took a direct cue here from the American Society of Motion Picture Engineers, which had proposed a set of standards for the American film industry in 1917. The group discussed at length a text by SMPE president John Allison, "Standardization of the Motion Picture Industry and the Ideal Studio," which

28 At the time of the group's founding, there was also a plan—though it wasn't immediately realized—to hold conferences that would rotate throughout important German cities. See "Was wir erreichten," 174.

was republished in *Die Kinotechnik* in a translation by Konrad Wolter. They also formed an internal standards committee (*Normenausschuss*) early on and worked closely with the newly formed "Standards Committee of German Industry" to forge some of the first standards in German cinema technology.[29]

Friedrich Kittler famously saw standards as one of the key places where industrial entertainment media reveal their origins in technologies of warfare (e.g. the line leading from the rotating machine gun to Marey's chronophotography to the machinic precision of a film strip moving at 25 frames per second), and human reaction times are subordinated to the agency of the machine understood as *Gleichschaltung* (alignment).[30] But while Kittler may be right to emphasize the context of WWI in which a group such as the Deutscher Normenausschuß (German Norms Committee) could emerge, his anti-humanist model of technological agency does little to help us understand the motivations of a group like the DKG in its focus on standards. For the DKG, the standardization of factors such as the placement and size of perforations on the filmstrip or the construction of sprockets on the transport mechanism was one the first prerequisites for any attempt to 'elevate' film technological production in line with other industrial sectors. As Lassally put it in a programmatic article on standards from November 1919:

> Screws, pencils, wedges, shafts, balance wheels, oilers and so on [...] are not commissioned, constructed, delivered and adjusted in a different manner for each machine, but rather conceived once and for all in as few forms and sizes as possible, produced and stocked in mass and purchased according to need.[31]

> Schrauben, Stifte, Keile, Wellen, Handräder, Öler usw. [...] werden nicht mehr zu jeder Maschine besonders konstruiert, in Auftrag gegeben, gefertigt, geliefert und verarbeitet, sondern ein für allemal in möglichst wenigen Formen und Größen erdacht, massenweise auf Lager produziert und bei Bedarf nur 'bezogen'.

29 For the founding of the Standards Committee, see "Die außerordentliche Generalversammlung der D.K.G.," *Die Kinotechnik* 2, no. 6 (1920), 224. For initial results of the committee's work, see "Die Normung des Filmbandes und seiner Transportorgane," *Die Kinotechnik* 3, no. 18 (1921), 681–92, reprinted in *Kinotechnisches Jahbuch 1922/1923* (Berlin: Hackebeil, 1923), 23–33.

30 Friedrich Kittler, "Gleichschaltungen. Über Normen und Standards in der elektronischen Kommunikation," in *Interface. Elektronische Medien und künstlerische Kreativität*, ed. Klaus Peter Dencker (Hamburg, 1992), 175–77.

31 Arthur Lassally, "Kinematographische Normen," *Die Kinotechnik* 1, no. 3 (1919), 13–14.

But more importantly, standards were a prerequisite for creating a framework in which industrialists, producers and technicians could identify as part of a common team rather than as competitors. Like the newspaper in Benedict Anderson's account of national communities, nation-wide standards would encourage factories, companies and the people they employed to see themselves as part of a shared community engaged in a common project. Thus Lassally's article continued:

> While the standardization of norms already brought significant advantages within a single factory, these advantages were augmented significantly by the unification of norms across an entire industry. The petty competitive viewpoint, which favors intentional deviations in details of production in order to force customers to rely on one's own company for replacement parts, has been recognized as truly uneconomical and abandoned.[32]

> Wenn schon die Normung innerhalb eines einzelnen Fabrikbetriebes erhebliche Vorteile erbrachte, so ergab sich doch eine ganz wesentliche Erweiterung derselben durch die Vereinheitlichung der Normalien für eine ganz Industrie. Der kleinliche Konkurrenzstandpunkt, welcher absichtliche Abweichungen in Kleinigkeiten bei der Ausführung anbringen ließ, um den Kunden beim Bezuge von Ersatzteilen an das eigene Unternehmen zu fesseln, ist als wahrhaft unwirtschaftlich erkannt und verlassen worden.

National standards—understood as a compatible set of ground-rules—thus formed part of the conditions of possibility for any 'crystallization' process of transforming competitors into collaborators. And there can be little doubt that this transformation was one of the key motivations behind the DKG's predominant focus on standards—alongside their work with agencies such as the Prussian fire and police departments—during its early years.

And if standards would help to forge a common playing field, it was also crucial, for any sense of group belonging and professional prestige, to forge something like a canon of shared history.[33] This would help to explain one of the curious features of the Deutsche Kinotechnische Gesellschaft:

32 Ibid.

33 On the importance of a shared history for professional bodies, see for example Laura Lee Swisher and Catherine G. Page, *Professionalism in Physical Therapy: History, Practice and Development* (Elsevier, 2005), 23–35.

namely that a society so resolutely opposed to any approach emphasizing art, aesthetics or culture would nonetheless be the first film society in Germany to value and practice film history.[34] The key figure here—though not the only one to contribute to the group's historiographical work—was Paul Liesegang, an established scholar of 'projection arts,' nephew of the founder of the projection manufacturing company Liesegang and a frequent contributor to *Die Kinotechnik* from the beginning (as well as member of the DKG from at least 1922).[35] In a series of articles, Liesegang discussed many topics from what we would now call 'pre-cinema' such as the history of projected animation pictures,[36] the origins of stereoscopic cinematography,[37] the history of cinematic entrepreneurs,[38] and even the history of the idea of projection leading back to antiquity.[39] The group also introduced a rubric, "Geschichtliches," in 1924 in official recognition of the importance of film history to their mission. The DKG lectures also programmed occasional lectures on the history of cinematic technologies, including several by Liesegang himself,[40] and the society also occasionally screened historical

34 For a good overview of the group's historical activities, see Ralf Forster, "Triumph der Technik. Das filmgeschichtlichte Wirken der Deutschen Kinotechnischen Gesellschaft," in *Wie der Film unsterblich wurde. Vorakademische Filmwissenschaft in Deutschland,* ed. Rolf Aurich and Ralph Forster (Berlin: Edition Text + Kritik, 2015), 167–79.

35 Other figures who made frequent historical contributions were Wolter and Seeber. There were also many series, such as Seeber's series on the history of motion picture cameras and an unsigned series on the historical development of projection machines. In addition, the journal included many one-off contributions, such as Karl Schaum's "Die geschichtliche Entwicklung der Kinematographie," *Die Kinotechnik* 1, no. 3 (1919), 6–9.

36 Liesegang, "Der Urpsrung des Projektionslebensrades. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Kinematographie," *Die Kinotechnik* 2, no. 1 (1920), 6–8; "Ucchatius und das Projektions-Lebensrad," *Die Kinotechnik* 2 (1920), 252–53, 294–96.

37 Liesegang, "Die Anfänge der stereoskopischen Kinematographie. Ein Beitrag zur Entwicklungsgeschichte des Kinematographen," *Die Kinotechnik* 2 (1920), 79–81, 139–41, 175–78, 213.

38 Liesegang, "Ludwig Döbler, der Vorfahre der Kinounternehmer," *Die Kinotechnik* 3, no. 1 (1921), 11–13.

39 The third and fourth issues of the journal included a debate between Wolter and Liesegang on a passage from Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura* that seemed to describe the persistence of images with uncanny prescience. As Liesegang noted, Wolter's references to Lucretius were hardly new: pioneers of animation from Plateau to the photo clubs of the 1890s had commented on Lucretius's apparent prediction of the cinematographic illusion of movement. See Liesegang, "Der römische Dichter Lucrez und der Grundgedanke des Kinematographen," *Die Kinotechnik* 1, no. 4 (1919), 5–6.

40 On 6 November 1922, for example, Liesegang gave a lecture entitled "Entwicklungsgeschichte der Kinematographie." See Max Flinker, "20. ordentl. Sitzung der D.K.G. am 6. November 1922 in der Technischen Hochschule Berlin zu Charlottenburg," *Die Kinotechnik* 4, no. 21 (1922), 804. For other lectures on the history of film technology, see for example Konrad Wolter, "Ortsgruppe München," *Die Kinotechnik* 4, no. 23 (1922), 871; Konrad Wolter, "Die 9. Ordentliche Sitzung," *Die*

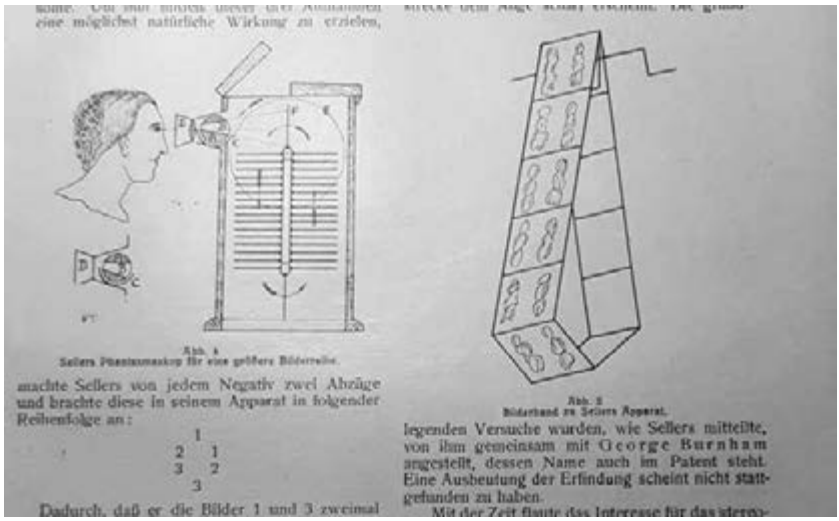

Figure 18: Paul Liesegang, illustrations from "Die Anfänge der stereoskopischen Photographie," *Die Kinotechnik,* May 1920

films.[41] (Figure 18) Liesegang also later went on to propose a "genealogical tree" of cinematography to facilitate easy memory of a common historical development.[42] (Figure 19)

This historiographical activity of the DKG has been noted previously, and film historians have taken particular interest in how the DKG positioned itself within the debate pitting the Skladanowsky Brothers against the Lumière Brothers for the status of 'inventors' of cinema.[43] But while this national question receives some mention in the society minutes, and the Skladanowskys themselves were guests at the group's meeting of 23 November 1920, what I find striking about the early historical contributions of Liesegang and others is how little it appears to have preoccupied them. Indeed, the developments of 1895 rarely play a foregrounded role at all here. That doesn't mean that the DKG didn't have a nationalist mission; on the contrary, as we saw above, the focus on technology can only be understood

Kinotechnik 3, no. 7 (1921), 256; "24. Ordentliche Sitzung der D.K.G.," *Die Die Kinotechnik* 5, no. 9 (1923), 236.

41 See for example Konrad Wolter, "Ortsgruppe München" *Die Kinotechnik* 4, no. 23 (1922), 873; Hans Rolle, "Die 22. ordentliche Sitzung," *Die Kinotechnik* 5, no. 4 (1923), 98.

42 In addition, he published an historical "Timeline of the History of the Cinematograph" dating back to Athanasius Kirchner's projectors from the mid-seventeenth century. See Liesegang, "Zahlentafel zur Geschichte des Kinematographen," *Kinotechnisches Jahrbuch 1922/23* (Berlin: Hackenbeil, 1923), 149–52.

43 Forster, "Triumph der Technik," 169–70.

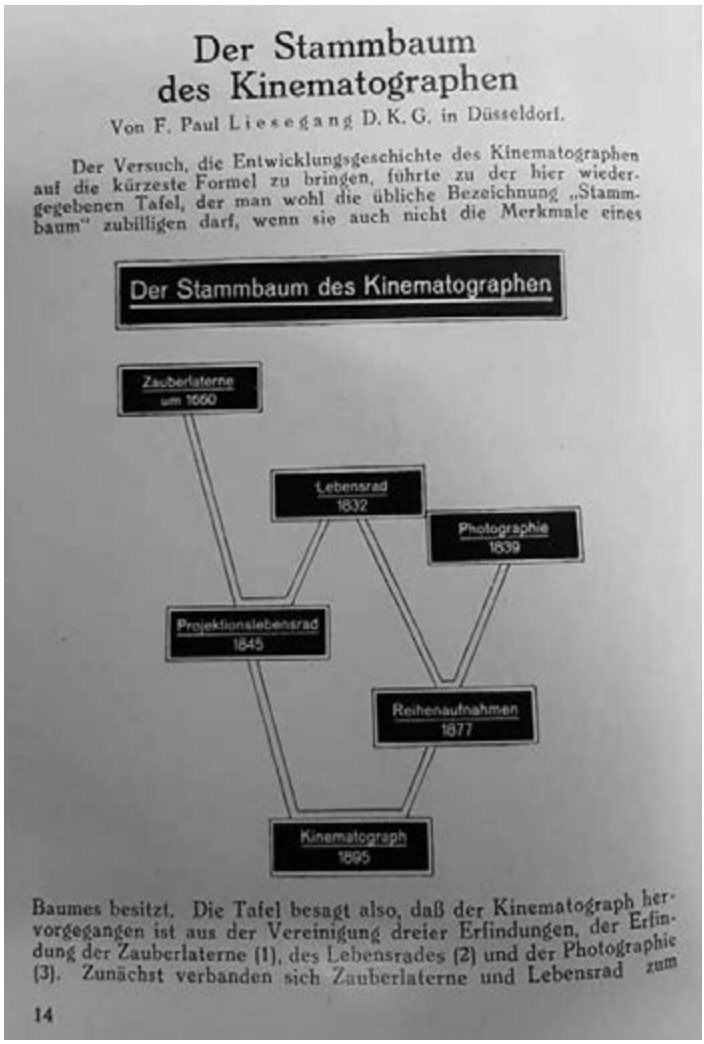

Figure 19: Paul Liesegang, "Der Stammbaum des Kinematographen," from *Kinotechnisches Jahrbuch,* 1924

in the framework of Germany's post-WWI status. But it does mean that the group's understanding of cinema history did not begin with 1895; on the contrary, they sought to frame a much *deeper* history of the film technological 'industry,' and the reasons for this are not hard to imagine: history, here, was serving above all to legitimate the DKG's 'idea' of the German film industry and the professional 'science' of film it sought to work out.

Exemplary, in this respect, was Liesegang's first lecture at the DKG on the "Developmental History of Cinematography" (Entwicklungsgeschichte

der Kinematographie) from 6 November 1922, in which he took readers on a journey from the first magic lanterns of the seventeenth century through the optical toys of Plateau, the projected animations of Franz von Uchatius, the chronophotography of E.-J. Marey and Eadweard Muybridge, and the inventions of Thomas Edison, the Lumières Brothers and Oskar Messter, down to the present day. In Liesegang's lecture, 1895 does not figure as a watershed year, and there is little sense of any need to mark Skladanowsky or the Lumières out as the inventors of cinematography. Much more important is the establishment of a long tradition of progressive film-technological development that could lend meaning to the DKG's work. As the minutes describe the end of Liesegang's lecture: "At the end of his exposition, the lecturer highlighted the importance of the Deutsche Kinotechnische Gesellschaft for the further development [of cinematic technology] and expressed his conviction that this development, as always, will continue in an ascending line" (Zum Schluß seiner Anführungen wies der Vortragende auf die Bedeutung der 'Deutschen Kinotechnischen Gesellschaft' für die Weiterentwicklung hin und gab der Überzeugung Ausdruck, daß diese Entwicklung, wie immer, in aufsteigender Linie erfolgen werde).[44] In other words, Liesegang's historical contributions—though they might have built on archival work he had been undertaking for some time—were being repurposed here as a presentation of the 'prehistory' of a professional organization, one that would legitimate that organization's claim to being the best-placed professional body to guide the development of the cinema technological industry. In this sense, Lumière was no more important to Liesegang than a figure like the Viennese magician and phantascope pioneer Ludwig Döbler (1801-1864), who he described in another article as the "ancestor of the cinema entrepreneur."[45] It also bears adding that this need for a prehistory wasn't even limited to projection (Liesegang's specialty) or cameras (the specialty of Seeber),[46] but also encompassed the history of all of the other technological sectors making up the cinema technological industry as the DKG understood it, including optical glass,[47] photochemical developing,[48] copy machines,[49] celluloid,[50]

44 "20. ordentl. Sitzung," 804.

45 Paul Liesegang, "Ludwig Döbler. Der Vorfahre der Kinounternehmer," *Die Kinotechnik* 3, no. 1 (1922), 11–13.

46 See especially Seeber's article series "Der kinematographische Aufnahme-Apparat," which ran from March 1920 to December 1921 and gave a long historical overview of film camera development.

47 See Konrad Wolter, "Die 10. ordentliche Sitzung der D.K.G," *Die Kinotechnik* 3, no. 13 (1921), 491.

48 Paul Rehländer, "Chemie und Kinotechnik," *Die Kinotechnik* 3, no. 14 (1921), 526–27.

49 See Hans Rolle, "Die 28. ordentliche Sitzung der DKG," *Die Kinotechnik* 5, no. 21–22 (1923), 502.

50 P. Martell, "Zur Geschichte des Zelluloids," *Die Kinotechnik* 11, no. 21 (1929), 568–69.

and other technologies (not to mention patenting systems), whose histories were frequently outlined in the lectures from experts in those areas.

Cinema Science as a Vocation

Alongside the empirical goal of improving film technological production, then, what was happening here was also an effort to render intelligible something like a 'profession' of film technicians, and the Deutsche Kinotechnische Gesellschaft—unlike some of the more amateur film clubs—can be usefully approached through the tools developed by the sociology of professions. Early sociologists of the professions emphasized the way in which professionalism demanded an ethics of service, disinterestedness and devotion to a greater cause. "The professional man is not thought of as engaged in the pursuit of his personal profit," Talcott Parsons explained in 1939, "but in performing services to his patients and clients, or to impersonal values like the advancement of science."[51] Subsequent theorists of the professions, writing in the wake of Foucaultian studies, have argued that such an ethics of 'disinterested' service in fact concealed profound struggles for power and prestige. Magali Sarfatti Larson's work in the 1980s, for example, examined how professional groups lay claim to social authority by constructing forms of 'expertise' to distinguish themselves from the 'amateurs' on whom they nonetheless rely for recognition.[52] More recently, Andrew Abbott has characterized professionalism (in distinction to theories of neat functional differentiation claimed by early sociologists such as Parsons) as a constantly evolving ecology marked by the ongoing struggle among various groups to frame expert knowledge in ways that establish their own jurisdiction over it.[53]

All of these theories of professions can help us to understand the stakes of the DKG's efforts to forge a community of professionals. Like Parsons's disinterested professional, the group—and the writers for *Die*

51 Talcott Parsons, "The Professions and Social Structure," *Social Forces* 17, no. 4 (1939), 458. See also Layton, *Revolt of the Engineers,* 4–5.

52 Magali Sarfatti Larson, "The Production of Expertise and the Constitution of Expert Power," in *The Authority of Experts*, ed. Thomas L. Haskell (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 28–76; Abbott, "Linked Ecologies," *Sociological Theory* 23, no. 3 (2005), 245–74. As Larson put it, construct expertise always entails the simultaneous construction of a lay public, who would "have in common with the experts the knowledge and social-cognitive map that allows them to understand the marks of expertise" (ibid.)

53 Andrew Abbott, *The System of Professions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

Kinotechnik—consistently appealed to values such as "honor" (*Ehre*), "conscience" (*Gewissen*) and "impartiality" (*Interessenlosigkeit*) to describe the kinds of ethics they demanded that their members adopt.[54] Indeed, from the first issue of *Die Kinotechnik,* the editors stylized themselves as impartial arbiters of film-technological debate and vowed never to publish articles written out of economic self-interest (i.e. as fronts for a specific company), but only contributions written in the service of the greater good.[55] The group also championed rituals meant to instill a sense of self-sacrifice in the various branches of the film industry. A good example can be seen in a discussion of projectionists in the opening editorial of the fourth issue of *Die Kinotechnik*. There, the editors argue that the American "Bund der Vorführer" (Projectionists' League) founded by *Motion Picture News* offers an excellent model for inculcating a sense of "honor in one's profession" ("Ehre seines Standes"), and they call on the projectionists among their readers to adopt an honorary oath, similar to that of the Americans, to always return films in the condition in which they found them:

> As a cinema projectionist, committed to the interests of my profession and eager to contribute to the elimination of the unsatisfactory conditions that predominate in projection booths, I promise that I will do everything in my power to send films back to distributors in flawless condition. Furthermore, should the necessity arise, I will fix any damaged pieces of film and any faulty splices that I might encounter in film copies sent to me. In this way, I will work hand-in-hand with my fellow film projectionists to the advantage of all those who organize or patronize film projections by projecting films that are free of such defects. I also promise that I will not punch any marker holes into the film strip, and should I receive a film with such holes, I will inform the distributor so that he may seek out the guilty party.[56]

54 An illustrative example can be seen in the first sentence of the opening editorial to the May 1920 edition: "Der Mahnruf, den die *Kinotechnik* seit dem ersten Tage ihres Bestehens allen ihren Lesern, allen in ernster und gewissenhafter Arbeit an der Fortentwicklung der technischen deutschen Film- und Kinoapparatenbau-Industrie tätigen Ingenieuren und Technikern, Wissenschaftlern und Praktikern in immer neuer Ton- und Klangart zurief: vereint Eure Kräfte, verbündet Euer Können und Euer Wissen, macht Eure Erfahrungen zu gemeinsamem Gut, nehmt voneinander, indem Ihr einander gebt, damit die Gesamtheit, durch das Vermögen eines jeden einzelnen bereichert, zu einer Macht werde, die zu den höchsten Leistungen auf dem sichersten Wege fähig werde, —dieser Mahnruf, indem von vornherein die Idee dieser Zeitschrift verkörpert liegt, ist nicht im Winde gehallt." "Was wir erreichten," 173.

55 See "Was wir wollen," 4.

56 "Was wir vorschlagen," *Die Kinotechnik* 1, no.4 (1919), 5.

> Als Kino-Vorführer, dem die Interessen seines Berufes am Herzen liegen, und der gewillt ist, mitzuhelfen an der Abstellung der Übelstände, die im Vorührungsraum herrschen, verspreche ich, daß ich nach meinen besten Kräften alles tun will, um die Filme an den Verleiher wieder in einwandfreier Beschaffenheit zurückzusenden. Ferner will ich, wenn sich die Notwendigkeit herausstellt, alle schadhaften Filmstücke, alle schlechten Klebestellen, die ich in den von mir empfangenen Filmen finden sollte, in Ordnung bringen. Auf diese Weise will ich mit meinen Vorführer-Kollegen Hand in Hand arbeiten und dadurch im Sinne aller Derer wirken, die Kino-Vorführungen veranstalten oder besuchen, indem ich Filme vorführe, die frei sind von allen Fehlern der genannten Art. Ich verspreche auch, daß ich keine Markierungslöcher in den Film stanzen will, und wenn ich einen Film mit solchen Löchern bekomme, dann will ich den Verleiher davon in Kenntnis setzen, damit er dem Schuldigen auf die Spur gehen kann.

The DKG sought to inculcate precisely this sense of honorable service to film technology as a whole, transforming an ethics of self-interest into an ethics of self-sacrifice to the larger cause of professional standards.

Such rituals suggest that the professional habitus of the German film engineer was not a foregone conclusion in 1919, but a project under construction, one for which *Die Kinotechnik* and the DKG formed a central construction site. But if that habitus laid explicit claim to values of impartiality, it also included many other aspects that would lend themselves to analyses informed by Larson and Abbott's examination of the imbrications between professionalism and claims to social authority. The most obvious of these was the group's thoroughgoing insistence on technological expertise itself. The refusal of "belletristic" contributions was a key part of this demarcation of territory. As stated above, both *Die Kinotechnik* and the *DKG* distinguished themselves from other societies and publications by their near total focus on the apparatus—what happens behind the screen—paired with an avoidance of any discussions of symbolic strategies or aesthetic effects. For the *DKG,* film was less an art on the screen than an ensemble of technologies and techniques, including such disparate elements as coal, electricity, chemicals, drying racks, copying machines, lighting apparatuses, patents, glass production, perforation machines and cogwheels. (Figure 20) One mark of expertise was to focus on these material and industrial elements rather than on stars, acting techniques, film sets or the art of directors.

However, this is not to say that the group avoided watching any films, but only that they watched differently from other kinds of film societies. In fact,

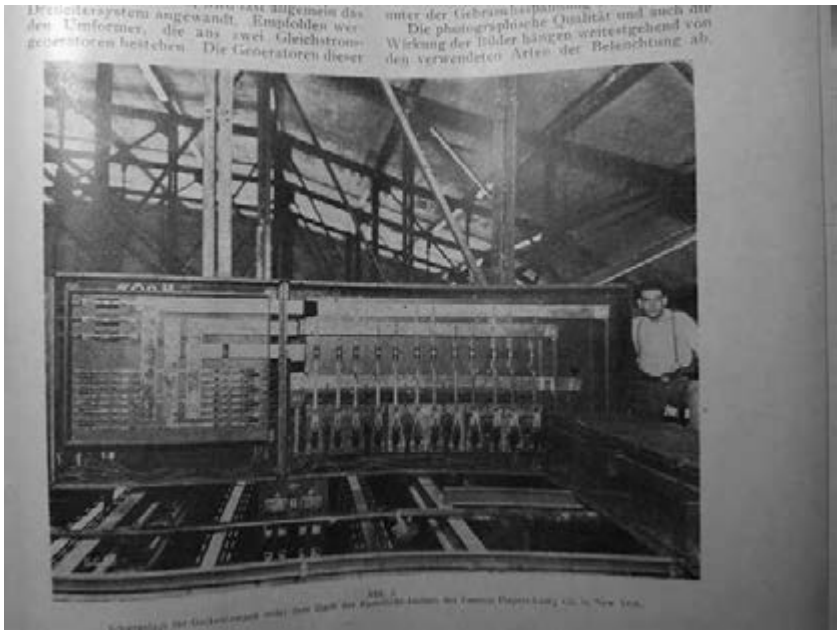

Figure 20: Switchboard for studio lighting, *Die Kinotechnik,* 1921

the DKG's founding statutes called explicitly for, among other things, the inclusion of "experimental projections" (*experimentelle Vorführungen*) during their meetings, and many, if not most, lectures were indeed accompanied by screenings.[57] The key distinction here is that such collective screenings were nearly always designed to test or showcase factors beyond the image on the screen, whether it was a screening of slow-motion cinematography (still a new technology at the time), a screening of different film stocks or safety film or a screening showcasing new methods of camera movement. These screenings were part of a larger practice of experimental demonstrations (of lenses, projectors, film stocks, etc.) intended above all as tests of the supporting technologies. A telling detail here is that, quite often, the same material was screened multiple times or in multiple versions side-by-side in order to compare film technologies, for example when the same footage was shown with different projector lamps,[58] or when the same footage was

57 "Was wir erreichten," 174.

58 See "Die zweite ordentliche Sitzung der D.K.G." *Die Kinotechnik* 2, no. 9 (1920), 343; an exception to this rule would be the occasional screening of historical film materials, as for instance when Seeber held a lecture on the historical development of film cameras. See "Die 22. ordentliche Sitzung," *Die Kinotechnik* 5, no. 4 (1923), 98.

screened on different portable projectors.[59] Such screenings were more or less indifferent to the *content* of the films screened, which could just as easily come from the realms of entertainment or advertising film as it could from science and education. In this sense, the DKG's screening practices differed from those of groups like the Kosmos Klub and the Kinematographische Studiengesellschaft and especially from the later arthouse cine-clubs discussed in the next chapter. The group also sought to institute a different kind of viewing, one that laid claim to expertise by reading the filmic image not as a self-enclosed aesthetic object or a representation of the world, but as the imprint of off-screen techniques and technologies (and judging its 'quality' according to this standard).

Indeed, despite their explicit rejection of 'belletristic' criticism, the editors of *Die Kinotechnik* even instituted such a counter-model of film criticism in 1920 when they issued a call for readers to submit so-called "technische Kritiken" (technological reviews) of the latest films on the market according to technological rather than aesthetic criteria.[60] At first, the uptake of technological critiques was slow, though there were sporadic reviews of films such as Robert Reinert's sensational *Nerven* (*Nerves,* 1919) from a reader who judged the film to be "technisch minderwertig" (technically inferior) or a glowing critique by Hans Pander of Arnold Fanck's *Wunder des Schneeschuhs* (*Miracle of the Ski Shoe,* 1921).[61] By the mid-20s, however, the *technische Filmkritik* had become a regular rubric, with writers discussing in-depth phenomena such as the use of montage in *Der heilige Berg* (*The Sacred Mountain,* 1926) or the use of double exposures in Abel Gance's *Napoleon* (1927).[62] They also ran a lengthy critique of *Metropolis* (1927), praising the technical mastery of Karl Freund (a DKG member) and the use of Shüfftan effects, while ridiculing the film's highly symbolic representations of factory

59 See Konrad Wolter, "Ortsgruppe München der D.K.G.," *Die Kinotechnik* 5, no. 23–24 (1923), 538.

60 "Was wir übersehen," *Die Kinotechnik* 2 no. 2 (1920), 41.

61 For the *Nerven* critique, see "Beiträge unserer Leser," *Die Kinotechnik* 2, no. 2 (1921), 62. For Pander's critique of the Fanck film, see "Zeitschriftenschau," *Die Kinotechnik* 3, no. 16 (1921), 625. The Fanck film had already been the subject of a DKG screening earlier in the same year, in which members praised the film's technological mastery. See Konrad Wolter, "Der 6. Ordentliche Sitzung der D.K.G.," *Die Kinotechnik* 3, no. 3 (1921), 98.

62 See R.T., "Technische Filmkritik: Der heilige Berg," *Die Kinotechnik* 9, no. 2. (1927), 45; Hans Pander, "Technische Filmkritik: Napoleon," *Die Kinotechnik* 9, no. 21 (1927), 572–74. The group also encouraged students at the Cinema Technological section of the Munich Film School (discussed further below) to undertake technological critiques of film copies lent to the school by UFA, Emelka and other companies. See "Kinotechnische Abteilung der Deutschen Filmschule zu München," *Kinotechnisches Jahrbuch 1922/23* (Berlin: Hackenbeil, 1923), 18

technology and factory work, which were shown through the eyes of "coffee house literati" (*Kaffeehaus-Literaten*) rather than professional engineers:

> During the 310 days of shooting, was there not a single technician in all the studios of the UFA who might have passed by and noticed one of these ridiculous images and gently alerted the producers that something just isn't right here? […] Who operates the transformers on the set, etc.? Or perhaps the switchboard operator who happened upon the scene simply couldn't speak because he was laughing so hard when he saw his colleagues engaged in "continuous rhythmical gymnastics."[63]

> Ist in den ganzen Ateliers der UFA kein einziger Techniker, der in den 310 Aufnahmetagen mal bei einer dieser unmöglichen Bilder während der Aufnahme zufällig vorbeikam, und die Aufnahmeleitung schonend darauf aufmerksam machte, daß hierbei scheinbar irgend etwas nicht stimme? […] Wer bedient die Umformer usw.? Oder konnte der zufällig vorbeikommende Schalttafelwärter des Ateliers vor Lachen nicht sprechen, als er seine Kollegen "rhythmische Dauerübungen" machen sah?

Such critiques, offering a counter-model to the emerging practice of aesthetic film criticism, functioned not simply to judge products on the market, but also to hone and perform a certain type of 'expert' looking, one that does not see the filmic image for its inherent qualities (good or bad), but rather sees *through* the filmic image, reading it as a window on to all the professional work going on behind the scenes.

Scott Curtis has argued that German medical practitioners worked to construct an expert 'scientific' mode of viewing founded on its distinction from the masses who were seduced by popular film.[64] Something analogous, we may now argue, was happening with the practices of film watching in the DKG, though the marks of expertise were also specific to the knowledge jurisdiction (film technology) to which this group was laying claim. If the masses of filmgoers were caught up in narrative logic, emotional close-ups or spectacular special effects, the trained eyes of the DKG—not entirely unlike later apparatus theorists of the 1960s, even if their politics were very different—would see through the filmic image to the apparatus behind it.

63 R. T., "Technische Filmkritik: Metropolis," *Die Kinotechnik* 9, no. 4 (1927), 103.

64 Scott Curtis, *The Shape of Spectatorship: Art, Science and Early Cinema in Germany* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 140.

Figure 21: Members of the Deutsche Kinotechnische Gesellschaft at the first anniversary meeting in May 1921

Here I would be remiss not to highlight another aspect of this claim to expert viewing: its gendered coding. Unlike other groups examined in this study, the DKG was, to all appearances, entirely male. (Figure 21) At one level, this gendered aspect might be seen simply as a reflection of the kinds of industrial professions from which the DKG's members came, which were themselves still reserved overwhelmingly for men. But that very fact also informed the idea of the 'film industry' and the expert engineer that the DKG sought to legitimate: an idea which—unlike the evolving professions of editing, acting or even directing—had little space for women. That is also to say that the 'expert eye' claimed and trained by the DKG was indelibly coded as a 'masculine' eye in contrast the 'feminine' form of spectatorship associated with cinema audiences.

If such 'expert viewing' informed the way in which the group watched films, it applied no less to the politics of image reproduction for readers of *Die Kinotechnik* itself. Unlike other industry journals, *Die Kinotechnik* rarely published images of film stills and never images of stars. Indeed, it tended to avoid publishing aesthetic images at all, with the notable exception of a few soft-focus 'portraits' of key technologies such as the "Erster Deutscher Filmer," the first German-made film camera from the Ertel factory in 1921. (Figure 22). What it *did* seek to publish along with most of the articles were

Figure 22: "Erster Deutscher Filmer" (first German camera), *Die Kinotechnik,* 1920

'expert images,' such as charts, graphs, flow-charts and engineer drawings. (Figure 23) These were informational images, which demanded to be read in ways that only experts literate in the relevant codes could do, and the ability to read such images was itself one of the markers of expertise required of anyone aspiring to enter into the DKG's professional community. Indeed, one of the group's frequent complaints about the current state of the German film industry was that most German producers of cinema apparatuses had no idea how to make engineer drawings (*Konstruktionszeichnungen*), and this went hand in hand with their reliance on personal intuition and near total lack of attention to mathematical laws and elementary physical principles.[65] The graphs, charts and other illustrations presented in the journal sought to counter this tendency. Whatever else these drawings might have represented, they signaled a downplaying of artistic intuition and imagination and a new emphasis on the values of scientificity: measurements, principles and laws.

The privileging of such mathematically calculated images also points to another touchstone of the professional habitus cultivated and constructed

65 See for example "Was wir brauchen," 4.

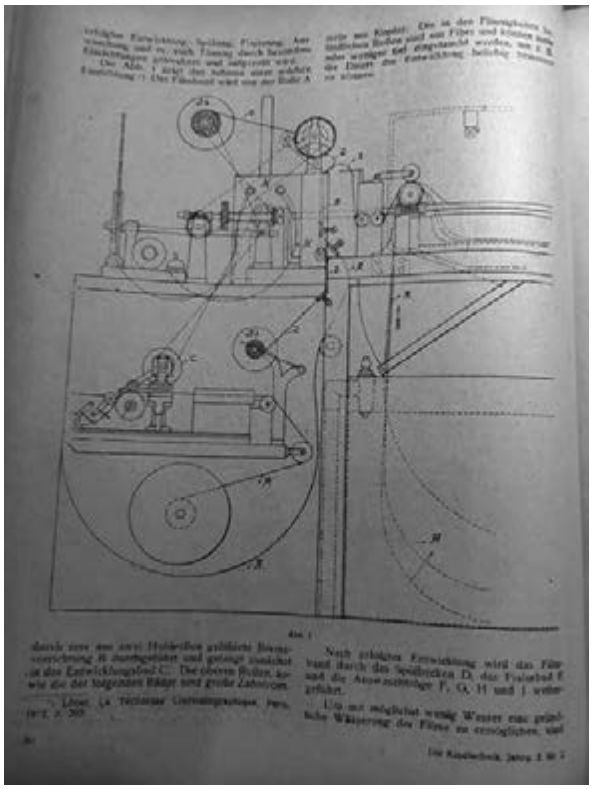

Figure 23: Schematic drawing of film development technology, *Die Kinotechnik,* 1920

by the group: that of 'objectivity.' Again and again, they argued that film production, distribution and projection, currently reliant on the whims and intuitions of practitioners, needed to be rethought on a scientific basis: in order to be professional, the film industry must be automated, as it were, and freed from the subjectivity of artisan producers. This was the gist, for example, of an article in the first issue of *Die Kinotechnik* by Paul Liesegang in which he lamented that projection speeds were still subject to the intuitive judgment of projectionists (or even the occasional practice of speeding up projections to get through more material in a single cinema program). Even with the best intentions and intuitive grasp of the movements on the screen, such practices could never match exactly the speed of filming.[66] What was needed, instead, was an objective (i.e., machinic) system for camera operators

66 Paul Liegang, "Ein Aufruf an Filmwerke und Lichtspielhäuser: Bewegungswahre Wiedergabe von Filmaufnahmen," *Die Kinotechnik* 1, no. 1 (1919), 7–9.

to record speeds numerically and for projectionists to reproduce them on an analogous numerical scale built into projectors. The importance of the article to the journal's editors is suggested by the fact that they accompanied it with a special introduction demanding that all factory owners, camera operators and theater owners read it and contribute to Liesegang's proposed reform. And the article exemplified the larger tendency of the DKG to favor objectivity over human judgment and to suppress the subjectivity of technicians and projectionists in favor of mathematical precision. Indeed, such objectivity was a prerequisite for any *science* of cinema: "In our group, craftsmanship is once again giving way to a *science* of cinematography" (Die *Wissenschaft* der Kinematographie kristallisiert sich bei uns aus dem Handwerkmäßigen wieder heraus).[67] This value also explains the group's deep investment in the automation of such processes as film development and film copying.[68] "Handicraft," they wrote approvingly at one point in the minutes, "has been completely eliminated from copying technology" (Die Handarbeit wurde ganz aus der Kopiertechnik ausgeschaltet).[69] It is also another factor that attracted the group to American film production, where the studio system seemed to take film production out of the hands of individual artists, making it instead into an autonomous and self-regulating industry. As one member explained in a lecture from 1922 recounting his trip to American film studios: "In all phases of work [in America], the goal is to assure the end result remains independent of the person doing the work" (Bei allen Arbeitsvorgängen wird angestrebt, das Endresultat der Arbeit unabhängig von der Person des Arbeitenden zu machen).[70]

The Ecology of 'Industry': Film Technology vs. Film Trades

All these markers of scientific 'expertise' informed the group's efforts to lay claim to—in Andrew Abbott's phrase—a "jurisdiction" over their knowledge domain. That struggle for jurisdiction can be felt in the group's efforts, described above, to define its area of competence against the "belletristic" approach of most societies and magazines. It can also be felt in those sections where the editors of *Die Kinotechnik* sought to position themselves

67 "Der große Katechismus des Kinotechnikers," 10.

68 See for example, "Automatische Filmentwicklung," *Die Kinotechnik* 2, no. 2 (1920), 49–51; "Neue automatische Kopiermaschinen," *Die Kinotechnik* 3, no. 15 (1921), 565–68.

69 "Die 28. ordentliche Sitzung der DKG," 502.

70 "18. ordentl. Sitzung der D.K.G. am 26. September 1922 in der Technischen Hochschule Berlin zu Charlottenburg," *Die Kinotechnik* 4, no. 16 (1922), n.p.

as the authoritative experts on all questions of film technology against other technology journals. Not infrequent, for example, were critiques of popular technological publications such as *Die Umschau,* which the editors faulted for its insufficient grasp of film technology.[71] No less palpable is the negotiation of their status vis-à-vis analogous European groups, such as the film technological section of the French *Société de la Photographie,* founded a year after the DKG in 1921, which the DKG followed with both interest and a keen sense of competition.[72]

Perhaps more significantly, the DKG lamented the founding of a second journal, *Die Filmtechnik,* by Seeber and Konrad Wolter themselves in 1925—which promised to combine the interest in film technology with artistic questions—for its incursion into their jurisdiction. Though it is not entirely clear why Seeber and Wolter left the DKG to found another journal,[73] what is clear is that the DKG perceived the move as a threat to their own efforts to speak for the film technological sector, as they stated in a special note they published for readers of *Die Kinotechnik* in early 1925:

> We are of the opinion that this new publication in no way corresponds to "an urgent necessity." [...] The appearance of a new professional journal will of necessity lead to a splintering with highly regrettable effects on the scientific and practical promotion of our cinematic technology.[74]

> Wir sind der Auffassung, daß diese Neuerscheinung in keiner Weise "einer dringenden Notwendigkeit" entspricht. [...] Hier muss das Erscheinen eines neuen Fachblatts notgedrungen zu einer Zersplitterung führen, die vom Standpunkt der praktischen und wissenschaftlichen Förderung unserer Technik aufs tiefste bedauert werden kann.

If the competition from *Die Filmtechnik* created such a stir, this was partly because it seemed to be reduplicating the model of *Die Kinotechnik*; among other things, *Die Filmtechnik* was initially intended to serve as the journal of the Österreichische Kinotechnische Verein (Austrian Cinema Technological Association), a direct counterpart to the DKG led by Paul Schrott (an editor of *Die Filmtechnik*), and the journal would

71 See "Zeitschriftenschau," *Die Kinotechnik* 2, no. 5 (1920), n.p.

72 See "Zeitschriftenschau," *Die Kinotechnik* 3, no. 1 (1921), 26.

73 On this point, see also Martin Reinart, "A Window of Opportunities: A Brief History of the German Technical Journal *Die Filmtechnik* Between 1925 and 1932," https://www.reinhart.media/filmtechnik.

74 "An unsere Leser!," *Die Kinotechnik* 7, no. 6 (1925), 144.

employ many of the same writers from *Die Kinotechnik* (such as Lassally and Liesegang).

But the tension wasn't only about turf; by all appearances, *Die Filmtechnik* was also heading towards a different understanding of the film industry from that of the DKG, one that went beyond—as the founding editorial put it—the "pure technician strictly conceived" to encompass the various groupings of artists and tradespeople that had grown up around cinema: actors, directors, set designers, script writers, lighting technicians, film copiers, theater owners, projections, musicians and advertising specialists.[75] The need for a forum to represent film tradespeople became increasingly felt over the course of the 1920s, particularly after the founding of the Spio (Spitzenorganization der Filmwirtschaft) in 1923 to represent the economic interests of film production companies, distributors, theater owners and other industry employers. And this was, at least in part, one of the needs that *Die Filmtechnik* evolved to meet. The new journal, the editors promised, would provide articles that were more useful for people working in the film trades (as well as people from other areas—teachers, businessmen, etc.—who needed to use film in their own careers) in "easily graspable" language.[76] And it was clearly arranged *for* the various trades, with rubrics not only on film technology, but also on film music, acting, directing, screenwriting, advertising and other areas (not to mention an increasing focus on aesthetics in film criticism and articles on the avant-garde).[77] *Die Filmtechnik* also quickly became home to several emerging trade organizations such as the Klub der Kameraleute Deutschlands (Club of German Camera Operators) and the Vereinigung der Lichtspielvoführer (Association of Cinema Projectionists).[78] And in January 1929, this link to the evolving trades of film practitioners was formalized when *Die Filmtechnik* became the organ of the newly-founded trade union Dachorganisation der filmschaffenden Künstler Deutschlands (Umbrella Organization for the Creative Film Artists of Germany, Dacho), which formed to represent the interests of film artists and workers in the face of increasingly powerful media conglomerates like the UFA (with their representation in the Spio).[79]

75 "Zum Geleit," *Die Filmtechnik* 1, no. 1 (1925), 1.

76 Ibid.

77 For the relation between *Filmtechnik* and the artistic avant-garde, see Reinhart, "A Window of Opportunities."

78 On the founding of the Klub der Kameraleute, see "Der Zusammenschluss der Kameraleute," *Die Filmtechnik* 1, Sonderausgabe (10 December 1925), 351–54. For minutes of the Vereinigung der Lichtspielvorführer, see for example *Die Filmtechnik* 2, no. 12 (1926).

79 See "In Reih' und Glied," *Die Filmtechnik* 5, no. 1 (1929).

No doubt, this model of the film industry focused on questions of labor and employment posed a challenge to the efforts of the DKG and *Die Kinotechnik* to articulate a model of a manufacturing industry led and managed by expert scientists and engineers. But the threat didn't emerge from nowhere. In the early years of the DKG, there was already a palpable tension between theorists and practitioners even within the group, which sometimes could not avoid making itself felt in the minutes of its meetings. That tension boiled into the open in a group meeting in early 1923, when the filmmaker Alexander Kossowsky of Kosso-Film (remembered today as one of the editors of the *Kulturfilmbuch* of 1924) voiced a litany of complaints about the DKG's treatment of practitioners, who had "always been so reticent to participate either verbally or through writing."[80] Kossowsky felt that both the journal and the group marginalized the voices of strict practitioners (*reine Praktiker*), and that when the latter did try to make contributions, they were generally dismissed in a condescending (*schulmeisterlich*) manner.[81] Hans Rolle, acting as chair and spokesman for the DKG's scientists, defended the group's good intentions and chalked Kossowsky's complaints up to his own "misfortunes" (*Mißgeschick*), adding that "the practitioners apparently haven't yet understood the full significance of exchanging ideas with technology experts."[82] While it is unclear precisely what misfortunes Rolle's accusation referred to here, it is not difficult to see what bothered Kossowsky. While the DKG had plenty of room for factory owners, its model of the industry as a domain of academic consultation and technological production—along with its insistence on science and its disparaging view of intuitive, experience-based knowledge—left little room for the voices of artists and craftspeople. Another of Kossowsky's key complaints was that the DKG did not allow for "Fachgruppen" in which such practitioners could come together to discuss their craft.[83] Precisely that model would find a home in *Die Filmtechnik* (which explicitly devoted sections to camerawork, lighting, directing, etc.), and it would come to structure the way in which the Dacho was organized a few years later. The DKG, for its part, still operated on a model largely focused on expert scientists, with practitioners playing a subordinate role.

This tension between scientists and practitioners—and the two evolving models of 'industry' it underlay—also came to the fore in another domain

80 See "Protokoll der ordentlichen Hauptversammlung der Deutschen Kinotechnischen Gesellschaft E.V.," *Die Kinotechnik* 5, no. 7 (1923), 183

81 Ibid., 182.

82 Ibid., 183.

83 Ibid.

in which the DKG sought to establish its professional jurisdiction: film education. This was, in fact, part of an international rise of film schools in the period around WWI. The best-known instance is the founding of the Moscow Film School in 1919. But there were also many initiatives that resulted in individual courses and professorships, such as the courses in photoplay composition offered by Columbia University as early as 1915, the integration of film courses at the Fach- und Gewerbeschule in Düsseldorf starting in 1919 or the introduction of lectures on film at the Universität Münster in 1921.[84] In fact, the DKG took great interest in all these developments,[85] and from the beginning, it sought to formalize education in film technology—what it called a *Kinotechnikum*—in order to reproduce the expertise to which it laid claim.[86] For a short time in 1920, the group collaborated with the recently founded Filmliga society towards the creation of a broader "German Film University" ("Deutsche Filmhochschule") in Berlin.[87] In some ways, this endeavor to found what the group also described as a "Film-Studien-Anstalt" might recall the projects of the 'cinematographic study societies' covered in the last chapter.[88] But the DKG's project was different. What they had in mind was not the use of film as a tool for the study of other areas, but rather something much more institutional and professional: the creation of a university discipline for the study of film technology itself. This is also one of the sources of the project's ultimate failure. The DKG was much more interested in creating a new department within their own home base at the Technical University, while the Filmliga and other groups involved sought an independent structure. More broadly, as Peter Slansky outlines, there was a strong level of mistrust between the DKG's vision of an academic 'science of cinema' and the vision of a film vocational school maintained by practitioners and representatives of film companies.[89]

Despite the failure of that joint venture, the DKG was still involved in two successful endeavors in film education in Germany: the creation of a film technology laboratory at the Technische Hochschule in Berlin and the

84 See "Film-Kolleg in Münster," *Der Lehrfilm* 2, no. 10 (1921), 14.

85 See for example "Technische Rundschau," *Die Kinotechnik* 2, no. 5 (1920), 270.

86 For the term *Kinotechnikum,* see for example "Was wir brauchen," 5.

87 On this collaboration, see Peter Slansky, *Filmhochschulen in Deutschland. Geschichte – Typologie – Architektur* (Berlin: Edition Text + Kritik, 2011), 71–79. As the English language doesn't recognize the distinction between *Hochschule* and *Universität,* I use the term "university" as a translation for both in what follows. See also Konrad Wolter, "Festsitzung zur Feier des einjährigen Bestehens der Gesellschaft, 24 May 1921," *Die Die Kinotechnik* 3, no. 6 (1921), 217–20.

88 "4. Ordentliche Sitzung," *Die Kinotechnik* 2, no. 11 (1920), 423.

89 Slansky, *Filmhochschulen in Deutschland,* 79–80.

founding of the German Film School (Deutsche Filmschule) in Munich. But these two endeavors once again display the tensions between an academic science and vocational education. The first of them—culminating in the creation of a "Prüf- und Versuchsanstalt für Kinotechnik" (Control and Test Institute for Film Technology) in the Photo-Chemical Department of the Technische Hochschule—was the direct outcome of the DKG's efforts to gain academic legitimacy for its vision of a 'science of cinema' guiding the film-technological industry. Opened in November 1921 and headed by Carl Forch (who received an honorary professorship), the Prüf- und Versuchsanstalt was essentially a university laboratory where technicians could test film technologies and students could write practice-based dissertations (though in practice few students enrolled).[90] Its founding can hardly be understood outside of the still recent university reforms, in which polytechnics had gained university status as a result of the efforts of engineering groups to increase their public authority. Indeed, the prime example of this new kind of university was the Technische Hochschule itself, which had been granted university status after lobbying by the Verein Deutscher Ingenieure. In many ways the DKG was following in the footsteps of the VDI, which had maintained its own Prüfstelle (control laboratory) for years.

The institute understood its role as one of consultancy and expert opinion (*Beratung und Gutachtung*),[91] a status of impartial and authoritative arbiter of industry claims to which the DKG had long aspired, and the new institute wasted no time asserting its authority by conducting tests allowing it to arbitrate important questions of the day, ranging from fire-safe film stock and different methods of storing film to technologies of film color and apparatuses for microcinematography.[92] The group's pronouncements in this regard were not always uncontroversial. One polemic, for instance, revolved around the subject of daylight projection (an important topic in

90 See "Die Prüf- und Versuchsanstalt für Kinotechnik an der Techn. Hochschule Berlin. Gründungs-Statut," *Die Kinotechnik* 3, no. 13 (1921), 483–84; Konrad Wolter, "Die 11. Ordentliche Sitzung der D.K.G.," *Die Kinotechnik* 3, no. 15 (1921), 573–74. On the dissertations, see "Jahresbericht des geschäftsführenden Vorstitzenden," *Die Kinotechnik* 5, no. 7 (1923), 182. On the types of tests being conducted, see "Die Ziele und Aufgaben der Prüf- und Versuchsanstalt für Kinotechnik an der Technischen Hochschule Berlin zu Charlottenburg," in *Kinotechnisches Jahrbuch 1922/1923* (Berlin: Hackebeil, 1923), 10: "Es wurde bisher die Untersuchung stromsparender Vorrichtungen für die Projektion, neuer Objektive, des Reflexionsvermögens von Projektionsschirmen, der photographischen und mechanischen Eigenschaften neuer Filme, die Prüfung fehlerhafte bzw. zweifelhafter Negativ- und Positivmaterialien u. a. m. im Auftrag gegeben."

91 "Jahresbericht des geschäftsführenden Vorstitzenden," 182.

92 See for example Adolf Miethe, "Mitteilungen aus der Prüf- und Versuchsanstalt für Kinotechnik," *Die Kinotechnik* 4, no. 10 (1922), 379–83.

educational film circles, as we saw in the previous chapter). In March 1920, the editors of *Die Kinotechnik* had published a special discussion of such projectors, which singled out the company Perlen-Tageslichtwand for critique on account of its false claim to have achieved daylight visibility through frontal projection. (The article claimed to have tested a Perle screen only to have it fail miserably.[93]) When the editors continued to critique the Perle company in subsequent issues in 1920, the company sent them a cease and desist letter and even brought a lawsuit.[94] No further mention of the lawsuit can be found in subsequent issues of the journal or the society's minutes, but the following year, the DKG made it known (likely prompted by the Perle lawsuit) that those redacting the society's meeting minutes should use extreme caution when singling out companies for critique.[95]

Another polemic revolved around the Berlin chemist Gustav Schaaf, a DKG member who claimed to have found a method for rendering nitrate celluloid film non-flammable without sacrificing any of the nitrate picture quality. Schaaf recounted how he had thrown entire nitrate reels into a blazing fire only to produce slight burns on the outer layers, and the DKG even screened some of those 'samples' in a meeting in February 1922, while stopping the projector for 5 minutes to test for burns, and were amazed at the results.[96] But they also suspected that Schaaf's assertions might be too good to be true,[97] and when Seeber and Forch proceeded to test his film stock in the Prüf- und Versuchsanstalt, they found that his films weren't made of nitrate at all, but rather of the recently introduced acetate celluloid. As a result, Schaaf was expelled from the DKG.[98] Beyond the performance of scientific authority, the Schaaf affair demonstrates the high value the group placed on professional reputation; after Schaaf's expulsion, Konrad

93 In fact, only rear-projection technologies, such as those used in the so-called "film cabinet systems," could achieve visibility in daylight conditions. See "Technische Rundschau," *Die Kinotechnik* 2, no. 3 (1920), 107.

94 See "Zur gefl. Kenntnisnahme," *Die Kinotechnik* 2, no. 9 (1920), 350.

95 See Konrad Wolter, "Die 8. Ordentliche Sitzung der D.K.G.," *Die Kinotechnik* 3, no. 5 (1921), 178: "Sollten im Verlauf eines Vortrages oder in der Diskussion auf einer unserer Sitzungen Werturteile über irgendwelche Erfindungen, Apparate, Verfahren abgegeben werden, so sollen diese Werturteile in der offiziellen, zur Veröffentlichung gelangenden Niederschrift möglichst in abgeschwächter Form wiedergegeben werden. […] Es ist selbstverständlich nicht angängig, die in der amtlichen Niederschrift wiedergegebenen Werturteile etwa als das offizielle Urteil der D.K.G. hinzustellen."

96 Konrad Wolter, "Die 13. Ordentliche Sitzung der DKG," *Die Kinotechnik* 4, no. 5 (1922), 184.

97 Hans Rolle, "Vorstandssitzung vom 30. Mai 1922," *Die Kinotechnik* 4, no. 11 (1922), 420.

98 See Konrad Wolter, "Deutsche Kinotechnische Gesellschaft," *Die Kinotechnik* 4, no. 18 (1922), 698.

Wolter wrote a personal apology for having invited Schaaf to present his 'non-flammable' film in the DKG meeting, insisting that any impression that Schaaf's findings might have legitimacy was entirely his own responsibility and not that of the DKG.[99]

If the Prüf- und Versuchsanstalt embodied the DKG's desire to gain academic legitimacy for its brand of 'cinema science,' the group's involvement in the founding of the German Film School in Munich (1921) was part of a different effort: namely a desire to facilitate what one report described as the "methodical training of a younger generation of film engineers" ("die methodische Heranbildung eines technischen Nachwuchses") in the interest of reproducing its brand of "Filmwissenschaft."[100] Like the (unsuccessful) project for a "Deutsche Filmhochschule" in Berlin, the Munich film school involved a number of collaborating—and sometimes competing—groups, including the newly founded Munich-based reformist group "Studiengesellschaft für das Film- und Kinowesen," as well as several film companies. The result was a loosely aligned institution with heterogeneous departments in different locations throughout the city; alongside the department for film technology, housed at the Höhere Fachschule für Photographie, there were also departments for directing, acting and staging; film economics (production, distribution, etc.); and film science and literature (journalism, film history).[101] Not surprisingly, perhaps, enrolments appear to have been highly gendered, with many female students enrolling in courses for acting and directing, while the section on film technology remained mostly (if not entirely) male.[102] While this gender divide does not appear to have been the result of any explicit school policy, it does fit with patterns of the time (for example the enrolments in the Bauhaus, where female students were encouraged to take courses in textiles and pottery, while male students were encouraged to take the more 'engineering'-related subjects like metalworking and architecture).[103] The conceptual tensions between the various factions involved in the new film school were exacerbated by longstanding tensions

99 Ibid.

100 "Mitteilungen aus der Industrie—Die Eröffnung der Deutschen Filmschule in München," *Die Kinotechnik* 3, no. 15 (1921), 585.

101 See Slansky, *Filmhochschulen in Deutschland,* 96–111.

102 A report in *Die Kinotechnik* explicitly mentions that the section for acting and directing admitted 30 women and 18 men, while the 19 students in the section on technology are simply described as "Schüler." See "Jahresbericht des Vereins Filmschule," *Die Kinotechnik* 5, no. 7 (April 1923), 186.

103 See Anja Baumhoff, *The Gendered World of the Bauhaus: The Politics and Power of the Weimar Republic's Premiere Art Institute 1919–1932* (Frankfurt am Main, 2001), 53–100.

between Berlin and Munich as competing centers of German film culture, a fact that threw up further hurdles to the DKG's participation in the film technical department.[104] Still, the group did become involved in the Munich film school when several members (Carl Forch, Oskar Messter, Adolf Miethe and Guido Seeber) sat on the administrative committee and Konrad Wolter was given a teaching post at the Höhere Fachschule für Photographie, where he also ran the film technical department.[105] This also led to the formation of a regional branch of the DKG in Munich, headed by Wolter, whose minutes began to appear in *Die Kinotechnik*.

But despite the DKG's contributions to the Munich film school, the school never came to embody their vision of an industry led by scientific engineers. Conceived as an independent trade school rather than an academic university, the Munich school was focused mostly on the accelerated (two-year) training of practitioners or the bestowing of qualifications on those already working in the industry, rather than the theoretical training of scientists and experts.[106] If this was true for acting and directing, it was also true for the film technical department, which focused mostly on practical training (above all cinematographers, but also film copy specialists, projectionists, etc.) rather than the all-around, theoretically-informed cinema engineer imagined by the DKG.[107] (Figure 24)

The problem of how to apply the DKG's vision to education was taken up in 1923 in a lecture by Arthur Lassally, reprinted in *Die Kinotechnik* under the title "Der Nachwuchs in der Kinotechnik" ("Education in Cinema Technology"). There, Lassally pointed out that the Berlin research institute and the film technology department at the Munich school represented the two extremes of film education: one absorbed almost entirely in theoretical knowledge (for which there was very little student demand),[108] the other almost entirely in vocational training.[109] Lassally then proposed his own

104 See for example "Die 11. ordentliche Sitzung der D.K.G.," 573–75.

105 On the make-up of the management committee, see Slansky, *Filmhochschulen in Deutschland*, 105.

106 Slanskly, *Filmhochschulen in Deutschland,* 104. A full description of the two-year program can be found in Konrad Wolter, "Kinotechnische Abteilung der Deutschen Filmschule zu München," in *Kinotechnisches Jahrbuch 1922/1923* (Berlin: Hackebeil, 1923), 16–17.

107 In 1925, Wolter would report that the majority of the ca. 14 students enrolled in the Kinotechnische Abteilung were training to be camera operators. See Wolter, "Die Kinotechnische Lehranstalt zu München," in *Kinotechnisches Jahrbuch* 1925 (Berlin: Hackenbeil, 1925), 14.

108 Lassally pointed out that only four students had been present at Forch's first lectures at the Technical University. Arthur Lassally, "Der Nachwuchs in der Filmtechnik" *Die Kinotechnik* 5, no. 5 (1923), 119.

109 Ibid., 119–22.

Figure 24: Camera practice in the Cinema Technological Department of the Deutschhe Filmschule 1924

hypothetical four-year curriculum (opposed to the two-year curriculum of the Munich Film School), which reveals a lot about how the DGK imagined their own reproduction of expert knowledge. In the first year, students would take general courses in mathematics, mechanics, physics, chemistry, optics, photography and technical drawing, culminating in a course he titled "Theorie der photographisch-optischen Instrumente" (Theory of Photographic-Optical Instruments). Year 2 added courses in cinematics (theory of moving images), electrical engineering, lighting technology, apparatus construction, history of photography, economics, x-ray technology and photogrammetry (making measurements from photography). Years 3 and 4 then gradually applied the theoretical foundations of the first years to more specialized areas (e.g., camera construction, film copying, business economics, film factory management).

Lassally's four-year curriculum was aimed at creating a caste of all-around 'engineers' in possession of the knowledge and skills to lead the film industry, and who would work at the highest levels of the industry as the DKG imagined it. But the fate of Lassally's project for a school curriculum also suggests the limits of the DKG's endeavors in the face of actual film industry developments in 1923. Lassally's article sparked intense discussion within the group, which was forced to ask itself why such a curriculum

hadn't seen the light of day. Eventually, the editors themselves intervened with a special note to say that there just wasn't enough demand in the current film industry for large numbers of such high-level engineers. And Lassally himself followed up on his article later that year to acknowledge that demand might not yet exist (though he did call for feedback from the various companies attached to the DKG). Ultimately, Lassally's curriculum was never instituted, and the Munich Film School itself ceased operations shortly after the National Socialist take-over of 1933.

The DKG's difficulty instituting a school for the training of all-around film technicians suggests that the idea of a 'film industry' espoused by the society was not the only one around and that their conception of a science-led technology sector could not fully meet the needs of practitioners within the evolving ecology of film professionalism after WWI. If this tension came to a head in educational initiatives, it also informed another area of activity in which the DKG invested a large proportion of its lobbying energy: exhibitions. In many ways, trade exhibitions provided a fitting sphere for anyone attempting to propagate the idea of a film industry on par with other national industries. Descended in part from the Universal Exhibitions of the nineteenth century, the annual trade exhibitions in cities like Berlin, Leipzig, Stuttgart and Vienna were key arenas for the showcasing of industrial branches in the early twentieth century. The TED forums of their day, these annual (and sometimes bi-annual) fairs offered a key framework for propagating visions of the future.[110] Almost from the beginning, the DKG saw such trade exhibitions as a critical space of intervention for realizing their vision of how a German film industry should be conceived. The journal inaugurated a special rubric under the title "Ausstellungen und Messen" (Exhibitions and Trade Fairs) in which they discussed various exhibitions (e.g., the Amsterdam cinema exhibition of 1920), and they were especially keen to carve out a space for the film industry in Germany's largest technology trade exhibition: the Leipzig "Mustermesse." In March 1920, *Die Kinotechnik* published one of their many manifestos under the title "Was wir ausstellen" (what we exhibit), promising that the coming Leipzig trade exhibition would include—under the influence of the journal itself—one of the most robust displays of cinema technology ever mounted in Germany. The following year, the DKG was more directly involved in the film-technological section of the Leipzig exhibition, and

110 See Michael Cowan, "From the Astonished Spectator to the Spectator in Motion: Exhibition Advertisements in 1920s Germany and Austria," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 21, no. 3 (2014), 2–29.

they proudly proclaimed that for the first time, the entire German film industry would be displayed in all of its dimensions for the public, thus demonstrating the society's goal of enshrining the German film industry alongside other branches of industrial production. As one A. Weber wrote in *Die Kinotechnik*:

> [At the Leipzig exhibition,] we will show the public that we have moved beyond the stage of mere experimentation, beyond the period of narrow-minded sectors working in isolation! The same hall will bring together all of our products and will become a symbol of the fact that we have become a self-contained branch of industry, cooperating with one another despite all necessary and useful competition.[111]

> Wir dokumentieren [in der Leipziger Ausstellung] für die Öffentlichkeit, dass wir heraus sind aus dem Versuchsstadium, heraus auch aus der Zeit der engherzigen Eigenbrödelei! Die gleich Halle faßt alle unsere Erzeugnisse und wird uns gleichsam zum Symbol dafür daß wir ein in sich geschlossener Industriezweig geworden sind, zusammengehörig trotz allem notwendigen und nützlichen Wettkampf.

As Weber went on to explain, the exhibition offered a particular vision of the relations between necessary specialization and the need for collaboration and an overview of the 'industry,' and Weber saw it as proof that the German film industry could be a leading player on the world stage.

In subsequent years, DKG members repeatedly discussed their desire to organize a comprehensive exhibition devoted to film technology in Berlin.[112] And such an exhibition did, in fact, come about in 1925 with the Kino- und Photo-Ausstellung (Kipho) at the Berlin Funkhalle. Though only tangentially involved in organizing the Kipho (through the work of Seeber), the DKG was particularly excited about the exhibition, stating that "with it, a longstanding dream of cinema engineers has become a splendid reality."[113] They held a special conference at the Kipho exhibition, reported extensively on the companies and technologies represented there and even published a special supplement *Die Deutsche Kinotechnische Industrie* to mark the

111 A. Weber, "Einblicke und Ausblicke," *Die Kinotechnik* 2, no. 3 (1920), 87.

112 See for example "Festsitzung zur Feier des einjährigen Bestehens der Gesellschaft, 24. Mai 1921," 217–20; Max Flinker, Hans Rolle and Guido Seeber, "Die Leipziger Kinomesse," *Die Kinotechnik* 5, no. 6 (March 1923), 147–54.

113 "Zur Eröffnung der Kipho," *Die Kinotechnik* 7, no. 18 (1925), 447.

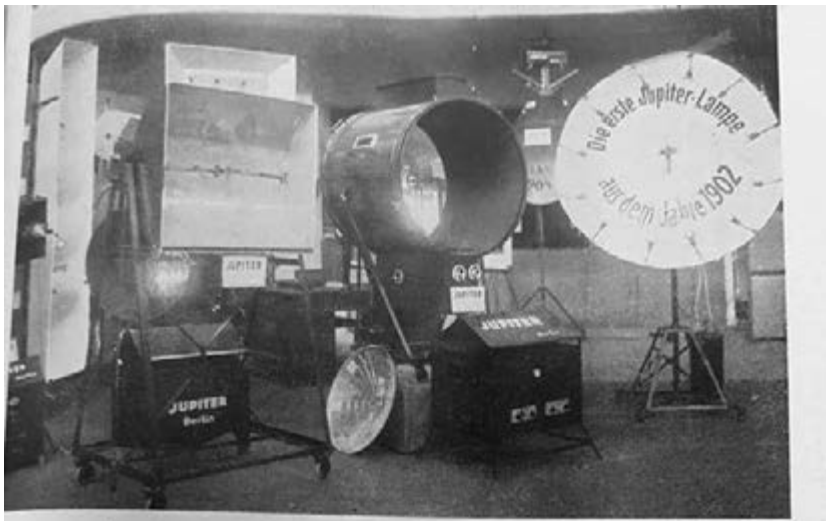

Figure 25: Stand for Jupiterlicht Klieg lights at the Kipho exhibition, *Die Kinotechnik,* 1925

occasion (which was sold at the exhibition). They were particularly excited by the fact that the exhibition seemed to represent the film technological industry "exhaustively" (*erschöpfend*), including all of the leading German companies and technological sectors, which their coverage divided into five sections: raw film production, camera recording technology (including optical lens technologies), film fabrication (developing, perforating, copying, etc.), projection technologies and lighting.[114] (Figure 25)

Moreover, they were well aware that the exhibition wasn't only for experts, but also a chance to sell their vision of a film technological industry to a lay public. In this respect, they lavished special praise on the exhibition's historical dimension, including the frequent displays of historical technologies such as the first Jupiter Lamps, and they reserved their highest accolades for Seeber's display "Zur Geschichte des lebenden Lichtbildes" (On the History of Cinema Projection) consisting of his own collection of historical projectors and cameras, which they described as the "Clou der Ausstellung" (highlight of the exhibition).[115] Indeed, in opposition to its own politics of privileging 'expert' images in *Die Kinotechnik,* the group recognized the importance of an image politics that privileged lay comprehension. They singled out the practice of companies such as Lignose raw film production, whose stands

114 "Die kinotechnische Industrie auf der 'Kipho,'" *Die Kinotechnik* 7, no. 19 (1925), 477.
115 Ibid, 448.

Figure 26: Lignose stand at the Kipho exhibition with the "Baum des Rohfilms," *Die Kinotechnik,* 1925

included giant models of factory premises, stereoscopic 'peep shows' of various aspects of factory production and allegorical images such as the *Baum des Rohfilms* (Tree of Raw Film), whose roots represented the various natural and chemical ingredients of raw film (cotton, gelatin, aether, grain alcohol, silver nitrate, potassium bromide, etc.) with the branches holding tin boxes of finished raw film. (Figure 26)

Figure 27: Still from *Kipho* film, 1925

But as much as the Kipho exhibition seemed to fulfil the promise of the DKG's image of a German film 'industry,' it also embodied some of the tensions around that concept in which the DKG found itself. In fact, the exhibition wasn't only about film technology, but also film art and the film industry understood in the sense of workers and craftspeople. In addition to the booths of German film technological companies, it also included aspects such as film architecture, costume displays, film advertising and set design. There was a model film studio where the public could try its hand at film acting, and the much-discussed 'Theater der 4000' was designed to showcase German film art, running two famous German films per evening for the entirety of the exhibition. In this sense, the Kipho exhibition also embodied the wider vision of the film industry that was finding homes in *Die Filmtechnik* and the Munich film school at the same time.

That tension is also visible in the famous Kipho advertising film made by Seeber himself. (Figure 27) In a previous publication, I interpreted *Kipho* as a self-representation of the avant-garde and its effort to situate film within a larger transformation of rhythm under industrialization. In many ways that interpretation still holds; the film does indeed show us the passage from the hand—with its back-and-forth work rhythms—to the automated machine working in continuous rotation (a symbolic progression that the DKG would

no doubt have appreciated).[116] But the *Kipho* film is about trades as much as it is about technology. While it shows us many of the technologies featured throughout a journal like *Die Kinotechnik*—drying racks, film copy machines, etc.—it also shows us the kinds of tradespeople that *Die Kinotechnik* rarely covered: camera operators, animators, set designers, editors, actors, lighting technicians, make-up artists, scriptwriters and projectionists, not to mention amateur filmmakers. And crucially, many of these figures visible in the film are *women*. *Kipho,* then, is a film about both technology *and* trades, and in this sense, the film represents well the ecology of competing understandings of the 'film industry' as it existed in the mid-1920s—competing ideas in which Seeber himself was caught up in 1925, as he moved between competing journals equally claiming to represent the 'film industry'.

Conclusion: Roads Taken

Pointing out the tension around the model of the film industry—and Seeber's defection to *Die Filmtechnik*—is not intended as an argument that the DKG should be seen as a failure. On the contrary, the DKG is the *only* group included in this study to not only outlive the 1920s, but to continue to operate to the present day. Like the American Society of Motion Picture Engineers, the DKG would later join forces with television engineers to become the Fernseh- und Kinotechnische Gesellschaft (Society for Television and Cinema Technology, FKTG) in 1972, which is still the major professional body of film and television scientists, engineers and technicians in Germany. Moreover, despite the DKG's lack of success in setting up their vision of a film school in the 1920s, the group can—and the FKTG does—legitimately claim a number of successes, including the introduction of the first film standards and major contributions to fire safety in the 1920s (both the development of safety film and collaborations with the Berlin fire department to catalogue and regulate film projectors).[117] Far from a 'road not taken,' then, the DKG shows us an example of a model of film society—and of film infrastructure—that in many ways succeeded.

What the above-mentioned tension does tell us, however, is that the DKG's model of a 'film industry' was caught up in a still evolving ecology of

116 See Michael Cowan, "Advertising, Rhythm and the Filmic Avant-Garde in Weimar: Guido Seeber and Julius Pinschewer's *Kipho* Film," *October* 131 (2010), 23–50.

117 See "Das Kinotechnisches Gesellschaft E.V. Das Jahr 1922," in *Kinotechnisches Jahrbuch 1922/23* (Berlin: Hackenbeil, 1923), 6.

professions, one whose boundaries were still in flux. Taking a cue from Malte Hagener's use of systems theory to describe the historical trajectory of the avant-garde, we might say that the phenomenon of the 'film industry' was still something of a strategic alliance of groups in the early 1920s, which was beginning to undergo a functional differentiation.[118] Today, the distribution of sectors, functions and professional jurisdictions is clearer than it was in the early period, and different models of a film industry can more happily co-exist. But precisely that lack of clarity in the early years is what makes a group like the DKG so interesting to follow. Examining those early years reveals—to borrow a key term from laboratory studies—forms of *unfinished* knowledge, where categories, concepts and professional jurisdictions were still in the process of crystallization. Whatever its successes or failures, the Deutsche Kinotechnische Gesellschaft understood that it was part of that process of crystallization.

118 Malte Hagener, *Moving Forward, Looking Back: The European Avant-Garde and the Invention of Film Culture 1919–1939* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), 77–121.

3. Communities of Love: Cinephilic Film Clubs, Movie Magazines and the Viennese Kinogemeinde

Abstract
This chapter examines the emergence of the familiar cinephilic film clubs in the mid-1920s, focusing in particular on the Viennese Kinogemeinde (Film Community, founded in 1926 by Friedrich Porges) and its attendant magazine *Mein Film.* Drawing on research into print journals, histories of play and studies of fandom and participation, the chapter argues that groups like the Kinogemeinde taught audiences—especially through ludic rituals modelled in film magazines and rehearsed in various society events such as costume balls—how to cultivate their passion for the movies, thereby helping to shape an emerging understanding of film as a sphere of performance art on par with other spheres of high culture (especially theatre).

Keywords: Cinephilia, star system, arthouse cinema, movie magazines, participation (history of), play (theory and history)

The Rise of the Film Friends

The last chapter examined the emergence of professional film societies in the early 1920s, asking why such groups took shape when they did and how they helped to crystallize the idea of film as a national industry. There, I focused on the technological variant of that professional paradigm represented by the Deutsche Kinotechnische Gesellschaft, which had a particular resonance in the context of German reparations and the attendant cultural investment in technological production. But as we saw, there were also other variations of the professional society focused more on evolving trades, such as the Dachorganisation der filmschaffenden Künstler (Dacho) in

Cowan, M., *Film Societies in Germany and Austria 1910–1933: Tracing the Social Life of Cinema*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2023
DOI 10.5117/9789463725477_CH03

Germany, as well as an Austrian variant, the Filmbund der künstlerischen und kunsttechnischen Mitarbeiter des Films (Film Association of Artistic and Technological Employees of Film), founded in 1922.[1]

This proliferation of professional groups also helped to create the conditions for the obverse phenomenon in the mid-1920s: audience-oriented film clubs dedicated to pursuits now clearly demarcated as 'amateur.' The term should be understood here not only in the sense of non-professional filmmaking (though that did tend to form one of the purviews of the new film clubs), but also in its etymological sense of 'loving': i.e. those *amis du cinéma* (film friends and *Filmfreunde*) that emerged in the mid-1920s to form the basis of what is now widely recognized as the "first wave of cinephilia."[2] This phenomenon has been examined extensively with respect to the prominent cine-clubs in France,[3] as well as key groups such as the London Film Society and the Dutch Filmliga.[4] But there were many other cinephilic groups, often highly ephemeral, but still worthy of investigation today: groups such as a Cambridge Film Club founded in 1924, which included members such as Ivor Montagu and Christopher Isherwood;[5] the Dutch "Club van Rolprentvrijnden" (Club of Movie Friends), which ran the journal *De Rolprent* from 1925 to 1927;[6] the Cine Club of Milan, founded 1926 by the literary and cultural group Il Circolo del Convegno under the direction of Enzo Ferrieri;[7]

1 On the Filmbund, see Walter Fritz: *Kino in Österreich 1896–1930. Der Stummfilm* (Vienna: Österreichischer Bundesverlag, 1981), 96–99.

2 On the notion of a "first wave" of cinephilia among the theorists of photogénie, see Paula Amad, "'Objects Became Witnesses': Eve Francis and the Emergence of French Cinephilia and Film Criticism," *Framework* 46, no. 1 (2005); Christian Keathley, *Cinephilia and History, or The Wind in the Trees* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 5.

3 See especially Christophe Gauthier, *La Passion du cinéma : cinéphiles, ciné-clubs et salles spécialisées à Paris 1920 à 1929* (Paris: Ecoles des Chartes : Association Française de Recherche sur l'Histoire du Cinéma, 1999).

4 For a general overview, see Malte Hagener, *Moving Forward, Looking Back: The European Avant-Garde and the Invention of Film Culture 1919–1939* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), 77–121. On the Dutch Filmliga, see Tom Gunning, "Encounters in Darkened Rooms: Alternative Programming of the Dutch Filmliga 1927–1931," in *The Emergence of Film Culture: Knowledge Production, Institution Building and the Fate of the Avant-Garde in Europe 1919–1945*, ed. Malte Hagener (New York: Berghahn, 2014), 72–118. On the London Film Society, see for example Leslie Hankins, "Iris Barry, Writer and Cineaste, Forming Film Culture in London 1924–1926: The Adelphi, the Spectator, the Film Society and British Vogue," *Modernism/Modernity* 11, no. 3 (2004), 488–515.

5 See Peter Parker, *Isherwood: a Life* (London: Picador, 2004), 227, note 4.

6 See "Kinowesen und Kinopropaganda im Ausland," *Der Filmbote* 9, no. 29 (17 July 1926), 7.

7 See Andrea Mariani, "Per la comprensione del buon film. Sulla germinazione del film culturale e la diffusione della cinematografia educativa in Italia (1926–1934)", in *Immagine – Note di Storia del Cinema* 11 (2015), 106–16.

the Cine Club Español (1928), which built upon existing screening activities by Luis Buñuel;[8] the Cine-Club of Geneva (1928); as well as several German cinephilic clubs of the mid-1920s, including the Berlin-based Deutscher Filmbund (German Film Association), the Frankfurt am Main-based Bund Deutscher Filmfreunde (Association of German Film Friends) and the Hamburg-based Deutsche Film- und Bühnengesellschaft (German Film and Stage Society), all founded in 1925.[9] Recent film-historical work has begun to explore some of these lesser-known groups,[10] but there is still much room for further investigation. (The above-named German groups, for example, have received no attention to date.) This chapter does not seek to map out the wider film club scene, either in Europe or further afield, but I do want to examine some of the continuities and shifts in the landscape of film societies with the rise of cinephilic associations in the mid-1920s. I will do so by focusing on one representative Austrian film club: the Kinogemeinde (Cinema Community), also known as the Vereinigung der Filmfreunde (Association of Film Friends), which operated through the popular magazine *Mein Film* from 1926 to the early 1930s.[11]

Of course, as my first chapter showed, a certain forerunner of this cinephilic paradigm was already present in the 1910s, when cinematographic study societies were already cultivating a passion for cinema (and a program to elevate it according to the standards of the time) long before the cine-club scene of the interwar period. But the *affective* dimension (the 'love of cinema') is notably stronger in the film club scene of the 1920s as the cinema reform movement recedes into the background, and one factor is decidedly new

8 See Ferran Alberich, Román Gubern and Vicente Sánchez-Biosca, "Film Clubs, Festivals, Archives and Magazines," in *A Companion to Spanish Cinema,* ed. Jo Labanyi and Tatjana Pavlović (London: Blackwell, 2013), 434.

9 All three German groups published announcements in the journal *Deutsche Filmwoche*, which had some affinities with the Viennese journal, *Mein Film,* analyzed in this chapter below. The Bund Deutscher Filmfreunde folded by the end of the year, but a successor club, the Club der Filmblitz-Freunde, formed the following year. See "Vereinsmitteilungen," *Deutsche Filmwoche* 1, no. 33 (December 1925), 2. The ending dates of the other two clubs are unknown. In Austria, one can also point to various cinephilic societies. In addition to the Kinogmeinde analyzed in this chapter, there was, for example, the Gesellschaft der Filmfreunde Österreichs (Austrian Society of Film Friends) founded by the Viennese author and cinephile Ernst Angel in 1936.

10 See for example Greg de Cuir Jr., "Early Yugoslav Ciné-amateurism: Cinéphilia and the Institution of Film Culture in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia During the Interwar Period," in *The Emergence of Film Culture,* ed. Malte Hagener (New York: Berghahn, 2014), 162–80; Lars Gustav Andersson, "Interwar Film Culture in Sweden: Avant-Garde Transactions in the Emergent Welfare State," in *The Emergence of Film Culture,* 227–49.

11 There is no clear ending date for the Kinogemeinde, but activity slowed visibly in the 1930s and the last published mention of Kinogemeinde activities in *Mein Film* occurs in the year 1935.

here: the dominant idea of cinema as an *art.* That's not to say there are no precursors, especially in France, where the 'film d'art' movement predates the arrival of WWI (and to a certain extent in Germany with the famous Autorenfilm debates of 1913). But in the German-speaking world, the idea of cinema as art had not yet become a dominant framework for efforts to elevate film in the prewar years (even if there were some building blocks for its subsequent crystallization, such as the work of *Bild und Film*).[12]

One reason for this change almost certainly lies in the further institutionalization of the film entertainment industry, in particular the structuring of that industry around celebrities, which meant first and foremost stars, but also directors and other personalities. Today, we tend to associate the star system with popular fan culture and distinguish it from cinephilic appreciation. But this distinction is less clear in the interwar period, when star appreciation—along with the collecting of star photos and autographs—was promoted even in the most highbrow cinephilic magazines of the 1920s, such as the French journal *Cinéa* (where the appreciation of star talent was understood as a key part of the larger world of film art). As has often been claimed before, the framing of film as art in the 1920s was part of a broader movement to legitimate film in the face of other arts, particularly theater and dance, as Béla Balázs sought to do in his 1924 book *Der sichtbare Mensch* (*Visible Man*), often considered the key pioneering work of aesthetic film theory.[13] But the solidification of the idea of cinema as an art form required infrastructural work going far beyond any single book, and one of my arguments in this chapter is that the new cinephilic clubs and magazines of the mid-1920s helped to *teach* audiences how to approach film as a realm of art: what films to value and how to appreciate cinematic art, how to 'read' filmic aesthetics and what to know about film art and culture more broadly.

This transformation of film into art—and the audience education that went with it—also brought with it another transformation at the level of spectatorship, which has been amply explored by film historians: namely the

12 Helmut Diederichs argues that *Bild und Film*—along with the wider debates around the *Autorenfilm*—played a key role in helping to institutionalize an approach to cinema as an art form before WWI. His analysis is correct on the facts regarding *Bild und Film*, but one might question the teleological framework of his study today, i.e. its effort to locate precursors to the aesthetic criticism of the 1920s "as it would be practiced by Jhering, Balázs, Arnheim, Groll and Haacke." Helmut Diederichs, *Anfänge deutscher Filmkritik* (Stuttgart: Verlag Robert Fischer & Uwe Wiedleroither, 1986), 166. As we saw in Chapter 1, aesthetic film theory was still a marginal development in the 1910s and not the framework most cinematographic study societies invoked in their efforts to elevate cinema in society.

13 See David Rodowick, *Elegy for Theory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 69–70.

disciplining of audience behavior.[14] If the cinemas were to become respectable palaces of art, audiences had to learn to comport themselves, to maintain silence, respect their neighbors and avoid physical or vocal interaction with the spectacle. The new scene of cine-clubs and film journals participated in this process of disciplining. For example, readers of *Vous avez la parole*, a monthly supplement to the French journal *Mon ciné,* encountered a veritable catechism of disciplinary instructions dispersed in bold print among the texts of their own letters—telling them to refrain from singing and talking, to favor subtle aesthetic choices over garish ones, to chastise theater directors who show films at the wrong speed or neglect damaged screens, and so on. "Gardez-vous de lire les titres à hautes voix!," the editors wrote in one such instruction, "Le cinéma n'est pas une école où les ignorants apprennent à lire!"[15]

At the same time, disciplining by no means exhausts the function of the new film clubs (and their attendant journals). And another central argument in this chapter is that these groups' popularity also resided in the way they seemed to mitigate the experience of discipline at the cinema by offering an outlet for the more active expression of love, in the magazine, through their playful participatory agenda. In so doing, I argue, these clubs and journals cultivated a model of participatory engagement with media *avant la lettre.* In this chapter, I examine how this participatory dimension functioned in the Kinogemeinde (and its journal *Mein Film*) both as a counterweight to the new strictures of cinematic behavior and as a form of (ludic) pedagogy in its own right, one that helped teach members to be cinephiles. In this way, the Kinogemeinde helped to crystallize an idea of cinema as an art form and an object of intense love, while managing some of the less satisfying side effects of that transformation.

Officially founded in October 1926, the Kinogemeinde (Figure 28) was largely the contrivance of Friedrich Porges, a filmmaker, publicist and editor of *Mein Film* (founded the same year), which served as the Kinogemeinde's mouthpiece. But the group also maintained close ties with the professional Filmbund der künstlerischen und kunsttechnischen Mitarbeiter des Films and included many representatives from the Viennese film industry, such as the producer Karl Imelski (a representative of the local MGM subsidiary

14 See for example, Thomas Elsaesser, "Discipline through Diegesis: The Rube Film between Attraction and Integration," in: *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 205–23.

15 *Vous avez la parole! Organe du public des cinémas. Supplément mensuel illustré de Mon ciné,* no. 13 (1925), 3. For more on this context, see also Gauthier, *La Passion du cinéma,* 261.

Figure 28: General Meeting of the Kinogemeinde, Vienna 1930

Fanamet), the cinema owner Rudolf Edhofer, the actress Marianne Frauer-Wulf and the rising star of Austrian film Igo Sym (visible in Figure 28 in the center with the tie), who later served as president of the Kinogemeinde. As its founders stated in the inaugural meeting of the group, the Kinogemeinde's mission was to "promote all efforts and activities designed to create a closer contact between the public and the world of film and to elevate (*heben*) the film industry in Austria."[16] To those ends, they planned to offer a roster of (by now) familiar film society activities, including film screenings, courses, lectures and guided tours of film studios, but also social gatherings, entertainment evenings and friendly excursions around the city or the surrounding countryside.[17] The group largely delivered on this promise during the years between its founding in 1926 and its eventual demise in the early 1930s; for example, one report from February 1928 claimed that the Kinogemeinde, which had amassed thousands of members by that time, had

16 Karl Tanner, "Die Kinogemeinde ist konstituiert!," *Mein Film,* no. 44 (1926), 4.

17 Ibid.

organized 38 events in the winter season alone, including film screenings, lectures, excursions, courses and tours of studios and production facilities.[18]

Like other German-language cine-clubs, the Kinogemeinde arrived on the scene later than its French counterparts (which stretch back at least to the work of Louis Delluc in the early 1920s). In fact, it explicitly drew on those French ciné-clubs for its model, as Porges intimated in one planning session from early 1926:

> An Association of Cinema Friends (Vereinigung der Kinofreunde), similar to the one we are planning, was recently founded in France. Its president is the influential and well-known film expert and publicist Jean Pascal. Of course, we also intend to promote contact with friends of cinema in other countries, and we hope that by establishing a community of common interest with those other groups, we can offer much that is interesting to our members in Austria.[19]
>
> Eine Vereinigung der Kinofreunde, ähnlich der von uns geplanten, entstand kürzlich in Frankreich, und ihr Präsident ist der einflußreiche und bekannte Filmfachmann und Publizist Jean Pascal. In unserem Programm liegt natürlich auch die Fühlungnahme mit den ausländischen Gruppen der Kinofreunde, und wir hoffen durch eine Interessengemeinschaft mit denselben unseren österreichischen Mitgliedern viel Interessantes bieten zu können.

The French group in question here was the Association des amis du cinéma, founded by Jean Pascal in 1921, from which the Kinogemeinde clearly borrowed its subtitle (Vereinigung der Kinofreunde).[20] And like its French counterpart, the Kinogemeinde sought to promote a society of amateurs in both senses of the word: a group of cinema friends and lovers, which would also promote an 'amateur' involvement in cinema at all levels.

The name of the cine-club was not all that Porges borrowed from the French model. Like Pascal's group, which was intimately linked to the journal *Cinémagazine* (1921–35), the Kinogemeinde was inseparable from a journal, namely *Mein Film* (1926–57), which was founded by Porges a few

18 "Die Hauptversammlung der Kinogemeinde," *Mein Film,* no. 119 (1928), 11.

19 "Die Vereinigung der Kinofreunde," *Mein Film,* no. 24 (1926), 6. The journal *Mein Film* also included regular reports from the film scene in France by Jean Lenauer under the title "Pariser Brief."

20 For a detailed chronology of Pascal's group (which lasted from 1921 to 1928), see Gauthier, *La Passion du cinéma,* 347–51.

months before the Kinogemeinde's official inauguration and helped to prepare the ground for the film club. The title *Mein Film* was almost certainly also inspired by popular French journals such as *Mon ciné* founded in 1922 (which ran the *Vous avez la parole* supplement cited above) and *Mon film* founded in 1924. *Mein Film,* for its part, served as the official mouthpiece of the Kinogemeinde. And not unlike the relation between *Die Kinotechnik* and the Deutsche Kinotechnische Gesellschaft, the magazine and the club were two faces of the same project. More precisely, one might say that they represented two circles of filmic community: one (the journal) represented a loose community of readers and the other (the cine-club) a more formalized association of film friends seeking face-to-face social interaction.[21] In this chapter, I consider these levels of community from the outside in, as it were, starting with the journal and its readers before zooming in on the cine-club, to examine how they taught moviegoers to be cinephiles and how their activities interacted with the disciplining of audiences in cinemas.

Film Magazines and the Participatory Community

Like its French counterparts, *Mein Film* was an eminently pedagogical journal. Indeed, one of the journal's central missions was to impart what the editors referred to as "Filmbildung" (film education) to a broader public. More precisely, as we learn in an article under this title signed by a certain "Hugo," they sought to make cinephilic education an integral component of that "general education," which "every cultured person ought to possess."[22] Like theater and the other arts, the editors argued, film knowledge—including "familiarity with geniuses of acting or directing [. . .], recognition of films that are already 'classics' and will go on to become milestones in film history, knowledge of the ABCs of film technique"— should be a self-evident part of everyone's repertoire of knowledge.[23] To this end, the magazine ran, in addition to countless pieces on stars and industry personalities, weekly columns with titles such as "Wie ein Film entsteht" (How a Film Is Made),[24]

21 The editors of the magazine *Mein Film* later commented on this relation themselves: "The readers of *Mein Film* themselves already constitute a community numbering in the tens of thousands, and we would be happy if the Kinogemeinde could allow our readers to have personal contact, in the widest sense, with each other and with us." "Tretet der Kinogemeinde bei!," *Mein Film* no. 419 (1934), 2.

22 Hugo, "Filmbildung," *Mein Film* 110 (1928): 8.

23 Ibid.

24 See for example "Wie ein Film entsteht," *Mein Film*, no. 14 (1926): 11.

"Kunst und Technik des Films" (Film Technology and Art),[25] and "Wie es gemacht wird" (How It Is Made).[26] Like Porges's own film, *Der Film im Film* (1924), such rubrics sought to take readers behind the screen, educating them in various aspects of film techniques, film production and film history. But there were also numerous articles designed to teach readers how to appreciate film aesthetics, how watch film and interpret film and what to look for (for example, articles on aspects such as cinematic hands, clothing, hairstyles, the role of extras, objects, landscapes, automobiles or even the movements of actors' feet.[27] (Figure 29) There were also numerous pieces on film history with titles such as "Wer hat das Kino erfunden?,"[28] as well as references to early cinema designed to inculcate a sense of a shared history of an artform that had only recently come into its own.[29] In addition, the journal published a year-book, the *Mein Film-Buch,* with short pieces on topics including the history of cinema technology (which the editors traced back to ancient shadow play),[30] the workings of national studios and industries and various aspects of film-making explained by luminaries of German cinema,[31] alongside numerous photos of stars, directors and producers.[32]

But such pedagogy was never simply a top-down affair. Like its French counterparts, and like magazines elsewhere in Europe and the US, *Mein Film* also included numerous more participatory features, where readers were able to practice their own cinephilia. There were invitations to suggest programming for local cinemas,[33] opportunities to submit film criticism,[34] projects allowing readers to participate in the writing of film scripts,[35] and numerous similar rubrics, such as "Mein erster Kinobesuch" (My First

25 See for example "Kunst und Technik des Films," *Mein Film*, no. 31 (1926): 6.

26 See for example "Wie es gemacht wird," *Mein Film,* no. 75 (1927): 7.

27 See for example "Das mimische Spiel der Füße," *Mein Film,* no. 5 (1926): 13; "Der Star einer Szene. Aufgabe und Bedeutung des Film-Komparsen," *Mein Film,* no. 11 (1926), 7; "Die Sprache der Hände," *Mein Film,* no. 12 (1926): 13; "Die Landschaft im Film," *Mein Film*, no. 15 (1926): 5; "Der 'leblose' Filmstar," *Mein Film,* no. 71 (1927), 6.

28 "Wer hat das Kino erfunden?," *Mein Film,* no. 78 (1927), 8.

29 See e.g. "Ein Film-Szenenbild aus dem Jahre 1907," *Mein Film,* no. 55 (1927), 8.

30 "Vom Schattenspiel zum Spielfilm," *Das Mein Film-Buch: Vom Film, von Filmstars und von der Kinematographie*, ed. Friedrich Porges (Wien: "Mein Film"-Verlag, 1926), 7–24. This text was reprinted with slight variations in the 1928 edition of the *Mein Film-Buch*.

31 The 1929 edition included articles by Guido Seeber (on trick film), Karl Freund (on camera techniques), Eugen Schüfftan (on sets and special effects) and others.

32 Most editions of the book also ended with a set of model letters in various languages for requesting autographs, as well as the addresses of central European stars and directors.

33 See for example "Welchen Film wollen Sie wiedersehen?," *Mein Film,* no. 24 (1926), 6.

34 "Das Publikum als Filmkritiker," *Mein Film,* no. 11 (1926), iv.

35 "Der Film des Publikums," *Mein Film* no. 7 (1926), 4.

DIE LANDSCHAFT IM FILM

Figure 29: Article on landscape in film, *Mein Film,* 1926

Time in a Cinema) and "Mein größtes Filmerlebnis" (My Greatest Film Experience), where readers could display their film knowledge and share their cinephilic memories with other readers.[36] *Mein Film* also promoted amateur film practice almost from the beginning with a column entitled "Der Film-Photo-Amateur."[37]

36 For instalments of "Mein erster Kinobesuch," see for example *Mein Film*, no. 45 (1926), 10; no. 47 (1926), 6. For instalments of "Mein größtes Filmerlebnis," see for example *Mein Film*, no. 103 (1926), 2; no. 105 (1927), 4; no. 108 (1927), 18; no. 110 (1927), 2.

37 For the first instalment, see "Der Film-Photo-Amateur," *Mein Film,* no. 14 (1926), 13.

Figure 30: First issue of *Mein Film,* cover with star puzzle, 1926

But above all, the journal promoted reader participation in the world of film through more playful rubrics, especially its many contests. Chief among these were the so-called "Preisrätsel" (puzzle contests), which—here too—drew inspiration from journals such as *Cinémagazine,* and which called on readers to infer the identity of important film stars from photos that had been cropped to leave only the subjects' eyes, photos of performers with their backs to audiences, photos shot in silhouette, childhood photos or photos that had been cut into pieces to form a kind of jigsaw puzzle, which readers had to reconstruct. *Mein Film* adopted similar puzzle contests from the first page of the first issue, where readers had to compete to see who could identify the most stars from a collage of star faces. (Figure 30) And the editors only became more creative from there. While borrowing some well-known forms, such as the eye puzzle and the jigsaw contest, the magazine editors

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MEIN TALISMAN

Von NORMA TALMADGE

Welchem Filmstar-Typ entspricht Ihr Aussehen?

WESSEN AUGEN SIND ES?

Figure 31: "Wessen Augen sind es?" Eye contest puzzle, *Mein Film,* 1926

also devised many original formats, such as contests where the heads of one performer were composited onto the body of another or one actor's face was inserted into the signature costume of another, asking reader to disentangle the two elements and name both stars and their film roles. (Figures 31–32)

Such photo-puzzles—and these film journals more broadly—can be positioned within the broader photomontage practices of the 1920s, which, partly spurred on by the decreasing costs of photographic reproductions,

Figure 32: "Wer hilft mir?" Contest puzzle with switched heads and bodies, *Mein Film*, 1927

engaged with what Miriam Hansen describes as a new sense of "abundance, play and radical possibility" promoted by mass culture.[38] But it would be a mistake to conflate these games with Dadaistic practices of photomontage, even if they do share some obvious affinities to work by Hannah Höch and

38 Miriam Hansen, "The Mass Production of the Senses: Cinema as Vernacular Modernism," *Modernism/Modernity* 6, no. 2 (1999), 69.

Figure 33: Montage of stars, *Mein Film,* 1928

others. (Figure 33) For one thing, while these film puzzles sought pleasure in taking things apart, they did so only within a symbolic economy that aimed at putting them back together: at *restoring* (virtually or literally in the prize submissions) the integrity of the star photograph or identifying the star figure being admired. More broadly, they encouraged readers to approach film *in terms of* star recognition and an affective investment in stars.

In this sense, the puzzles embody a more 'pedagogical' form of play more akin to what Roger Caillois famously termed *ludus.* For Caillois, forms of

play could be charted along a line between two poles.[39] While one pole, which he called "paidia," encompassed various forms of child's play with its anarchical pleasure in destruction, the other—ludic—pole was associated with processes of training: the acquisition of skills, the formation of habits and the solidification of shared rules and values.[40] Ludic forms of play, in his understanding, had an eminently pedagogical function, contributing at once to the "disciplining" of individuals and the "civilizing" of humanity.[41] And not insignificantly, he saw the ludic tendency embodied most fully in his own time by the kinds of skill-based puzzles that had come to populate the pages of print media since the nineteenth century, such as rebuses, crosswords, anagrams and "those contests such as newspapers organize on occasion."[42]

The puzzle contests adopted by film magazines were clearly embedded within this ludic tradition, and they were only one part of a much broader program of ludic participation through which *Mein Film* sought to forge a community of film appreciation that allowed readers to demonstrate shared tastes, values and love of film. Many rubrics sought to test audience memory by printing stills from recent theatrical releases and asking readers to identify which films they came from.[43] Others—such as "Die Schrullen des Dr. Mauritius" (The Quirks of Dr. Mauritius), which ran over several months—asked them to identify signature scenes of films from textual riddles. Still others challenged them to demonstrate their knowledge of film technique by, for example, printing a sketch of a film set with numerous stylistic errors and challenging audiences to find them all.[44] (Figure 34). Yet more games thrived on the cultivation of shared wit and gentle humor, which served to convey readers' investment in film as an object of love. For example, one long-running contest asked readers to send in caricatures of their favorite film star. The resulting caricatures had little in common with the biting satire of Dada artists such as George Grosz, tending instead towards endearing affirmations of contemporary film stars.[45] (Figure 35) Another contest—with variations in similar film magazines around the world—printed unidentified film stills and asked readers to put their

39 Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 13.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid, 21, 33.

42 Ibid. 31.

43 E.g. "Sind Sie ein aufmerksamer Kinobesucher?," *Mein Film,* no. 42 (1926), 8.

44 "Haben Sie Talent zum Regisseur?," *Mein Film,* no. 80 (1927), 9.

45 See for example the results printed under "Karikieren Sie ihren Filmliebling!," *Mein Film* no. 35 (1926), 8.

Figure 34: "Haben Sie Talent zum Regisseur?" Contest to recognize mistakes, *Mein Film,* 1927

knowledge of 'typical' film plots on display by imagining the wittiest subtitles.[46] And yet another serial instalment, dubbed "Das A-B-C des Films" (The ABCs of film), consisted entirely of humorous couplets submitted by readers and selected by the editors for publication. The only rule was that "the verses should combine the name of a star with that of another star or with a film concept."[47]

46 "Filmdichter heraus!" *Mein Film*, no. 113 (1928), 4.

47 "Das A-B-C des Films!" *Mein Film,* no. 4 (1926), viii.

Figure 35: "Karikieren Sie Ihren Filmliebling!" Contest of reader caricatures, *Mein Film,* 1926

Such contests allowed readers to demonstrate that they *were* what the magazine editors consistently addressed them as: "Filmenthusiasten" (film enthusiasts) or "Kinonarren" (Cinema fanatics).[48] Moreover, one thing that all of these contests shared—not only with each other, but also with other movie magazines of the time—was the way in which they called on readers to organize their investment of film affect and their acquisition of film knowledge around *celebrities*. In this, the contests resonated with other

48 See for example, "Was macht Kinonarren aus uns?," *Mein Film,* no. 91 (1927), 6.

Figure 36: Film aptitude tests among readers of *Mein Film,* 1927

participatory features that film magazines inherited from the nineteenth-century forerunners, such as the ubiquitous letter columns, in which readers could demonstrate both their knowledge and love of film personalities.

As the society's stated goal of putting the public in closer 'contact' with the world of film suggests, such contests were sometimes linked to a vague prospect of launching careers in film. *Mein Film* ran numerous columns such as "Der Film als Beruf" (Film as a Career), and there was no shortage of film beauty contests and 'film aptitude' contests, often in collaboration with Viennese film companies, that tempted readers with the prospect of being discovered by the industry. (Figure 36) The journal also launched a so-called "Archiv der Filmaspiranten" (Archive of Film


UNSER FILMARCHIV

Mary Nowak,
III., Dapontegasse 2

1.) 15. Mai 1908
2.) Volks-, Bürger-, Kunstgewerbeschule
3.) Psychologie
4.) Reiten, rodeln, chauffieren, Tennis
5.) Beruf: Kunstgewerblerin
6.) 1.70 m
7.) Blaue Augen
8.) blond, Bubikopf
9.) Naive, Lausbuben, Hochstapler

Figure 37: "Our Film Archive," entry for a reader of *Mein Film* with answer to questionnaire, 1927

Aspirants), in which readers could send in photos with key information (birthdate, education, sports, occupation, height, eye color, hair color and the types of film roles sought) to a database that the journal promised to make available to film companies. (Figure 37) And in at least one case, *Mein Film* does appear to have played a mediating role, when Fritz Lang, while working in Vienna, discovered the actress Lien Dijers in one of the journal's beauty contests and cast her as the secret agent Kitty in *Spione* (*Spies*, 1928).[49]

49 See "Fritz Lang entdeckt bei seinem 'Mein Film'-Autogrammtag einen neuen Filmstar," *Mein Film*, no. 97 (1927), 5.

On the whole, however, the idea of mediating careers in film remained a relatively minor preoccupation, and even in the film aptitude tests, there were likely few contestants who went in expecting to become professional actors, though they might have been happy to have their image captured on a few meters of film and their pictures published in the journal. (This was incidentally one of the frequent prizes for other contests in the journal, whose winners would be invited to pose for an eight-meter test recording [Probeaufnahmen]). More typical were contests such as "Welchem Filmstartyp entsprich Ihr Aussehen" (What film star type does your appearance correspond to?), which allowed lay readers to demonstrate their style in resembling certain "film types."[50] The journal editors also constantly warned readers about the dangers of self-appointed 'film schools' hawking their courses in the popular press.[51] On the whole, then, this was and remained a journal for *audiences,* and much more important than any promises to get into film were forms of participation in the 'amateur' mode, including amateur film and photography, but also all the forms of 'amateur' knowledge being tested in the various contests.

A good example of such avowedly amateur participation was a collective film project the journal organized at first under the generic title *Der Film des Publikums* (*The Audience Film*) and promoted from late 1926 to the film's premiere in October 1927 in the Kinogemeinde.[52] The final film, entitled *Alles will zum Film* (*Everything Tends Towards Film*), was produced by the Viennese Listo film studio with a screenplay by Ida Jenbach (better known for her work on *Die Stadt ohne Juden* [*The City Without Jews,* 1924]). But the project embodied all of the aspects of *Mein*

50 For results of the contest, see "Welchem Filmstartyp entspricht Ihr Aussehen?," *Mein Film,* no. 51 (1926), 4.

51 See for example "Kampf gegen den Filmschulenschwindel. Eine Warnung an alle, die zum Film wollen," *Mein Film,* no. 28 (1926), 4. These critiques were not aimed specifically at the Deutsche Filmschule in Munich, but at the many shady operations that arose around the same time, which would invite people for film "try outs" and promise to help them get into the industry for a fee (but with little or no ability to deliver). See for example "Verhaftung dreier Filmunternehmer," *Neues Wiener Tageblatt,* no. 257 (17 September 1920), 7. But Porges was likely skeptical even of the Munich Film School, as he frequently responded to readers' inquiries about film schools with the argument that no current actors or directors had ever come from a film school. Porges was not only one warning about film schools; there was, in fact, an ongoing debate about their value in the Viennese press. For example, another writer, Oscar Geller, penned a biting critique of the Munich Film School in *Der Filmbote* in 1924, arguing that no "school" could possibly teach people to become actors or directors in a few years, since this required years of practical experience. See Geller, "Münchner Notizen," *Der Filmbote* 7, no. 19 (10 May 1924), 12–14.

52 For the premiere, see "Die Première des Filmlustspiels 'Alles will zum Film'," *Mein Film* 94 (1927), 11.

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Von den Aufnahmen zum „Rätselfilm"

Alphons Kraemer der Filmschriftsteller und eine reizende Schülerin Vilma Ataya

Alphons Fryland und Ellen Kürty in Wien

Infolge des Verkehrsstreik war eine entsprechende Verzögerung der für Alphons Fryland und Ellen Kürty geplanten Empfangs auf dem Flugfeld in Aspern leider nicht durchführbar. Die Flugreise Alphons Frylands, die eine wichtige Szene des neuen Orbit-Films „Die Khiwa-Nacht" bildet, wird jedoch in den nächsten Wochen stattfinden. Der Landung des Künstlers, auf dem Flugfeld in Aspern, die ebenfalls gefilmt wird, werden unsere Leserinnen und Leser als Mitwirkende beiwohnen können. Wir werden die näheren Daten rechtzeitig bekanntgeben. Falls die Flugreise Alphons Frylands und der Empfang auf dem Flugfeld in Aspern noch vor Erscheinen unseres nächsten Heftes stattfinden sollte, werden die näheren Daten in der Ausgabe der „Stunde" vom Freitag den 29. d. M. bekanntgegeben.

Die Aufnahmen der Films, dessen Produktionsleitung Direktor Robert Reich inne hat, haben unter der Regie Robert Wohlmuths bereits im Liebo-Atelier begonnen. Das Manuskript stammt von Rosa Wachtel. Neben Ellen Kürty und Alphons Fryland wirken in den Hauptrollen Carmen Carteliéri, Mizzi Griebl, Willy Kirschner und der Wiener Komiker Raff mit. Architektur: Hans Rung und Stefan Wessely. An der Kamera steht Ludwig Schaschek. Die Aufnahmeleitung besorgen die Herren Franz Payer und J. B. Hartmann. Wir werden über die Aufnahmen des interessanten Films noch eingehend berichten.

Riff und Raff bei der Marine

Parteibesetzung in 8 Akten.

Raff, ein Bauer . . . . . Walther Berry
Riff, ein Ingenieur . . . . . Raymond Hatton

Riff und Raff, das originelle amerikanische Komikerpaar, dessen köstliche Darstellung der Films „Riff und Raff im Weltkrieg" zu den erheiterlichsten Filmerlebnissen der vergangenen Saison zählte, sind die Helden dieses an heiteren Einfällen, Spannung und unwiderstehlicher Situationskomik überaus reichen Lustspieles.

Der Bauer Raff ist ein ungeschlachter Riesenkerl und seinem kleinen Impresario Riff an Körperkraft um ein Vielfaches überlegen. Nicht aber an schlauer Lebenstüchtigkeit. Daher hat es Riff an einem Tage gewußt, daß er Raff überlegen bleibt, sich für beide „durchs Leben zu schlagen".

Einen Tages erbeitet Raff eine schwere Niederlage und wird knockout aus dem Ring getragen. Als er aus seiner Betäubung erwacht, macht er die traurige Entdeckung, daß sein getreuer Impresario Riff mit der Kasse durchgebrannt war.

Einige Zeit vergeht, in der Raff vergeblich bemüht war, des Flüchtlings habhaft zu werden. Da begegnet er ihm eines Tages durch Zufall auf der Straße. Riff, der keinen anderen Ausweg sieht, dem rächenden Arm Raffs zu entgehen, schwingt sich auf ein eben vorüberkommendes Lastauto, darin eine Schar von Freiwilligen, die sich zur Kriegsmarine gemeldet haben, zum Hafen geschafft werden. Raff springt dem Flüchtenden ohne Bedenken nach.

Während Raff mit Riff abenteuerlichen Verwicklungen und ohne die beiden sich verlieren, finden sie sich als blinde Passagiere auf einem Kriegsschiffe wieder.

Die drolligen und verwickelten Erlebnisse, die sich aus dieser Situation für die beiden ergeben, schildert die humorvolle Filmkomödie aus in wirbelndem Lustspieltempo.

Szene aus „Riff und Raff bei der Marine".

Figure 38: Report on shooting of the "puzzle film" with amateur actors, *Mein Film,* 1927

Film's participatory agenda. It was, first of all, combined with a puzzle contest, organized by *Mein Film* in collaboration with Vienna's foremost puzzle magazine *Sphinx* (whose director Maximilian Kraemer also played the part of an unscrupulous 'film school professor' in the final film). For the contest, readers were invited to solve eight film-themed crossword puzzles published over several weeks in *Mein Film* and *Sphinx.* The winners had a chance to act in the film alongside Kraemer, each according

to his or her own capacity (assessed by a jury), and the final film in fact included around 100 readers of *Mein Film* as extras. Regular reports on the progress of the project in *Mein Film* showed the lucky winners with Maximilian Kraemer on set. (Figure 38) But the film also had a further participatory element since the film itself included embedded puzzle elements to be solved, in a further contest, by readers who saw the final film. In discussions of the contest, the journal editors sometimes hinted that the film might be a way for lucky contestants to get discovered, but this was clearly not the main purpose. With screenings entirely confined to Vienna, the film was first and foremost an opportunity for readers of the journal to *see* each other on the screen. And the film itself contributed to the journal's warning about film schools, since its narrative focused on the machinations of a 'film school' charlatan. What the project did, then, was to further the journal's mission of creating a sense of shared cinephilic community through amateur participation at multiple levels. And in this sense, appearing on screen and having one's name printed among the list of winning puzzle-solvers formed a continuum.

Re-Assessing Early Participation

From the point of view of a critical film theory informed by the Frankfurt School, it would be easy to write off all of this participatory activity as a form of ideological manipulation. Siegfried Kracauer, for example, writing in the early 1930s, argued that such magazines were creating an acquiescent public of dreaming sleepwalkers, distracted from urgent political questions by the illusory promise of participation in the lives of the flickering heavenly bodies above. With its utterly trivial questions concerning the habits and preferences of stars, such pseudo-participation

> fabricates a marvelous world on high, full of princes and princesses, and from now on the ignorant will mistake appearance for reality and gaze as though intoxicated at the fairy world above. They will thus be made useless and distracted from a struggle that could actually help them achieve better conditions of existence. But the correct task, which film too ought to share, is precisely not to mesmerize them into sleep, but rather to awaken them from their spell.[53]

53 Siegfried Kracauer, "All About Film Stars," trans. Alex Bush, in *The Promise of Cinema: German Film Theory 1907–1933,* ed. Anton Kaes, Nicholas Baer and Michael Cowan (Oakland:

This critique of the 'dreaming' spectator was, in fact, a standard trope among the political film groups that emerged in the late 1920s (a point I'll come back to in the next chapter), and it would go on to form a mainstay of ideological film critique well into the era of apparatus theory and beyond. From our current standpoint in the age of online participation, however, such a write-off of spectatorial activity begs for reconsideration.[54] For one thing, as we have seen, audience participation was never limited to the kind of caricatured fan worship critiqued by Kracauer, but also included numerous frameworks for fans to demonstrate 'serious' knowledge of cinema. In this sense, the participatory film journal served to mitigate the growing distance of the film industry from ordinary lives.

In addition, such participation was one of the few places where women spectators could 'get close' to the world of film in any systematic way. To be sure, the many beauty contests organized by journals like *Mein Film* might be seen to carry their own forms of misogyny, where photography taught women to shape their own looks for the camera and according to the templates offered by the film industry. At the same time, beauty contests were hardly the only form of women's participation. The journal also ran a dedicated women's section, "Alles für die Frau" (Everything for Women), with contributions by female film stars. And there were many other forms of participation specifically for women, such as a contest entitled "Ein weiblicher Filmkomiker gesucht!" (Seeking a Female Film Comedian), which invited female readers to display their comic talent at a time when women comics were largely missing from cinema screens dominated by Keaton, Chaplin and Lloyd.[55] (Figure 39).

Magazines like *Mein Film* thus allowed readers—male and female—to 'take part' in the new world of film art and film stars, if only in well-defined

University of California Press, 2016), 346. Originally published as "Rund um die Filmstars," in *Frankfurter Zeitung,* May 10, 1931.

54 The locus classicus for our current age of participatory media is Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

55 The call for female comics states explicitly that "there is still no female comedienne in the style of Chaplin, Keaton and Lloyd." "Ein weiblicher Komiker gesucht. Die Zeitschrift *Mein Film* will eine neues Filmkomödiengenre schaffen!," *Mein Film,* no. 10 (1926), 10. This, of course, ignores the rich history of film comediennes from the prewar period, whose films had likely shown in Viennese cinemas. See Maggie Hennefeld, *Spectres of Slapstick & Silent Film Comediennes* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018). An article on female comedians published a few months later in *Mein Film* (in tandem with the contest) does acknowledge the existence of several interwar actresses known for their comic roles, such as Ossi Oswalda and Emmy Wyda, but there is still no mention of the tradition of slapstick comediennes. See Waldemar Lydor, "Weibliche Filmkomiker!," *Mein Film,* no. 32 (1926), 9.

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Filmkomikerrevue in Sievering

Man weiß, wie alle die großen Filmkomiker geworden sind: wie Chaplin aus einer kaum beachteten Zirkustype die weltberühmte und vielbelachte tragikomische Filmgestalt wurde, wie es Harold Lloyd möglich durch eine einfache, nichtssagende Brille zu einem der größten Filmkomiker brachte, und dann Buster Keaton, der einem Gerichte zufolge Wiener sein soll und in so kurzer Zeit weltberühmt wurde. Was denen gelungen ist, müßte doch auch anderen möglich sein!

Nun, gar so einfach ist die Sache ja nicht, denn mit dem Filmkomikertyp verhält es sich so wie mit dem berühmten Ei des Kolumbus. Nachdem sie von einem anderen kreiert wurde, kommt jeder furchtbar rasch auf die gleiche Idee. Nachahmer gibt es also genug. Gute und echte. Was aber gesucht wird, ist Individualität. Ein neuer Typ, und ein solcher ist eben nicht leicht zu finden.

Jedenfalls hatte sich in Sievering eine stattliche Anzahl von Filmkomikeraspiranten eingefunden, die vor dem Aufnahmeapparat ihre Feuerprobe bestehen wollten.

Man sah zahlreiche gelungene Typen unter den ungeduldig Wartenden und es ist immerhin erfreulich, daß zweifellos Anwesenden schon vor Beginn der Probeaufnahmen einen gewissen Erfolg zu verzeichnen hatten. Direktor Grün-

kut von der „Sascha"-Film (die in liebenswürdigerweise ihre Freilichtbühne zur Verfügung gestellt hatte) musterte mit kritischem Blick die Zukunftsstars und engagierte einen weiblichen und einen männlichen Filmkomiker für einen neuen Film.

Die Wartenden bemühten sich bereits vor den Aufnahmen, sich von ihrer „komischsten" Seite zu zeigen, und so gab es ofmals heiße Gefechte.

Nur der Himmel lachte nicht.

Im Gegenteil. Er, vorher so freundlich, zeigte auf einmal sein finsterstes Gesicht und bedeckte sich mit Wolken.

Nichtsdestoweniger versammelte Regisseur Hans Pehal seine Scharen um sich und begann Instruktionen zu erteilen. Die Kern seiner fachdienlichen Ausführungen war, daß der Filmkomiker sich jeder Übertreibung enthalten müsse und daß der Filmkomiker niemals selbst lachen darf, wenn er belacht werden soll. Das Spiel des Filmkomikers müsse aus feinen, graduellen Nuancen zusammengesetzt sein, wenn es in seiner Gesamtheit komisch wirken soll.

Nun wurden von den zukünftigen Filmkomikern Mimikproben ihrer Kunst verlangt. Es zeigte sich, daß es doch gar nicht so leicht ist, auf Befehl eine kleine Szene zu spielen. Immerhin sah man einige nette Einfälle und manches ganz humorvolle Spiel, wenn auch gesagt werden muß, daß sich die Starsopranten noch nicht gänzlich

Endlich hatte der Himmel ein Einsehen und es konnte auf der Freilichtbühne mit den eigentlichen Probeaufnahmen begonnen werden. Die Teilnehmer wurden geölmt und schließlich auch einige kleine Spieleinsen arrangiert.

Eine Kopie des Samstag aufgenommenen Films wird die Fahrt über das große Wasser, in das Dorado aller Filmschauspieler, nach Amerika antreten.

Jedenfalls werden von allen Erschienenen Aufnahmen gemacht, die auch hier in Wien noch einer Prüfung unterzogen werden. Unsere „Filmkomikerrevue" ist eine durchaus ernste Aktion, die den Zweck verfolgt, neue Talente für den Film zu entdecken. Ob uns dies bei der ersten Filmkomikerrevue schon gelungen ist, werden wohl die fertigen Aufnahmen erweisen.

Das Regenwetter hat leider den Verlauf der Einnahmeaufnahmen gestört. Wir werden aus dem fertigen Film und auf Grund der im Atelier aufgenommenen Liste der dort Anwesenden noch genau feststellen, ob sämtliche Typen auch im Bild vertreten sind.

Figure 39: Comedian try-outs with readers of *Mein Film,* 1926

limits. In this sense, the pages of the magazine offered readers a very different media experience from the darkened space of the movie theater. That space, as we have seen, was increasingly associated with audience discipline, as the kinds of bodily and vocal interaction characteristic of attractions cinema (and lampooned in films such as Edwin S. Porter's Uncle Josh at the Picture Show [1902]) were curtailed and theaters discouraged what Wanda Strauven has called the "player mode" of pre- and early

cinema spectatorship.[56] In this context, as Strauven puts it, the new cinema screen was a screen "that protects the apparatus from the touching hand, creates a safe distance between the view and the viewer, and thus acts as a 'shield.'"[57]

This is not to argue that interwar audiences were literally immobilized. Given recent research into nontheatrical modes of cinema in the 1920s and 1930s, as well as studies emphasizing the haptic dimensions of film spectatorship in the classical period, few today would see Baudry's "standard apparatus" of darkened theater, frontal seating and sensory reduction as the only model of cinema in the interwar period. As I have explored elsewhere, moreover, interwar film culture did occasionally allow for explicitly interactive films, such as the puzzle film discussed above, which likely took a cue from Paul Leni and Guido Seeber's *Rebus films* (a serial collection of filmic crossword puzzles made from 1925 to 1927, which audiences solved on puzzle cards handed out with tickets).[58] All of these experiments harken back to the pre-World War I "Preisrätselfilme" (prize puzzle films) of Joe May and others, in which audiences were asked to participate in tracking down a fictional criminal.[59] Such puzzle films could be seen as part of a long history of interactive cinema—stretching from nineteenth-century optical toys down to the contemporary vogue of mind-game films and fan re-workings—that also included early versions of the shooting gallery and popular instructional films, where audiences danced in their seats along with the representations on the screen.[60] By the 1920s, however,

56 Wanda Strauven, "The Observer's Dilemma: To Touch or Not to Touch," in *Media Archeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications*, ed. Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 148–63. Strauven borrows the term "player" mode from André Gaudreault and Nicholas Dulac, who use it to describe the mode of engagement with optical toys. I've cited Strauven's text because her explorations of the vicissitudes of player mode in classical film culture and beyond are more germane to the topic here.

57 "Der Mann, der hinter mir sitzt," *Mein Film,* no. 98 (1927), 4.

58 On the Rebus film series, see my article "Moving Picture Puzzles: Training Perception in the Weimar 'Rebus' Films," *Screen* 51, no. 3 (2010), 197–218. Though it is difficult to know how many such puzzle films existed in the 1920s, the German example was not an isolated one. The editors of *Cinémagazine* (the inspiration for *Mein Film*) reported in 1925 on a certain American publisher that "shows a crossword puzzle on the screen every week during the actualities, which spectators are invited to fill out." "Echos et Informations," *Cinémagazine* 5, no. 13 (March 27, 1925), 609.

59 On interactive detective films, see Karen Pehla, "Joe May und seine Detektive," in *Joe May: Regisseur und Produzent*, ed. Hans-Michael Bock and Claudia Lenssen (Munich: edition text kritik, 1991), 61–72.

60 On the cinematic shooting gallery, see Michael Cowan, "Interactive Media and Imperial Subjects: Excavating the Cinematic Shooting Gallery." On dance instructional films, see Kristina

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Der Mann, der hinter mir sitzt

Einmal werde ich den Mann, der hinter mir sitzt, in Notwehr töten. Und ich werde sicherlich freigesprochen werden, denn ich werde den Geschworenen die Pein und das Leid schildern, das ich durch diesen Mann erdulden mußte, und sie werden in Tränen ausbrechen und mich sicherlich freisprechen...

Wie komme ich schließlich und endlich dazu, mir meine zwei Stunden, die ich mir heute erkämpfen muß, zwei Stunden, in denen ich lachen oder weinen will, zwei Stunden, in denen ich in eine andere Welt tauchen will, zwei Stunden, auf die ich mich eine ganze Woche freue, wie komme ich also dazu, mir diese zwei Stunden durch den Mann, der hinter mir sitzt, vergällen zu lassen. Sie verstehen sich gewiß, denn hinter ihnen sitzt ja auch ein Mann, so oft sie ins Kino gehen, und sie kippen sich wahrscheinlich nach gute und haus über ihn. Ich bin überzeugt, sie werden sich vertragen.

Der Mann, der hinter mir sitzt, ist ein Kinogegner. Ich begreife nur nicht, warum er denn ins Kino geht. Wenn der Film zu Ende ist, hätte er auch gewöhnlich einen Monolog und schreien sich selbst, niemals mehr seine kostbare Zeit durch so einen Unsinn zu vergeuden, ich sitze dann jedesmal sichtlich freier, aber — wenn ich dann wieder ins Kino gehe — wer sitzt hinter mir: der Mann! Das heißt — daß wir uns richtig verstehen — es ist natürlich nicht immer derselbe Mann, aber das ist auch ganz gleich, denn er ist eine Type, die man leider immer wieder findet. Wie er aussieht, ist ja ganz gleichgültig. Meistens ist es ein Kinder, der einen gottjämmerlichen Katarrh hat, der ja unser Mitleid erregen müßte, würde er sich nicht gerade das Kino dazu aussuchen, um sich einmal nach Herzenslust auszuhusten (und den Vordermann anzuhusten). Wehe aber, wenn man im Verlauf der Vorstellung den Nebenmann einmal eine flüchtige Bemerkung zuraunt. Da beißt der Mann hinter mir: „Ruhe! — man sieht ja gar nichts!" Was er aber sieht, das gottlob kann absolut nichts. Er verbeißt bei dem Lustspiel mit größter Willensanstrengung das Lachen, und niemals empört: „So ein Flegel, sehr unanständig, das letztemal, daß ich im Kino war". (Das sind aber, wie schon oben bemerkt, leere Versprechungen.) Wenn irgend etwas Tragisches auf der Leinwand abrollt, so hilft der Mann hinter mir gerade in den entscheidendsten Szenen ein höhnisches Lachen erfinden, um damit absichtlich und deutlich zu demonstrieren, wie arg er über diesen „kindischen Blödsinn" steht, oder aber er erzählt seinem Nebenmann (der natürlich noch unglücklicher ist wie der Vordermann), wie oft er sich wundern müsse, daß man sich heute für so etwas begeistern kann, und er habe sich in seiner Jugend für Sonnenthal und Kainz begeistert und auf der vierten Galerie angestellt. Jedenfalls verhindert er es, daß man sich in irgend eine Stimmung einlebt, denn man kann sicher sein, daß der Herr hinter mir diesen gerade im entscheidendsten Moment verreißt. Darin schwelgt er den Lesebuch, die einen Kuß auf der Leinwand phonetisch untermalen, oder jenen originellen Musikern, die aus dem Orchester Hupensignale oder Kinderpauken ertönen lassen, und den von den Vorgängen gefangenen Beobachter zu Tode erschrecken. Manchmal unterhält sich aber der Herr hinter mir auch, und da ist er am Furchtbarsten. Denn sein Lachen hat nichts Menschliches mehr an sich, und die Art, wie er seine Begeisterung „auslebt", indem er mit seinen Kniescheiben gegen den Sitz des Vordermanne trommelt, gehört zu seinen unterhaltsamen und sehenswerthaften Kinoeindrücken. Doch der Mann, der sich unterhält, ist gottlob seltener, wie der, der sich langweilt. Schrecklich sind sie aber alle beide.

Noch schrecklicher ist aber der „Informierte". Der Informierte sitzt natürlich auch hinter mir, und er ist der Schreckliche der Schrecken. Er reißt unbarmherzig die Schleier von allen noch so schönen Illusionen und läßt gar nichts übrig. Wir sehen zum Beispiel auf der Leinwand eine wunderbare Winterlandschaft, durch die die Heldin irrt. Den Sturm hört man förmlich sausen, und die Arme kann sichtlich nicht mehr weiter, sie wankt — sie sinkt. Lähmendes Entsetzen befällt uns, da sagt der Mann hinter mir mit höhnischer Stimme: „Das ist alles Salz und überdies im Atelier aufgenommen!" Zum Teufel — kein Mensch hat ihn gefragt, aber er ist eben „informiert" und blickt sich nun siegesgewiß im Kreise um. Oder aber, wenn die schöne Diva durch das Schicksal und einen rohen Mann so hoch geworfen wird, und war in einer Großaufnahme sieht, wie ihr die Tränen über die schönen Wangen kullern, dann sagt der Mann hinter mir sachlich: „Glycerin!" Kleine rosige, aber so grausige, um jegliche Stimmung zu zerstören. Tränen sind dem Mann, der hinter mir sitzt, und der informiert ist, natürlich keine Sensation. Er erklärt sie alle. Erklärt sie sofort, an Ort und Stelle, und zwar ist natürlich gewungen, zu erklären, und verpaßt auf der Leinwand die spannendsten Momente. Wenn der kühne Schatzsucher gerade auf der Durchsage angelangt ist und den lebensgefährlichen Weg der Dachrinne entlang wagt. Wenn sich alle Herzen vor Aufregung zusammenkrampfen, und weitaufgerissene Augen auf die Leinwand starren, da sagt der Herr hinter mir mit vorlautselbstbewußtem Stimmen: „Das wird natürlich so gemacht: Auf ein Dach wird eine Pappschachtel aufgestellt..." Seine leuchtenden Ausführungen gipfeln natürlich in der Versicherung, daß die Szene ganz und gar ungefährlich ist, und daß sie jeder, natürlich auch er, nachmachen könnte, wenn er wollte. Aber er will nicht. Er geht lieber ins Kino und erklärt den Leuten, wie es gemacht wird...

Oder er nörgelt... Spricht von Beleuchtung und von Scheinwerfern, vom „Kadr" und von Blenden, von Totalen... Spricht und spricht, daß es einem schwindelt, Alles ist falsch und schlecht in diesem Film, und der Regisseur ist ein absoluter Nichtskönner. Er sieht sich wie Unterstützung suchend ringsumher, und jede neue Einstellung jedes neue Bild gibt ihm neue Möglichkeit, Stoff zum Nörgeln und Kritisieren. Manchmal hat der Mann den Film schon gesehen, und geht nur einem Freund oder Verwandten zuliebe nochmals. Dann spielt er den Connaisseur und erzählt vor jedem Bild den Inhalt des nächsten. Lässt die Tiefe laut vor und erklärt jedes Bild, denn der Begleiter des Herrn, der hinter mir sitzt, muß ein kompletter Idiot sein, der weder lesen noch den Sinn einer Szene verstehen kann.

Mein sehr „versierter" Mann hinter mir! Glauben Sie mir, wir, die wir ins Kino gehen, lieben eben die Illusion, wir lieben diesen Vorsaken in eine Märchenwelt, und wir wollen nicht wissen, „wie es gemacht wird". Wir sind auf ihre Enthüllungen aber schon gar nicht neugierig... Aber ich weiß ja, daß mir das alles nichts nützen wird. Ihn schreie Mal wird ja wieder der Mann hinter mir sitzen...

... Aber einmal werde ich ihn in Notwehr töten. Und werde sicherlich freigesprochen werden!

Hugo.

Figure 40: "Der Mann der hinter mir sitzt," *Mein Film,* 1927

such interactivity had become carefully regulated, among other things by being confined to short films in the preliminary program. For feature films,

Köhler, "Moving the Spectator, Dancing with the Screen: Early Dance Instructional Films and Reconfigurations of Film Spectatorship in the 1910s," in *Corporeality in Early Cinema: Viscera, Skin and Physical Form,* ed. Marina Dahlquist, Doron Galili, Jan Olson and Valentine Robert (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018), 275–89. On mind-game films, see Thomas Elsaesser, "The Mind-Game Film," in *Puzzle Films: Complex Story Telling in Contemporary Cinema*, ed. Warren Buckland (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 13–41.

however, silence and minimal bodily interaction was becoming the norm, and these cinephilic journals and clubs were *themselves* participating in this process. For example, a satirical article published in *Mein Film* under the title "Der Mann, der hinter mir sitzt" (The Man Sitting Behind Me), named and shamed several types of annoying noisy neighbors in the cinema, including the snobby critic, the one who laughs too loud and—"the most horrible type of all"—the "informed viewer," who wants to explain to everyone around him how the special effects were created. (Figure 40). Such figures, the article concluded, rendered impossible any effort to "immerse oneself in the fairy world" of the film and experience the illusion on the screen.

But if these journals discouraged such forms of participatory spectatorship in movie theaters, they offered spectators another outlet for interacting with film culture in their own pages (and their attendant cine-clubs), which did promise to unveil the secrets of film, to reveal the lives of stars and to allow readers to voice and even perform their passion for the cinema. This idea of the movie magazine as a substitute for the lack of interaction in the movie theater is addressed explicitly in the introduction to the first contest in *Mein Film:*

> In a cinema, no one would dare risk the embarrassment of erupting into shouts of "Bravo Paul Richter!," "Bravo Henny!," or "Bravo Fairbanks!" Still, the tongue so longs to overflow with the joys that fill the heart. Or, as one of our most cherished idealists sang: "You want to carve it into every piece of bark, to scrawl it into every gravel pathway—and you long to write it on every blank piece of paper…"
>
> It is here, with this blank piece of paper, that the magazine *Mein Film* comes in, to create a kind of "substitute" means for its enthusiastic readers to express their applause.[61]

> Niemand dürfte es, ohne sich lächerlich zu machen, riskieren, in einem Kino plötzlich in den Ruf "Hoch Paul Richter!," "Hoch Henny!," "Hoch Fairbanks!" auszubrechen. Und doch ginge der Mund so gerne über, wovon das Herz voll ist. Oder, wie einer unserer liebenswertesten Idealisten sang: "Man schnitt' es gern in alle Rinden ein, man grüb' es gern in jeden Kieselstein—auf jedes leere Blatt möchte man es schreiben…"
>
> Und hier, bei diesem leeren Blatt, setzt die Aktion der Zeitschrift "Mein Film" ein, um ihren enthusiasmierten Leserinnen und Lesern eine Art "Beifallersatz" zu schaffen.

61 "Wer ist Ihr Ideal?" Mein Film, no. 4 (1926), 2.

If readers could no longer shout their appreciation in the impersonal movie theater, then, they could at least write that appreciation in the pages of the magazine or show it in one of the many star look-a-like contests. And this compensatory function was all the more prevalent, as we will see below, in the space of the cine-club.

The Kinogemeinde as Performative Community

As stated, the Kinogemeinde was inseparable from the journal *Mein Film,* and plans for a film club (first formally announced in May 1926) appear to have been present from the beginning.[62] In many ways, the association's above-cited aim of "creating a closer contact between the public and the world of film" can be understood as the extension of the journal's participatory agenda to a more formalized *Verein,* replete with membership cards and badges. Indeed, many of the events and happenings organized by the journal—for example the premiere of *Alles will zum Film*—took place within the Kinogemeinde. Conversely, many of the Kinogemeinde's social activities were already prefigured in the first months of the journal, for example when the editors would announce the arrival of film stars in Vienna and readers would meet at the train station to greet them in person. (Figure 41) And according to Porges, the original intention was to create a group that would become the go-to address for such activities, following what he described as a disastrous publicity event with Conrad Veidt organized by theatrical groups in May 1926.[63]

The Kinogemeinde program also resembled that of the magazine in its mix of 'serious' and 'ludic' events.[64] The group offered many pedagogical activities reminiscent of earlier film societies, such as lectures, screenings, seminars, studio tours and even—an aspect echoing the technological

62 For the first announcement, see "Die Schaffung einer Kinogemeinde," *Mein Film,* no. 19 (1926), viii.

63 See "Gründung einer Kinogemeinde: Zusammenschluß der Filmfreunde Wiens," *Mein Film*, no. 20 (1926), 4. It is difficult to ascertain what actually happened in the so-called 'Veidt affair', but Porges intimates that no one showed up to greet Veidt and claims that the botched event was organized intentionally by 'enemies of cinema' from the world of theater to defame the film industry.

64 There were even subcommittees for each type of event, including a "lecture committee" for more pedagogical activities and a separate "leisure committee" that oversaw the more entertainment-oriented events. See "Die Arbeit der Kinogemeinde beginnt," *Mein Film* 45 (1926), 4. Other committees included a PR committee and an administrative committee, and the group would later add committees for amateur film, excursions and other areas of activity.

Figure 41: Crowd gathered at West Train Station in Vienna for the arrival of Paul Richter, *Mein Film*, 1926

groups examined in the previous chapter—tours of film laboratories. Here, the link to pre-war film clubs was unmistakable, as the Kinogemeinde even established its home base in the same Kosmos Kino founded by its educational forerunner the Kosmos Klub für wissenschaftliche Kinematographie (which had lost much of its educational mission to become more of a commercial cinema after the war), where it met twice a week to discuss and

socialize in the Kosmos Café.[65] The content of the group's early activities also bear out this link, displaying a mixture of the old (educational) and new (artistic) film paradigms. For example, the group's statutes called for "two film screenings per month, consisting of either educational films (*Kulturfilme*), films that are not being shown in movie theaters for one reason or another or re-runs of quality artistic films no longer playing in cinema programs."[66] Similarly, the early lecture program was characterized by a mixture of educational and artistic topics. There were educational titles such as *Welt und Natur im Film* (World and Nature in Film) and *Tiere im Film* (Animals in Film), as well as titles on technological topics, such as Josef Ambor's *Die technische Arbeit am Film* (Technological Work in Film), accompanied by a tour through the laboratories of Listo film. But other lectures sounded a more distinctly mid-1920s note, such as *Die Gefahren des Kameramanns* (Dangers of Being a Camera Man), *Filmtempo in Amerika* (Film Tempo in America), *Wie die Filmstars in Hollywood leben* (How Film Stars in Hollywood Live) or a lecture by Marianne Frauer-Wulf, *Die Mode in Film* (Fashion in Film), on the emerging field of costume design and make-up artists.[67] Like previous cinematographic clubs, moreover, the Kinogemeinde printed numerous lists of recommended films ("Filme, denen man mit Interesse entgegensieht") currently playing in Viennese cinemas.[68]

But like *Mein Film,* the Kinogemeinde's training program was never limited to top-down pedagogy. The group also organized numerous more ludic events overseen by the leisure committee. Foremost among these were the many soirees, parties and cabaret-style evenings called "Bunte Abende" (colorful evenings).[69] Here, club members had an opportunity to gain 'closer contact' with the world of film in a quite literal sense, since the group's soirees regularly included personalities from the Viennese film

65 Robert Gokl and Peter Payer, *Das Kosmos-Kino. Lichtspiel zwischen Kunst und Kommerz* (Vienna: Verlag für Gesellschaftskritik, 1995), 28–29.

66 "Die Kinogemeinde ist konstituert!," *Mein Film* 44 (1926), 4.

67 For reports and announcements, see for example "Die Arbeit der Kinogemeinde beginnt," *Mein Film,* no. 45 (1926), 4; "Mitteilungen der Kinogemeinde," *Mein Film* no. 50 (1926), 10; "Mitteilungen der Kinogemeinde," *Mein Film,* no. 57 (1927), viii. The Frauer-Wulf lecture was partly published under the title "Toilettengeheimnisse des Films," *Mein Film,* no. 58 (1927), 15.

68 See for example, "Mitteilungen der Kinogemeinde," *Mein Film,* no. 64 (1926), viii.

69 This practice had equivalents in other clubs, such as the Hamburg-based *Deutsche Film- und Bühnengesellschaft,* which announced many similar "bunte Abende" in the pages of *Deutsche Filmwoche*. See for example "Vereinsmitteilungen," *Deutsche Filmwoche* 1, no. 21 (September 1925), 2.

industry, along with occasional celebrity guests such as Fern Andra, Rudolf Klein-Rogge, Werner Futterer or Peter Lorre.[70]

But getting close to film also meant turning film itself into a more *performative* affair, and the Kinogemeinde undoubtedly served as a kind of compensation for the increasing impersonality of the movie theater. The "colorful evenings" were nothing if not theatrical happenings; acts included not only film personalities, but also well-known dancers (classical and modern), humorists, magicians, musicians, puppet artists and other personalities from the variety stage, who often invented special 'film-themed' performances for the occasion. (Figures 42) To offer just one example, one of the first such parties in November 1926 included a performance by the fifteen-year-old piano virtuoso Julius Chajes; short dances by members of the Viennese National Opera Ballet troop and the Cerri Ballet; lieder sung by the concert singer Josa Paschanda; a magic demonstration by the stage magician Gilbert Prunner; a performance by the virtuoso whistler Leo Rausch; a specially composed "Mein-Film-Couplet" performed by the film star Hans Effenberger; various songs by the "piano humourist" Carlo Krisch; and a short sketch entitled "Parodie einer Filmaufnahme" (Parody of a Film Take) by members of the group, all followed by dancing and social mingling.[71] Such soirees, which encouraged audience interaction, tell us a lot about the *company* that film kept in the minds of the Kinogemeinde. That is, they seemed to proclaim cinema's place among the arts, specifically among the *performing* arts, thereby restoring a sense of presence, liveness and 'contact' between audiences and performers. Indeed, even when film personalities did attend these events, they too made the world of film into an art of performance. Kinogemeinde attendees could see film personalities performing comic sketches, such as one entitled *Achtung, Aufnahme, Los!* (*Lights, Camera, Action!*) with the film actors Carmen Cartellieri and Hans Effenberger and the director Heinz Hanus or *Die Lieblingsfrau des Maharadscha* (*The Maharaja's Favorite Wife*) performed by Mizzi Gribl along with several lay members of the club);[72] reciting poems (as when the "film diva" Maly Delschaft recited two self-composed poems to "rapturous applause" from the partygoers);[73] or singing lieder they had composed for the occasion.

70 See for example "Der 'bunte Abend' der Kinogemeinde," *Mein Film,* no. 71 (1927), viii; "Der große Künstlerabend der Kinogemeinde," *Mein Film,* no. 91 (1927), 10; "Werner Futterer als Gast der Kinogemeinde," *Mein Film,* no. 94 (1927), 11; "Der bunte Abend der Kinogemeinde," *Mein Film,* no. 123 (1928), 12.

71 See "Mitteilungen der Kinogemeinde," *Mein Film,* no. 50 (1926), 10.

72 See "Das 'Mein-Film' Fest," *Mein Film,* no. 68 (1927), viii.

73 See "Maly Delschaft als Vortragende der Kinogemeinde," *Mein Film* 68 (1927), viii.

Ein Blick auf den Parkett

Ein neuer Henny-Porten-Film

Wer auf ein interessantes und anregendes Tagblatt reflektiert, liest unbedingt die große Wiener Tageszeitung

Der Tag.

Das Blatt des intellektuellen Lesers, der auf erschöpfende Information, geistvollen Unterhaltungsstoff und unabhängige Kritik Wert legt.

Monatsabonnement S 5.—

Verwaltung:

Wien, IX., Canisiusgasse Nr. 8–10

Figure 42: Report on soiree of the Kinogemeinde with dancers from the Viennese Staatsoper, *Mein Film,* 1929

But 'getting close' to film did not only mean rubbing shoulders with film personalities. There were also numerous opportunities for club members *themselves* to perform and display their love of film. Foremost among these were the many costume parties held by the group (often as part of the "colorful evenings"), where members were invited to dress up as stars and, in an extension of the journal's strategies, compete for best costume prizes.[74] A good example can be seen in a party organized by

74 For reports on costume contests, see for example "Eine Nacht in Hollywood. Das Maskenfest der 'Kinogemeinde'," *Mein Film,* no. 116 (1928), 12; "Welchem Filmstar ähneln Sie?" *Mein Film*, no. 282 (1931), 5.

Eine Sommernacht am Montparnasse

Das große Sommerfest der Kinogemeinde

Figure 43: Report on a summer party of the Kinogemeinde with members in costume and décor imitating the set of *Das Modell von Montparnasse* (1929), *Mein Film,* 1929

the group in summer 1929 under the title "Das Modell von Montparnasse" (The Model from Montparnasse). Named after the eponymous film with Lilian Harvey and the Kinogemeinde president Igo Sym, the party included decorations emulating the film set designed by Mia Czech from the Kinogemeinde's organizational committee. It also included an artist's cabaret, a "pleasure bar," a jazz band and a male beauty contest. Though Igo Sym could not be present, his brother Fred did attend and won the beauty contest to be dubbed "Mr. Döbling" (after his Viennese neighborhood). But the real attraction was surely provided by the many film costumes, including Chaplins, Maharajas, Zorros, Odalisks and a

King of Abyssinia.[75] Through this form of proto-cosplay, Kinogemeinde members were able to express their love for film no less than when they collected star photos (and one photograph from the 1929 party shows examples of both). (Figure 43).

Another feature that stands out in the descriptions of these various soirees is the emphasis on gentle humor and friendly atmosphere. Numerous reports touted the "well-known amiability" of hosts such as Igo Sym or the role of Karl Imelski (who led the leisure committee and often officiated many of the events) as the "much loved *maître de plaisir*."[76] In part, this emphasis on amiability was meant to underscore the sense of community the organizers wanted members to find here—a point also made in numerous responses to letters from anxious readers of *Mein Film* wondering if they would be welcome in the Kinogemeinde. "The Kinogemeinde is characterized by such a kind sense of sociability [*Geselligkeit*]," the editors wrote in one such response to 'Lina' in early 1927, "that you will certainly feel at home very quickly, even if you do not bring any personal acquaintances with you."[77] More broadly, the emphasis on gentle humor functioned—in sharp distinction to the biting Dadaist satire of political groups, which I will discuss in chapter 4—to underscore the *affirmative* function of the Kinogemeinde: its status as a space for professing one's love and enthusiasm for the world of cinema and one's affective connection to all those who shared it. Nor was this emphasis on humor limited to the parties. It was no less prevalent in descriptions of film lectures, which almost always included lines such as this one in relation to a lecture by director Karl Imelski: "The lecture was not at all dry but, on the contrary, highly accessible and delivered with delightful humor."[78] Indeed, even lectures reminiscent of the old scientific groups were now transformed into occasions for gentle humor, as when Hans Pebal (from the Fox News office in Vienna) gave a lecture on animals in film: "The antics of young bears, the images of penguins as clowns, the peculiar friendship between a dog and a duck and similar spectacles unleashed pleasant laughter in the audience."[79]

There were many other activities, formal and informal, designed to bring members of the Kinogemeinde into closer contact with each other and the

75 The prevalence of such theatrical events is suggested by the fact that Kinogemeinde members also received a 10% discount from a local costume and mask shop. See "Kostüm- und Maskenleihanstalt," advertisement, *Mein Film* 63 (1927), 11.

76 "Eine Nacht in Hollywood," 12; "Der große Künstlerabend der Kinogemeinde," 10.

77 "Meine Filmpost," *Mein Film,* no. 76 (1927), 15.

78 "Der Vortrag Dr. Imelskis im Rahmen der 'Kinogemeinde,'" *Mein Film,* no. 47 (1926), 4.

79 "Vortrag von Hans Pebal," *Mein Film,* no. 55 (1927), viii.

world of film. For example, members of the society formed subgroups for trading autographs and photos and informal meetups at cinemas to watch and discuss films from the current season such as *Sunrise*.[80] There were also bi-weekly social evenings at the Kosmos café, where members could mingle freely. Another major source of more leisurely activity in the summer months was offered by the group's many excursions, organized by the excursion committee, which offered group members a chance to travel together to the countryside, to cultural areas around Vienna or down the Danube by steamship.[81] (Figure 44) Here, members could not only get to know other members, but also practice amateur photography and film, since most excursions were combined with amateur filming in addition to music. (One announcement for a 1928 excursion reminded members: "Don't forget your cameras, lutes and mandolins."[82]) By early 1928, the group announced that they planned to create film footage of every single excursion, not only documentary footage of the outing itself, but also—a practice reminiscent of the humorous sketches from the group's soirees—"humorous little ad-hoc film scenes."[83] On several occasions, footage from the group's excursions was even shown in the preliminary programs of selected Viennese movie theaters.[84] And excursions were also a space for members to demonstrate their film knowledge to the outside world; one report of a 1928 steamboat trip through the Wachau valley, for example, described how some members of the Kinogemeinde entered into a spontaneous debate with a German tourist group about American film stars:

> From the confidence—which can only result from a thorough orientation [in film matters]—with which the [Viennese] group repelled the other group's attacks and clarified all misunderstandings, the tour guide can deduce that the educational work of the previous season in text and film images found fertile ground among the members.[85]

> Aus der Sicherheit—wie sie nur gründlich Orientiertheit zu gewähren vermag—, mit der diese Gruppe alle Angriffe abzuweisen und

80 See "Mitteilungen der Kinogemeinde (Vereinigung der Kinofreunde)," *Mein Film* 60 (1927), viii; "Mitteilungen der Kinogemeinde," *Mein Film* 109 (1928), 11.

81 See e.g. "Der erste Ausflug der Kinogemeinde," *Mein Film*, no. 72 (1927): viii; "Vom ersten Ausflug der Kinogemeinde," *Mein Film*, no. 74 (1927), 9.

82 "Mitteilungen der Kinogemeinde," *Mein Film*, no. 124 (1928), 10.

83 "Sommerprogramm der Kinogemeinde," *Mein Film,* no. 120 (1928), 12.

84 See "Der Ausflugsfilm der Kinogemeinde," *Mein Film,* no. 76 (1927), 11; "Das neue Aktionsprogramm der Kinogemeinde," *Mein Film*, no. 87 (1927), 4.

85 "Der Wachau-Ausflug der Kinogemeinde," *Mein Film,* no. 130 (1928), 15.

Figure 44: Report on a Kinogemeinde excursion on the Danube to the Wachau Valley, *Mein Film*, 1928

> Mißverständnisse aufzuhellen weiß, vermag der Ausflugsleiter mit Genugtuung festzustellen daß die Aufklärungsarbeit der vergangenen Saison in Wort und Lichtbild bei den Mitgliedern auf fruchtbaren Boden gefallen war.

One could of course question the veracity of such reports, which may well be infused with a strong dose of wishful thinking. But the Kinogemeinde

clearly wanted its members to demonstrate their film knowledge (and to legitimate film knowledge in the process) among the public at large.

All of this suggests that the Kinogemeinde's serious activities and its leisure pursuits were not so distinct as they might seem at first glance. If the pedagogical events included a lot of humor and interactivity, the leisure events themselves were also pedagogical undertakings, where members could learn, through practice, how to cultivate a new cinematic self. Like the contests run by *Mein Film,* this pedagogy was a thoroughly *embodied* experience, one that implicated the hands, the voice, the body and the senses in a performative acquisition of membership to a cinephilic community. And in this sense, the training of cinephiles here went well beyond the stereotype of ideological distraction described by Kracauer. Adapting Walter Benjamin's terminology, we might better understand it as a project to create a public of 'lay' experts, a hands-on audience who could overcome the shield of the movie screen, get close to film, communicate with its stars, learn its secrets, practice it and even judge it.[86] And yet, this education was cinephilic through and through, encouraging readers as it did to love film art and to share that love with others.

It was precisely this *interplay* of 'loving' and 'knowing' that characterized the template for a cinematic self being constructed by groups like the Kinogemeinde, where it overlapped with the interplay between the disciplining of theatrical spectatorship and the active, participatory acquisition of film knowledge outside the theater. That interplay found a theorization in another article for *Mein Film* from 1928 titled "Was ist Filmillusion?" (What Is Film Illusion?). There, the editors sought to defend the magazine against industry charges that pedagogical rubrics showing how the magic of cinema is created would deflate the pleasures of moviegoing by destroying the power of on-screen illusions.[87] True, they wrote, magazine readers (and cine-club members) might know all the technical secrets of cinema: that the scenery consisted only of the barest facades or magnified Schüfftan models, or that "the terrible snowstorm in which [the heroine] is about

86 On the film audience as expert, see Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1968), 231–32.

87 The article begins: "In professional circles, we often hear the wish that film periodicals would not inform their readers so extensively, in words and pictures, 'how it is made.' Knowledge of technical secrets, experts say, will cause the audience to lose all of their illusions." K. W., "What Is Film Illusion?" trans. Alex Bush, in *The Promise of Cinema*, 335. Originally published as "Was ist Filmillusion?" *Mein Film,* no. 128 (1928), 7. (Subsequent citations are taken from the English translation.)

to die is actually nothing but salt and baking soda."[88] Indeed, they added (in language remarkably prescient of apparatus theory), cinephiles know well that "everything the spectator experiences at the moment of viewing (buildings, landscapes, people and objects) is nothing more than flickering light and shadow on a white screen, which disappears without a trace the instant the beam of light is extinguished."[89] And still, when we sit in the darkened theater, we dream with the film: "We laugh and cry and fear and hope and tremble and rejoice."[90] In many ways, such an argument portends later analyses of film fetishism ('I know very well, but all the same . . .'). Yet, rather than try to "disengage the cinema-object from the imaginary and win it for the symbolic," as Christian Metz's oft-cited phrase would have it, the editors of *Mein Film* celebrate the persistence of those illusions that Kracauer (and Metz) held in suspicion.[91] Indeed, this was the very definition of cinephilia here. "For film is like love," the article concludes. "We know exactly how much or how little is behind it. And yet our illusions will never disappear."[92]

As we saw, such reverence for the experience of loving illusion was central to the group's understanding of proper theatrical behavior, which had nothing but contempt for the vociferous explanations of the informed "man sitting behind me." And yet, in trying to understand the kind of cinephilia represented by the Kinogemeinde and *Mein Film*, we should not underestimate the pleasures of knowing that they also modeled for their community again and again: the interactions with film technology and aesthetics, the look 'behind the screen,' the unveiling of technical secrets, as well as the lives of film stars. The cinephilic self of *Mein Film* was about both love and knowledge; more precisely, this was a self defined by its ability to maintain both poles in a particular equilibrium, managing both through interactive practices that would help sustain the newly promoted passion for cinema. Returning to my suggestion from the outset of this chapter, we might describe this as a culture of the *amateur* in the broadest sense of the term: a public of cinema lovers who would also be hands-on dabblers and players, and who would find in the cine-club and its magazine a space for interacting with film culture in a way increasingly discouraged within the silent and reverent space of the movie theater.

88 Ibid., 336.

89 Ibid.

90 Ibid.

91 For Metz's phrase, see Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, trans. Ben Brewster (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 3.

92 "What is Film Illusion?," 337.

Conclusion: Cinephilia and the Care of the Self

The figure of the amateur has garnered increasing attention in writing on cinephilia today, partly as a placeholder for thinking about the new agency of cinephiles in the digital era. In one of the most frequently cited discussions of the topic, Jacques Rancière has proposed the phrase "politique de l'amateur" (a nod to Truffaut's "politique des auteurs") to outline a position that "challenges the authority of specialists" and acknowledges "that everyone is justified to trace, between certain points of this topography, a singular path that contributes to cinema as a world and to its knowledge."[93] For Girish Shambu, this revalorization of amateur knowledge, epitomized by today's savvy Internet cinephiles, contains an "anti-hierarchical thrust" that provides a counterpoint to the institutional strictures of academic Film Studies and ultimately promises to "weaken the barriers between the two worlds."[94] But despite the similarity in terms, it is important to see how the amateurism of 1920s cine-clubs was part of a different dynamic. While allowing readers to take part in film, lay societies like the Kinogemeinde also enfolded that participation into an educational project, teaching audiences both to love film and to organize film knowledge around emerging categories. Whereas Rancière's politics of the amateur seeks to intervene in a context where film art has already been the object of an academic discipline for decades, the amateur politics of early film clubs was part of a project to inaugurate film art as a paradigm in the first place. Whereas Rancière's amateurism stands opposed to claims of expertise in matters of taste, the amateurism of the 1920s promised to help audiences acquire a certain expertise (however amateur), which would shape their approach to cinema and inform their love for it.

To be sure, such an acquisition, and the film education that undergirded it, could easily be seen as mere ideological manipulation (as it was in Kracauer's proto-Frankfurt-School reading of film magazines). Yet, that approach cannot quite account for the kinds of self-cultivation being elaborated in cine-clubs like the Kinogemeinde. A better approach might draw on Foucault's later writings on the "care of the self": those practices of self-management that, according to Foucault's well-known model, constituted the irreducible performative basis of ancient philosophy in its efforts to know the self.[95] Of

93 Jacques Rancière, "The Gaps of Cinema," trans. Walter van der Star, *NECSUS: European Journal of Media Studies*, 1, no. 1 (2012), 8.

94 Girish Shambu, *The New Cinephilia* (Montreal: Caboose, 2015), Kindle Edition.

95 Foucault's elaborations on ancient modes of "care of the self" can be found in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France*, 1981–1982, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005); *The History of Sexuality, vol. 3, The Care of the Self,* trans. Robert Hurley

course, the communities of 'film friends' promoted in the 1920s cine-club scene hardly engaged in ascetic rituals or (for the most part) philosophical pursuits. But these communities did elaborate certain practices through which audiences could learn to manage their own experience and knowledge of film. If these involved puzzle contests and the social activities of groups such as the Kinogemeinde, they also encompassed activities more reminiscent of spiritual exercises. For example, the yearly *Mein Film Books* included a "Film-Tagebuch" (film diary), in which readers were asked to keep a record of all the films they saw in a single year with stars, directors and personal notes. "If the hours spent in the cinema brought you experiences," the diary heading told users, "record those experiences here. Every film friend who carefully maintains this diary throughout the year will have a lovely and durable book of memories!"[96] The film diary and its particular brand of *ars memoria* suggests, once again, that cinephilic experience is never spontaneous but always bound up with practices that help to generate and sustain experience: in this case acts of writing down, operations of mental collecting and techniques of recollection.

As Shambu reminds us, cinephilia has always depended heavily on writing as an aid to memory, especially in pre-video eras when storing and replaying films was beyond the purview of most audience members. But as he also points out, such 'memory' is never simply a transparent record of a fixed film text; rather, it is the cumulative result of performative iterations, changing over time like a palimpsest as cinephiles read about films, discuss them and revisit them in their minds.[97] Shifting the question slightly, I would emphasize here that such memories were intended

(New York: Vintage, 1988). Foucault's central point was to show how ancient philosophy was first and foremost an art of living and a set of practices rather than simply a body of knowledge (with which it would come to be identified after Descartes). His perspective could shed useful light on early cinephilic societies, which similarly involved the elaboration of specific practices. Indeed, despite the very different contexts and emphases, everything Foucault highlighted with regard to the philosophical schools of late antiquity—the focus on embodied practice and behavioral rules, the value placed on self-management, the social bonds formed around self-care—could also apply to the emerging culture of cinephilia with its magazines, contests and cine-clubs: "The precept according to which one must give attention to oneself was [. . .] an imperative that circulated among a number of different doctrines. It also took the form of an attitude, a mode of behavior; it became instilled in ways of living; it evolved into procedures, practices and formulas that people reflected on, perfected and taught. It thus came to constitute a social practice, giving rise to relationships between individuals, to exchanges and communications, and at times even to institutions. And it gave rise, finally, to a certain mode of knowledge and to the elaboration of a science" (*Care of the Self*, 45–46).

96 "Das Tagebuch des Films," *Das Mein Film-Buch* (1926), 39.

97 Shambu, *The New Cinephilia*

to be *shared*, providing models of experience for other filmgoers. If the Kinogemeinde encouraged such sharing through frameworks like film discussion evenings with collective visits to local cinemas, *Mein Film* did so through participatory rubrics like the above-mentioned columns "Mein erster Kinobesuch" (My First Trip to the Cinema) and "Mein größtes Filmerlebnis" (My Greatest Film Experience), which themselves almost certainly provided models for discussion at Kinogemeinde social evenings. Again and again, reader responses to these columns described what one reader called "abundance of memory images bubbling up" in her mind as she contemplated the challenge to write down one striking experience in a cinema.[98] Many submissions focused on intense emotions, as when Gerti Weighaupt described her memory of a close-up of Aud Egede Nissen's face in the film *Schwester Veronika* (*Sister Veronica,* 1927) in Balázsian terms: "The expression in Nissen's eyes at that moment was indescribable. I couldn't help it—tears were streaming down my cheeks."[99] Other submissions—especially those for "Mein erster Kinobesuch"—recounted life-changing experiences akin to religious conversions. For example, one reader recounted his first trip to the cinema to watch Fritz Lang's *Die Nibelungen* with a school group:

> The school instructed us to go see the newly released *Nibelungen* film. I reluctantly followed the order, annoyed by such an affront to my taste.
>
> And then . . .
>
> Of course, every artistic experience makes a deep impression on the mind of a young fifteen-year-old, but this one left me completely overwhelmed and utterly transformed. Siegfried's ideal appearance on the screen put me into a state of indescribable enthusiasm: I felt with him; I shared his joy; I fought by his side; and—a fact that I'm not ashamed to admit here—I shed warm tears after his horrible death. [. . .] Since then, I have succumbed with heart and soul to the dreamland of film, that ideal and limitless world of fairy tales—and I believe this will be forever![100]

> Wir bekamen in der Schule die Weisung, uns den eben erschienenen Nibelungenfilm anzusehen. Mit Widerwillen erfolgte ich den Auftrag, empört über eine solche Zumutung.
>
> Und dann...

98 "Mein größtes Filmerlebnis," *Mein Film,* no. 108, 18.

99 "Mein größtes Filmerlebnis," *Mein Film,* no. 118 (1928), 18.

100 "Mein erster Kinobesuch," *Mein Film*, no. 45 (1926), 10.

> Auf einen fünfzehnjährigen jungen Menschen macht ja jedes Kunsterlebnis einen besonders tiefen Eindruck, aber ich war damals einfach überwältigt und wie von Grund aus verwandelt. Siegfrieds ideale Lichtgestalt riß mich zu unbeschreiblicher Begeisterung hin, —ich fühlte mit ihm, ich freute mich mit ihm, ich kämpfte an seiner Seite und—ich schäme mich nicht, es zu sagen, ich vergoß heiße Tränen bei seinem schrecklichen Tode. […] Und seither bin ich dem Traumland des Films, jener idealen, unbegrenzten Märchenwelt mit Herz und Seele verfallen. Und wie ich glaube: für immer!

Still other readers (especially men) sought to strike a more analytical note. In a letter reprinted in "Mein größtes Filmerlebnis," for example, one Hans Miehl described his memory of a shot from the Asta Nielsen film *Dirnentragödie* (*Tragedy of a Prostitute*, 1927), in which the eponymous prostitute, who had finally saved enough money to purchase a shop that would lift her out of her abject poverty, raised her head in pride only to bump it on the oppressive staircase of her shabby tenement building:

> This tiny little nuance contained the entire tragedy of the aging prostitute. She can no longer escape her destiny. She will never be able to hold her head up proudly and optimistically, for her past weighs too heavy upon her, pressing her down into the filth and misery of the street…[101]

> In dieser winzigen Nuance lag die ganze Tragödie der alternden Dirne. Sie kann ihrem Schicksal nicht mehr entfliehen—sie darf den Kopf nie mehr Stoltz und hoffnungsfreudig erheben, die Vergangenheit lastet zu schwer auf ihr und drückt sie in den Schmutz und das Elend der Straße nieder…

While the magazine editors could describe these columns as aids to memory,[102] they clearly also stood as *models*: models of film experience and models of how to narrate one's story as a cinephile. Another letter writer in the "Mein größtes Filmerlebnis" column described how a particular scene from *Die Nibelungen* (Etzel's astonished reaction upon seeing Kriemhild for the first time) took on all the more significance for him after he subsequently

101 "Mein größtes Filmerlebnis," *Mein Film,* no. 110 (1928), 3.

102 The journal's presentation of the "Mein größtes Filmerlebnis" contest emphasized just this point: "The time of the film image is fleeting. It disappears without a trace from the white screen. […] Only the minds of a few thankful cinema-goers retain memories of this or that great film idea, of a particularly impressive acting performance, a clever intuition of a director." "Mein größtes Filmerlebnis," *Mein Film*, no. 103 (1926), 2.

read Lang's own account of the ways in which film could convey inner feelings without words.[103] Reading such accounts of readers' own experiences today, one can't help wondering whether they *themselves* didn't similarly help to reshape the memory of other readers—and cine-club members—who had seen the same films, so that here too memory operated on a palimpsestic principle, as one's experience of a given film was inextricably shaped by encounters with other people's experiences and memories.

Rubrics such as the "Mein größtes Filmerlebnis" and the film diary suggest that the film cinephilic education promoted by *Mein Film* and the Kinogemeinde might best be understood as a set of blueprints for work on the self, where the management of knowledge, affect and experience according to shared conventions formed the basis for the acquisition of a cinephilic sense of self, one inseparable from the sense of belonging to a shared community of 'film friends.' In this, such rituals form part of a broader set of techniques of participation that accompanied and facilitated the institutionalization of film as art in the German-speaking world, and which found their point of density in the cine-club and its associated film magazine. While it would surely be a mistake to celebrate such techniques uncritically as self-evident proof of audience 'agency,' we should also avoid reducing them to mere ideological manipulation. Rather, what a group like the Kinogemeinde offered—and what its members signed on to—were models for participating in a new cinephilic culture, models that provided immense pleasures even as they undergirded the legitimation of the idea of cinema as an artform.

103 "Mein größtes Filmerlebnis, *Mein Film*, no. 105 (1927), 4.

4. The Skeptical Community: Left-Wing Film Societies and the Making of the Suspicious Spectator

Abstract
This chapter examines the best-known German film society, the socialist Volksfilmverband (People's Film Association, VFV, founded in 1928) in the context of agitational culture in the turbulent years of the late Weimar Republic. The chapter argues that the VFV—which arose simultaneously with analogous left-wing film societies in London, Paris, Amsterdam, New York and other cities—was the first to solidify a pervasive view of cinema as "mass medium," understood in terms of its ability to impact the social and political outlook of the masses. Under this rubric, the chapter examines the ways this group sought to inculcate a habitus of suspicion among the cinema-going public (which would resist film's seductive power), as well as the group's links to other left-wing institutions, particularly in journalism.

Keywords: activist cinema, political engagement, apparatus studies, documentary, newsreels, mass media

Left-Wing Suspicion

As we have seen, the idea of cinema as an art form was a latecomer in the landscape of film societies, growing out of, but differentiating itself from, earlier attempts to 'elevate' cinema under the guise of popular education. That idea of cinema as an art is still at the heart of most film society activity today, though the ludic side of 1920s cinephilic film societies has notably diminished, our current landscape characterized more by a sense that we need to preserve an idea under threat than by the kind of euphoric discovery of a new terrain. But as we have also seen, cinephilia was never far from

Cowan, M., *Film Societies in Germany and Austria 1910–1933: Tracing the Social Life of Cinema*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2023
DOI 10.5117/9789463725477_CH04

its obverse in cinephobia, which would come to the fore once again in the 1920s in another group of film societies that also continue to influence our current ideas of the film society: societies explicitly political in their outlook. Groups like the Volksverband für Filmkunst (Popular Association for Film) in Germany, the London Workers' Film Society and the French Amis du Spartacus (Friends of Spartacus) all emerged in the late 1920s to promulgate a new idea of cinema focused less on art than on cinema's status as a force for shaping mentalities, one whose increasing influence over the masses could no longer be ignored. In this chapter, I focus on the German Volksverband für Filmkunst, also known colloquially as the Volks-Film-Verband, to explore how they sought to create a very different type of spectatorship, one characterized by suspicion rather than love and one whose training involved above all the acquisition of tools for resisting cinema's seductions. Consisting of a coalition of left-wing writers and intellectuals, the Volks-Film-Verband was clearly a very different undertaking from the reformist film societies of educators, jurists and psychologists of the 1910s. But the group also bore a certain resemblance to their forerunners in cinema reform, even if they came from very different political directions.

Founded in 1928 under the presidency of writer Heinrich Mann, the Volks-Film-Verband (hereafter VFV) has received more scholarly attention than any other group examined in this book. Previous accounts of the VFV have tended to look backwards from the film cultural scene of the 1960s and 1970s, seeing the group above all as a failed precursor to later developments. Richard Weber, for example, in the preface to the 1975 facsimile re-edition of the group's journal *Film und Volk* (*Film and the People*), saw the VFV as an unsuccessful forerunner to 1960s initiatives in working-class film production, one that started out as a broad-based progressive coalition before succumbing to the "revolutionary impatience" of the German Communist Party (KPD).[1] Bruce Murray, for his part, argued that the group had failed from the beginning to create a genuine 'grass roots' film culture, and like Weber, Murray located the

1 Richard Weber, "Der Volksfilmverband. Von einer bürgerlichen Bündnisorganisation zu einer proletarischen Kulturorganisation," in *Film und Volk. Organ des Volksfilmverbandes. Februar 1928–März 1930* (Cologne: Verlag Gaehme Henke, 1975), 5–26 (especially 22–24). Weber was writing from West Germany against an East German historiography that saw the Volks-Film-Verband first and foremost as a communist organisation (see e.g. p. 7). Weber also argues that the VFV didn't have access to the requisite technology—16mm and 8mm cameras and projectors—that would make workers' cinema more viable in the 1960s. However, this might be a debatable point given the interest in amateur cinema—and more broadly 'amateur' film culture—from the earliest film societies onward. By the time the first issue of Film und Volk was published, journals such as *Die Filmtechnik* and *Die Kinotechnik* were running regular columns for amateur film enthusiasts.

VFV's demise in its increasing annexation by uncompromising Communist members: "[A]s [the VFV's] connection to the KPD strengthened and as the economic crisis escalated, polarization between the KPD and the other parties intensified, and the VFV's base of support gradually disintegrated."[2] By these accounts, the VFV's short history would mirror the tragic developments of late Weimar political culture more broadly, where the splintering of the left in the face of dire economic circumstances prevented it from creating an effective resistance to the ascendancy of National Socialism.

This is, no doubt, a useful way of understanding the VFV's short history within a broader story of the left in Germany. The society was indeed founded with the intention of creating a progressive coalition, before eventually—with the onset of the financial crisis—coming under the control of the German Communist party through the aegis of the KPD-backed outfit Interessengemeinschaft für Arbeiterkultur (Syndicate for Working-Class Culture, IFA).[3] We should be cautious, however, about how we understand 'failures' within the context of film societies. It is true, as both Weber and Murray point out, that the VFV never delivered on many of the concrete goals articulated in its earliest manifestations, including the founding of a first-run theater (*Uraufführungstheater*) for workers in Berlin and the creation of a stable framework for working-class film production in Germany more broadly.[4] Despite helping to produce a few films of the period—most notably the German-Soviet co-production *Das Dokument von Shanghai* (*The Shanghai Document,* 1928) and *Hunger in Waldenburg / Um's tägliche Brot* (*Shadow of a Mine,* 1929)—the VFV abandoned calls to produce a steady stream of films for workers by mid-1929. But even if we acknowledge these shortcomings, one could still ask whether we ought to hold the VFV to a higher standard than other film societies. As we have seen, such groups were inherently unstable; with the exception of the Deutsche Kinotechnische Gesellschaft, none of the clubs and societies examined in this study lasted more than a few years, and none of them achieved all the goals set out in their founding statutes. All of them had to learn 'on the job,' a process that involved continuous reassessments of objectives and self-definitions as the societies and their publics evolved and circumstances changed. In this sense, the VFV was

2 Bruce Murray, *Film and the German Left in the Weimar Republic: From Caligari to Kuhle Wampe* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 239.

3 Toni Stooss, "'Erobert den Film!' oder Prometheus gegen UFA & Co. Zur des proletarischen Films in der Weimarer Republik," in *Erobert den Film! Proletariat und Film in der Weimarer Republik* (Berlin: Neue Gesellschaft für bildende Künste, 1977), 33. Weber, "Der Volksfilmverband," 20–21.

4 On the concrete projects at the time of the group's founding, see for example Rudolf Schwarzkopf, "Unser Ziel und unser Weg," *Film und Volk* 1, no. 1 (March 1928), 4–5. All citations from *Film und Volk* in this chapter come from the reprint by Richard Weber.

no exception, and its short time-span—lasting from March 1928 until early 1932 (in the Hamburg and Stuttgart chapters)—is hardly extraordinary when one thinks about the careers of groups like the Berlin Kinematographische Studiengesellschaft or the Viennese Kinogemeinde.

Still, one could argue that the VFV had a particularly 'ephemeral' quality compared to other groups examined here—and this not without reason, since it had to grapple not only with scanty material resources (given the low cost of membership), but also, on account of its leftist orientation, with the resistance of the film industry, city councils and the police. The founding members of the VFV were under no illusions about the challenges faced by a left-wing cultural organization. From the beginning, their efforts met with opposition from the authorities, who banned the screening of their inaugural compilation newsreel, *Zeitbericht—Zeitgesicht* (News of the Times—Face of the Times), at the group's inaugural matinee at the Capitol Cinema in Berlin on 26 February 1928. They also faced hurdles from distributors and cinema operators, who pressured the owners of the Capitol (albeit unsuccessfully) to drop the matinee altogether and would continue to refuse to release relevant films such as Pabst's *Die Liebe der Jeanne Ney* in subsequent months and years.[5] Such challenges plagued the VFV throughout its existence, and the group had persistent difficulties even funding its film journal, *Film und Volk*, let alone meeting all of its other goals. (Figure 45) As a result, the VFV had to put out constant calls for volunteers (*Helfer*) to donate their time and energy to ensure that the journal came out on time or events could happen at all. (Figure 46) A flyer distributed to Hamburg members in mid-1929 summarized the situation fairly typically: "The Volks-Film-Verband must struggle against great difficulties; volunteers from among the group's members are few and far between, the group's financial situation is wanting, and the systematic boycott of our group by nearly all bourgeois film distribution companies hampers our work" (Der Volks-Film-Verband hat mit großen Schwierigkeiten zu kämpfen; die Helfer aus den Mitgliederkreisen sind nicht zahlreich, die finanzielle Lage des Verbandes ist schlecht, und der planmäßige Boykott fast sämtlicher bürgerlicher Filmverleih-Gesellschaften hemmt uns in der Arbeit).[6] Reading through such announcements, one has a sense that the

5 See for example the letter from Rudolf Schwarzkopf (treasurer of the VFV) to Heinrich Mann dated 30 March 1928 in *Film und revolutionäre Arbeiterbewegung in Deutschland 1918–1932,* ed. Gertraude Kühn, Karl Tümmler and Walter Wimmer, Vol. 2 (Berlin: Hensch Verlag, 1978), 246–47.

6 "Flugblatt des Hamburger Volks-Film-Verbandes," in *Film und revolutionäre Arbeiterbewegung,* 292.

Figure 45: *Film und Volk,* August 1928, cover page

VFV, even more than the other groups covered here, was always hanging by a thread. This precarious quality also means that researching the VFV poses challenges. Unlike the other film societies examined here, the group left no printed minutes in its journal *Film und Volk* (though the journal did include an 'announcements' section). In addition, many of the key documents circulated by the group were unpublished, unofficial or even underground, including letters, pamphlets and flyers.[7] And even the group's screenings sometimes happened 'under the radar,' as it were, so as to avoid pushback from cinema operators.[8]

Malte Hagener has argued that we need to reassess the narratives of failure around groups such as the VFV—which he situates within the larger cine-club movement of the late 1920s—in order to highlight the lasting

7 Like much writing on the VFV, this chapter relies heavily on the helpful document collection *Film und revolutionäre Arbeiterbewegung in Deutschland.*

8 See for example Rudolf Schwarzkopf's letter to Heinrich Mann from 30 March 1928, in which he describes a planned screening of Eisenstein's *October,* to which they did not invite the press "so as not to arouse the protest of theater owners once again" (*Film und revolutionäre Arbeiterbewegung,* 247).

Das zweite Jahr

Im Anfang steht die Frage. — hat der Volks-Film-Verband in seinem Gründungsjahr das gehalten, was seine Freunde von ihm erwarteten. Nein! Ein klares nein! Es wäre zwecklos, und gereichte unserer Bewegung nur zum Schaden, wollte man die Antwort auch nur mit einem Beiwort abschwächen. Was erwarteten unsere Freunde vom VFV.? Rudolf Schwarzkopf, der erste Direktor schrieb im Heft 1 zum Programm:

„Der Weg ist verschieden, je nach den örtlichen Besonderheiten. In Berlin führt er zu einem großen Uraufführungstheater. Die Mitglieder werden mindestens 10 Mal im Jahre dieses Theater besuchen können, wobei sie sicher sein können, nur Filme zu sehen, die ihren und unseren Zielen entsprechen. — Die Eintrittspreise werden streng nach den Selbstkosten berechnet werden. — Und eines Tages werden wir selbst produzieren —."

Hier sind die drei Illusionen, die das Tempo unserer Entwicklung hemmten, die uns von unserem eigentlichen Ziel: Kampf gegen die Reaktion im Film, wegbrachten. Die erste und schönste Illusion, das große Uraufführungstheater, wurde ohne Schwierigkeit überwunden. Die Gründe dazu sind zu offenbar, als daß sie hier angeführt werden müßten.

Die zweite Illusion ist die gefährlichste und heute noch fest verankert bei der Hellerschaft wie bei den Mitgliedern. Es ist eine der Hauptaufgaben des Verbandes, im zweiten Jahr, hier eine vollständige ideologische Neuorientierung vorzunehmen. Weg von der Einstellung, daß der VFV., eine Organisation ist, wo man für niedrige Eintrittspreise, möglichst monatlich, einige qualifizierte Filme zu sehen bekommt. Nicht Konsum-, sondern Kampforganisation wollen wir sein. Armer Don Quichotte werden einige Helfer raten. Das wußten wir schon lange. Das haben wir in allen Diskussionen immer wieder betont. Aber trotzdem ist hier die Stelle, wo wir den größten Fehler machten. Freilich haben wir gewettert gegen Kitsch, Schund und Reaktion. Aber nicht auf die Reden kommt es an, sondern auf den Inhalt unserer Arbeit. Fast die gesamte Arbeit im Gründungsjahr unserer Organisation, erschöpfte sich in Filmveranstaltungen, die nach dem Leitmotiv durchgeführt wurden: „Eintrittspreis für Mitglieder 20, für Gäste 80 Pfg."

Wer glaubt, daß man mit dieser Methode gegen die Filmreaktion ernsthaft kämpfen kann, der mag ebenso gut annehmen, daß man mit dem ersparten Sonntagsgeld eines Lehrlings Ufa-Aktien kaufen kann. Warum werden wir mit Filmveranstaltungen allein keinen Kampf gegen die Filmreaktion führen können? Einfach darum, weil der Gegner immer die besseren Veranstaltungen hat. Er verfügt über herrliche Filmtheater, wir müssen uns mit Saalvorführungen begnügen. Haben wir wirklich ein Theater, dann nur des Nachts oder Sonntags morgens, wo wir für die außergewöhnliche Zeit eine außerordentliche Propagandakraft entfalten müssen, wollen wir das Theater gefüllt sehen. Und schließlich, die Filme, die der VFV. zeigt, sind nicht sein Monopolgut, sondern werden in jedem großen Theater ebenso gezeigt. Hinzukommt noch, daß die übrigen linksgerichteten Kulturorganisationen sich des Filmes im steigenden Maße als Propagandamittel bedienen. Im Monat Januar führten die Berliner Organisationen allein 52 Filmver-

Werdet Helfer

14

Figure 46: "Werdet Helfer," *Film und Volk,* 1929

contributions such groups made to film culture: "[D]espite the disappearance of many ciné-clubs [sic] activities in the course of the 1930s, they created something more durable than ephemeral events. What was at stake was not only a new public, but a new way of viewing films and a new way of thinking about film."[9] Those new energies around film, Hagener argues, would find their lasting imprints in the rise of film archives, state institutions and key schools of filmmaking such as the British documentary movement.

9 Malte Hagener, *Moving Forward, Looking Back: The European Avant-Garde and the Invention of Film Culture 1919–1939* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), 119.

Hagener's revisionist account has the particular advantage of showing how cultural and discursive factors can create the very frameworks in which new institutions (archives, institutes, etc.) become intelligible, and part of what I want to explore in this chapter is precisely the ways in which the VFV, despite the many challenges the group faced, helped to crystallize to "a new way of thinking about film" as a political instrument, as well as the links of the group to the burgeoning practice of documentary.

At the same time, as Hagener himself understands well, one cannot ignore the very real differences existing within the film society scene of the 1920s. In the context of a study like this one, those differences lead us to distinguish sharply between the cinephobic tendencies of the VFV and the cinephilia of groups like the Viennese Kinogemeinde. But they might also lead us to question whether the VFV can even be seen as an 'avant-garde' film society at all. Writers for the journal *Film und Volk* tended to reserve the term "avant-garde" almost exclusively to designate the French experimental scene.[10] And despite counting Walter Ruttmann among its honorary committee and running occasional articles by figures like Ruttmann and László Moholy-Nagy in the journal, the VFV showed little interest in experimental film, in the sense of non-narrative or absolute film. As they put it in their opening manifesto "Der Volks-Film-Bühne ruft!" (The Popular Film Stage is Calling!), written in January 1929 and reprinted as a preface to the first issue of *Film und Volk*:

> What we want and demand are not extravagant experiments. We have no obsessions with educational ideas rooted in aesthetics and literature. We know that cinema should, first and foremost, be a place of relaxation and entertainment. But we believe that "entertainment" does not mean "trash," and that "relaxation" is not the same thing as "intellectual poverty."[11]
>
> Wir wollen und verlangen keine verstiegenen Experimente. Wir haben keine in Ästhetik und Literatur befangenen Bildungsfimmel. Wir wissen, dass das Kino in erster Reihe eine Stätte der Entspannung und Unterhaltung sein will und sein soll. Aber wir glauben, daß "Unterhaltung" nicht

10 One exception can be found in a letter from Rudolf Schwarzkopf to Heinrich Mann from April 1928, in which Schwarzkopf proposed the creation of separate working groups, to include one group on experimental film. But this idea appears to have fallen off the radar in subsequent documents of the VFV. See Schwarzkopf, letter to Heinrich Mann from 2 April 1928, in *Film und revolutionäre Arbeiterbewegung,* 248.

11 "Gründungsaufruf vom Januar 1928," *Film und revoluntionäre Arbeiterbewegung*, 238. See also "Die Volks-Film-Bühne ruft!," *Film und Volk* 1, no. 1 (March 1928), preliminary pages.

> gleichbedeutend ist mit "Schund," daß "Entspannung" nicht dasselbe ist wie "geistige Armut."

The term "extravagant experiments" (*verstiegene Experimente*) evokes films such as those shown at the famous matinee *Absoluter Film* in 1925. But it might have also been a reference to another film society, namely the Gesellschaft Neuer Film (Society for New Film), founded by Hans Richter and others for the screening of experimental film almost simultaneously with the Volks-Film-Verband in 1928.[12] Regardless of the specific referent here, however, the VFV was clearly defining itself in distinction to film groups dedicated to artistic experimentation, something a writer from Hamburg made clear when he argued that, even as the group sought to elevate the tastes of the masses, it also needed to avoid "the danger of snobby fellow travelers."[13] The VFV's surviving screening records also indicate that the group rarely, if ever, showed abstract films in the vein of Richter and Ruttmann. They did screen occasional montage films—especially Albrecht Viktor Blum's *Im Schatten der Maschine* (*In the Shadow of the Machine*), which toured various VFV chapters in Germany in 1928 and 1929—but those were films the group could value for their documentary function, as it did for Russian film more broadly (a topic I explore in more detail below). On the whole, the Volks-Film-Verband simply had little investment in probing the 'specific' or 'essential' aesthetic qualities of film. Nor did the group subscribe to the anti-mimetic project of high modernism.

But if the VFV was not primarily motivated by questions of artistic or medium specificity, where did its project lie? This chapter argues that it lay in teaching people to understand film first and foremost as a question of mass mentalities and a means of mass organization: to assess its nefarious impacts on the masses (in its current form as entertainment cinema), but also to use its sheer mass appeal for progressive ends. As the same founding manifesto put it, in a passage that would find echoes in numerous subsequent articles and public lectures:

> Day after day, 200,000 people sit in the cinema in Berlin alone. In the space of a year, this adds up to more than *60 million cinema patrons.* This figure alone demonstrates sufficiently the immense *importance of film.* [...] No less *immense* are the possibilities of film in every respect.[14]

12 On this point, see also Hagener, *Moving Forward, Looking Back,* 90.

13 Max Holländer, "Der neue Geist im Film," *Film und Volk* 1, no. 3–4 (June 1928), 21.

14 "Die Volks-Film-Bühne ruft!" n.p. The italicized words are given in bold font in the original.

> Tag für Tag sitzen allein in Berlin an 200 000 Menschen im Kino. Das macht im Jahre weit über *60 Millionen von Kinobesuchern*. Diese Ziffer allein beweist zur Genüge die ungeheure *Bedeutung des Films.* […] *Ungeheuer* sind daher die *Möglichkeiten des Films* schlechthin in jeder Beziehung.

In other words, the VFV understood film first and foremost *as a mass medium,* one whose influence over the working masses could no longer be ignored. In what follows, I want to step back from questions about success or failure of the VFV to chart the evolution of this idea of cinema as a mass medium, as well as the implications the idea had for the group's understanding of what a 'film society' meant, how it should be structured and what it might do.

Positioning the Left-Wing Film Society

Though the VFV has traditionally been approached within a context of left-wing politics, it is perhaps worth recalling here at the outset how much the group had in common with previous film societies. Like most of its predecessors, the VFV started out from the idea of a feedback loop. The founding manifesto, for instance, speaks of the need to channel the public's dissatisfaction with mainstream cinema in order to force the industry to take account of higher tastes and improve its output.[15] Such channeling would be the goal of the journal's main journal, *Film und Volk,* which was launched in March 1928 with a print run of 5000 copies,[16] as well as the planned film screenings, seminars,[17] excursions and exhibitions, all of which would be provided to members for 50 Pfennig per year.[18] (Figures 47–48)

15 "Die Volks-Film-Bühne ruft!," n.p.

16 See the letter from Franz Höllering to Heinrich Mann dated 6 July 1928, in *Film und revolutionäre Arbeiterbewegung,* 260–61.

17 The group did run several seminars, such as the four-part seminar offered by Béla Balázs in January 1930, which included the topics: "Vom Manuskript bis zum fertigen Film" (From Manuscript to Finished Film) "Filmtechnische und dramaturgische Vorträge" (Lectures on Film Technology and Dramaturgy), "Ästhetische Analyse des Films" (Aesthetic Analysis of Film) and "Einblicke in die Arbeit und Entstehung eines Films überhaupt" (Insights into Film Labour and the Making of Film As Such). See "Mitteilungen des Volksverbands für Filmkunst," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 2 (December 1929–January 1930), 14.

18 On planned activities, see for example "Neue Wege! Die Gesellschaft 'Neuer Film' stellt sich vor. Die Volks-Film-Bühne ruft," *Berliner Volkszeitung,* 22 February 1928, n.p.

Für nur 50 Pfennig kann jeder Mitglied der Volks-Film-Bühne werden

Was bietet die Volks-Film-Bühne ihren Mitgliedern?

1. **Kostenlosen Zutritt** zu mindestens zehn großen **Filmveranstaltungen** im Jahr.

Uebersteigt der auf Grund der Selbstkosten errechnete Eintrittspreis den Mitgliedsbeitrag, so hat das Mitglied lediglich den Unterschied zu entrichten.

Im Rahmen dieser Veranstaltungen werden in- und ausländische Filmwerke von besonderem Wert erstmalig vorgeführt.

2. **Vorträge,** Vorlesungen, Ausstellungen, **Atelierführungen** und **Arbeitsgemeinschaften** zur Förderung und Vertiefung des Verständnisses für die Probleme des Films.

3. Eine monatlich erscheinende illustrierte **Zeitschrift,** in der alle Fragen der in- und ausländischen Filmproduktion, unbeeinflußt von Rücksichten des Inseratenteils und anderen Interessenverknüpfungen, behandelt werden.

4. Jedes Mitglied hat in regelmäßigen Mitglieder- und Hauptversammlungen Gelegenheit, die Tätigkeit der Volks-Film-Bühne entscheidend mitzubestimmen.

Hinein in die Volks-Film-Bühne!

Hier abschneiden — Deutlich schreiben!

Beitrittserklärung

An den Volksverband für Filmkunst (Volks-Film-Bühne), Berlin SW 48 Friedrichstraße 235

Hiermit erkläre ich meinen Beitritt zur Volks-Film-Bühne (Volksverband für Filmkunst) E. V.

Das Einschreibegeld in Höhe von 50 Pfennig und den Monatsbeitrag in Höhe von 50 Pfennig für ..... Monate, mithin insgesamt ..... Mark, sende ich anbei in Briefmarken — ist an den Werber ..... abgeliefert — soll bei Uebersendung der Mitgliedskarte durch Nachnahme eingezogen werden.

Name: .....

Adresse: .....

Beruf: .....

„Bukwa" G. m. b. H., Berlin C 2

Figure 47: Advertisement for the "Volks-Film-Bühne" with notice of membership, *Film und Volk,* 1928

But if the VFV's dialectical relation to the industry resembled that of other film societies generally, the group displays a particular affinity with the 'reformist' ethos of some of the pre-war film societies discussed in the first chapter. Starting with their opening manifesto, the VFV repeatedly evoked the well-known reformist term "Schund" (trash) to describe the majority of industry output and promised to counter it by transforming the cinema into "a means of disseminating knowledge, Enlightenment,


VOLKS-
FILM-VERBAND

(Volksverband für Filmkunst) E. V.

For only 50 Pfennig all may join the membership of the Volks-Film-Verband (Peoples' Film Association).

Entrance Fee: 50 pf. Monthly subscription 50 pfg.

Board of Directors:

Heinrich Mann, Kathe Kollwitz, Prof. Alfons Goldschmid, Erwin Piscator, Leonhardt Frank, Dr. Max Deri, Dr. Franz Höllering, Rudolf Schwarzkopf.

Artistic Committee:

Béla Balázs, Arthur Holitscher, Karl Freund, Edmund Meisel, G. W. Pabst, Leo Lanis, Ernst Angel, Andor Kraszna-Kraus, Franze Dyck-Schnitzer, Viktor Blum, I. A. Hubler-Kahla.

Join the Volks-Film-Verband.

All information and prospectuses from the offices of the Association, Berlin SW. 48, Friedrichstrasse 235, or from any of the branch offices.

cut here — write clearly

NOTICE OF MEMBERSHIP

To the Volksverband für Filmkunst, Berlin SW. 48, Friedrichstrasse 235.

I herewith declare my entrance into the Volksverband für Filmkunst E. V.
Enclosed is my entrance fee of 50 Pfg. and the monthly fee of not more than 50 Pfg for .... months making a total of.... Marks, for which postal order (cheque or stamps) is enclosed.
Orders and cheques payable to the Workers' Bank at S 14, Wallstrasse 65, for a/c, N° 6210 (Volks-Film-Verband).

Name

Occupation

Adress

All filmgoers who are tired of the reactionary tendencies, artistically, socially and politically of the bad German films belong with us. Against the mass of capital invested in reactionary films we must set the strength and enthusiasm of our energetic organisation.

What the Volks-Film-Verband has to offer:

1. Free admittance to at least ten good films per year. If the costs of the Association are in excess of this, the member has only the difference to pay.
2. Reports and estimates to promote understanding of the problems of the film.
3. The illustrated monthly film Magazine, **Film und Volk** at the reduced price of 20 Pfg. (instead of 40 Pfg.).

Figure 48: Advertisement for the Volks-Film-Verband with notice of membership, *Close-Up,* July 1928

education, skills, thoughts and ideas."[19] Of course, the VFV inflected such reformist ideas differently from earlier groups, and this difference was a product of its left-wing inheritance. Despite the rhetoric of knowledge and education in its founding manifesto, the group had little interest in science film, beyond the occasional screening (and article) by Edgar Beyfuß.[20] For

19 "Die Volks-Film-Bühne ruft!," n.p.

20 See for example Edgar Beyfuß, "Film und Medizin," *Film und Volk* 3, no. 1 (January 1930), 14–16.

that matter, as I'll discuss further below, its interest in art and aesthetics was also highly qualified. Rather, the criteria for 'elevating' film revolved primarily around progressive values and politics, something the VFV inherited from what was, by 1928, a well-established tradition of left-wing engagement with film—following left-wing theatrical movements such as the Volksbühne—in the pages of journals such as *Vorwärts* and *Die rote Fahne*.[21]

In this sense, the VFV was hardly an original undertaking, and many of the ideas I'll be discussing in this chapter were part and parcel of left-wing cultural formations in the 1920s.[22] If the VFV had anything unique to add to this established left-wing cultural scene, it was primarily their exclusive focus on film, which in their eyes had become a force powerful enough by the mid-1920s to warrant a distinct engagement. Here again, then, the film society did not so much create a new idea of cinema as it served to crystallize ideas that were already in the air. It is worth pointing out that, in this respect, the VFV was also part of an international development of progressive film societies. To a certain extent, this included some of the avant-garde and arthouse groups analyzed by Hagener; members of the VFV could indeed see a certain affinity with groups such as the Dutch Filmliga, the London Film Society, the French ciné-clubs or the New York Film Arts Guild, inasmuch as all of these groups shared a desire to defend 'independent film' (an affinity made clear, for example, in the very positive review of the Congress of Independent Film in La Sarraz published in *Film und Volk* in October 1928).[23] But more often than not (and especially as the group veered leftward), when writers for the VFV referred to "our fellow organizations" (*unsere Brüderorganisationen*), they specifically meant left-wing film initiatives such as the London Workers' Film Society, the French Amis du Spartacus or the Dutch Vereeniging voor Volkscultuur (Association for Popular Culture), all founded within a year of

21 See especially Murray, *Film and the German Left,* 30–55.

22 Indeed, as they themselves recognized, there was nothing inherently unique about a left-wing group screening films. As one writer observed in April 1929: "In Berlin alone, left-wing organizations carried out 52 film screenings in January. In no way should the VFV see this development as a competition. Quite the contrary, it should welcome it" (Im Monat Januar führten die Berliner [linksgerichteten] Organisationen allein 52 Filmveranstaltungen durch. Eine Entwicklung, die der VFV durchaus nicht als Konkurrenz zu hemmen hat, sondern im Gegenteil, er muß sie rodern). "Das zweite Jahr," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 3 (April 1929), 14–15.

23 See "La Sarraz," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 8 (October 1929), 3. There is some evidence that the VFV tried to establish collaborations with many of these groups early on. See H. Jaeger, "Protokoll der 1. Reichskonferenz vom 30. April 1928 in Erfurt," *Film und revolutionäre Arbeiterbewegung,* 252.

the VFV.[24] In an article from January 1930, for example, Franzesko Misiano could claim triumphantly that the VFV, through its association with the left-wing distributor Weltfilm, was part of a "network of proletarian film organizations" (*Netz von proletarischen Filmorganisationen*) that included workers' film societies in Germany, Great Britain, France, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Switzerland and North America.[25]

Among scholars of German film, this rise of leftist film culture in the Weimar Republic has been examined especially in relation to the influence of Eisenstein, whose *Battleship Potemkin* enjoyed a surprisingly successful run in 1925.[26] No doubt, this reading has some legitimacy inasmuch as the VFV repeatedly held up Soviet cinema as a model for its own endeavors, and members like Albrecht Viktor Blum cited Soviet montage as a major influence on their own work in Germany.[27] But stylistic influences alone could not sustain an operation like a film society. More crucial were the infrastructural conditions that Soviet distribution—and German-Russian collaborations in particular—helped to put into place. Given the VFV's struggles with cinema owners and distributors, obtaining *any* films for screening posed a challenge, and no doubt part of the reason they turned to Soviet film was on account of existing left-wing initiatives in production and distribution companies. There was Willi Münzenberg's Internationale Arbeiterhilfe (IAH, founded 1921), which helped to bring many of the first Soviet films to Germany, and from which many of the writers for *Film und Volk* came. There were also several film distribution and production companies that the IAH helped to spawn, such as Prometheus Film (1926–31), the Deutsch-Russische Film-Allianz (Derussa, 1927–29) and Weltfilm (1928–32).[28] Without the existence of such distribution companies, a film society like the VFV would have been unthinkable, and it was only logical that the editors of *Film und Volk* frequently ran advertisements for these distributors and occasionally attached distribution catalogues to issues of the journal.[29] (Figure 49)

24 See "Unsere holländische Bruderorganisation im Kampf gegen die Schikanen," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 12 (December 1929), 15; "Unsere Bruderorganisation in England," *Film und Volk* 3, no. 2 (February 1930), 39.

25 Franzesko Misiano, "Die Gegner formieren sich," *Film und Volk* 3, no. 1 (January 1930), 2.

26 See for example Miriam Hansen, "Of Lightning Rods, Prisms and Forgotten Scissors: *Potemkin* and German Film Theory," *New German Critique,* no. 95 (2005), 162–79.

27 See Viktor Albrecht Blum, "Bildschnitt," in *Film und Volk* 2, no. 2 (December 1928), 9.

28 See Murray, *Film and the German Left,* 195–98. On Derussa more specifically, see Thomas Saunders, "The German-Russian film (mis)alliance (DERUSSA): Commerce and politics in German-Soviet cinema ties," *Film History* 9, no. 2 (1997), 168–88.

29 The 1978 facsimile reprint of *Film und Volk* includes one such catalogue in October 1929, but there are other announcements for attached programs that were not included in the reprint.

Figure 49: Weltfilm Catalogue, *Film und Volk,* 1929

At the same time, neither the VFV nor the distribution companies it relied on were limited to Russian cinema. They also showed some international productions—and discussed many more in their journal—including films by Chaplin, Jacques Feyder, Alberto Cavalcanti and others. Hence one might say that the very hurdles imposed by the German film industry (i.e., the difficulty of obtaining current German films) led the VFV to devote increased attention to what would later come to be understood as world cinema.[30] But this was not simply a question of necessity or limited access. Far from promoting just any films from other parts of the world, the VFV, following organizations like the IAH, understood world cinema to have a mission. Not unlike Vertov, they wanted cinema to link the working classes of different countries, allowing them to see each other and to feel part of an international community with common interests (a point I'll return to below). The group also repeatedly critiqued dominant colonialist models of

30 Cf. the protocol of the group's first international conference in 1928: "Deutsche Filme gebe es bis jetzt für uns nur wenig. Es kämen zur Zeit nur russische, französische und amerikanische in Frage" (Jaeger, "Protokoll," 254).

global cinematic production and distribution that did not serve that mission. For example, one writer discussing the prominent travelogue filmmaker Lola Kreutzberg lamented: "In her trip to the colonies, Lola Kreutzberg could only see exoticism. She could see nothing of the struggles of this oppressed people, of their misery and poverty, of colonial oppression" (Lola Kreutzberg hat in den Kolonien nur das Exotische gesehen, vom Kampf dieses unterdrückten Volkes, von Elend und Armut, von der kolonialen Unterdrückung sah sie nichts).[31] Another article by Alfons Goldschmidt (of the IAH) on Latin American film complained that most of the 'Latin American' films showing in countries like Chile were in fact US productions, which functioned primarily as delivery systems for imperialist propaganda rather than attempts to lay bare the realities of local working-class life:

> The obfuscation goes so far that they even dare to show films which are visibly against Latin American independence movements. In Mexico City I saw a Negro film, dripping with sentimentality, which was actually an anti-Negro flick that expressed pure disdain for all 'colored' peoples.[32]

> Die Benebelung geht soweit, daß man sogar Films zu spielen wagt, die den latein-amerikanischen Unabhängigkeitsinteressen sichtbar zuwider sind. In Mexiko-Stadt sah ich einen Neger-Film, mit großer Sentimentalität aufgemacht, in Wirklichkeit aber ein negerfeindlicher Streifen, der die Verachtung allen ‚farbigen' Völkern zum Ausdruck brachte.

World cinema, then, was understood here not in terms of auteurist masterpieces, but rather in terms of socialist politics, where 'good' films revealed the exploitative workings of international capital and the conditions of world labor rather than peddling in Hollywood fantasies or perpetuating exoticized images of local 'traditions.'

All of this also points to a foundational tension that informed the VFV's existence, one that largely overlapped with the tension between 'center' and 'left' factions: namely a tension between aesthetic and political understandings of film or between art and what the group referred to—following discussions among left-wing intellectuals at the time—as *Tendenz* (ideology, political direction). At first, these two ideas co-existed more or less unquestioned, often laid out side-by-side with little to suggest any tensions

31 "Lola Kreutzberg, *Tiere, Tänzerinnen und Dämonen,*" *Film und Volk* 3, no. 1 (January 1930), 24.

32 Alfons Goldschmidt, "Filme in Latein-Amerika," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 6 (1929), 4.

between them. The group's founding manifesto, for instance, informed readers that their mission was to struggle "against artistic trash [*Schund*], against intellectual poverty and against politically and socially reactionary films."[33] Elsewhere, writers made more explicit claims about the linkage between the aesthetics and politics, as in this line from a discussion of the censorship of *Potemkin*: "The best artistic and best political images almost always coincide."[34] As the group veered leftward, however, it became increasingly evident that these two values did not necessarily overlap. At the VFV's first national conference in April 1928, for example, the Hamburg representative Max Holländer worried aloud about "the danger that the organization might be infiltrated by 'artistic progressives' (*Kunstfortschrittler*) who demand films of high aesthetic quality but understand nothing about politics (*Tendenz*) and therefore smuggle in reactionary artistic films films."[35] (Holländer then called for statutes to explicitly forbid artistic endeavors that weren't coupled with progressive *Tendenz*.)

Such tensions between artistic and political qualities eventually called for some grappling with the question of what precisely was understood by 'art.' In December 1928, an article by Alfred Piepenstock under the title "Klassenkunst" (Class Art) answered that question by mounting a virulent critique of the dominant Kantian idea of disinterested aesthetics, arguing instead that art is always driven by *Tendenz*. Like any art form, Piepenstock maintained, film was inherently political, indeed more so than other arts on account of its mass appeal. Hence, films should be appraised first and foremost in terms of their ideological content—for example whether they promoted an individualistic or a collective world view—rather than simply on abstract aesthetic or formal principles. Soviet film, he concluded, had taught people to rethink their understanding of aesthetics and ushered in a new epoch "in which art is no longer a *thing in itself* (*ein Ding an sich*), but rather a *thing for us* (*ein Ding für uns*)."[36]

33 "Die Volks-Film-Bühne ruft!", n.p. Such 'coalition' thinking was actually built into the early plans for the group; in a letter to Heinrich Mann from April 1928, Schwarzkopf proposed several subgroups within the VFV, devoted respectively to aesthetics, radical politics, democratic politics and apolitical productions (tendenz-freie Produktion), for which he foresaw Mann as the head. See Rudolf Schwarzkopf, letter to Heinrich Mann 2 April 1928, in *Film und revolutionäre Arbeiterbewegung,* 248.

34 Image caption, *Film und Volk* 2, no. 3 (April 1929), 7.

35 Jaeger, "Protokoll," 254 ("die Gefahr, daß sich in die Organisation ‚Kunstfortschrittler' einschlichen, die künstlerisch gute Filme zwar verlangten, aber von ‚Tendenz' nichts wissen und darum auch künstlerische reaktionäre Filme einschmuggeln wollten").

36 Alfred Piepenstock, "Klassenkunst," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 2 (December 1928), 6.

Given this ambivalence about aesthetic judgment in the VFV, it is, then, unsurprising that the group tended to avoid the kinds of abstract explorations of medium specificity promoted by arthouse and experimental cine-clubs. Instead, VFV writers overwhelmingly preferred an aesthetics we would now associate with documentary realism. Indeed, this is the primary framework in which members of the VFV read Soviet film, even that of Eisenstein. A 1928 review of Eisenstein's *October,* for example, makes no mention of montage, but praises Eisenstein's realistic depiction of the Russian revolution: "The film is not even history-writing, it is not the dramatization of historical events. It is: coverage, reportage, contemporary history" ([Der Film] ist nicht einmal Geschichtsschreibung, er ist nicht Dramatisierung eines historischen Ereignisses, er ist: Berichterstattung, Reportage, Gegenwarts-Historie).[37] A similar dynamic can be seen in the group's positive reception of American film. A discussion of Chaplin from 1929, for instance, has little to say about Chaplin as an artist, but a lot to say about the realism of Chaplin's films: "What he experiences in his films is what we have seen and observed 100 times in daily life. These are the things that matter to us, thing that play out in our lives" (Das, was er in seinen Filmen erlebt, hundertmal haben wir es im täglichen Leben beobachtet und gesehen. Es sind Dinge, die uns angehen, die in unserem Leben spielen).[38]

A key descriptor in such readings was "wirklichkeitsnah" (close to reality), and this demand for proximity to reality could not be further from the celebrations of cinematic illusion we saw in the Viennese Kinogemeinde. As the Chaplin example suggests, moreover, staying close to reality did not necessarily mean that films had to be non-fiction in a strict sense, and many articles in *Film und Volk* praised fictional and even fantasy films such as

37 Hans Siemsen, "10 Tage, die die Welt erschütterten," *Film und Volk* 1, no. 2 (April 1928), 14.

38 Erich Lange, "Charlie Chaplin – 40 Jahre," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 4 (May 1929), 14. Cf. a review of Feyder's *Die neuen Herren* (*Les nouveaux messieurs*, 1929): "Wenn wir von der Liebesgeschichte, um der sich die eigentliche Handlung gruppiert, absehen, so dreht sich dieser Film um Probleme, die uns allen am tiefsten angehen: das Verhältnis des Arbeiterführers zu der Klasse, aus der er hervorgeht, die ihm zur Macht verhilft; sein Verhältnis zu seinem politischen Programm und Versprechungen, zu den Klassengegnern und zur politischen Position, die er bekleidet." J. K., "Kritischer Filmbericht," *Film und Volk* 3, no. 2 (February 1930), 34. To understand the stakes of the group's realist aesthetics, it is perhaps helpful to recall what it was aimed against. Above all, the group disliked the reigning genres of historical film, including nationalist films of the Fredericus Rex variety, but also costume dramas and nostalgic Heimatfilms, which they often described as "Alt-Heidelberg- und Rheinweinkitsch." Good films, on the contrary, should deal with contemporary reality. But they also critiqued Hollywood romances and special effects films intent on illusion. All of these films received the appellation of "kitsch" within the VFV, suggesting a link to contemporary modernist discussions about ornamentation.

Cavalcanti's *Le petit chaperon rouge* (1929) for their stylistic realism.[39] Still, there was a marked preference for 'docu-drama' qualities such as the use of lay actors and outdoor sets. This is apparent in the glowing reception accorded to films such as *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück* (*Mother Krausen's Journey into Happiness,* Phil Jutzi, 1929), which one VFV writer praised for its "near total exclusion of actors" and its use of location shooting in Berlin's Wedding district.[40] It should hardly come as a surprise, then, that one of the first German films the VFV helped to create, *Hunger in Waldeburg* (*Shadow of a Mine,* 1929), was also a docu-drama, showing the plight of impoverished mine workers in Silesia. In his discussion of the film, project director Leo Lania described it as a "combination of reportage and fiction film," which followed a "typical worker's destiny" and featured "not a single actor, not a single studio shot, no made-up faces, no wigs, no false beards and no costumes."[41] *Hunger in Waldenburg* was, he concluded, a first attempt "to bring the close-to-reality film [*wirklichkeitsnaher Film*] to Germany as well."[42]

The VFV's praise for docu-drama appears to have few if any links to the contemporary documentary movement in Britain, which is never mentioned in the pages of *Film und Volk.* More plausibly, it looked back to a longer tradition of Soviet documentary films shown in Germany in the early 1920s, mostly through the aegis of the Internationale Arbeiterhilfe.[43] At the same time, such docu-dramas also bore distinct affinities with the Kulturfilm movement in Germany, which often employed lay actors and displayed an analogous blend of fiction and non-fiction (e.g., featuring 'typical' rather than individualized characters). In fact, the VFV showed a keen interest in the possibilities of the Kulturfilm, both in Germany and Russia.[44] But they consistently critiqued German Kulturfilm productions for failing—in their adherence to scientific explanations—to identify the social and political causes of the problems they explored. A review of the anti-syphilis film *Küsse die Toten* (*Kiss the Dead,* 1928), for example, faulted the film not only for its unrealistic happy ending (in which a sailor who contracts syphilis

39 See Egon Larsen, "Cavalcanti dreht," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 7 (August–September 1929), 7–8.

40 Otto Nagel, "Heinrich Zille," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 7 (August–September 1929), 3.

41 Leo Lania, "Hunger im Kohlenrevier: ein Filmbericht aus dem Waldenburger Notgebiet," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 3 (April 1929), 1.

42 Lania, "Hunger im Kohlenrevier," 3.

43 See Toni Stooss, "'Erobert den Film!' oder Prometheus gegen UFA & Co.: Zur Geschichte des proletarischen Films in der Weimarer Republik," 18–19; Murray, *Film and the German Left,* 52–53. Films such as *Hunger in Waldenburg* (1928) had direct precursors in films such as *Hunger in Sowjetrußland* (1922), which the IAH brought to Germany in 1922.

44 See for example "Kulturfilm in der UdSSR," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 11–12 (December 1929), 12–13.

from a prostitute is eventually healed and able to live out a happy marriage), but above all for its lack of attention to the social conditions of syphilis outbreaks: "Alongside the effects of sexual diseases, one needs to identify the causes, not simply those external causes in the form of spirochetes, but also the social determinants of devastating mass illnesses" (Neben den Folgen der Geschlechtskrankheiten muß man die Ursachen sehen, d.h. nicht lediglich jene äußeren im Gestalt der Spirochäten, sondern ebenso die sozialen Ausgangspunkte volksverheerender Krankheiten).[45] This is precisely what another writer meant when he wrote that "The Kulturfilm must acquire documentary value" (Der Kulturfilm muss dokumentarischen Wert bekommen).[46] In the eyes of the VFV, such "documentary" value always means attending to social conditions and taking a political position.

Confronting the Industry: The Question of Scale

But if the VFV's working class mission made for a particular understanding of film aesthetics, it also made for a specific understanding of its own role as a film society. This is visible, first of all, as a question of scale; unlike most of the film societies discussed in previous chapters, the VFV set out from the start to create a nation-wide network of film associations. Indeed, the very word *Verband* (association, federation), rather than *Klub* or *Gemeinde* (community), was meant to emphasize that this would be a *mass* organization, not tied to any given locality. In fact, the group's initial name, proposed at the first national conference in Erfurt in spring 1928, was Reichsverband deutscher Volks-Film-Verbände" (National Federation of People's Film Associations), though it continued to be known colloquially as the Volks-Film-Verband.[47]

45 Kurt Caro, "Küsse die Toten," *Film und Volk* 1, no. 3–4 (June 1928), 11. A later discussion of such sexual "Enlightenment" films argues similarly: "Wie will man von der sexuellen Not unserer Jugend sprechen, ohne die Tatsache zu erwähnen, daß viele Jugendliche kein einziges Bett haben. Daß sie gezwungen sind, mit Eltern, Großeltern, Geschwistern und Untermietern zu schlafen. Daß jugen Arbeitermädchen mit Schlafburschen ihr Bett teilen müssen.... Die Sexualnot, meine Herren Produzenten, ist nicht in den geräumigen Wohnungen der Filmdramen zu suchen, sondern in den Mietslöchern des Berliner Nordens. Nicht bei Sektgelagen und in Weinrestaurants, nicht im Auto des Wochenend-Jünglings, sondern im Gefängnis, auf dem Arbeitslosen-Nachweis, unter den Obdachlosen." "Achtung! Sensationsmache!" *Film und Volk* 2, no. 6 (July 1929), 2.

46 Manfred Georg, "Das Dokument von Shanghai. Die Enthüllung Ostasiens durch den Film," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 1 (November 1928), 4.

47 Jaeger "Protokoll," 257. This mass-scale also clearly distinguished the VFV from its forerunner in the Volksbühne movement and helps to explain why the group dropped the idea of a central first-run

From the beginning, the VFV placed great emphasis on establishing local chapters quickly around the country. But setting up such a federation of left-wing film societies was difficult, as one can gather from a surviving protocol of the group's first international conference. To a large extent, local associations had to rely on socialist infrastructure already in place; frequently, they built upon the work of popular Arbeiter Kultur- und Sportkartells (Cartels for Proletarian Culture and Athletics), which already had experience organizing film screenings.[48] But there were also theater groups like the "Guillotine" group in Tübingen (which took out a group membership to the Stuttgart chapter of the VFV) and a "Theatergemeinde" (theater community) in Offenbach, which formed the basis of the local VFV chapter there.[49] Some of these localities had an easier time than others. If the formation of the Hamburg group was fairly straightforward, members seeking to set up a chapter in conservative Munich met with much greater obstacles from planning authorities and the so-called Landesfilmbühne (the film department of the Bavarian Cultural Ministry).[50] In addition, there were the standard problems encountered by most 'federalist' structures, such as fears that Berlin would dominate other groups.[51] But these were counterbalanced by the recognition that, in the face of the intransigence of film distributors and cinema owners, it was necessary to organize film distribution centrally, coordinating tours of films throughout the various groups rather than leaving each group to secure its own prints and screening rights from distributors.[52] There was also a lot of on-the-job learning: learning how to skirt entertainment taxes by inserting cultural films,[53] learning about the habits of cinema-goers (who it turned out were mostly unwilling to travel far from their local districts to see films),[54] and so on.

theater in Berlin. As Friedl Lange explained, anticipating Walter Benjamin's arguments, film differed from theater in its reproducibility: "Eine Aufführung der Volksbühne ist nur an der Volksbühne zu sehen, ein Film kann in jedem Kino gespielt werden, selten fährt jemand eine weite Strecke, um einen Film zu sehen." Friedl Lange, "Helfer der Kultur," *Film und Volk* 1, no. 5 (August 1928), 12.

48 See for example Jaeger, "Protokoll," 254; "Mitteilungen des Volksverbandes für Filmkunst," *Film und Volk* 1, no. 2 (April 1928), 23–24. On the wider background of left-wing associational culture, see Sabine Hake, *The Proletarian Dream: Socialism, Culture and Emotion in Germany 1863–1933* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2017), 155–77.

49 See letter to the Volks-Film-Verband from the Guillotine (Tübingen), dated 7 March 1929, in *Film und revolutionäre Arbeiterbewegung,* 285–86. On the theater group in Offenbach, see Jaeger, "Protokoll," 253.

50 Jaeger, "Protokoll," 255.

51 See Jaeger, "Protokoll," 252–53.

52 Jaeger, "Protokoll," 254.

53 Jaeger, "Protokoll," 255.

54 See "Worauf es ankommt," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 2 (December 1928), 12.

Not surprisingly, recruitment was an ever-present issue, and groups searched for various ways of recruiting *en masse*. Sometimes, representatives would go into factories in an effort to recruit entire groups of workers.[55] And lest we forget, recruitment was also the most important function of film screenings themselves. Indeed, there is hardly a report on a film screening, either in the journal or in the correspondence among members, that fails to mention how many members that screening helped to enlist.[56] In Berlin, the group divided the entire city into districts and planned screenings in each one with the explicit goal of attracting more members.

In every way, then, the VFV sought to form a *mass* organization, and this emphasis on mass-scale can only be understood when one also understands the VFV's view of the film industry with which it stood in conflict. Unlike groups such as the Viennese Kinogemeinde, the VFV was deeply suspicious of the industry—here identified with major film producers and distributors rather than technological manufacturers—and its motives. This, too, it shared with earlier reformist societies. But where those pre-war societies had worried about the film industry's lack of concern for public morality, the VFV understood the industry above all through the lens of class struggle: i.e., as an alliance of capital and state power increasingly intent on suppressing working-class interests. Here again, one can see the VFV's inheritance from previous left-wing groups, which had frequently criticized the industry for promoting capitalist ideologies.[57] But the VFV focused especially on the increasing consolidation of economic power within the film industry, which had institutionalized significantly since the 1910s with the rise of a few large companies such as UFA and Emelka and the founding of the Spio in 1923.[58] For members of the VFV, clear evidence for the dangerous concentration of power was provided by the 1927 acquisition of the UFA by media mogul Alfred Hugenberg (rightwing politician and head of Scherl Verlag, who would go on to help the National Socialists come to power), which brought Germany's largest film company into the sphere of a vast and

55 See for example Rudolf Schwarzkopf, letter to Heinrich Mann from 30 March 1928, in *Film und revolutionäre Arbeiterbewegung,* 247; Franz Höllering, letter to Heinrich Mann from 6 July 1928, in *Film und revolutionäre Arbeiterbewegung,* 260.

56 A typical screening report reads like this: "Am vergangenen Sonnabend hatten wir eine sehr gelungene Mitgliederveranstaltung mit dem neuen Eisensteinfilm. […] Wir haben durch diese Veranstaltung neuerdings einige hundert Mitglieder gewonnen." Rudolf Schwarzkopf, Letter to Heinrich Mann, 19 April 1928, in *Film und revolutionäre Arbeiterbewegung,* 249.

57 See Murray, *Film and the German Left,* 36–55

58 Toni Stooss has argued that the tendency toward "monopolization" in the film industry formed one of the key motivators behind the formation of the VFV. See Stooss, "'Erobert den Film!' oder Prometheus gegen UFA & Co.," 24.

right-leaning media concern. The Rupert Murdoch of his day, Hugenberg remained a central—perhaps *the* central—target of VFV critique, which saw Hugenberg's UFA as the chief example of a much larger process of media consolidation (or in the vocabulary of the VFV "Vertrustung").[59] As Albert Hotopp, representative of the Prenzlauerberg chapter of the KPD and editor of *Film und Volk*, put it in an article from 1929:

> The growth of trust-like operations within the film industry is so strong that production, distribution and the ownership of large movie theaters now lies in the hands of just a few companies. The market is dominated by Ufa, Terra, Phöbus, Emelka, etc. They decide what gets made and screened. Their press creates the propaganda for these productions and systematically steers cinemagoers towards the films that the industry finds good. Good in this sense means hidden propaganda for the goals of imperialism.[60]

> Die Vertrustung innerhalb der Filmindustrie ist so stark, daß Herstellung, Verleih und große Theater in der Hand einiger weniger Gesellschaften liegen. Der Markt wird beherrscht von der Ufa, Terra, Phöbus, Emelka, usw. Sie bestimmen, was gedreht und gespielt wird. Ihre Presse macht die Propaganda und lenkt planmäßig den Kinobesucher zu dem Film hin, den die Industrie für gut hält. Gut ist in diesem Sinne die versteckte Propaganda für die Ziele des Imperialismus.

While the VFV quickly realized that it could never hope to match this sheer scale of film industry resources, it did believe that a mass film society would at least make the presence of an opposition visible.[61]

In its effort to counter the industry, the VFV also sought to position itself within a larger landscape of international film initiatives in the late 1920s. While this included the like-minded international film societies mentioned above, it also included several 'enemy' conservative organizations against which it sought to define itself. Foremost among the latter were the International Catholic Office for Cinema, founded in 1928 following the First International Catholic Cinema Congress in The Hague (which

59 On the importance of media concentration as a VFV theme, see also Weber, "Der Volksfilmverband," 14.

60 Albert Hotopp, "Kinobesucher und Produktion," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 6 (July 1929), 11.

61 As one writer put it, the VFV would oppose the "Kapitalmasse hugenbergscher Filmkonzerne" with "die Menschenmasse der bewußt Wollenden und Könnenden." "Worauf es ankommt," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 2 (December 1928–January 1929), 12.

also led to the founding of the Munich-based Leo Filmgesellschaft for the production of 'Catholic correct' films) and the International Educational Cinematographic Institute, founded in Rome in 1928 with backing from the League of Nations.[62] The German Volksverein für das katholische Deutschland (Popular Association for Catholic Germany) had already played an important role in the cinema reform movement of the 1910s, helping to found (among other things) the Lichtbilderei G.m.b.H. (See Chapter 1.) But the Catholic Church was devoting new energies to film in the mid-1920s, which it recognized as a powerful means of disseminating a religious and moral world view. What was striking about the new International Catholic Cinema Office, as W. Nettelbeck reported in his discussion for *Film und Volk*, was the extent to which it seemed to mirror, inversely, the goals of left-wing groups like the Volks-Film-Verband; the statutes of the Catholic Cinema Office called for a) the creation of film production and distribution structures, b) the influencing of the industry in the interests of quality films and c) the influencing of audiences to seek out better films. And yet, as Nettelbeck argued, the two groups' understandings of 'better films' were diametrically opposed, with one revolving around religious and moral values and the other around a socialist world view.[63] As for the Educational Film Institute, its goal—as the VFV saw it—resided in the education of youth in the values of imperialism and fascism. The VFV clearly believed both these groups to be in collusion with an industry intent on propagating a capitalist social order, and it thus saw them as opponents in an increasingly polarized terrain of film culture. As Franzesko Misiano described it, "as in politics and other areas, there is a struggle taking place in the area of film, in which the opponents, labor and capital, face off in irreconcilable enmity" (ebenso wie auf politischen und anderen Gebieten, [spielt sich] auf dem Gebiet des

62 On the Catholic Film Congress and its impacts, see Guido Convents, "Resisting the Lure of the Modern World: Catholics, International Politics and the Establishment of the International Office for Catholic Cinema (1918–1928)," in *Moralizing Cinema: Film, Catholicism and Power,* ed. Daniel Biltereyst and Daniela Treveri Gennari (New York: Routledge, 2015), 19–35.

63 See W. Nettelbeck, "Katholische Filmpropaganda," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 3 (April 1929), 4: "Trotz scheinbarem Gleichklang der Parolen, stehen sich beide Richtungen in schärfster Opposition gegenüber. Die Bestrebungen der Klerikalismus gehen dahin, historische Filme zu zeigen, in der [sic] die katholische Kirche objektiv eine bessere Rolle spielt als heute. Der Volksfilmverband will Zeitgeschehen im Film mit nacktester Wirklichkeit. Der Klerikalismus will die Geschichte als das Wirken unkontrollierbare göttliche Kräfte darstellen. Der Volksfilmverband will zeigen, daß die Geschichte ausgefüllt ist, mit dem Kampf der Unterdrückten gegen die Unterdrücker. Der Klerikalismus will die heutige Gesellschaftsordnung als ewig darstellen, während der Volksfilmverband die Beseitungung der heutigen Ordnung als Voraussetzung für freies künstlerisches Schaffen ansieht."

Films ein Kampf ab, bei dem sich die beiden Gegner Arbeit und Kapital in unversöhnlicher Feindschaft gegenüberstehen).[64]

As passages like this suggest, the VFV viewed the film industry as a quasi-conspiratorial force, intent on keeping the masses in the dark about the social determinants of their own conditions. Writers repeatedly invoked terms such as "Benebelung" (fogging, obfuscation) and above all "Verdummung" (stultification, making people stupid)—a key word they shared with other left-wing cultural groups—to describe the goals of the industry in league with groups such as the Catholic Film Office. Thus Hotopp lamented that "Three million cinema-goers walk into cinemas every day and allow those unwinding strips of stultification to roll past them with no resistance" ([Die 3 Millionen tägliche Kinobesucher] laufen in die Kinos und lassen widerspruchslos das rollende Band der Verdummung an sich vorbeiziehen).[65] This propagandistic impact of film encompassed not only overly nationalist films such as the *Fredericus Rex* series—a longstanding target of left-wing groups—but also and above all seemingly 'unpolitical' films such as romantic comedies, which (as Rudolf Schwarzkopf described it at the first national conference) "serve to make the masses stupid and thoughtless through their erasure and denial of class struggle."[66]

This understanding of the industry also informed another structural tension within the VFV: namely the tension around the concept of 'neutrality.' On the one hand, the VFV's founders set out explicitly to form a 'neutral' organization in the sense that it would not belong to any single party—and this at least partly for the same reason outlined above, namely the need to maximize numbers. On the other hand, the group sought to show that the film industry—and its allied groups—were in fact never neutral, but fully in the service of class interests.[67] Thus Kurt Kersten could write in typical fashion: "Naturally, the film industry's neutrality does not extend to Soviet Russia. One need only think of the anti-Bolshevist class-baiting films of the Ufa, the drivel churned up by a certain filthy person [i.e., Hugenberg, MJC]" (Diese Neutralität [der Filmindustrie] gilt natürlich nicht gegenüber Sowjetrussland. Man denke nur an die antibolschewistischen Hetzfilme der

64 Franzesko Misiano, "Die Gegner—formieren sich," *Film und Volk* 3:1 (January 1930), 4.

65 Hotopp, "Kinobesucher und Produktion," 12.

66 Jaeger, "Protokoll," 251.

67 Thus Franz Höllering declared in the first issue of Film und Volk that one of the group's central objectives lay in the "enlightening the masses about the exploitation to which they are exposed, even in their rare moments of leisure, by a film industry which their class enemy controls unrestrained down to the present day." Franz Höllering, "Vorwort," *Film und Folk* 1, no. 1 (March 1928), 4.

UFA, die Quasseleien eines gewissen schmutzigen Menschen).[68] Perhaps the most virulent critic of appeals to neutrality was Willi Münzenberg, former head of the Young Communist International and founder of the Internationale Arbeiterhilfe. "All the shouting about 'neutrality' in film," Münzenberg wrote in an article for *Film und Volk*, "only has the goal of concealing the bourgeois propaganda spun out in bourgeois films" (Das Geschrei von 'Neutralität im Film hat nur den Zweck, die mit den bürgerlichen Filmen betriebene bürgerliche Propaganda zu verschleiern).[69]

Parallel to the tension between aesthetics and politics, this tension around 'neutrality' became increasingly heated as left-wing factions came to the fore in the VFV. Thus in an editorial from April 1929 entitled "The Second Year" (Das zweite Jahr)—often held up as the publication announcing the group's transformation from a popular front to a KPD-allied left-wing organization—the journal's editors declared: "All this idle talk of political 'neutrality' only concealed the fact that our struggle had been waged, up to then, in an apolitical manner" (Wir haben mit dem Gerede von politischer 'Neutralität' nur verborgen, dass unser Kampf bisher unpolitisch geführt wurde).[70] What the ascendant left wing of the VFV was arguing here was that *all* film is, in fact, political. Hence, any film society that wants to focus on film's political potentials must work to reveal the inherently political nature of the medium—and of the capitalist film industry more specifically—rather than endorsing deceptive categories of neutrality.[71]

This might also explain why the VFV, in its publications, drew so much attention to what we would today call a 'political economy' of film, regularly reporting on the labor conditions within the film industry. While they assiduously avoided the kinds of star gossip characteristic of mainstream film magazines, writers for *Film und Volk* did regularly take readers 'behind the scenes' to discuss the economics of the industry: the monopolistic ambitions of leading film companies, their hidden links with the mainstream press (including and especially other film journals),[72] and the working conditions

68 Kurt Kersten, "Die Schlacht der Titanen. Der Krieg als Fußballmatch," *Film und Volk* 1, no. 3–4 (June 1928), 9.

69 Willi Muenzenberg, "Film und Propaganda," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 9–10 (November 1929), 5.

70 Jan. "Das zweite Jahr," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 3 (April 1929), 15.

71 As a writer for *Arbeiterbühne und Film,* the successor journal to *Film und Volk,* would put it: "Jeder Film hat eine Absicht, eine Tendenz, und sei es die, vorzutäuschen, er habe keine. Worauf es für uns ankommt, ist, zu zeigen, worin die Tendenz besteht, und uns klarzumachen, inwiefern ein Film den Interessen des Proletariats zuwiderläuft oder ihnen nützt." Wilhelm Prügel, "Zur Frage 'Proletarische Filmkritik'," *Arbeiterbühne und Film* 23, no. 6 (June 1931), 17.

72 See for example Ebbe Neergard, "Die Soziologie des Films," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 5 (June 1929), 4–5.

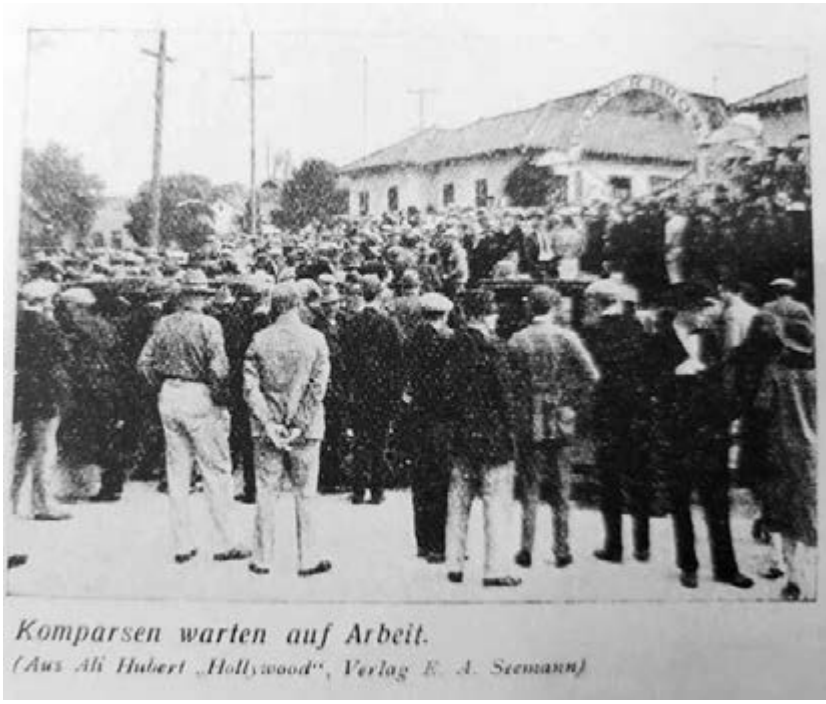


Figure 50: "Extras Waiting for Work," *Film und Volk,* January 1930

that characterized mainstream film companies.[73] Writers were particularly attentive to the plight of low-paid 'below the line' workers, such as extras and set designers.[74] Rather than encouraging the hopes that readers could one day break into film—as journals such as *Mein Film* were wont to do—writers for *Film und Volk* sought to warn readers against the 'illusions' of an industry promising fame and fortune and highlight the futility of joining the bloated ranks of underemployed *Komparsen*.[75] (Figure 50)

Finally, the group's fundamental suspicion of the film industry informed a further tension—parallel to the friction between center and left factions—between a desire to reform the industry from within and a desire to institute

73 Hotopp, "Kinobesucher und Produktion," 11; "Verstummelung so oder so," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 8 (October 1929), 14.

74 See for example Alfred Piepenstock, "Die Film-Illusion," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 5 (June 1929), 14–15; Hak, "Die Architekten beim Zille-Film," *Film und Volk* 3, no. 1 (1930), 8.

75 Piepenstock, "Die Film-Illusion," 14. This kind of reporting became especially prevalent after the stock market crash in late 1929. See e.g. "Glashaustragödie Nr. 1," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 9–10 (November 1929), 21; "Arbeiterentlassungen in der Filmindustrie," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 11–12 (December 1929), 13; "Glashaustragödie Nr. 2," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 11–12 (December 1929), 21.

a counter-model. The contours of this debate are not always clearly defined, but one can perceive it around one of the key ideas that recur throughout VFV writings: that of a "consumer association" (*Konsumentenverein*). A model for reform groups during the Weimar Republic more broadly, the consumer association—or cooperative—provided an obvious framework for understanding the work of film societies, since it offered another model of the feedback loop, where the demands of self-organized consumers would force producers, in the words of one contemporaneous authority on the subject, towards "the lowering of prices and the improvement of quality" in their products.[76] Such a framework also situates the film society within a burgeoning self-awareness of the power of consumers in the early twentieth century. At first, the VFV was largely seen within this framework, both within the press at large and by some of its own founding members. Hans Siemsen, for example, in an article for *Die Weltbühne,* described the group as "the first attempt at an organization of [film] consumers."[77] In an article from August 1928 for *Film und Volk*, another writer, S. Alher, adopted a similar position when he explained: "It is a well-known fact that every improvement in the quality of a commodity—and film is, among other things, a commodity—has only been achieved through pressure from consumers. Only the dissatisfaction of the purchaser can force the producer to produce something better" (Nun ist es eine bekannte Tatsache, daß jede Qualitätsverbesserung einer Ware—auch der Film ist neben anderem eine Ware—nur unter dem Druck der Konsumenten erzielt wurde. Nur die Unzufriedenheit des Abnehmers zwingt den Fabrikanten, besser zu produzieren).[78] For Alher, the film industry's problem was not that it was a capitalist industry, but only that it wasn't as upright as other industries (a fact he blamed on the current system of film distribution, which forced cinema owners to take packages of films with some good and lots of bad).

But this appeal to 'consumer pressure'—which still imagined the main goal to be that of promoting more 'quality' artistic products within the

76 Vachen Fomic Totomianz, *Theorie, Geschichte und Praxis der Konsumentenorganisation* (Berlin: Verlag von R.L. Prager, 1923), 27. Totomianz's book was published in 1914 and reprinted in 1923 and 1929. For a broader take on co-operative movements and cinema, see Alan George Burton, *The British Consumer Co-Operative Movement and Film 1890s–1960s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005).

77 Hans Siemsen, "Volksverband für Filmkunst," *Die Weltbühne* 24, no. 13 (27 March 1928), 477. Similarly an article for the *Österreichische Film-Zeitung* described the group as "die Organisation der Film-Konsumenten." "Kinematographie und Politik," *Österreichische Film-Zeitung,* no. 11 (10 March 1928), 15.

78 S. Alher, "Revolution von unten," *Film und Volk* 1, no. 5 (August 1928), 6.

industry as it existed—was increasingly critiqued by the group's more left-wing members, who brought with them a deep-seated commitment to ideas of conflict and struggle (*Kampf*) pervasive within communist associational culture of the 1920s.[79] Thus in the "Second Year" article cited above, the editors argued that one of the "most dangerous illusions" the VFV had indulged in during its early phase was precisely its adoption of the reformist, consumer framework:

> One of the main tasks of the association (*Verband*) during its second year is to undertake a complete reorientation in this area. Down with the idea that the VFV is an organization where people can see a few quality films per month for cheaper entry prices. We do not aspire to be a consumer organization, but a fighting organization (*Kampforganisation*).[80]
>
> Es ist eine der Hauptaufgaben des Verbandes, im zweiten Jahr hier eine vollständige Neuorientierung vorzunehmen. Weg von der Vorstellung, daß der VFV eine Organisation ist, wo man für niedrige Eintrittspreise möglichst monatlich einige qualifizierte Filme zu sehen bekommt. Nicht Konsum- sondern Kampforganisation wollen wir sein.

This tension between *Konsumorganisation* and *Kampforganisation* runs throughout the writings of the VFV. One of the flyers from the Hamburg group, for example, told readers:

> We are not a consumer organization or a special purpose organization dedicated to the sole task of offering cheap screenings of good films. Our undertaking is not intended to compete with movie theaters that show good films. Rather, we are above all a fighting organization for cultural struggle (*Kampf- und Kulturorganisation*), which as the first active organization of cinemagoers will also go public at suitable occasions.[81]
>
> Wir sind keine Zweck- oder Konsumorganisation, mit der einzigen Aufgabe, gute und billige Filmveranstaltungen zu liefern, wir sind keine Konkurrenzunternehmen für Kinotheater, die gute Filme spielen; sondern

79 On the reach of the term "Kampf" in communist associational culture, see Hake, *The Proletarian Dream,* 260.

80 "Das zweite Jahr," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 3 (April 1929), 14. For a similar take, see Franz Höllering, "Eroberung des Films," *Film und Volk* 1, no. 5 (1928), 4–5.

81 "Flugblatt des Hamburger Volks-Film-Verbandes" (probably May 1929), in *Film und revolutionäre Arbeiterbewegung,* 292.

> vornehmlich eine Kampf- und Kulturorganisation, die als erste aktive Kinobesucherorganisation bei entsprechenden Anlässen auch an die Öffentlichkeit treten wird.

In passages like this one, the defining characteristic of a "Kampforganisation" remains consistently vague, but in its evocation of militant left-wing agitation, it was clearly intended to suggest an opposition to the film industry as such, rather than a desire to improve it from within. And the concept went hand-in-hand with the idea—outlined by the leader of the Stuttgart chapter of the VFV, Friedrich Wolf, in his widely read pamphlet *Kunst ist Waffe* (1928)—of art as a "weapon" in class struggle. Wolf, like others in the group, understood film distribution as a central terrain of class warfare, where the industry explicitly sought to retain power over the masses:

> Precisely in the domain of *film*, it is abundantly clear today how much *art is a weapon!* It was surely not on account of film's artistic value or its beautiful eyes that the great industry magnate Hugenberg bought up the Ufa, Germany's largest film company. At that time, the company had suffered great financial losses. But Hugenberg saw an 'ideal' potential for profit! And he recognized the immense potential for power that film offers today, at a time when millions of people visit Ufa theaters on a daily basis. He saw film as an imperceptible weapon in the class struggle, a poison gas with no smell or taste, which obscures and dulls the mind with Kitsch and stultification, with sweet tones of Wagner and colorless Nibelungen and Faust films.[82]

> Gerade bei dem *Film* zeigt es sich heute am klarsten, wie sehr *Kunst Waffe ist!* Um seines Kunstwertes, um seiner schönen Augen willen hat der Industriemagnat Hugenberg die ‚Ufa', diese größte deutsche Filmgesellschaft, gewiß nicht aufgekauft. Sie hatte gerade damals gewaltige Verluste. Aber Hugenberg sah den ‚ideellen' Gewinn! Er erkannte den gewaltigen *Machtfaktor,* den der Film heute bildet, da täglich Millionen in die Ufa-Theater gehen. Der Film als unmerkliche Waffe im Klassenkampf, als geschmack- und geruchloses Kampfgas, das mit Kitsch und Verdummung, mit süßlichen Rheingold und farblosen Nibelungen- und Faustfilmen das Volk vernebelt und verdummt!

82 Friedrich Wolf, "Kunst ist Waffe" (Leipzig: Reclam, 1969), 22.

For Wolf and his left-wing associates, the film industry—through films like Lang's *Nibelungen* (1924) and Murnau's *Faust* (1926)—was engaged in a stealth (*geruchslos, geschmackslos*) form of warfare. Accordingly, the essential task of a society like the VFV was not to offer the working classes better access to the industry's products, but precisely to make this ongoing class war—and the place of working-class cinemagoers as its objects—visible and graspable as such for members.

This growing resistance to being perceived as a mere 'consumer organization' also occasioned—and logically so—an increased skepticism about the value of film screenings as a principal form of VFV activity. The facilitation of film screenings (typically on a schedule of 10 screenings a year) formed one of the group's original objectives, one that linked their work to that of many other film societies. But as the VFV evolved, the impact of screenings increasingly came into question, as many members felt they reinforced the impression of a consumer organization and distracted from the goal of creating a more critical public. Thus in the "Second Year" article, the authors lamented the way in which screenings had occupied so much of the group's initial attention:

> Nearly all of our energy in the initial year was exhausted by the efforts to organize film screenings, which were held according to the principle: "Member tickets 20 pfennig, guests 80 pfennig." Anyone who believes that you can wage a genuine struggle against reactionary films in this way will also believe that an apprentice could purchase Ufa shares by saving up his Sunday pay. Why can we not wage a struggle against reactionary film with film screenings alone? For the simple reason that our opponents will always have better film screenings to offer. They have magnificent movie theaters at their disposal, while we have to content ourselves with screenings in multi-purpose halls. And even when we do manage to secure a theater, this is only in late evenings or Sunday mornings, which obliges us to undertake an extraordinary propaganda campaign in order to fill up the theater during this unusual time slot.[83]

> Fast die gesamte Arbeit im Gründungsjahr erschöpfte sich in Filmveranstaltungen, die nach dem Leitmotif durchgeführt wurden: "Eintrittspreis für Mitglieder 20, für Gäste 80 Pfg." Wer glaubt, dass man mit dieser Methode gegen die Filmreaktion ernsthaft kämpfen kann, der mag ebensogut annehmen, daß man mit dem ersparten Sonntagsgeld eines Lehrlings

83 "Das zweite Jahr," 14.

> Ufa-Aktien kaufen kann. Warum werden wir mit Filmveranstaltungen allein keinen Kampf gegen die Filmreaktion führen können? Einfach darum, weil der Gegner immer die besseren Filmveranstaltungen hat. Er verfügt über herrliche Filmtheater, wir müssen uns mit Saalvorführungen begnügen. Haben wir wirklich ein Theater, dann nur nachts oder Sonntag morgens, wo wir für die außergewöhnliche Zeit eine außerordentlich Propagandakraft entfalten müssen, wollen wir das Theater gefüllt sehen.

Film screenings, then, took on an ambivalent status in the VFV. For anyone subscribing to the idea of a *Kampforganisation* and rejecting the consumerist model, they not only seemed like a hopelessly ineffectual means of lobbying the industry to change, but also risked perpetuating—by failing to render visible the all-out class war that the film industry was waging—the very false consciousness of working-class audiences the VFV sought to overcome. The "Second Year" article goes onto say that it is not a question of eliminating film screenings, which still served a publicity and recruitment purpose. But much more important than screenings, the author insisted, was the emphasis on *Kritik*; through the journal, seminars and public events, the group should work harder to change the working-class public's understanding of cinema as both a medium and an industry, to teach its readers to see cinema as a terrain of class warfare and to grasp their own place within that struggle.[84]

Film as Mass Medium

None of this completely answers the question of whether a group like the VFV should work within or without the existing industry (a question that arguably remained unresolved). But it does make clear that, increasingly as the group veered leftward, it could no longer see its objective in the facilitation of 'quality' films, but rather in the transformation of consciousness. At the heart of this project was also a vision of film markedly different from that of previous film societies: namely an understanding of film as a mass medium. In their earlier publications, VFV members still spoke regularly of film as an art form, and this was something they shared with most other film societies of the 1920s. But as we saw, artistic criteria were never entirely

84 Ibid., 15. Another programmatic article from 1930 explained: "Das Schwergewicht unserer Arbeit hat sich von der Durchführung eigener Filmvorführungen verschoben auf die Durchführung von Kundgebungen, die die politischen und kulturellen Probleme des Films aufzeigen." T., "Die Arbeit des Volksfilm-Verbandes im neuen Jahr," *Film und Volk* 3, no. 2 (February 1930), 38.

divorced from ideological ones, and the tension between the two only grew more pronounced as the group's left flank gained prominence. Another way to describe that process is to say that the VFV increasingly recognized, perhaps more than any other film society of this period, that film had become one of the central instruments of power over mass consciousness in modern industrial societies.

Though VFV writings never used the term "mass medium," they did frequently stress the presence of the masses. Indeed, almost every pamphlet and every film introduction repeated the central idea from the group's founding manifesto (cited at the outset of this chapter) that cinema is relevant above all on account of the sheer scale of its reach.[85] VFV writers also repeatedly appealed to the idea of film as "propaganda" (a term yet to acquire the negative ring in the 1920s that it would after the experience of German fascism). I have already discussed the growing opposition to notions of 'neutrality' among members such as Münzenberg. The obverse of that opposition was precisely the recognition that all film is propaganda. In articles such as Münzenberg's "Film und Propaganda" (1929) or Franzesko Misiano's "Die Gegner—formieren sich" (The Opponents are Organizing, 1930), readers were increasingly encouraged to learn to see film as an inherently propagandistic medium,[86] and rather than opposing such propagandistic value, they should learn to use film to propagate their own world view in opposition to that of the bourgeoisie. Just how strongly this view of film as propaganda came to supplant the view of film as art in the VFV can be seen in an exhibition room the group designed in February 1930 as part of the so-called "IFA-Schau" exhibition of the KPD-backed Interessengemeinschaft für Arbeiterkultur (Syndicate for Working-Class Culture, IFA, founded 1929) on Potsdamer Platz in Berlin. Intended to showcase what one member called "the new direction that the VFV has taken since its reorganization,"[87] the exhibition had as its centerpiece a large-format photomontage entitled *Film*

85 A flyer for the Düsseldorf chapter, for example, told potential recruits: "Du gehst gern ins Kino? […] Mit Dir sind es tägliche Millionen, die im Kino sitzen. Und diese Tatsache wird weidlich ausgenutzt, um mit elenden Geschäftsfilmen, Monarchistenkitsch und faulem Fredericuszauber die Köpfe zu verdummen, die Seelen zu vergiften und dabei noch ein gutes Geschäft zu machen." "Werbeblatt der Düsseldorfer Gruppe des Volks-Film-Verbandes," in *Film und revolutionäre Arbeiterbewegungen,* 299.

86 Thus Misiano explained: "Der Film als eine der besten und raffiniersten Waffen im Dienste der Propaganda wird in ungeheurliche Weise von den Organisationen der Bourgeoisie ausgenützt, um mit seiner Hilfe die Klasseninteressen der Bourgeoisie zu sichern und zu verstärken." Misiano, "Die Gegner—formieren sich," 1–2.

87 Heinz Luedecke, "Eine Ausstellung des Volk-Film-Verbandes," *Film und Volk* 3, no. 3 (March 1930), 54.

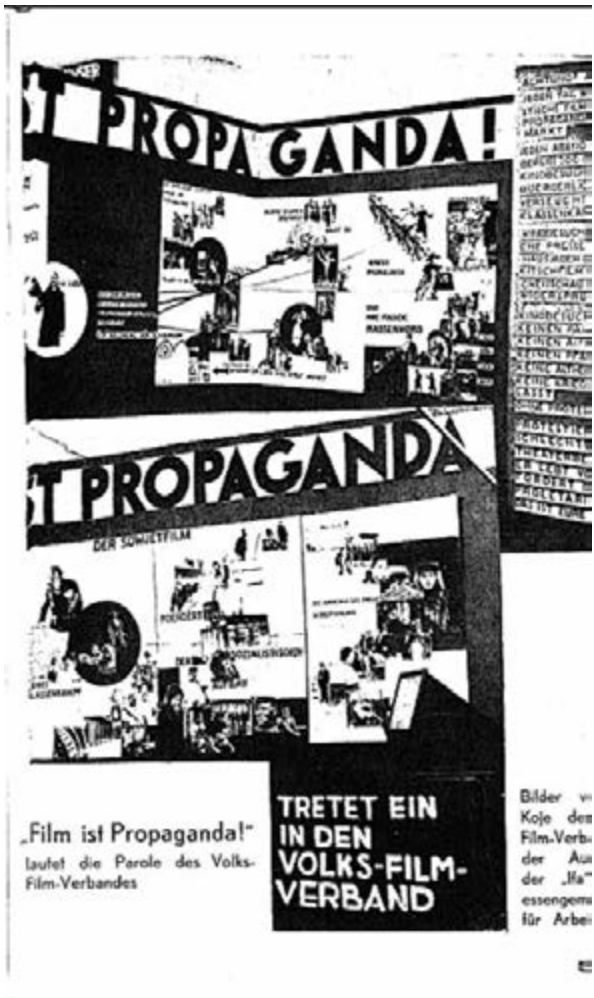


Figure 51: Illustration of an Exhibition by the Volks-Film-Verband, *Film und Volk*, March 1930

ist Propaganda, which illustrated in two parts the propagandistic thrust of bourgeois film and the counter-propaganda of Soviet film.[88] (Figure 51)

This focus on propaganda was a logical outcome of the group's links with Soviet film culture, and not unlike the Russian groups, the VFV also discovered that the propagandist value of film images went hand-in-hand with the instability of their meaning. One activity for which the VFV is most

88 For a more detailed description of the exhibition, see "Film ist Propaganda," *Die Rote Fahne,* 26 February 1930, n.p.

often remembered today (through the writings of Béla Balázs, Siegfried Kracauer, Jay Leyda and others) is its forays into compilation film, which, although never achieving the same visibility as the work of Esfir Shub in Moscow, nonetheless formed part of a similar discovery that the meaning of images could be shaped, in film as it was in photomontage, through relational elements (i.e. juxtaposition with intertitles and other images).[89] Perhaps the best-known instance of this activity was the group's inaugural event at the Capitol cinema, which included a short compilation 'promotional film' *Was wir wollen—was wir nicht wollen* (*What We Want—What We Don't Want*), showing excerpts from the kinds of films the group sought to promote and the kinds it was against, as well as a compilation newsreel assembled by Ernst Angel and Viktor Albrecht Blum, *Zeitbericht—Zeitgesicht* (News of the Times—Face of the Times), which turned bourgeois newsreels on their heads.[90] Since the newsreel was censored at the last minute by the authorities, audiences had to make do with a description of the film given by Franz Höllering.[91] But it offers a good instance of the overlaps between the VFV and Soviet compilation practices. As one reporter present at Höllering's lecture recalled: "instead of the normal visual reporting, the newsreel contained the same themes, but seen from both sides. For example, the king of England, filmed giving a speech, states that the situation is stable in China. This is followed by a counter-image of street battles in China, and so on."[92] As Kracauer would later remark, looking back at the censored newsreel, "this experiment teaches us that simply by arranging the standard newsreel differently, one can make it more incisive."[93]

But this question of the mutability of images' meanings was not limited to compilation film practice in any narrow sense (which, with the exception of Albrecht Viktor Blum, does not appear to have been very widespread in the VFV beyond the inaugural event). It was also part of a wider recognition that,

89 See Béla Balázs *Theory of the Film* (London: Dobson, 1952), 165–66; see also Jay Leyda, *Films Beget Films* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 29.

90 For the term 'promotional film' (Werbefilm), see Rudolf Schwarzkopf, letter to Heinrich Mann from 12 May 1928, in *Film und revolutionäre Arbeiterbewegung,* 258.

91 It was eventually approved by the censors, but the VFV decided not to show it in public in its altered form. See "Unsere Wochenschau," *Film und Volk* 1, no. 2 (April 1928), 22.

92 "Volksverband für Filmkunst," *Berliner Handelblatt und Tageszeitung* 27 February 1928, n.p. A similar report—albeit claiming that Balázs instead of Höllering described the newsreel to audiences—can be found in the *Vossische Zeitung.* See "Volks-Verband für Film-Kunst," *Vossische Zeitung,* no. 98, 27 February 1928, n.p.

93 Siegfried Kracauer, "The Weekly Newsreel" ("Die Filmwochenschau") (1931), trans. Alex Bush, in *The Promise of Cinema: Germany Film Theory 1907–1933,* ed. Anton Kaes, Nicholas Baer, Michael Cowan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), 72.

as in the famous Kuleshov experiment, film images could be made to take on different values through operations of juxtaposition and contextualization. This was the upshot of many a discussion of censorship in the pages of *Film und Volk*. More often than not, such censorship took the form not of outright banning (though there were a few exceptional cases such as Georg Asagaroff's *Revolte im Erziehungshaus* [*Revolt in the Reformatory,* 1929]), but of subtler alterations to prints (additions, outtakes, re-edits), which could transform the meaning of a film. Perhaps the best example here is the fate of Béla Balázs's film *Die Abenteuer eines Zehnmarkscheines* (*The Adventures of a Ten-Mark Note,* 1926), which—as Schwarzkopf explained in a lengthy discussion of the film—was edited and rearranged to foreground a romantic love story and de-emphasize scenes of strikes and exploitative labor.[94]

Another example of this awareness of contextualization can be seen in the frequent discussion of war footage. Heroic war films were a staple object of VFV critique, which held them up as a prime example of bourgeois propaganda.[95] But the group also recognized that images of war could have the opposite effect from the one intended, if seen—in the words of one writer—"with the right eyes."[96] Often, this idea was linked to a belief in the objectivity of indexical camera images, as when Béla Balázs argued (in his speech at the inaugural event) that "even when one films a battlefield for a nationalistic and bellicose film, the camera always and unavoidably records the horrors of war."[97] But the group also recognized the crucial role of contextualization in influencing whether images of warfare would be read as depictions of horror or depictions of heroism. Thus the first issue of *Film und Volk* included a short contribution by Arthur Seehof entitled "Filme im Reichsarchiv" (Films in the State Archive), in which Seehof discussed the wealth of WWI footage stored in the vaults of the Prussian State Archive. According to Seehof, right-wing groups such as Vaterländischer Film GmbH (Patriotic Film Inc.) and the Verein Deutschtum im Bild (Association for Images of Germanness) had already gained access to the footage, which they were re-editing with new intertitles in order to create war propaganda for screenings in the occupied territories of the Rhineland (essentially an analogous operation, from the opposite side of the ideological spectrum, to the one the VFV undertook in its censored newsreel). Hence, Seehof called

94 Rudolf Schwarzkopf, "Abenteuer über Abenteuer," *Film und Volk* 1, no. 2 (April 1928), 11.

95 See for example Hans Siemsen, "Gibt es pazifistische Filme?," *Film und Volk* 1, no. 1 (March 1928), 9–11.

96 Emil Rabold, "Verfilmte Seeschlachten," *Film und Volk* 1, no. 5 (August 1928), 13.

97 "Volksverband für Filmkunst," *Berliner Handelblatt und Tageszeitung,* 27 February 1928, n.p.

on the Prussian government to give left-wing groups similar access to the material, in order that they might create anti-war propaganda in the vein of Ernst Friedrich's *Krieg dem Kriege* (*War Against War,* 1924).[98]

Perhaps the most important indicator of the VFV's understanding of cinema as a mass medium, however, can be seen—to draw on Greg Waller's idea once more—in the particular company that cinema kept in their eyes. That company included left-wing theater, and the VFV was often compared to the Volksbühne movement from a few decades earlier. But just as frequent were comparisons with the press, specifically newspapers. Indeed, it is notable how many of the contributors to *Film und Volk* were journalists (or writers who practiced journalism). There were also artists (painters, stage actors), filmmakers, film producers (especially from the Internationale Arbeiterhilfe and left-wing production it helped to spawn) and the occasional academic. But most of the writers for the journal made their living in the world of the press: figures such as Kurt Caro (editor of the *Berliner Volkszeitung*), Franz Höllering (former editor of the *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung*), Kurt Kersten (journalist for *Die Aktion*) and Leo Lania (né Lazar Herman), a former editor of *Die rote Fahne* who had also pioneered undercover investigative journalism after infiltrating the Nazi movement in the early 1920s. Given this connection to journalism, it is perhaps unsurprising to see how much attention the VFV devoted to the press. For the founders of the group, film *was* still part of the world of newspapers; accordingly, they were overwhelmingly concerned with public relations—as one can glean, for example, from the early reports sent to Heinrich Mann (living in Italy at the time) by Rudolf Schwarzkopf and Franz Höllering, which rarely failed to mention the reception of VFV events in the press and often attached press reviews.[99] "It is absolutely urgent," Höllering wrote to Mann characteristically in July 1928, "that we receive wide coverage from the entire spectrum of the press" (Es ist unbedingt notwendig, daß wir einen großen Widerhall in der gesamten Presse finden).[100] For members like

98 "Der deutsche Außenminister redet sehr oft und sehr viel vom Frieden. Wie wäre es, wenn er sich darum bemühen würde, die offiziellen Kriegsfilme aus dem Potsdamer Schlaf zu wecken, um sie einer Gesellschaft zu übergeben, die wirkliche Garantien bietet, daß sie so gezeigt werden, wie sie gedreht sind." Arthur Seehof, "Filme im Reichsarchiv," *Film und Volk* 1, no. 1 (1928), 30. Friedrich himself was frequently involved in VFV activities. For example, he gave an illustrated lecture to accompany a screening of the Prometheus production *Namenlose Helden* (1925). See "Mitteilungen," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 3 (April 1929), 16.

99 See Schwarzkopf's letter to Mann from 30 March 1928, in *Film und revolutionäre Arbeiterbewegung,* 246.

100 Höllering, letter to Mann from 6 July 1928, in *Film und revolutionäre Arbeiterbewegung,* 261.

Höllering, this PR factor was one of the key motivations behind the decision to create a politically 'neutral" group, which would find a positive reception in the entire press rather than just left-wing publications. Schwarzkopf agreed, as he stated at the first international meeting of the VFV: "Given the apparatus of power wielded by our opponents, it is not enough to have *Vorwärts* and *Die Rote Fahne* [both left-wing papers, MJC] on our side. We must also have the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and the *Vossische Zeitung*" (Gegen den Machtapparat der Gegner genügt es nicht, den *Vorwärts* und *Die Rote Fahne* hinter sich zu haben. Man müsse auch die Frankfurter Zeitung und die Vossische haben).[101] While not everyone might have concurred on the need to please the centrist press, the attention to PR remained a constant focus of the group, not only behind the scenes, but also in communications to their own members. A flyer issued by the Hamburg group, for example, bore the title "Eisenstein und die Hamburger Presse" (Eisenstein and the Hamburg Press) and reported in detail the positive press they received from Eisenstein's guest lecture.[102]

The link to the press was not only a factual question of members' background and competence. It was also an epistemological link, since the members of the VFV understood film itself as a mass medium analogous to the newspaper, one that was quickly overtaking its print forebear in its power to shape public opinion and mass consciousness. In his opening remarks at the group's first national conference, for example, Schwarzkopf stated categorically that film had now attained an importance, "which today surpasses that of newspapers,"[103] and similar comments abound in the group's journal and lectures. "Film's power," we read in the "Mitteilungen" (notifications) section of the second issue of *Film und Volk,* "is almost greater than that of the press, which is rightly described today as 'the only great power').[104] This idea of cinema as the new newspaper also means that the VFV approached film-going as part of a community ritual. Benedict Anderson's thesis on the role of newspapers in the formation of a sense of national belonging—arising from the very act of simultaneous reading—is well known. As I have argued elsewhere, an analogous dynamic was underway in 1920s film culture, as film—partly catalyzed by developments in radio and early television—began to be seen as a kind of 'broadcast' medium,

101 Jäger, "Protokoll," 253.
102 "Der Filmvortrag Eisenstein und die Hamburger Presse" (date unknown), in *Film und revolutionäre Arbeiterbewegung,* 297.
103 Jäger, "Protokoll," 251.
104 "Mitteilungen," *Film und Volk* 1, no. 2 (April 1928), 22.

which could help solidify political communities by allowing viewers to participate vicariously in contemporary political developments.[105] This sense was particularly strong in Soviet film, where cine-trains were employed to bring the revolution to the far reaches of the Soviet Union and allow—in Dziga Vertov's memorable phrase—the proletarians of the world "to see, hear and understand one another."[106] And as we saw, this is precisely how the VFV understood the function of 'global cinema' as a collection of films about working conditions around the world.

Given this view of cinema, it is not surprising to see the VFV invest a lot of energy in newsreels—both in critiquing mainstream newsreels, which they saw as a central proponent of bourgeois propaganda, and in creating their own newsreels.[107] Despite the censoring of the compilation newsreel at the group's inaugural event, many members still felt the group should start with newsreel production before moving into feature films.[108] In April 1928, the VFV thus announced plans to found a weekly left-wing newsreel consisting of original material.[109] While the project never materialized within the VFV, there were many subsequent calls to create proletarian newsreels—as well as related short forms like election films—throughout *Film und Volk*.[110] And Weltfilm did create a short-lived newsreel in 1930 entitled *Welt und Arbeit,* which saw seven installments.[111] In reality, however, newsreels were fraught with difficulties; even when individual groups did manage to film their own newsreels, as the Breslau group reported at the first national conference, it was too difficult to find enough distributors to make such productions viable, and the newsreels quickly went out of date before many people could even see them.[112] Still, the focus on newsreels as a desideratum in the VFV's early years, combined with the repeated presence of articles on radio and television, does

105 Michael Cowan, "The Realm of the Earth: Simultaneous Broadcasting and World Politics in Interwar Cinema," *Intermédialités,* no. 23 (Spring 2014). https://www.erudit.org/fr/revues/im/2014-n23-im0209/2/1033343ar

106 Dziga Vertov, "First Steps," [1931] in Annette Michelson (ed.), *Kino-Eye. The Writings of Dziga Vertov* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1984), 112.

107 For the critique of newsreels, see for example "Richtungs Wochenschau!," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 9–10 (November 1929), 9.

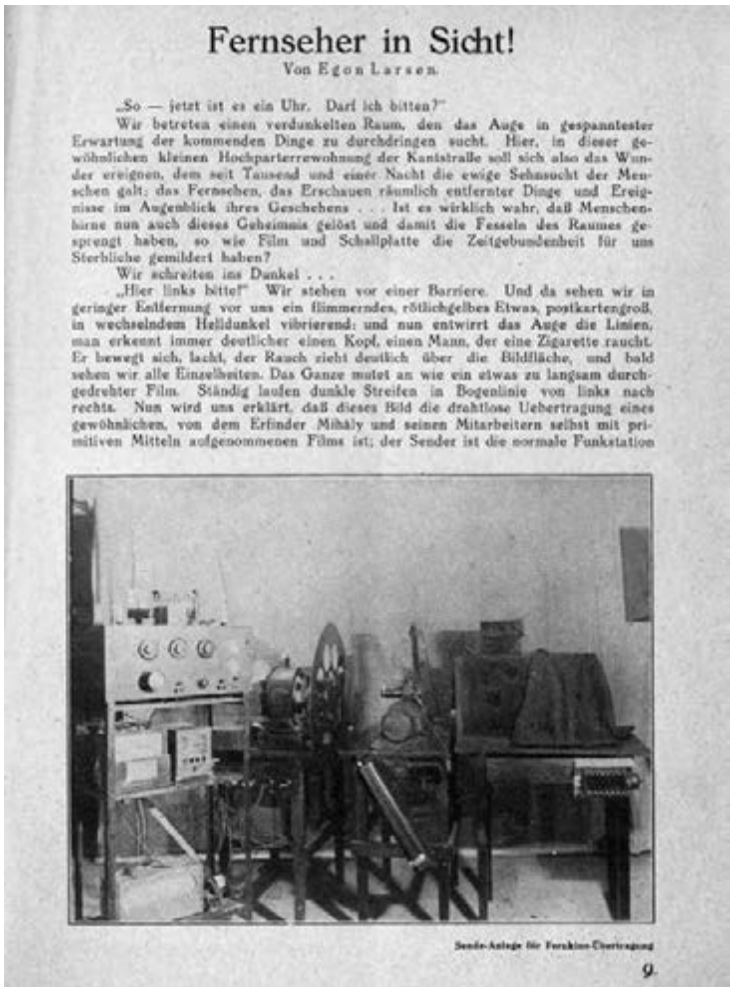
108 Jaeger, "Protokoll," 252.

109 See "Unsere Wochenschau," *Film und Volk* 1, no. 2 (April 1928), 22.

110 E.g. "Deutsche Wahlfilme," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 3–4 (June 1928), 17; Leo Lania, "Kunst ist Waffe!," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 1–2 (November 1928), 14–15; "Richtungs Wochenschau," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 9–10 (November 1929), 9.

111 See Thomas Tode, "Dosiertes Muskelspiel. Die linke Filmkultur der Wemarer Republik," in *Geschichte des dokumentarischen Films in Deutschland. Band 2. Weimarer Republik 1918–1933,* ed. Klaus Kreimeier, Antja Ehmann and Jeanpaul Goergen (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2005), 548.

112 Jäger, "Protokoll," 254.



Fernseher in Sicht!

Von Egon Larsen.

„So — jetzt ist es ein Uhr. Darf ich bitten?"

Wir betreten einen verdunkelten Raum, den das Auge in gespanntester Erwartung der kommenden Dinge zu durchdringen sucht. Hier, in dieser gewöhnlichen kleinen Hochparterrewohnung der Kaiserstraße soll sich also das Wunder ereignen, dem seit Tausend und einer Nacht die ewige Sehnsucht der Menschen galt: das Fernsehen, das Erschauen räumlich entfernter Dinge und Ereignisse im Augenblick ihres Geschehens . . . Ist es wirklich wahr, daß Menschenhirne nun auch dieses Geheimnis gelöst und damit die Fesseln des Raumes gesprengt haben, so wie Film und Schallplatte die Zeitgebundenheit für uns Sterbliche gemildert haben?

Wir schreiten ins Dunkel . . .

„Hier links bitte!" Wir stehen vor einer Barriere. Und da sehen wir in geringer Entfernung vor uns ein flimmerndes, rötlichgelbes Etwas, postkartengroß, in wechselndem Helldunkel vibrierend; und nun entwirrt das Auge die Linien, man erkennt immer deutlicher einen Kopf, einen Mann, der eine Zigarette raucht. Er bewegt sich, lacht, der Rauch zieht deutlich über die Bildfläche, und bald sehen wir alle Einzelheiten. Das Ganze mutet an wie ein etwas zu langsam durchgedrehter Film. Ständig laufen dunkle Streifen in Bogenlinie von links nach rechts. Nun wird uns erklärt, daß dieses Bild die drahtlose Uebertragung eines gewöhnlichen, von dem Erfinder Mihály und seinen Mitarbeitern selbst mit primitiven Mitteln aufgenommenen Films ist; der Sender ist die normale Funkstation

Sende-Anlage für Fernbild-Übertragung

9

Figure 52: "Television in View!," article in *Film und Volk,* May 1929, with image of television transmission station.

tell us something.[113] (Figure 52) What it suggests is that the VFV understood cinema less as a 'storage' medium (i.e. for the creation of historical images

113 On radio and television articles, see Arthur Seehof, "Film und Funk," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 1–2 (November 1928), 11–12; Egon Larsen, "Fernseher im Sicht," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 4 (May 1929), 9–11; "Werden wir fernsehen?," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 8 (October 1929), 8–10. Although none of these articles offers an explicitly political reading of television's possibilities in the vein of Vertov's "Radio Eye," the author's interest is clearly geared towards thinking about television as a mass medium. Seehof's article, for example, starts with the line "Massenwirkung des Bildes: Film. Massenwirkung des Wortes: Rundfunk," before going on to make the same demands for "gegenwartsnahe" radio programming as for film (Seehof, "Film und Funk," 11).

for posterity) than as a 'transmission medium'—analogous to other mass media emerging at the time—which would create a sense of community belonging through the dissemination of reports on current proletarian life.

The focus on newsreels also tells us a lot about how the VFV understood the function of feature films, including its own productions. Here, we can return to the discussion of aesthetics above. For one of the key motivations behind the preference for docu-dramas was precisely that film was supposed to function like in-depth reporting: to make *contemporary* proletarian life visible so that the working classes of the world might see each other and understand themselves as part of a global community. This aspect was emphasized in lectures, as one can gather from Friedrich Wolf's surviving notes for a lecture before the Stuttgart screening of *Das Dokument von Shanghai* in November 1928:

> The Shanghai film offers no sentimental romanticizing of Chinese life, no detective stories like the *Der Kaufmann von Shanghai* and no cine-novella in the style of *Song,* which is otherwise a very good film with the little Chinese girl and the magnificent Heinrich George. [...] The Shanghai film shows you the China of today, [...] the vast coming empire of 200 to 300 million workers and peasants. [...] You'll see that, there too, people work for pennies, exhaust themselves, starve and let themselves be exploited. Only over there, this all reveals itself in a way that is much simpler, clearer and more brutal, but also more honest than is the case with us.[114]

> Der Shanghai-Film gibt keine chinesische Gartenlaub Romantik, keine Revolverjournalistik wie den "Kaufmann von Shanghai," auch keinen Kinoroman wie den an sich sehr guten "Song"-Film mit der kleinen Chinesin und dem glänzenden Schauspieler George [...] Der Shanghai-Film zeigt ihnen das China von heute, [...] das große kommende Reich der 2–300 Millionen Arbeiter und Bauern. [...] Sie sehen, daß auch drüben die Menschen um Pfennige arbeiten, sich mühen, darben und ausgenutzt werden, nur daß dort alles noch viel einfacher, klarer, furchtbarer, aber auch aufrichtiger sich den Blicken darbietet als bei uns!

An article in the *Süddeutsche Arbeiterzeitung* would later foreground the same idea when it claimed that the police's effort to ban *Das Dokument von*

114 Friedrich Wolf, "Rededisposition. Vortrag *Dokument v. Shanghai* 26.11.28," in *Film und revolutionäre Arbeiterbewegung,* 278. The *Song* film referred to here is *Song. Die Liebe Eines armen Menschenkindes* (Richard Eichberg, 1928).

Shanghai arose from "the bourgeoisie's fear of the connections of solidarity between the European proletariat and the Chinese people and their consequences for the new German imperialism and its hunger for power."[115] Such solidarity was precisely the goal of VFV productions, which understood film as a means of linking the workers of the world through audio-visual 'reporting' on proletarian conditions around the globe.

Perhaps no one espoused this idea of cinema as the new press as strongly as Münzenberg, who had laid out his argument for understanding film as a mass medium in his widely read pamphlet *Erobert den Film!* (*Conquer Film!* 1925). In an article for *Film und Volk,* Münzenberg summarized that argument for VFV readers, stating that cinema was now a battleground for public opinion analogous to that of print newspapers a century ago:

> It is high time revolutionary workers' organizations understood that, just as their bourgeois opponents once founded printing presses, created newspapers and covered the land with a network of print distribution centers and delivery companies, so those opponents are today doing the same thing to an even greater degree in the area of cinematography through the construction of film studios, the creation of distribution offices and the acquisition of movie theaters.[116]

> Die revolutionären Arbeiterorganisationen müssen endlich klar erkennen, daß der bürgerliche Gegner, so wie er früher Druckereien gründete, Zeitungen schuf und das Land mit einem Netz seiner Speditionen und Schriftenvertriebsstellen bedeckte, heute das gleiche in einem gesteigerten Maße auf dem Gebiete der Kinematographie durch Bau von Kinoatelieren, Schaffung von Verleihbüros und Erwerb von Kinotheatern leistet.

Passages like this offer a good indication of the idea of cinema espoused by the VFV—especially among its more left-wing members—and of the points that idea brings to the fore. These members saw cinema in the first instance not as a collection of artworks but as an informational *network*: a system for disseminating mass images of the world that were never neutral but always geared towards shaping worldviews in the interests of a particular class. In order to counter the power of the dominant film industry, Münzenberg continued, it was essential (and this was his definition of "conquering film")

115 "Die Machenschaften gegen den Shanghai-Film," *Süddeutsche Arbeiterzeitung* 28 November 1928, reprinted in *Film und revolutionäre Arbeiterbewegung,* 281.
116 Münzenberg, "Film und Propaganda," 5.

that the working classes appropriate—or construct—such networks for themselves: "In order to create propaganda today, film studios, distribution offices and film theaters are no less necessary than printing presses, magazines, distribution centers and street vendors" (Für die Propaganda sind heute Filmateliers, Verleihbüros und Kinotheater so notwendig und unentbehrlich wie Druckereien, Zeitschriften, Zeitungsexpeditionen und Kolporteure).[117] In this view of cinema as the audio-visual successor to print newspapers, the key goal of a film society was not to probe the essence of the cinematic medium. It was, rather, a question of creating new networks for producing and distributing working-class films. As a mass medium, film was a battleground of ideas and world views, and only by controlling infrastructural networks could the working classes hope to counter the sheer power of those networks at the disposal of the film industry.

This focus on distribution meant that the VFV was never overly concerned by the question of pristine cinematic conditions (projection speeds, torn screens, lighting, sound) that preoccupied arthouse cine-clubs.[118] Nor were they overly worried about 'quality' artistic films, despite some of the group's initial pronouncements. Rather, their efforts were directed above all at getting the right films to the masses, whether or not this happened inside cinema halls or other spaces. Unlike some arthouse clubs, moreover, the VFV also quickly lost interest in running older films (though this was one of their original objectives), most likely for the reasons outlined above having to do with their focus on images of 'current' life and events. But the industry wasn't about to distribute current films—which had an initial run of some 18 months—to a group like the VFV.[119] To get around this, the VFV tried out various strategies, including renting out cinemas for special screenings of Sunday matinees (though this remained an unsatisfying approach due to the difficulty of drawing crowds), as well as attempting to show theatrical films in non-cinematic spaces such as assembly halls, schools and factories.[120]

In this sense, the VFV also became something of a non-theatrical film society by default—'non-theatrical' being understood here not simply in the narrow empirical sense of screenings that happened outside of cinemas, but also in the sense that the group increasingly relied on alternative distribution networks not geared primarily towards movie theater operators. As already

117 Münzenberg, "Film und Propaganda," 6.

118 As Hagener points out, many of the group's actual 'screenings' consisted of extracts from films. See Hagener, *Moving Forward, Looking Back,* 94.

119 See Jäger, "Protokoll," 254.

120 Jäger, "Protokoll," 253.

mentioned, a group like the VFV could never have taken shape without the infrastructural support of alternative distributors such as Prometheus, DeRussa and Weltfilm. But the VFV's increasing reliance on these distribution companies meant that it was inevitably pushed in the direction of a para-cinematic film circuit for clubs and associations. Weltfilm, for example, had, by late 1929, come to define itself exclusively as a distributor for "associations and organizations" (*Vereine und Organisationen*) rather than for cinemas. It distributed not only films, but also projectors and screens, and published instructions on how to organize film evenings, which were reprinted in *Film und Volk*.[121] And although there was never a phenomenon in Germany quite like the Russian cine-trains, the VFV did show a marked interest in forms of mobile cinema distribution, as one can gather from several images published in *Film und Volk* showing Russian Wanderkinos, the projection trucks maintained by the Instituut voor Arbeidersontwikkeling (Institute of Workers' Education) in Amsterdam or the army of traveling film advertising trucks run by the company Devoli.[122] (Figure 53)

Yet, even as it increasingly relied on alternative distributors, the VFV continued to face difficulties finding space to screen films at all. While theater owners put up various forms of resistance, Weimar laws (at least in the eyes of the VFV) increasingly sought to limit the spaces where film could be shown outside of standard cinema circuits.[123] Against this backdrop, alternative film distribution was also a risky affair, as one can gather from the instructions that accompanied a Weltfilm catalogue from 1929 printed in *Film und Volk*: "Under no circumstances may a film be shown in any other place than the one for which it was ordered" (Auf keinen Fall darf der Film an einem anderen Ort als bestellt gespielt werden).[124] Authorities also exerted

121 At least one article for *Film und Volk* claimed that theater owners themselves were trying to prevent mainstream films from being shown in associations. See "Kampfansage der Theaterbesitzer," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 11–12 (December 1929), 9.

122 An image of the Dutch projection trucks can be found in *Film und Volk* 1, no. 3–4 (June 1928), 7. The Devoli advertising trucks can be seen in *Film und Volk* 1, no. 2 (April 1928), 9. As the Devoli example shows, this interest in mobile cinemas extended to "enemy" groups as well. Hence the image of the Devoli trucks bears the caption: "Those are no innocent lorries of any old delivery company, but rather the mobile cinemas of 'Devoli.' With these 'culture deliverers,' Mr. Hugenberg intends to bring the blessings of his products to rural citizens." *Film und Volk* 1, no. 2 (April 1928), 9. This attention to mobile cinema distribution was hardly limited to the VFV, but also extended to left-wing groups. The SPD, for example, maintained a fleet of 55 cine-trucks to screen elections films around 1930, and the IAH maintained its own fleet of cine-automobiles See Stooss, "'Erobert den Film!' oder Prometheus gegen UFA & Co.," 29–30, 33.

123 See "Kampfansage der Theaterbesitzer!," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 11–12 (December 1929), 9; "Zensur von Arbeiter-Filmvorstellungen," *Film und Volks* 2, no. 6 (July 1929).

124 Weltfilm catalogue, reprinted in *Film und Volk* 2, no. 11–12 (December 1929), n.p.

Figure 53: Russian Wanderkino, *Film und Volk,* November 1928

the same kinds of pressure on owners of non-theatrical spaces that they did on cinemas. An example can be seen in the scandal around the Stuttgart screening of *Shanghai Document.* The screening was originally scheduled to take place in the dome hall of the prestigious Stuttgart Kunstgebäude, but the owners of the Kunstgebäude cancelled the screening at the last minute, apparently due to pressures from the Württemberg police. (Figure 54) The Stuttgart VFV eventually found another forum (ironically, a cinema, namely the Union-Theater), but debates continued to rage about who had done what. The police claimed that they merely warned the Kunstgebäude of possible safety concerns after learning from a "private individual" that the film in question was a Bolshevist propaganda film. Defenders of the VFV claimed that the "private individual" in question was actually a member of the police department, and that the pressuring of the Kunstgebäude flouted Weimar laws forbidding political censorship.[125]

125 See "Die Machenschaften gegen den Shanghaifilm," *Süddeutsche Arbeiter-Zeitung,* 28 November 1928, reprinted in *Film und revolutionäre Arbeiterbewegung*, 279–80. The idea that police were using "safety" concerns to flout Weimar censorship laws forbidding censorship for political reasons (by staging demonstrations to trigger the shut-down of screenings for safety reasons) was a frequent suspicion on the part of the VFV. At the same time, as the Stuttgart "Shanghai Affaire" shows, the VFV was no less adroit at using the press to generate PR around such attempted bans. For more on Weimar film censorship laws, see Kara L. Ritzheimer, *Trash,*

Figure 54: Kunstgebäude, Stuttgart, photo by Jakob Brüllmann, 1914

Whatever the truth of these various claims, the Shanghai film affair illustrates clearly that the VFV's battle with the film industry and the authorities was not simply a battle over film content. It was also—and perhaps above all—a struggle for space and infrastructure, one linked to the idea of cinema as a network for disseminating world views and consolidating a sense of worker solidarity. More than any other film society examined in this book, the VFV understood cinema as a question of infrastructure, and more than any other group, it faced unique infrastructural challenges in its efforts to organize film events at all. The centrality of this 'infrastructural' dimension cannot be understood apart from the group's idea of cinema as a mass medium.

Training the Suspicious Spectator

This idea of cinema as a mass medium also had clear repercussions for another dimension of the VFV I have yet to discuss: namely the kind of

Censorship and National Identity in Early Twentieth-Century Germany (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 160–219.

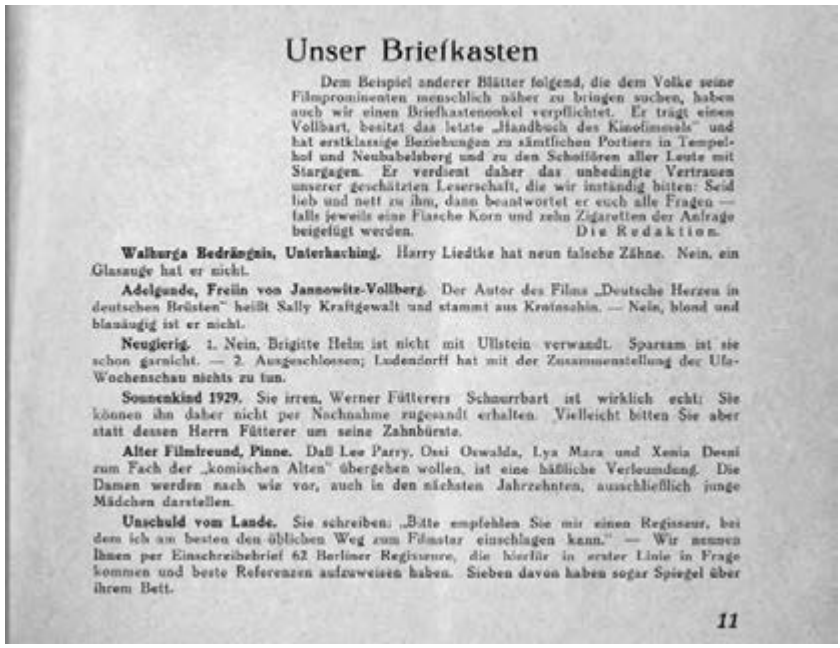
'cinematic self' it sought to engender. Though I've hinted at the group's pedagogical project throughout this chapter, I want to address this question in more depth before concluding, in order that we might be able to compare the cinematic self-hood envisioned within the VFV with that of other film societies. In many ways, this is a more difficult task for the VFV than for other groups on account of the dearth of sources mentioned at the outset. But it is also worth underscoring that the VFV was one of the least 'participatory' of all the film societies examined in this book. Their journal offered no letters column, no contests, no film aptitude tests and no interactive puzzles (though it did publish some reader-authored film criticism towards the end of its run, an aspect I'll return to below).[126] This lack of space for reader interaction in *Film und Volk* may well be a product of the group's initial 'coalition' structure, which in practice meant that intellectuals sought to speak for the masses they did not fully trust.[127] As Bruce Murray has argued, the VFV was anything but a 'grass roots' organization, either in its early center-left or its later left-wing manifestations.[128] But the lack of space for membership participation was also surely linked to the group's deep suspicion of the star system and the kinds of fan phenomena it encouraged. Indeed, the only rubric in *Film und Volk* that resembles the interactive features of typical fan magazines is a fictional and blatantly satirical column titled "Unser Briefkasten" (Our Letter Box), which ran in May and June 1929 and was meant to mock the mechanisms of 'Verdummung' employed by the industry. (Figure 55) "Following the example of other magazines," the editors wrote, "which seek to offer the people a means of making human contact with its film stars, we have also engaged a letterbox uncle" (Dem Beispiel anderer Blätter folgend, die dem Volke seine Filmprominente menschlich näher zu bringen suchen, haben wir auch einen Briefkastenonkel verpflichtet).[129]

126 There were occasional calls for reader input in the margins, such as one marginal comment, published alongside a report on the Catholic Film Congress in Paris in late 1929, telling readers to "write to us with information about the work of these shadowy men, should you have any direct experience of it." *Film und Volk* 2, no. 11–12 (December 1929), 5.

127 A typical expression of this attitude towards the masses can be seen in Hans Siemsen's article on the Volks-Film-Verband for *Die Weltbühne*. "Wer ist mit dem Zustand, dem Niveau des heutigen Kinos zufrieden? Sie nicht? Ich auch nicht. Aber wir sind nicht ‚das Publikum'. Achtzig oder Siebzig Prozent der Kinobesucher sind durchaus zufrieden. … Das große Publikum hat gar keinen Willen. Ihm ist die Qualität der Filme, die es sieht, weniger wichtig als die Qualität der Kartoffeln, die es ißt. Ohne Meinung, ohne Kritik, ohne Anspruch sitzt es im Kino und geht dumpf befriedigt oder dumpf unbefriedigt nach Hause." Siemsen, "Volksverband für Filmkunst," 477.

128 Murray, *Film and the German Left,* 140–41.

129 "Unser Briefkasten," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 4 (May 1929), 11.



Unser Briefkasten

Dem Beispiel anderer Blätter folgend, die dem Volke seine Filmprominenten menschlich näher zu bringen suchen, haben auch wir einen Briefkastenonkel verpflichtet. Er trägt einen Vollbart, besitzt das letzte „Handbuch des Kinofilmsels" und hat erstklassige Beziehungen zu sämtlichen Portiers in Tempelhof und Neubabelsberg und zu den Schoßhören aller Leute mit Stargagen. Er verdient daher das unbedingte Vertrauen unserer geschätzten Leserschaft, die wir inständig bitten: Seid lieb und nett zu ihm, dann beantwortet er euch alle Fragen — falls jeweils eine Flasche Korn und zehn Zigaretten der Anfrage beigefügt werden. Die Redaktion.

Walburga Bedrängnis, Unterhaching. Harry Liedtke hat neun falsche Zähne. Nein, ein Glasauge hat er nicht.

Adelgunde, Freiin von Jannowitz-Vollberg. Der Autor des Films „Deutsche Herzen in deutschen Brüsten" heißt Sally Kraftgewalt und stammt aus Kreinsahin. — Nein, blond und blauäugig ist er nicht.

Neugierig. 1. Nein, Brigitte Helm ist nicht mit Ullstein verwandt. Spartam ist sie schon garnicht. — 2. Ausgeschlossen; Ludendorff hat mit der Zusammenstellung der Ufa-Wochenschau nichts zu tun.

Sonnenkind 1929. Sie irren, Werner Fütterers Schnurrbart ist wirklich echt; Sie können ihn daher nicht per Nachnahme zugesandt erhalten. Vielleicht bitten Sie aber statt dessen Herrn Fütterer um seine Zahnbürste.

Alter Filmfreund, Pinne. Daß Lee Parry, Ossi Oswalda, Lya Mara und Xenia Desni zum Fach der „komischen Alten" übergehen wollen, ist eine häßliche Verleumdung. Die Damen werden nach wie vor, auch in den nächsten Jahrzehnten, ausschließlich junge Mädchen darstellen.

Unschuld vom Lande. Sie schreiben: „Bitte empfehlen Sie mir einen Regisseur, bei dem ich am besten den üblichen Weg zum Filmstar einschlagen kann." — Wir nennen Ihnen per Einschreibebrief 62 Berliner Regisseure, die hierfür in erster Linie in Frage kommen und beste Referenzen aufzuweisen haben. Sieben davon haben sogar Spiegel über ihrem Bett.

11

Figure 55: "Our Letter Box," satirical column, *Film und Volk,* May 1929

The phony 'letters'—signed with names like "Sonnenkind 1929" (Sun Child 1929) and "Unschuld vom Lande" (Innocent One from the Country)—posed typical star-struck questions (with one writer asking if he could acquire Werner Fütterer's false moustache) and offered an occasion for satirical answers with jibes at the film industry (e.g. "It's true. Adolf Hitler has just acquired the Munich censorship bureau" [Es stimmt, Adolf Hitler ist Besitzer der Münchener Filmprüfstelle geworden]).[130] Presaging Siegfried Kracauer's similar critique of letter columns from a few years later (discussed in the previous chapter), the "Unser Briefkasten" column demonstrates the VFV's deep suspicion of the industry's power to distract audiences from their real conditions through the encouragement of dreamy star gazing.[131]

Given this lack of participatory rubrics in *Film und Volk,* there is little evidence as to how VFV members responded to the group's pedagogical principles in reality. Nonetheless, one can make out a certain template for the kinds of conduct, identifications, knowledge and affect the group

130 "Briefkasten," *Film und Volks* 2, no. 5 (June 1929), 11.

131 The mock letters section in *Film und Volk* would also find an echo in the journal's successor *Arbeiterbühne und Film* in discussions such as Heinz Luedeck's article "Die werktätige Frau und der bürgerliche Film," *Arbeiterbühne und Film* 23, no. 3 (March 1931), 28–29.

wished to promote among its adherents. This was, first of all, a matter of addressing audiences as part of a left-wing community—an aspect visible, for example, in the kinds of advertisements carried in *Film und Volk.* Unlike other magazines, the journal included almost no advertisements for other film journals, with the exception of the occasional advertisement for *Close-Up* (which also ran adverts for the Volks-Film-Verband in its turn).[132] While there were some virulent critiques of industry journals like *Film-Kurier,* there was little equivalent to the kinds of discussion of other film literature one could find in *Film und Lichtbild* or *Die Kinotechnik*.[133] Here, then, readers were not being interpellated as part of a community that valued film knowledge for its own sake, let alone a community of fans. By contrast, the journal *did* print numerous advertisements for left-wing journalistic literature, such as J. Thomas's *Illustrierte Geschichte des Bürgerkriegs in Russland* (*Illustrated History of the Russian Civil War*) or the journal of communist intellectuals *Linkskurve*. What this advertising policy suggests is that the VFV understood its film pedagogy not as part of a specialist training in film knowledge (as already stated, this was not a group for exploring the distinct qualities of the medium), but as part of a broader pedagogy in the left-wing understanding of the world.

Within this project of encouraging a left-wing community, the VFV wanted its members, more specifically, to be able to distinguish clearly between films to like and films not to like, as the 'promotional film' from the group's very first screening suggests. Good films served to document the plight of working-class life, the horrors of war or the trajectories of class struggle. Bad films distracted audiences from class struggle by glorifying war, falsifying history, heroicizing individuals, exoticizing foreign cultures or reveling in nostalgic Heimat images (what writers for *Film und Volk* liked to call "Alt-Heidelberg- und Rheinweinkitsch").[134] Such bad films, in fact, made up the vast majority of the group's film reviews, which taught readers how to recognize both bad quality and bad *Tendenz,* which is why the monthly round-up of films often bore titles like "Eine Woche Reaktion" (a Week of Reactionary Films) and authors often signed off with phrases such as "Einer, der das alles nicht mehr sehen will" (someone who no longer

132 For an advertisement for *Close-Up,* see *Film und Volk* 2, no. 1 (November 1928), 1. For an advertisement for the Volks-Film-Verband in *Close-Up,* see figure 48 in this chapter above.

133 The critiques of mainstream film journals start in the first issue. See Herber Jherring, "Film-kritik," *Film und Volk* 1, no. 1 (March 1928), 29; "Film-Kurier," *Film und Volk* 1, no. 1 (March 1928), 29.

134 Franz Höllering, "Erobergung des Films," *Film und Volk* 1, no. 5 (August 1928), 4.

Figure 56: "Newsreel Face of the World," *Film und Volk*, August 1928

wishes to see any of this).[135] Bad films also included mainstream Kulturfilms and newsreels, which the journal mocked in occasional photomontages dispersed throughout articles with the title "Wochenschaugesicht der Welt" (Newsreel Face of the World, Figure 56).

Indeed, teaching audiences to recognize 'bad' films as such appears to have been a frequent part of VFV screening activities, all the more so in light of the difficulties the group faced in obtaining a sufficient supply of 'good' films. A letter from the Stuttgart group to Weltfilm from January 1929 is telling in this regard; the author (possibly Friedrich Wolf) requested that Weltfilm include several examples of kitschy short educational films of the type produced by Ufa. "We intend to show this type of film in all of our screenings," the writer explained, "because they show film kitsch in its most blatant form" (Wir haben die Absicht, in jeder unserer Veranstaltungen derartige Filme zu zeigen, die den Kitsch auf dem Filmgebiete in der krassesten Auswirkung zeigen).[136] The intention here was to facilitate a kind of 'prophylactic' exposure to such films in controlled conditions in order to help audiences learn not to be seduced by the authority of film images. In this, the VFV has a certain affinity with other film groups, particularly reformist groups (recall the critical pedagogy of Kastalia) and professional groups like DKG. Here too, however, the left-wing motivation for such filmic hygiene was markedly different from those previous groups. Moreover, if the ability to distinguish between good and bad films was part of the prescriptive program of all film societies, it took on a particularly virulent tone in the VFV, one audible, for example, in Franz Höllering's preface to the first issue of *Film und Volk*: "We will demand absolute purity from those who involve themselves with film. It's either/or. The time for cloudy judgment is over" (Wir werden von denen, die sich mit Film beschäftigen, absolute Reinheit verlangen. Entweder—oder. Die Zeiten der trüben Geschäften sind vorbei).[137] Here, distinguishing good films from kitsch was not simply a question of developing personal tastes, but of acquiring a key capacity that helped define one's belonging within a collective political struggle. Indeed, one might even say that, like Carl Schmitt, the Volks-Film-Verband located the *political* precisely in the ability to decide between 'friend' and 'enemy' in a collective sense, to associate and dissociate clearly between affiliations and draw unambiguous lines.

135 See Fränze Dyk-Schnitzer, "Eine Woche Reaktion," *Film und Volk,* 1, no. 1 (march 1928), 18–20; "Deutscher Film-Alltag," *Film und Volk* 1, no. 2 (April 1928), 19.

136 Letter to Weltfilm, 1.1.1929, in *Film revolutionäre Arbeiterbewegung,* 284.

137 Franz Höllering, "Vorwort," *Film und Volk* 1, no. 1 (March 1928), 4.

Nor was this simply a question of 'knowing,' but also a kind of template for comportment at film screenings. For example, reports recounted how, when the VFV screened the heavily censored version of Béla Balázs's *Abenteuer eines Zehnmarkscheins* in April 1928, audience members booed and whistled, and one member of the audience stood up and complained in words directly reminiscent of the group's promotional film: "These are exactly the kinds of things we no longer want to see!" ("Das sind gerade die Dinge, die wir nicht sehen wollen!").[138] In his own account of the screening, Rudolf Schwarzkopf defended Balázs, insisting that the audience knew the censors had depoliticized Balázs's film. Hence, the audience's intervention, Schwarzkopf argued, was aimed at the censors rather than the filmmaker. But whether they were booing Balázs or the censor, the anecdote still suggests that at least some members had understood the group's lessons and sought to demonstrate it in public.

It also suggests another facet of the cinematic self as the VFV understood it: its vociferousness. The VFV's ideal cinemagoer was not meant to be the reverent or silent dreamer of cinephilic film societies, but rather an *oppositional* figure who wasn't afraid to talk back to the screen (or the organizers of an event). Reading through reviews of VFV screenings, one finds occasional reports of this type of behavior. For example, various newspapers reported how, after the group's inaugural screening of Pudowkin's *Last Days of St Petersburg*, several members stayed behind in the room and sang the International.[139] At another screening of *Hunger im Waldenburg* and *Im Schatten der Maschine* in Vienna, audience members yelled at the screen when the show ended with a short slapstick sketch, which they believed served to depoliticize the event.[140] It is, of course, impossible to verify how widespread such boisterous behavior was, and it is entirely possible that reports of this type were exaggerating their frequency or intensity. But such oppositionality was part of the way in which the VFV imagined its membership and liked to describe it. It would be a mistake, moreover, to read this audience imaginary as a belief in some inherent unruliness of working-class audiences or as an avant-gardist nostalgia for the 'undisciplined' world of early cinema. Rather, it was part of the template of an oppositional self cultivated by the VFV and by left-wing groups more broadly.

138 Cited in Schwarzkopf, "Abenteuer über Abenteuer," 12.

139 See "Volksverband für Filmkunst: Matinée im Capitol," *Berliner Tagesblatt und Handelszeitung,* 27 February 1928, n.p.; "Volksverband für Filmkunst. Die gestrige Veranstaltung," *Vossische Zeitung,* 27 February 1928, n.d. In this case, the VFV leaders—who at that point still strove to be a party-neutral organization—assured the press that they weren't on board with the singing of the International.

140 See "Zensur von Arbeiter-Filmvorstellungen," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 6 (July 1929), 15.

Such oppositionality also bore its own affective dimension, which was characterized by a strong dose of aggressive humor and satire. Indeed, *Film und Volk* is the only film journal examined in this study to cultivate so systematically a sense of biting satire in its pages (as opposed to the gentle humor of cinephilic magazines described in the previous chapter). The mock letters column mentioned above offers a good example of the phenomenon, as do numerous satirical *faits divers*. A short piece titled "Die Autoren von 1909" (Authors of 1909) for example, recounted how a reconstruction of a "Kintopp" show from 1909 was meant to make audiences laugh at the naïve simplicity of 'primitive' cinema compared to current feature films, but only ended up making people laugh at the fact that today's kitschy costume dramas are no better (and probably even worse because they've grown longer).[141] This satirical dimension also extended to the journal's use of images. While *Film und Volk* rarely published star images (beyond a few sympathetic figures like Asta Nielsen), it did publish numerous satirical caricatures: images of censors, for example, or of the Catholic Church. (Figure 57) Not unlike the work of Dada artists, these visual satires were intended above all to model an aggressive sense of oppositionality, to remind readers who their 'opponents' were and to distance them from any temptation to be seduced by the products of the Hollywood or German dream factories.

In this context, we might also ask to what extent the militant affectivity being cultivated here intersected with the group's gender politics. Though we have no surviving member lists for the VFV analogous to those of the Kosmos Klub (see chapter 1), the membership undoubtedly included women. Indeed, the VFV distinguished itself from most other film societies by being one of the only film associations to include women within its official governance structure (albeit in a small minority), with Käthe Kollwitz on the management board (*Vorstand*) and three women on the honorary committee (*Ehrenausschuß*): actor Asta Nielsen, Helene Stöcker (an activist for women's equality and gay and lesbian rights) and the SPD politician Klara Weyl.[142] The journal also included—at least during the group's initial

141 Egon Larsen, "Die Autoren von 1909," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 3 (April 1929), 12. Another anecdote recounted how a newly converted sound film set was encountering too much noise from birds in the room during filming. When a worker used a red flag to shoo the birds away, another studio director stated irately: "Das dulde ich nicht länger. Sagen Sie dem Mann, er soll mit einer *weißen* Fahne winken." "Die ‚Rote Fahne' bei der Ufa," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 11–12 (December 1929), 22.

142 See the governance list printed in *Film und Volk* 1, no. 1 (February–March 1928), n.p. There is some evidence that this tendency carried over into local VFV chapters. For example, the announcements section in January 1929 listed the author Ilse Molzahn among the honorary

Figure 57: Anonymous caricature of the Catholic church as children's propaganda cinema, *Film und Volk,* April 1929

months in 1928—several articles by female authors.[143] At the same time, none of their articles—nor in fact any articles in the journal's three-year run—dealt directly with topics of women's emancipation, despite the direct engagement of many of these participants in the cause of women's struggles at the time. Moreover, the contributions of women authors completely disappear by the end of the first year.

committee of the Magdeburg chapter. See "Mitteilungen des Volksverbandes für Filmkunst," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 2 (December 1928–January 1929), 16.

143 See Fränze Dyk-Schnitzer, "Eine Woche Reaktion," *Film und Volk* 1, no. 1 (February–March 1928), 18; Irmalote Lewinsky, "Märchen vom Film," *Film und Volk* 1, no. 2 (April 1928), 20; Franziska Hoffmann, "Tierfilme," *Film und Volk* 1, no. 3–4 (June 1928), 16; Friedl Lange, "Helfer der Kultur," *Film und Volk* 1, no. 5 (August 1928), 12.

The latter phenomenon might be chalked up to an increasing tendency to leave off authors' names altogether as the journal swung away from the popular front model to a more militantly communist (collective) one. But one can still ask to what extent the militant turn of the VFV, its insistence on presenting itself as a *Kampforganisation* rather than a consumer pressure group, brought to the fore a longstanding gender dichotomy in the proletarian imaginary, one in which—as Sabine Hake has pointed out—"the exploitation of the workers is invariably understood as a feminizing experience, against which the process of radicalization promises a remasculinization."[144] Such a gendered dichotomy arguably did inform the VFV's own imaginary; despite the lack of attention to the specificities of the women's movement, for example, the group did reserve special praise for certain films about suffering women such as *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück* (Mother Krausen's Journey to Heaven), which employed the prototype of the suffering mother as a gendered metaphor for class exploitation.[145]

More importantly, for my topic here, a similar dichotomy was likely at work in the group's disdain for (feminized) film fans in opposition to the (masculinized) empowered cinemagoer, who would resist the seductions of capitalist ideology. In an article for *Arbeiterbühne und Film,* the successor-journal to *Film und Volk,* Heinz Luedecke recalled the mock letters column from *Film und Volk* in a scathing review of the fan questions section from *Filmwelt,* but this time focused specifically on female fans:

> For the most part, the questions [sent into *Filmwelt*] come from women and girls who long to escape the narrow confines of their existence for the "big world." Evidently, these are mostly working women, who have not yet learned [...] that the "happiness" they dream of is merely the final illusory flower of a culture destined to die, and that only Socialism can make working people free and happy. [...] Women are an especially susceptible object for capitalist propaganda, a phenomenon related to the fact that they have been held in a more oppressive state of dependency than men for centuries. But through these women, capitalist propaganda also reaches men, who are otherwise less suggestible. The "little film darling" usually has a husband, a boyfriend, a fiancé or a brother, whom she infects with her pathological love for illusion. Little wonder, then, that the ruling class's most powerful instrument of mass stultification,

144 Hake, *The Proletarian Dream,* 57.

145 *Mutter Krausen* made the cover of the January issue of 1930, along with several articles on the film.

> film, with its paraphernalia of magazines etc., pays such close attention to the mentality of female audiences.[146]

> Zum größten Teil fragen Frauen und junge Mädchen, die sich aus der Enge ihres Lebens hinaussehnen in die "große Welt." Offenbar sind es überwiegend werktätige Frauen, die noch nicht erkannt haben, […] daß jenes "Glück," von dem sie träumen, die letzte Scheinblute einer unwiderruflich zum Tode verurteilten Kultur ist, daß nur der Sozialismus die arbeitenden Menschen frei und glücklich machen kann. […] Die Frau ist ein besonders willfähriges Objekt der kapitalistischen Propaganda, und das hängt damit zusammen, daß sie jahrhundertlang in einer noch viel drückenderen Abhängigkeit gehalten wurde als der Mann. Durch die Frauen aber erreicht der Kapitalismus mit seiner Propaganda auch die im allgemeinen schwerer beeinflußbaren Männer. Die "kleine Filmsehnsucht" pflegt gewöhnlich einen Ehemann, Freund, Bräutigam oder Bruder zu haben, den sie mit Illusionskrankheit infiziert. Kein Wunder also, daß das mächtigste Massenverdummunginstrument der herrschenden Klasse, der Film mit allem drum und dran an Magazinen usw., so sehr auf die Mentalität des weiblichen Publikums rücksicht nimmt.

Such passages tend to align 'femininity,' suggestibility and vulnerability to capitalist messaging, in opposition to the militant spectator, armed with critical insight, suspicion and a (masculine) resistance to the power of illusion.

It was this latter prototype that informed the VFV's version of a proletarian cinematic self. If one thing characterized the group's pedagogical program, it was almost certainly the effort to train the masses in critical media literacy, a project that another writer would describe as the effort to "eradicate cine-illiteracy" (den Kino-Analphabetismus zu liquidieren).[147] This involved inculcating a reflexive suspicion of the film industry itself. Already in the first article of the first issue, Franz Höllering outlined this pedagogical mission when he declared that one of the group's central objectives lay in the "enlightenment of the masses concerning the exploitation to

146 Heinz Luedecke, "Die werktätige Frau und der bürgerliche Film," *Arbeiterbühne und Film* 18, no. 3 (March 1931), 28. Women authors could also buy into this framing of socialist struggle as a struggle to overcome the 'weakness' of feminine disposition, as is evident in an article published the following month by the artist Alice Lex. See Alice Lex, "Die Frau und der Film," *Arbeiterbühne und Film* 18, no. 5 (May 1931), 12–13.

147 T. K. Fodor, "Um das blaue Band der Filmzensur," *Arbeiterbühne und Film* 23, no. 2 (February 1931), 29.

which they are exposed, even in their rare hours of rest, by a film industry dominated and controlled by their class enemies" (Aufklärung der Massen über die Ausbeutung, deren sie noch in ihren kargen Ruhestunden durch eine Filmindustrie ausgesetzt sind, die ihr Klassenfeind [...] beherrscht und kontrolliert).[148] This desire to focus members' attention on the industry also helps to explain the ambivalence about film screenings mentioned above, since screenings alone were not conducive to developing awareness of the machinations happening behind the scenes, and it was difficult to control audience reactions to industry films. Indeed, later VFV events frequently replaced screenings with lectures about the industry, such as one on the "economic significance of film" (volkswirtschaftliche Bedeutung des Films) by Alfons Goldschmidt in January 1929.[149]

At the same time, and following the group's emphasis on compilation and recontextualization, there was no shortage of articles teaching audiences to read films against the grain. Not all popular film was to be rejected, and readers of *Film und Volk* could learn, for example, to see the progressive potential of films by Chaplin, Keaton and even Harold Lloyd, which (according to one writer for the journal) served to lay bare "the brutality of high capitalist, bourgeois civilization" (die Grausamkeit der hochkapitalistischen Bourgeoiszivilisation), even if they couldn't propose an alternative to capitalism as Russian film did.[150] Similarly, another writer, in a short discussion of an ostensibly patriotic English war film, explained that the film could just as easily be read as an anti-war film and asked readers to imagine how the film might be received if one were to change the intertitles to emphasize the cost of war.[151]

This attention to the mutability of film prints went hand in hand with a desire to make audiences conscious of *censorship* operations. Again and again, spectators were encouraged not to assume that a print they saw in their local cinema was the final or intended version of a given film. In some cases, this attention to print conditions could overlap with the burgeoning auteurist paradigm, as when G. W. Pabst complained, during a lecture to the VFV at the Deutsch-Amerikanisches Theater in March 1928, that the truncated version of *Die Liebe der Jeanne Ney* exemplified "the high-handed way in which the industry handles the work of an author by making changes

148 Franz Höllering, "Vorwort," *Film und Volk* 1, no. 1 (March 1928), 4.

149 See "Mitteilungen," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 3 (April 1929), n.p. A version of the lecture was also published under the title "Filmwirtschaft" in the first issue of *Film und Volk*.

150 Gerhart Pohl, "Grotesk-Films," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 7 (August–September 1929), 17.

151 Emil Rabold, "gefilmte Seeschlachten," *Film und Volk* 1, no. 5 (August 1928), 13.

or adding or subtracting material."[152] But more often than not, the idea was to encourage audiences to think about the censors' ability to change films politically, in terms of their *Tendenz*. An example of this can be seen in the debate over Balázs's *Der Abenteuer eines Zehnmarkscheins*, from which the group sought to profit to condition audiences to be aware of the censors' ability to "mutilate" (*zerstückeln*) films and change their meaning before the public even has a chance to see them. According to Schwarzkopf, Hans von Zwehl, who gave the lecture before the screening of Balázs's film, even brought the censor card and passed it around among the audience, declaring: "Learn from this example, friends, that even the best manuscripts are of no use as long as business people are allowed to make arbitrary changes to the product of an intellectual worker" (Lernt, Freunde, aus diesem Schulbeispiel, daß noch so gute Manuskripte nichts nützen, solange Geschäftsleute sich herausnehmen dürfen, willkürlich Änderungen an dem Produkt des geistigen Arbeiters zu verüben).[153]

All of this attention to the world behind the screen suggests that the VFV sought to inculcate within audiences a certain hermeneutics of "suspicion" in Paul Ricoeur's well-known formulation. Anticipating the apparatus theorists in the 1960s, they wanted audiences to understand the *work* that goes on behind the scenes and ways in which that work is never neutral, rather than succumbing to the fetishistic illusions of the finished product on the screen. Members of the VFV also had a key word to signal this pedagogical effort: *Kritik*. The term signaled not only film criticism in the narrow sense, which they tended to designate with the title "kritischer Filmbericht" (critical film report).[154] but also a more general critical disposition towards the world of popular film. As one writer explained characteristically in January 1930, much more important than getting audiences to engage with individual films was "teaching our members and the wider cinemagoing public to adopt a critical attitude towards film" (die Erziehung unserer Mitglieder und des breiten Kinopublikums zur kritischen Stellunghahme zum Film).[155]

Still, film criticism in the narrow sense *was* a key means of modeling such a critical mode of engagement, all the more so as the group's initial plans

152 Letter from Rudolf Schwarzkopf to Heinrich Mann, 20.3.1928, in *Film und revolutionäre Arbeieterbewegung,* 246.

153 Schwarzkopf, "Abenteuer über Abenteuer," 12.

154 See for example Max Brenner, "Kritischer Filmbericht," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 3 (April 1929), 9–11.

155 T. "Die Arbeit des Volksfilm-Verbandes im neuen Jahr," *Film und Volk* 3, no. 2 (February 1930), 38; An almost identical phrase can be seen in an article from November 1929. See "In eigener Sache!," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 9–10 (November 1929), 4.

to focus on filmmaking receded. Film reviewers urged readers, first of all, to recognize the uselessness of most mainstream film criticism on account of its inevitably compromised position within the capitalist press. This was the gist of an article from August 1928 by the actor Hermann Hübner titled "Diese Kritik" (This Criticism), which sought to attune readers to the "many threads [that] run between film capital and the press," with Hugenberg's media empire forming a prime example.[156] Individual film reviews also took up this lesson and sought to discourage readers from accepting the authority of mainstream reviews. A highly critical discussion of Fritz Lang's *Die Frau im Mond* (1929), for example, explained the film's otherwise glowing critical reception this way: "Either the newspapers praising the film belong personally to the dear Lord Hugenberg or, as in most cases, they're connected to his vast possessions through some other line of interest, be it only publicity contracts" (Entweder gehört die jeweilig beifallsfreudige Zeitung dem lieben Gott Hugenberg persönlich oder ist in den meisten Fällen mit dessen teuerem Besitztum durch irgendwelche anderen Interessen und seien es nur Inseratenaufträge verbunden).[157]

In their own film reviews, VFV critics did attend to artistic qualities (acting, story, atmosphere, etc.), but they also incorporated sustained attention to the aspects of *Tendenz* not usually covered in the mainstream press. Numerous reviews critiqued films for their content, arguing for example that a film's narrative was too individualistic, failed to foreground social causality or was simply unrealistic.[158] Reviewers particularly disapproved of films in which social problems were overshadowed by romantic love stories. For example, a review of *Sprengbagger 1010* (*Explosives Excavator 1010*, 1929), a film thematizing the displacement of traditional agriculture by industrial coal harvesting, started with the lines:

> There might be some justification for rendering the representation of social problems more 'personally relatable' to a lay public through the interweaving of fictional elements and personal destinies—so long as this doesn't compromise the presentation of the social problem as such.[159]

156 Hermann Hübner, "Diese Filmkritik," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 5 (August 1928), 8.

157 A. A., "'Deutsche Spitzenproduktion'. Die Frau im Mond," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 9–10 (November 1929), 13.

158 One reviewer described an unnamed "marriage film" as a "Sammelserium von sogenannten Filmbeispielen, die auf das wirkliche Leben nicht zutreffen und keineswegs ein Bild von den wahren Problemen der Ehe zu geben vermögen." Oka, "Bürgerliche Film im Mai," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 5 (June 1929), 12.

159 "Kritischer Filmbericht," *Film und Volk* 3, no. 1 (January 1930), 20.

> Es mag sich rechtfertigen lassen, wenn solche Darstellungen [sozialer Probleme] durch die Einflechtung von Spielhandlungen und die Wiedergabe persönlicher Schicksale dem großen Publikum ‚menschlich näher gerückt' werden—solange die Problemstellung als solche hierdurch nicht beeinträchtigt wird.

A similar skepticism was reserved for the popular rags-to-riches narratives that encouraged hope in individualistic solutions to systemic problems of working-class life. "We are surely not wrong," wrote the reviewer of one such film about a peasant girl who marries into royalty (*Spielereien einer Kaiserin / Shenanigans of an Empress,* 1929),

> to assert that such films dissipate a lot of justified anger and dissatisfaction through their false pretense and the awakening of unfounded hopes. The destiny on the screen offers the audience a substitute for its own unfulfilled desires for a better existence.[160]

> Wir gehen sicher nicht fehl, wenn wir behaupten, daß durch solche Filme viel gerechte Unzufriedenheit und Zorn durch falsche Vorspiegelungen, durch Erwecken unbegründeter Hoffnungen abgeleitet wird. Man lebt im Leinwandschicksal die eigenen unerfüllten Wünsche nach einem besseren Dasein aus.

And not surprisingly, VFV reviewers had little praise for productions of world cinema that failed to highlight the actual social conditions of the locales they featured. Thus a review of Franz Osten's *Schicksalswürfel* (*A Throw of the Dice,* 1929), stated: "This 'Indian' film was indeed shot partly in India. […] However, the result is not a truly Indian film, but rather a pompous romantic story, which only happens to play out in ancient India" (Dieser 'indische' Film is zwar teilweise in Indien selbst aufgenommen worden, […] und doch ist das Ganze kein wahrhaft indischer Film, sondern eine prunkvoll romantische Geschichte, die zufällig im alten Indien spielt).[161] Among all of

160 J. K., "Kritischer Filmbericht," *Film und Volk* 3, no. 3 (March 1930), 57.

161 Max Brenner, "Kritischer Filmbericht," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 7 (August–September 1929), 16. Similarly, a review of the Kulturfilm *Die Wunder Asiens* (*The Wonders of Asia,* 1929), complained that "Hürlimann [the director] führt uns durch halb Asien als durch die erschütternd-herrliche Grabstätte einer vergangenen Kultur. Er vermeidet es peinlich, irgend etwas über die Gegenwart dieser Völker auszusagen. […] Er geht mit viel Sachkenntnis und Geschmack vor, doch müßte eigentlich Schluß gemacht werden mit dieser musealisch-archeologischen Betrachtungsweise der Kulturfilme." J.K., "Kritischer Filmbericht," *Film und Volk* 3, no. 3 (March 1930), 58.

this critique, there were a few positive reviews, as when reviewers praised King Vidor's *The Crowd* (1928) for its "unadorned representation of a simple and sober reality,"[162] or when they lauded *Menschen am Sonntag* (*People on Sunday,* 1929) for its realistic depiction of the lower middle classes seeking respite on a weekend for the toils of their weekly labor.[163]

VFV reviews also sought to draw attention to conditions behind the scenes in order to attune readers to industry determinants or the activities of the censor. In his article "Soziologie des Films" (Sociology of Film), Ebbe Neergard summarized this position when he argued that aesthetic criticism utterly fails to take account of the capitalist industrial context, which conditions the surplus of bad films: "Industrial capitalism bears the blame for this—and as long as it has not disappeared, clever aesthetic theories are of little use to us" (Der industrielle Kapitalismus trägt die Schuld—und solange er nicht verschwindet, nützen die klugen ästhetischen Theorien uns nur wenig).[164] Moreover, just as Hans von Zwehl had passed around the censor card at the screening of Balázs's *Die Abenteuer eines Zehnmarkscheins,* so the journal's editors argued that film criticism must take censorship conditions into account. Thus Walter Nettelbeck (from the *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung*) argued in a programmatic article from May 1929 that "*daily film criticism must be supplemented by the daily criticism of censorship.*"[165] Individual film reviews also followed suit, as when one reviewer of the American film *Wings* (1927) wrote that any evaluation of the film could only be provisional. "For the German adapters [*Bearbeiter*] apparently changed and shortened the work significantly in all too apprehensive caution, because this American war film naturally represented Germans as the enemy" (Denn die deutschen Bearbeiter sollen das Werk in allzu ängstlicher Vorsicht erheblich verändert und gekürzt haben, weil in diesem amerikanischen Kriegsfilm der Deutsche naturgemäß als Gegner erscheint).[166] Through such tactics, reviews sought

162 "Kritischer Filmbericht," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 9–10 (November 1929), 12.

163 J.K. "Kristischer Filmbericht," *Film und Volk* 3, no. 3 (March 1930), 58.

164 Ebbe Neergard "Die Soziologie des Films," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 5 (June 1929), 5.

165 W[alter] Nettelbeck, "Presse und Zensur," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 4 (May 1929), 5. Italics in original. Nettelbeck added that such a critique of censorship would at least provide a humorous break from the monotony of bad film reviews given the ridiculous quality of many of the censors' decisions.

166 Max Brenner, "Kritischer Filmbericht," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 3 (April 1929), 10. Cf. a discussion of *Revolte im Erziehungshaus* from 1930: "Hat man den Film in der Originalfassung nicht gesehen, so ist es fast unmöglich zu entscheiden, ob hier eine unbarmherzigen Verstümmelung stattgefunden hat, so daß die Reste kaum noch etwas von den Werten des Ganzen beibehalten haben, oder daß er überhaupt nicht an die Bedeutung und Kraft des Theaterstückes heranreichte." J. K., "Kritischer Filmbericht," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 2 (February 1929), 35.

to model again and again a particular type of critical media literacy, one that would resist the illusions of the dream factory and ask about material conditions and ideological interests behind the production—and alteration—of the films available on German cinema screens.

If film criticism was a key area for the group's pedagogy broadly, teaching readers how to read films and look behind them, it was also one area in which the VFV began to integrate more reader participation towards the end of its run. That participation coincided with the group's annexation by the KPD, which was already encouraging so-called "worker correspondents" (*Arbeiterkorrespondenten*) to submit reviews of theater, radio and film offerings to its flagship journal *Die rote Fahne*.[167] With the subordination of the VFV to the IFA (Interessengemeinschaft für Arbeiterkultur) in 1930, the practice was also introduced into *Film und Volk* to offer a model of the kind of viewing the journal expected from readers. The first column of this type reprinted one anonymous worker's response to a critique of E. A. Dupont's Titanic drama *Atlantic* (1929), which subjects the film to a sharp ideological critique for the way it idealized (in the reviewers' eyes) the ship's captain, while making the workers aboard the Titanic appear as dishonorable money-grubbers and gamblers, when the reality was in fact the other way around.[168] Whatever credence we wish to lend this critique, it did clearly demonstrate the kind of suspicious film viewing the group sought from its members. Moreover, the publication of the critique coincided with a new program, announced in the following issue (the last as an independent journal): "Members of the Volks-Film-Verband should send in reports from all cinemas" (Berichterstattung aus allen Kinos muss dem Volks-Film-Verband durch seine Mitglieder zugehen).[169]

Film und Volk would never manage to print those solicited reports from cinemas, since the journal folded one month later.[170] But the 'participatory turn' would be developed in *Film und Volk's* successor journal, *Arbeiterbühne und Film.* It's important to note here that *Arbeiterbühne und Film*—which launched in June 1930 as a combination of *Arbeiterbühne* and *Film und Volk*—no longer spoke officially for the *Volks-Film-Verband,* which had all but

167 See Murray, *Film and the German Left,* 194–95. See also Heinz Luedecke, "Dringende Aufgabe der proletarischen Filmkritik," *Arbeiterbühne und Film* 22, no. 6 (June 1930), 23.

168 "Der Arbeiterkorrespondent meldet sich!," *Film und Volk* 3, no. 1 (January 1929), 22–23.

169 "Die Arbeit des Volksfilm-Verbandes im neuen Jahr," *Film und Volk* 3, no. 2 (Feburary 1930), 38.

170 Such reader-authored reviews did form the staple of another short-lived VFV-linked publication, *Sozialistische Filmkritik,* run by Willi Bredel as a journal for the Hamburg chapter of the group from 1930 to 1931. See Stooss, "'Erobert den Film!' oder Prometheus gegen UFA & Co.," 27.

fizzled out by mid-1930 (with the exception of a few regional groups such as Stuttgart). Rather, the journal billed itself as the official organ of the Arbeiter Theater-Bund Deutschlands (Workers' Theater Association of Germany, ATBD)—itself now one of the many subgroups of the Interessengemeischaft für Arbeiterkultur. Indeed, there is hardly a mention of the VFV anywhere in the new journal beyond one article that refers to it as a failed venture, and *Film und Volk* itself was reduced to one rubric mostly overseen by Heinz Luedecke from the IFA.[171] But it was paradoxically under this KPD-led outfit that the leftwing film journal in Germany finally adopted the kinds of participatory techniques familiar from other film society magazines.

First and foremost, *Arbeiterbühne und Film* inaugurated a full-fledged program of proletarian film criticism, in which readers were asked to submit critiques of the films showing in working-class districts. The exercise was conceived partly as a means of influencing working-class cinema owners to show proletarian films,[172] but it was also part of a larger program of what Luedecke described as the "film critical education" of readers, an education that played out across the pages of the journal as Luedecke himself reviewed submitted critiques, praising some aspects and chastising others (e.g. wasting space on plot, too much focus on aesthetic qualities, failure to identify the hidden *Tendenz* of films, etc.).[173] In this way, the journal's proletarian film critique sought to inculcate a habitus of suspicious film viewing, one that readers could demonstrate through their critical submissions. As Luedecke put it: "You will now show the masters at Ufa, Paramount and Warner Brothers that, even in the darkened movie theater, you remain a good proletariat, who will not be fooled into believing that X is Y and that a war film is an anti-war film!" (Du wirst den Herren von der Ufa, Paramount und Warner Bros jetzt mal zeigen, daß Du auch noch im Dunkeln ein knorker Prolet bist, der sich keinen X fürn U vormachen läßt und keinen Kriegsfilm fürn Antikriegsfilm!).[174] But the participatory pedagogy of the proletarian film critique was not only about learning bahaviors. It was also meant to transform, through the inculcation of certain performances, readers' sense

171 See Korea Senda and Heinz Luedecke, "Agitpropisierung des Films," *Arbeiterbühne und Film* 23, no. 5 (1931), 9.

172 See e.g. Heinz Luedecke, "Immer wieder: proletarische Filmkritik!," *Arbeiterbühne und Film,* 22, no. 11 (November 1930), 25: "[Den Besitzern der Arbeiterkinos] muß immer wieder unter die Nase gerieben werden, daß die werktätigen Massen, von deren Groschen sie leben, keine Lust mehr haben, sich arbeiterfeindliche und kriegshetzerische Machwerke anzusehen!"

173 Ibid., 25.

174 Heinz Luedecke, "Proletarische Filmkritik — Der Leser hat das Wort!" *Arbeiterbühne und Film* 22, no. 9 (September 1930), 22.

of belonging. As Luedecke put it in another programmatic discussion: "Only in this way [through active critique] can the feeling of connectedness and joint responsibility arise, which will create a solid proletarian basis for proletarian film production" (Nur so kann das Gefühl der Verbundenheit und Mitverantwortlichkeit entstehen, welches der proletarischen Filmproduktion eine breite proletarische Basis schafft).[175] The proletarian film critique was thus also understood as a forum for creating a community of like-minded readers, who would speak to one another in the pages of the journal, sharing ideas and critiquing each other's shortcomings.

In many ways, this push for readerly participation in *Arbeiterbühne und Film* recalled socialist efforts to 'activate' spectators more broadly (e.g., in Brechtian theater) and employed methods already developed within other communist organizations to do so. Beyond the expansion of Arbeiter-Korrespondenten into reader-authored film critiques, the journal also proposed to transform film production itself along the lines of agit-prop theater. In a programmatic article entitled "Agitpropisierung des proletarischen Films" (Agitpropisation of Proletarian Film), Luedecke and the Berlin-based Japanese theater and film director Korea Senda proposed to mimic revolutionary theater groups by creating small collectives of workers' film correspondents (*Arbeiterfilmkorrespondenten*), who would film short "reports" of demonstrations, scenes from factories and episodes of rural working-class life using newly available 16mm cameras.[176] These could then be re-edited into longer montage films, "which would employ the dialectical method to exert a revolutionary critique of existing conditions."[177] In this way, the authors sought to finally realize the VFV's dream of creating a sustainable infrastructure for working-class film culture, albeit the new program had a decidedly more 'participatory' character.

But this participatory dimension in *Arbeiterbühne und Film* also, and perhaps ironically, represented a return to techniques familiar from more cinephilic film society publications. The journal regularly asked readers to give feedback on its rubrics, stating which articles and writers they liked and what they would like to see more of.[178] And titles such as "Proletarische Filmkritik. Der Leser hat das Wort" (Proletarian Film Criticism: The Readers Speak) could not help but recall the rubrics of popular film magazines

175 Luedecke, "Dringende Aufgabe der proletarischen Filmkritik," 24.

176 For more on the 16mm work that did occur among leftwing groups, see Stooss, "'Erobert den Film!' oder Prometheus gegen UFA & Co.," 38–39.

177 Senda and Luedecke, "Agitpropisierung des proletarischen Films," 10.

178 See for example *Arbeiterbühe und Film* 17, no. 8 (August 1930), 31.

like *Mein Film*. Indeed, the journal even ran a prize contest for the best proletarian film critique. Although the results of the contest were never published (since the journal folded in June 1931, four months after the contest was announced), the call for submissions offers a good impression of how *Arbeiterbühne und Film* positioned itself with respect to mainstream film magazines. On the one hand, the contest recalls analogous contests from *Mein Film* and similar journals. "The main goal of this prize contest," the editors wrote there, "is to show our most zealous readers how much we appreciate their activity" (Dieses Preisausschreiben hat vor allem den Zweck, unseren eifrigsten Mitarbeitern zu zeigen, wie hoch wir ihre Aktivität schätzen).[179] But the editors also sought to distinguish their contest rigorously from the capitalist model of the reader contest. Hence they justified the prizes—all copies of important communist publications—this way: "We will not be distributing prizes that are 'valuable' in a bourgeois sense, and we would not do that for reasons of principle, even if we had access to greater funds. Whoever wishes to participate with us should not do so with the intention of profiting individually!" (Wir bringen keine im bürgerlichen Sinne 'wertvollen' Preise zur Verteilung, und wir würden es auch aus prinzipiellen Gründen nicht tun, wenn wir über größere Mittel verfügen könnten. Wer mit uns gehen will, darf nicht mit individuellen Gewinnabsichten kommen!).[180] Here too, the working-class cinematic self was meant to be a collective self, whose self-discipline in the cinema sacrificed personal pleasure to a collective struggle against the capitalist film industry. Such differences should, however, not blind us to some of the analogous methods at work here. What the editors of *Arbeiterbühne und Film* recognized, like cinephilic societies before them, was that constructing a cinematic self was most effective when it involved a degree of shared participation among readers, who could performatively enter into a community of like-minded filmgoers.

Conclusion

Why this participatory dimension did not figure more strongly in Volks-Film-Verband might be a matter of speculation, but the group clearly sought to inculcate similar habits of viewing defined by the ability to see through the illusions of the dream factory and resist the seductions of the darkened movie theater. This, as we have seen, was the larger stake of 'critique' in the

179 "Achtung! Preisausschreiben!," *Arbeiterbühne und Film* 18, no.3 (February 1931), insert.
180 Ibid.

VFV and its successors in *Arbeiterbühne und Film,* and this might be the most lasting legacy of such left-wing film communities: their articulation of a certain mode of critical media literacy. If we measure these groups against their proclaimed intentions to inaugurate a sphere of proletarian film production, we might indeed see both the VFV and its communist successors as failures. But if we read the VFV as one of the first groups to crystallize the idea of film as a mass medium—and to articulate the protocols of a cinematic self that could manage its exposure to that medium by developing strategies of critical viewing—then the VFV and similar groups had a much more important, if less tangible, impact on subsequent film culture. They offered a template of critical and skeptical viewing that would characterize the protocols of 'informed' cinema and media spectatorship from the 1960s onward, including—despite the group's own resistance to women's issues of its day—much feminist film criticism.

Afterword: What's in an 'Idea'?

In the introduction to this book, I cited Francesco Casetti's concept of the "idea of cinema" from his essay on relocation in the digital era, but without fully fleshing out the connections to my own project. As stated, I would take issue with Casetti's use of the singular, as I believe different ideas of cinema can co-exist without the need to posit a common ground binding them all together. But I do find Casetti's concept useful for thinking about the work and impact of film societies during a previous era of media change. While certainly not the only place where ideas of cinema take shape, film societies offer a particularly useful test case for observing what I have called—following the editors of *Die Kinotechnik*—processes of crystallization: i.e., the diffuse agency by which ideas of cinema assume more solid contours to become objects of shared recognition: nameable, repeatable and capable of influencing how people interact with cinema. One of the implicit theses of this book is that we need to look at such collective processes, much more than individual auteurs or theorists, if we want to understand how cinema took on the range of shared meanings it acquired in the twentieth century.

But one objection to my use of Casetti's 'idea of cinema' might be the seeming ideal*ism* suggested by the name. Casetti is indeed at pains to distinguish the idea of cinema, which structures filmic experience (and which he hopes will survive the transition to the digital), from cinema's traditional material-technological substrate (the classic apparatus of projector and filmstrip, which he acknowledges probably will not survive). In this, I also find in Casetti an intellectual ally, for I too have argued that focusing on film societies can help us overcome the kinds of techno-determinism still latent in much film history, since they played such a formative role in shaping mass understandings of cinema and its potentials. This belief in the agency of ideas is one factor that situates my own study in the vicinity of other film cultural approaches.

But this question of materialist vs. culturalist readings is more complex than it might seem. Even in Casetti's reading, it turns out that the "idea of cinema" is multi-layered, consisting of a mix of embodied and ideational elements. There are, first of all, *habits*. For Casetti, the ingrained habits of

Cowan, M., *Film Societies in Germany and Austria 1910–1933: Tracing the Social Life of Cinema*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2023
DOI 10.5117/9789463725477_AFTER

cinema spectators constitute a kind of embodied substrate of cinematic experience; they form those acquired bodily competencies—e.g., the focusing of attention, the shutting out of the surrounding world—by which spectators themselves help create the cinematic experience (and, crucial for Casetti's argument, carry that experience over from the movie theater to portable devices).

Casetti has little to say about how such habits took hold on a mass scale (spending most of his essay examining key classical theorists—Balázs, Eisenstein, Epstein, etc.—who analyzed the experiences they helped to generate). But he does suggest that they originated in the very period at which my own study begins, as the cinematograph was transforming into entertainment cinema.[1] I would argue that they correspond to the much larger field of protocols and learned forms of comportment that I've posited in this study as central to the formation of various types of cinematic selves (albeit again in a more diverse array than Casetti's essay would suggest). Indeed, I might even be tempted to replace Casetti's "habits" with the Bourdieuean "habitus" (a term I have occasionally invoked in the preceding pages) in order to gesture towards the ways in which spectatorial competencies can embody forms of social power. Part of my argument (summarized under the term "productions" in the introduction) is that film societies can help us to see, in real time, the messy formation of such spectatorial habits and protocols, as well as the competing agendas that undergird them.

And yet, this isn't merely a question of tracing the rise of new habits ca. 1910, 1920 or 1930. As I've suggested throughout the book, film societies also imported *existing* habits for interacting with spectacles or technologies from elsewhere: from the associational worlds of amateur science, professional life, theatrical society, political activism and many other areas. The members of early film societies brought these existing habits and competencies to bear upon film, thereby appropriating it for these different existing social worlds. At the same time, as I have argued, they helped to forge something new and even film-specific by adapting those existing associational worlds and their attendant competencies to the new medium and complex of cinema, to which each of them turned as it became an urgent question within their respective spheres.

Two other key components in Casetti's "idea of cinema" are *memory* and *imagination,* both of which come into play in a story of cinema's survival in the digital era. Without our memory of traditional cinema, he argues, we would never be able to recognize something new as still belonging to it. But

1 See Casetti, "The Relocation of Cinema," 21.

without imagination, we would never be able to project the remembered past into a new and unfamiliar situation or (crucially) to adapt our understanding of the past to provide new genealogies for a changing medium by studying phenomena like portable film projectors. Casetti posits a kind of dialectic of memory and imagination, one in which we use our memory of the past to recognize present phenomena as "still cinema," but we also revise our understanding of the past to accommodate a changing present and imagine cinema anew. This, he argues with reference to Benjamin, is the interplay that will assure cinema's survival across a digital rupture. In my own reading, I have been examining a very different media shift, one in which cinema itself was the new and unfamiliar term. Still, I like to think that the dialectic between past, present and future, between memory and imagination, played a key role there. Like early spectators generally, those engaged in early film societies did not come to cinema as blank slates, but brought their memories (of other spheres), which in turn centrally informed the kinds of imaginaries they could construct for and around cinema as a new medium. Film societies helped to structure this process of translation and mediation in specific ways, and my introduction drew attention to the importance of relationalities for understanding this process. A society like the Kosmos Club for Scientific and Artistic Cinematography channeled the memory of other educational formations—reading clubs, associations of scientific photography, etc.—to imagine the cinema as a new terrain of experiential learning, whereas a group like the Volks-Film-Verband (coming some 15 years later) could channel the memory of socialist youth organizations to imagine the cinema as a new weapon in the shaping of class consciousness. Those imaginaries were at one and the same time latecomers (building on older traditions) and pioneering prototypes for future development, which would have a powerful impact on the ways people would approach cinema—the questions they would ask of it, the competencies they would bring to it, the experiences they would search for in it—for decades to come.

This discussion is not intended to try to force an overlap between my own examination of film societies and Casetti's meditation on cinema's relocation into the digital era. I've already pointed out several details (and points of emphasis) on which we differ, and my own film-historical questions share little of the existential pathos driving Casetti's central question of cinema's survival today. But thinking through these connections does allow me to reiterate a key point here in closing: namely that we can learn a lot about early film societies if we embrace our own positionality as (still early) digital spectators when imagining ourselves back into those earlier social undertakings. Rather than approaching early film societies armed

with the reflexive auteurist associations that the phrase "film society" has acquired in reference to the post-WWII Parisian arthouse scene, we would do better to think of them as formations grappling with new media, intended to navigate their own period of media rupture. Cine-clubs arose to confront that change at a moment when (on the one hand) cinema had gained mass appeal, but (on the other) its potential directions were still profoundly open and multiple. In this context, early film societies were oriented towards the future—influencing those directions— rather than (as self-styled cine-clubs tend to be today) towards the past.

If one wished to take this research on new media clubs further, one could look at any number of analogous phenomena from the early twentieth century; I've already mentioned photography clubs in this book, but there were analogous phenomena such as radio clubs, which flowered in a similar variety of forms in the 1910s and 1920s and would merit a study in their own right. Alternatively, one could look forward to the later world of computer clubs starting in the 1960s and, of course, to the new media groups evoked at the outset of this book: gaming associations, VR clubs or data visualization societies. What 'ideas' of radio, of computing, of immersive media or of visual information have such clubs helped to inaugurate? What existing knowledge have they drawn on to do so? What forms of spectatorship and what competencies undergird those ideas? Of course, answering those questions was not the project of the present book. But I do hope that calling them to mind as potential fellow-travelers can help to bring a fresh perspective to the history of film societies, allowing us to see beyond ingrained auteurist investments and access some of the potentiality that characterized this form of sociability at a time when cinema was still new.

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Index

Film Societies in Germany and Austria 1910–1933 traces the evolution of early German-language film societies from the emergence of mass movie theaters in the 1910s to the turbulent years of the late Weimar Republic. Examining a diverse array of groups, this study approaches film societies as formations designed to assimilate and influence a new medium: a project emerging from the world of amateur science before taking new directions into industry, art and politics. Through an inter-disciplinary approach – in dialogue with social history, print history and media archaeology – it also transforms our theoretical understanding of what a film society was and how it operated. Far from representing a mere collection of pre-formed cinephiles, film societies were, according to the book's central argument, *productive* social formations, which taught people how to nurture their passion for the movies, how to engage with cinema, and how to interact with each other. Ultimately, the study argues that examining film societies can help to reveal the diffuse agency by which generative ideas of cinema take shape.

Michael Cowan is Professor of film and media history in the Department of Cinematic Arts at the University of Iowa. His research, focused on German and European cinema, examines the broader cultural and technological contexts in which film practices emerged and evolved in the early 20th century.

FILM CULTURE
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'Michael Cowan's deeply researched study contends that film clubs, though often overlooked, were pivotal in articulating ideals of spectatorship, notions of cinema's identity as a medium, and utopian beliefs in film's transformative power, thereby challenging us to rethink core assumptions of media studies and rewrite film history.'

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