8 Hans Richter and the "Struggle for the Film History"

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Abstract
Referencing avant-garde artist and film-maker Hans Richter's materialist film history book *The Struggle for the Film*, this chapter looks at Richter's "struggle for the film history" and his own place in it. Richter's concern with history was a constant factor in his long career that spanned several art movements and two continents. Richter's notion of history and his doing film (and art) history in writing, teaching, and film-making provide insights into the politics and material conditions of film history in the wider context of exile and the preservation of endangered cultural heritage and in relation to the historiographies and philosophies of history of his compatriots Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer, who shared the fate of eviction and exile.

Keywords: film history, Hans Richter, Iris Barry, theory of history, avant-garde, exile

"Thank you so much for your notes. As a film writer, you know the difficulties involved in getting these things straight, and when the filmmaker himself lends a hand, it does make things so much easier—and more probably [sic] accurate."[1] When Arthur Rosenheimer wrote these lines in a letter to Hans Richter on March 7, 1946, it was in his function as assistant to the curator of the Museum of Modern Art's Film Library, Iris Barry. The writing was underpinned with Rosenheimer's experience of being the freshly minted author of *The History of the Motion Picture, 1895–1946*, which was the catalogue

1 Letter, Assistant to the Curator [Arthur Rosenheimer] to Hans Richter, March 7, 1946, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), Department of Film Archive, Correspondence Files, Richter, Hans, A-39, 1936–1969.

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accompanying the second part of the exhibition of films from the Museum of Modern Art's Film Library held at the museum from September 1946 through December 1947.[2]

Richter had contacted Iris Barry in a letter three days earlier and asked her "to correct some errors" in case the *Film Encyclopedia* should be reprinted.[3] Richter addresses four points for correction. The first concerns the dating of Eggeling's first film. Richter explains:

> Eggeling did not make any film in 1917, nor did he make any films or tests before 1921. There is an error in Rotha [and Manvell]'s book, *Movie Parade*, p. 139,[4] which probably results from a caption under a drawing by Eggeling in the film number of the modern art magazine *G*, which I published from 1923–26. The caption reads: "Hier entstand der absolute Film 1917–18." This means "Here originated the absolute film 1917–18." At that time, neither Eggeling nor I (we were then already working together) had thought of movies; it was not until 1920 that we started to think of them. The first piece of modern art ever put on celluloid was one drawing of the ten in my scroll drawing, *Prelude 1919*. We did it as a test piece. It was between 30 and 40 feet long and still exists at the Eoscop Laboratories in Basel.[5]

This detailed rectification illustrates a meticulousness and fervour that would characterize Richter's entire practice of doing film history. Points two to four speak of a similar concern about misrepresentation of historical facts and Richter's own role in this history. In point two, Richter clarifies the relationship between Eggeling and him, underlining that he was "not a follower of Eggeling," but that they worked independently on the same problem. Point three is about the first screening of *Symphonie Diagonale* in Berlin in 1922 and *Rhythm 21* in Paris, which Richter dates to 1921, and

2 Arthur Rosenheimer, *The History of the Motion Picture, 1895–1946* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1946).

3 Letter, Hans Richter to Iris Barry, March 4, 1946, MoMA, Department of Film Archive, Correspondence Files, Richter, Hans, A-39, 1936–1969. It is unclear which publication Richter is referring to here.

4 Something strange here: *Movie Parade* was first published in 1950 (Paul Rotha and Roger Manvell, *Movie Parade, 1888–1949: A Pictorial Survey of World Cinema* [London and New York: The Studio Publications, 1950]). Richter must have known Rotha's script. The page number Richter indicates in the letter does not lead to Eggeling's film. There is, however, a caption on page 150 of the published book that reads "Diagonale Symphonie 1917–22. Direction: Viking Eggeling German."

5 Letter, Hans Richter to Iris Barry, March 4, 1946, MoMA, Department of Film Archive, Correspondence Files, Richter, Hans, A-39, 1936–1969.

point four lists the references to Richter's documentary films he had made since 1928—all of them sponsored films that can be (and have been) seen as artists films, commissioned films and/or useful cinema.[6] Richter also mentions that he made "approximately 100 commercials with 'Epoche' in Berlin from 1928–30, sometimes one a week." Of these allegedly hundred commercials, only *Der Zweigroschen-Zauber* (*Twopenny Magic*, 1929) is extant, and it is questionable whether Richter's statement is correct. This also applies to Richter's dating of the Paris screening of *Rhythm 21*. Jeanpaul Goergen's thorough research into Richter's filmography has shown that the screening must have taken place in 1923 and not in 1921.[7] Notwithstanding the factual inaccuracies of Richter's presentation of the (hi)story, or rather, in part because of these inaccuracies, Richter's comments speak of a concern to get the facts and figures of film history straight, in particular those concerning himself, and to secure them—and him—an "adequate" place in film history.

In this chapter, I am not interested in whether Richter or any other historian got the facts and figures of film history straight. Instead, I am concerned with Richter's practice of doing film history. It is a practice that might aptly be called the "struggle for the film history" in reference to Richter's book *The Struggle for the Film*.[8] Richter finished the book in 1939 during exile in Switzerland, but it was not published until 1976, shortly after his death, and not in English until 1986 (however, parts had been in circulation in contemporary articles). *The Struggle for the Film* is a major contribution to film theory, but it is also involved, as Noël Carroll has put it, "in the attempt to map a materialist conception of history onto film history."[9]

The case of Hans Richter allows insights into the practice and politics of doing film history, or more specifically, into the "struggle for the film history" and one's own place in it at a crucial moment in time when, in the 1930s, film culture was institutionalized with film archives being founded,

6 See Yvonne Zimmermann, "Hans Richter and the *Filmessay*: A Media Archaeological Case Study of Documentary Film History and Historiography," in *A Companion to Documentary Film History*, ed. Joshua Malitsky (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2021), 367–89.

7 Jeanpaul Goergen, "Hans Richter: Filme und Texte der Zwanziger Jahre," in *Hans Richter: Film ist Rhythmus*, special issue of *Kinemathek* 40, no. 95 (July 2003), 88. See also Holger Wilmesmeier, "Entstehungsgeschichte: Le Film 100 Titres," in *Hans Richters* Rhythmus 21*: Schlüsselfilm der Moderne*, ed. Christoph Bareither, Kurt Beals, Michael Cowan, Paul Dobryden, Karin Fest, Klaus Müller-Richter and Birgit Nemec (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann 2012), 40.

8 Hans Richter, *The Struggle for the Film: Towards a Socially Responsible Cinema*, ed. Jürgen Römhild, translated by Ben Brewster (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986).

9 Noël Carroll, *Theorizing the Moving Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 291.

film festivals being inaugurated, and film canons being built.[10] Just as important, it was a moment when European film culture was displaced and transferred to the United States under the pressures of Fascism and World War II. Richter's work and career provides an idea of how film history had been negotiated and manufactured in this period, who was involved in it, and what was at stake for the actors. Richter's case also draws attention to the variety of tools that were used to practice film history; writing, lecturing and teaching, and film-making.

Hence, it is the process and not so much the outcome of film history that I am looking at, the dirty making of it and less its clean result. Retracing Richter's "struggle for the film history" involves a close reading of archival sources and contemporary writings on film history, but I also aim to put the elements of my micro-analysis into a larger framework of the philosophy of history and in conversation with Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer, two German intellectuals who shared the fate of exile with Richter, wherever it seems appropriate.

Somewhat inevitably, my deconstructing Richter's practice of doing film history goes hand in hand with my own constructing a narrative of Richter's constructing film history. As a film historian, I am familiar with such circumstance; constructing narratives is what film historians do in their work. But I am not always as aware of it as I am here.

On the Function of Film History Writing: A Controversy in *Film Culture*

In 1958, facts and figures once again provided food for discussion between Hans Richter and Arthur Rosenheimer, who had in the meantime changed his name to Arthur Knight. And again, a book by Knight had just been published. But this time, Knight's book itself, *The Liveliest Art: A Panoramic History of the Movies*, was the reason for their conversation.[11] And this time, Knight was much less pleased with Richter's intervention than he was twelve years ago. Film historical facts and figures set the ball rolling, but there was more at stake. The real bone of contention was the very notion of film historiography.

10 See Malte Hagener, ed. *The Emergence of Film Culture: Knowledge Production, Institution Building and the Fate of the Avant-garde in Europe, 1919–1945* (New York: Berghahn, 2014).

11 Arthur Knight, *The Liveliest Art: A Panoramic History of the Movies* (New York: Macmillan, 1957).

It all had started with a review of *The Liveliest Art* in *Film Culture* by film critic and Richter's close friend Herman G. Weinberg.[12] Weinberg opened his review stating that for the layman, the book would be a lively introduction to the history of the movies. "For the advanced film student, however," Weinberg holds, "this 'panoramic history' (a redundant phrase) not only trods thrice-familiar ground without adding anything new but is wanting in that scholarship that would appear to be a sine qua non of any sort of historical writing."[13] With "that scholarship," Weinberg means knowledge of the facts and figures of film history, a proficiency that Knight allegedly lacked, for his book, according to Weinberg, is partly based on misinformation, hearsay, and "misstatements on films that the author had not seen or about which his memory has played him tricks."[14] In the rest of the review, that is, about three-quarters of the entire text, Weinberg, in a nerdy film geek manner, complacently dissects inaccuracies and faults Knight supposedly makes in the book.

Unsurprisingly, Knight was not amused, but "both distressed and disturbed" by Weinberg's review of his book, as he wrote in a letter addressed to *Film Culture* editor Jonas Mekas, which was published in the following issue of *Film Culture*.[15] Knight divides his detailed answer into five categories: difference of opinion, matters of critical judgement, points of information weighed and rejected, points of information he would have rejected had he but known, and errors of Weinberg's "own devising."[16] According to Knight,

> A film historian must make up his own mind which sources to trust for his materials where the films themselves and the people who made them are no longer available. He must make up his own mind whether to tell the story of *Variety* as it existed in Germany or as it was shown in this country—and in the *only* form in which film students can study it today. Most importantly, he must define his own attitude towards films.[17]

At this point of the dispute, Richter stepped in, but not to judge which one of the disputing cinephiles was right or wrong. Instead, he upset both of the opponents with his explanations on the function of film history writing that

12 *Film Culture* 4, no. 16 (January 1958): 22–23.
13 Ibid., 22.
14 Ibid.
15 "Arthur Knight Answers H. G. W.," *Film Culture* 4, no. 17 (February 1958), 19.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid., 20.

were published in the next issue of *Film Culture*.[18] The anger of Weinberg and Knight must have been considerable, since, as Richter mentions in a letter to Knight following the controversy in *Film Culture*, neither Weinberg nor Knight showed up at the party that took place shortly after Richter's replica had been printed—and for the same reason.[19]

What did Richter do that both adversaries considered his intervention to be an attack on them? Richter was careful not to criticize Knight or Weinberg in his essay, but instead gave several examples: Maurice Bardèche and Robert Brasillach's 1935 book *Histoire du cinéma*, of which Iris Barry's translation had been first published in English in 1938 under the title *The History of Motion Pictures*,[20] and the late Theodore Huff who was acknowledged as "one of the most conscientious fact and date-finders in the realm of film history" and whom Richter had hired to give a course in film history at the Institute of Film Techniques at City College of New York for this very reason.[21] However, Huff's success as a film history teacher was tarnished according to Richter. At the end of the term, there were only a few students left. Allegedly they were bored with the facts and dates that alone had little meaning and needed interpretation. Richter chose Huff as an example in his essay to make a point against "this stickling about facts, which I consider of secondary importance," as he states in his letter to Knight.[22] In his *Film Culture* essay, Richter explains that "facts and dates, though they are elements of history, are not history in the complete sense of the word. History has, besides dates and facts, a meaning, several meanings, according to its several aspects, and different meanings in different periods."[23]

The example of Bardèche and Brasillach, on the other hand, served Richter to criticize an approach to film history that is written from the point of view of the newspaper or magazine film critic and that categorizes films as "good" and "bad." That, of course, was a side blow against film critic Weinberg, who got another rub down at the end of essay where Richter states that serious

18 Hans Richter, "Hans Richter on the Function of Film History Writing," *Film Culture* 3, no. 18 (April 1958): 25–26.

19 Letter, Hans Richter to Arthur Knight, April 29, 1958, MoMA, Department of Film Archive, Correspondence Files, Hans Richter, C.XIV.I.

20 Maurice Bardèche and Robert Brasillach, *Histoire du cinéma* (Paris: Denoël and Steele, 1935); Maurice Bardèche and Robert Brasillach, *The History of Motion Pictures*, trans. Iris Barry (New York: W. W. Norton/The Museum of the Modern Art, 1938); reprinted in Great Britain under the title *History of the Film* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1945).

21 Richter, "Hans Richter on the Function of Film History Writing," 26.

22 Letter, Hans Richter to Arthur Knight, April 29, 1958, MoMA, Department of Film Archive, Correspondence Files, Hans Richter, C.XIV.I.

23 Richter, "Hans Richter on the Function of Film History Writing," 26.

students of film should beware of the voice of the so-called film critic, for the best they could learn from him was scepticism.

The few studies that look at Richter's engagement with history in film and/or art interpret this preoccupation as evidence of a professional reorientation that was instigated by the condition of exile in the United States. Doris Berger in her examination of Richter's paintings and films made in the 1940s and 1950s argues that due to Richter's personal circumstances as an émigré, his professional orientation as an artist in exile developed toward historicizing the avant-garde.[24] In a similar vein, Nora M. Alter in her analysis of Richter's filmic post-war work takes Richter's emigration to the United States as a significant rupture in his career that enacted a profound transformation on his filmic theory and practice and led to an increased engagement with history.[25] Ludger Derenthal in his study on Richter as a Dada art historian holds that Richter's turning to history started with commentaries on the (avant-garde) film in the late 1940s and 1950s and were followed by histories of art.[26]

Without wishing to make any major criticism on these interpretations, I argue that they warrant revision in two ways: first, Richter's involvement with history long predated his exile in the US and represents an underlying continuity in Richter's entire work and career. Second, if the condition of exile did affect Richter's orientation towards history, it was the exile in Europe, and in particular the period in Switzerland between 1937 and 1941, that was the catalyst for Richter to accentuate his preoccupation with history. I elaborate on these two points in more detail in what follows.

For a Constructivist Art and Film History with a "*Standpunkt*"

Richter's presumably first explicit statement on history writing is a polemic manifesto on art historiography, which was published in 1926 in the magazine *G—Zeitschrift für elementare Gestaltung*, which Richter edited with

24 Doris Berger, "The Moving Canvas: Hans Richter's Artistic Practice in the 1940s," in *Hans Richter: Encounters*, ed. Timothy O. Benson (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art 2013), 139.

25 Nora M. Alter, "Hans Richter in Exile: Translating the Avant-garde," in *Caught by Politics: Hitler Exiles and American Visual Culture*, ed. Sabine Eckmann and Lutz Koepnick (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 225. See also Helmut G. Asper, "Filmavantgardisten im Exil," in *Exil und Avantgarden*, ed. Claus-Dieter Krohn, Erwin Rotermund, Lutz Winckler, and Wulf Koepke (Munich: edition text + kritik, 1998), 174–93.

26 Ludger Derenthal, "Hans Richter—der Künstler als Kunsthistoriker," in *Hans Richter: Malerei und Film: Ausstellung vom 24.2.–23.4.1989* (Frankfurt Main: Deutsches Filmmuseum, 1989), 146–54.

the help of Werner Graeff. The short text "Geschichte ist das, was heute geschieht" ("History is what happens today") embraces Rudolf Kurtz' 1926 book *Expressionismus und Film*[27] as a herald of an emerging model of art historiography that holds that "the reality of history is not read off the 'facts,' but—constructed."[28] This constructivist model of historiography is pitched against a "*Geschmackskunstgeschichte*" (art history of taste) that, according to the manifesto, must stop: "Psychology is unfair competition. Art history is not the compilation of biographies of individual artists, but rather the history of the moving forces of the epoch."[29] Kurtz' *Expressionismus und Film* was a pioneering art historical treatise in that it examines film as an equal of the other arts. One of the chapters is devoted to abstract art, which includes an appreciation of the abstract films of Viking Eggeling, Hans Richter, Walter Ruttmann, Fernand Léger, and Francis Picabia. Kurtz characterizes these films as "anti-psychological," for they reject, as is typical of Expressionism, the psychological experience, the dominance of feeling, and replace it with "construction from out of the conscious, metaphysically-determined Will."[30]

Obviously, Richter's 1926 art history manifesto strongly resonates with his 1958 essay on the function of film history writing. In both texts, Richter sharply dismisses art and film history as a history of personal taste and preferences as art and film critics practiced it. The second parallel is the conviction that history needs a "*Standpunkt*" (point of view): "*Kunstgeschichte?! Wo ist Standpunkt, wie sieht er aus?*" ("Art history!? Where is the point of view, what does it look like?"), writes Richter in 1926.[31] As a third common feature, both texts reject an understanding of historiography as the accumulation of dates and facts. Herewith, Richter takes position against the classical historicist tradition of Ranke, which led to the crisis of historicism amongst German intellectuals, and champions instead a historiographical approach that studies the shaping forces of an era: that is, the political, economic, social and cultural phenomena that account for the processes and structures that shape both art and society.[32]

27 Rudolf Kurtz, *Expressionismus und Film* (Berlin: Verlag der Lichtbildbühne, 1926). In English: *Expressionism and Film*, trans. Brenda Benthien, ed. Christian Kiening and Ulrich Johannes Beil (New Barnet: John Libbey Publishing, 2016).

28 G [Richter, Hans], "Geschichte ist das, was heute geschieht," *G—Zeitschrift für elementare Gestaltung* 5–6 (April 1926), 131, translated by the author.

29 Ibid.

30 Kurtz, *Expressionism and Film*, 89.

31 G [Richter, Hans], "Geschichte ist das, was heute geschieht," 131, translated by the author.

32 On cinema and the crisis of historicism, see Nicholas Baer, *Historical Turns: Weimar Cinema and the Crisis of Historicism* (forthcoming), and Baer's article "Relativist Perspectivism: *Caligari* and the Crisis of Historicism" in this volume.

Richter was dissatisfied with the state of film historiography in the late 1950s, because he did not see these demands fully met yet. In the *Film Culture* essay, he writes:

> As director of the Film Institute at the City College of New York, I taught film history to about 3,000 students during the last 15 years. I did not find a single book among the many written on this subject that I could recommend to the students as a reference work.[33]

Richter had joined the faculty of the Institute of Film Techniques at City College of New York in late 1941, shortly after his arrival in the United States, and was appointed director in 1948, but was more or less in charge from about 1942, when Irving Jacoby, the founder of the institute, left to serve as film producer for the Office of War Information. The institute was founded in 1941 with the aim to "provide practical instruction in the production and use of educational and public-service motion picture," as Jacoby outlined in a mission statement of the institute.[34] Its original assignment was to train specialists in the production of wartime information films needed by the government. Among the US film schools, the Institute of Film Techniques was unique in specializing on documentary and educational film, or, as we would say today, on useful cinema.[35] Richter taught two standard courses per term: "The History of the Fictional Film" and "Fundamentals of Documentary Film History and Production," both designed as one four-hour session a week, changed to two two-hour sessions a week around 1950. The course descriptions published in the *City College Bulletin* from 1950 onwards read as follows:

> The History of the Fictional Film.
> The development of the film as an art form, as a technique, and as a mirror of the different intellectual and moral trends in our society. Its influence on society and the influence of society upon the film.

33 Richter, "Hans Richter on the Function of Film History Writing," 26.

34 Irving Jacoby, "Statement concerning the Film Institute and Unit at the City College," unpublished two-page manuscript, February 1943 (CCNY Archives, Institute of Film Techniques, Vertical File 353).

35 For a more detailed discussion of the Institute of Film Techniques and its place in the entangled transnational histories of avant-garde, documentary, and educational film, see Yvonne Zimmermann, "Advertising and Avant-gardes: A History of Concepts, 1930–1940," in *Advertising and the Transformation of Screen Cultures*, by Bo Florin, Patrick Vonderau, and Yvonne Zimmermann (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021), 77–111, in particular pp. 102–5. See also Cecile Starr, "Notes on Hans Richter in the USA," *Film Culture* 79 (Winter 1996): 17–26.

> Fundamentals of Documentary Film History and Production. Contribution of the documentary film as an art and as a social instrument. Analysis of the production of a film from the first concept to the recorded film, stressing the highly developed specialization in film work. Field trips. Guest lectures by leading film makers.[36]

The list of the lecturers Richter invited to speak to his students reads as the who's who of documentary film-making of the time: Robert J. Flaherty, John Grierson, Leo Hurwitz, John Ferno, Joris Ivens, Alice M. Keliher, Stuart Legg, and Irving Lerner.[37] And this inventory only includes the names of those who visited the institute from its foundation until 1946.

There is an anecdote about Richter's pedagogy that documentary filmmaker and teacher George Stoney would tell his students at Columbia University around 1960. Stoney succeeded Richter as director of the institute in 1957 but left in 1958. The anecdote is recollected by a former Columbia University student and goes as follows:

> [On] the first day on the job as film instructor at Richter's faculty, he [Stoney] got the cameras out, taught the kids to thread up, and led them all tumbling down the staircase with war cries, to begin shooting five minutes after they saw their first camera. Passing Richter in the hallway, Richter yelled at George—"But they haven't even analyzed the Odessa Steps sequence from Eisenstein's Potemkin!!!"[38]

According to Stoney, the first course in film at City College under Richter *always* started with a screening of *Potemkin*.[39]

A third standard course was "The Documentary Film as an Educational Tool." It dealt with the analysis of the different ways film would contemporarily be used in the classroom, in public life, in business, and as a political

36 *City College Bulletin*, no. 5, June 1, 1950, 42. Before 1950, the two courses would be listed as "The History of the Motion Pictures" and "Fundamentals of Film Production." See *City College Bulletin*, no. 5, June 1, 1948, 40.

37 Hans Richter, "The Institute of Film Techniques," *Film News: World Wide News of the Information Film* 7, no. 5 (February/March 1946): 10.

38 The source could not be identified. It is probably a newsletter, but it does not contain a name or a date or a publication. The one-page document is held at MoMA, Department of Film Archive, Clipping Files, Hans Richter.

39 George Stoney, "Breaking the Word Barrier," in *Film Study in Higher Education*, ed. David C. Stewart (Washington, DC: American Council on Education, 1966), 87. On Richter's teaching, see Richter's recollections in "Learning from Film History," *Filmmakers Newsletter* 7, no. 1 (1973): 26–27.

instrument. A second focus was placed on the study of the history, method, and potentialities of the documentary film movement.[40] The course was repeatedly taught by Albert Hemsing, head of the overseas non-theatrical operations of the Office of War Information.[41] In 1952, however, Arthur Knight served as lecturer.[42]

Richter had been retired from teaching at the Institute of Film Techniques for two years when he complained in his 1958 letter to Knight that "there is not a single standard work yet which shows film as a 'dynamic process,' encompassing at least the most important five trends: social, esthetic [sic], philosophical, psychological, economical that shaped film and conditioned it."[43] But there were some history books that at least point in this very direction. In his *Film Culture* essay, Richter cites Siegfried Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler*, originally published in English in 1947, for its thesis that film is a mirror of the social climate, a social symptom,[44] Rudolf Arnheim's *Film as Art*, which comprises excerpts from Arnheim's 1932 book *Film als Kunst* translated into English and newly published in 1957, for providing a key to the aesthetic laws that film is based on with the help of Gestalt theory and its psychological implications,[45] Marxist film critic and author Guido Aristarco's 1951 book *Storia della teoriche del film* on the development of aesthetic film theories for offering "a valuable contribution to historical writing [...] if somebody would care to translate it,"[46] and his own 1929 book *Filmgegner von heute—Filmfreunde von morgen*, which has not been translated into English, for depicting the development of the art film as a dynamic problem leading from film's purely reproductive stage to a creative one.[47] These books are presented as attempts "to approach film through a conviction founded on an idea," and thus as positive examples.[48]

What is hardly surprising, but still worth mentioning about this list is that film historiography founded on an idea and written from a "*Standpunkt*"

40 *City College Bulletin*, no. 5, June 1, 1950, 42.

41 Richter, "The Institute of Film Techniques," 10.

42 *City College Bulletin*, no. 5, September 1, 1952, 87.

43 Letter, Hans Richter to Arthur Knight, April 29, 1958, MoMA, Department of Film Archive, Correspondence Files, Hans Richter, C.XIV.I.

44 Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947).

45 Rudolf Arnheim, *Film as Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957).

46 Guido Aristarco, *Storia della teoriche del film* (Torino: Giulio Einaudi, 1951).

47 Hans Richter, *Filmgegner von heute—Filmfreunde von morgen* (Berlin: Hermann Reckendorf, 1929).

48 Richter, "Hans Richter on the Function of Film History Writing," 26.

appears to be the thing of European (white male) authors, many of them in exile in the US. Directly related to this is Richter's sardonic remark on the need for a translation of Aristarco's—and one might add his own—book, which clearly points to the issue of language and translation in film history and historiography, and, indirectly, to the hegemony that the English language had gained in this field. That Richter did not mention his *The Struggle for the Film*, which in its pronounced focus on the interrelations and interdependence of film, art, and society would make a prime example of Richter's materialist conception of film history and historiography,[49] is easily explained by the fact that the book had not been published yet, not in German, let alone English. This was to happen nearly twenty and thirty years later, respectively. I will come back to the nexus of language, translation, and film history later.

The Brief of History: On the Present-Interest Theory of History

Richter's conception of history is deeply functional in that history is considered as serving a pedagogical goal. In the 1926 manifesto, Richter writes: "History is what happens today. And from this—from the deep and affirmative understanding of the present, history becomes meaningful again."[50] The present is seen as having an epistemic function, which lies in its capacity to enhance the understanding of the past. But the epistemic relationship between present and past is mutual: not only does the present illuminate the past, but the past also illuminates the present. In his 1973 book *Encounters from Dada till Today*, which was published in English only in 2013, Richter writes the following about Robert J. Flaherty's documentaries:

> We want to know what we did yesterday, a hundred years ago or a thousand years ago, and we want to know who we are. We keep searching this past, which extends our finite span and brings life and death into a relation we can understand. It is this going back (and forward) that attracts us to history. "History"—it is not a sort of adventurous fairy tale, but a pointer

49 Richter himself described *The Struggle for the Film* as "a materialistic-historic analysis of the film," Letter, Hans Richter to Iris Barry, March 17, 1939, MoMA, Department of Film Archive, Correspondence Files, Richter, Hans, A-39, 1936–1969.

50 "Geschichte ist das, was heute geschieht. Und daraus—aus dem tiefen und bejahenden Begreifen des Heute wird auch erst Vergangenheit wieder sinnvoll," G [Richter, Hans], "Geschichte ist das, was heute geschieht," 130, translated by the author.

> full of meanings. It shows us where we may be coming from and where we may be going.[51]

The enigmatic attraction that Richter attributes to Flaherty's films results from their searching for origins, for the deeds of human survival, the sources of perseverance, and the preservation of elemental forces. Richter was fascinated by these films because Flaherty found such examples from the past in the present of the twentieth century. Obviously, Richter was neither concerned about Flaherty's staging for the camera realities of life that had ceased to exist nor about his producing an image of a present interwoven with ancient traditions that was history itself. But that is not the issue here. The point is to illustrate Richter's captivation with the mutual relation between present and past and with the significance of the past for the present in particular. Or, as he states in his 1926 manifesto, art history is not written in retrospect, but "in the here and now and for the now."[52]

Clearly, Richter saw in history use-value for the present, and it was this use-value for the present that prompted him to develop a conceptual framework for the production of several educational short films during World War II. All these projects, elaborated on both sides of the Atlantic, would use examples from history to teach the present a lesson on freedom, democracy, and human rights. Among these projects were "Zwei Belagerungen" ("Two Sieges"), developed in Switzerland, as well as "The Four Freedoms," "The Monroe Doctrine," and "The Role of Women in America," developed in the US. These projects shared the fate that Richter failed to acquire sponsors. Thus, the films were not made.[53]

That misfortune does not undermine the fact that Richter advocates for a present-interest theory of history. His compatriot Siegfried Kracauer, who also emigrated to New York in 1941, dedicates an entire chapter to this theory of history in his book *History: The Last Things before the Last* (published posthumously in 1969)—if only to vehemently critique it.[54] The present-interest theory of history emerged in the wake of historicism and was indebted to the theory of art by Benedetto Croce and his follower R. G. Collingwood. It is based on two premises: first, that the historian is a child of his era, and that the *Zeitgeist* (spirit of the era) accounts for, as Kracauer

51 Hans Richter, *Encounters from Dada till Today*, trans. Christopher Middleton (Munich: Prestel, 2013), 220–21.

52 G [Richter, Hans], "Geschichte ist das, was heute geschieht," 131, translated by the author.

53 See Yvonne Zimmermann, "Hans Richter and the *Filmessay*," 379.

54 Siegfried Kracauer, *History: The Last Things before the Last* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969).

puts it, "the why and how of his devotion to the past."[55] And second, in a stronger version, the present-interest theory claims that the present is not only the point of departure of all historical reconstruction, but also its vanishing point. In other words, that historical research should be motivated by an interest in the present and proceed with an eye to it.[56] Or, as Croce's dictum would have it, history is contemporary history.[57]

Kracauer opposes the present-interest theory of history for its underlying claim that there is a principle that governs the whole of human history.[58] Gertrud Koch is certainly right to warn against hastily embracing Kracauer as a precursor of the postmodern critique of the link between a history of philosophy and historiography.[59] But it is remarkable how much Kracauer's concept of history resonates with concerns that would be central to postmodern historiography; concerns such as history versus histories, macro- versus micro-history, non-simultaneousness, heterogeneity, and discontinuity.

Koch in her introduction to Kracauer's oeuvre argues that critical distance is what unites his disparate works.[60] Richter, in contrast, had irons in the fire. The increasing attempts at historicizing film in the 1930s and 1940s was not something for Richter to be observed from a critical distance, but something to participate in, for at stake was his own place in this very history. While Kracauer asserts that the exile's true mode of existence is that of a stranger, and that self-alienation and self-effacement is a precondition of genuine knowledge,[61] Richter represents the opposite model of a historian who, instead of waiting in the anteroom like Kracauer, is involved; who is not an extraterritorial observer of history, but an entangled maker of it. And unlike Kracauer, for whom fragmentation, instead of a continuum, is

55 Ibid., 63.

56 See Inka Mülder-Bach, "History as Autobiography: *The Last Things before the Last*," *New German Critique* 54 (Fall 1991), 151.

57 See Benedetto Croce, *History: Its Theory and Practice* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1960 [1921]), 19.

58 Kracauer, *History: The Last Things before the Last*, 63.

59 Gertrud Koch, *Siegfried Kracauer: An Introduction*, trans. Jeremy Gaines (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 118.

60 Ibid., 120.

61 Kracauer, *History: The Last Things before the Last*, 83–84. Kracauer's study on "The Hotel Lobby" (1925) in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans. Thomas Y. Levine (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 173–85, entails a similar configuration of observation without participation. See, for example, Marc Katz, "The Hotel Kracauer," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 11, no. 2 (Summer 1999): 134–52, and Gertrud Koch's chapter "The Early Phenomenology of Modernity and Mass Culture: Of Hotel Lobbies and Detective Novels," in her *Siegfried Kracauer: An Introduction*, trans. Jeremy Gaines (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 11–25.

a precondition for experience, as Drehli Robnik in his study of Kracauer's theoretical entanglement of cinema and history underlines,[62] Richter is committed to modern historiographical assumptions that include ideas of medium-specificity, chronological development, continuity, coherence, and progress both in art and society. Richter's idea of the "development" of film from a stage of mere reproduction of reality to an artistic production of it is a story of progress based on the notion that film history has a *telos* in that it pursues the goal to free film from representation of reality and reach artistic expression.[63] The same applies to Richter's idea that film history develops towards realism, which, as Richter would point out to his students at the Institute of Film Techniques, Griffith had tried to establish in *Intolerance*, "and Stroheim and Eisenstein much more."[64] Clearly, such ideas belong to an era of traditional film historiography.

Materialist History and the Materiality of History

What unites facets of Richter and Kracauer as well as Walter Benjamin's thoughts on history, however, is their mutual concern for the cultural artefact as image and object in relation to history. As Benjamin writes in his "Theses on the Philosophy of History":

> To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it "the way it really was" (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger. Historical materialism wishes to retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to a man singled out by history at a moment of danger.[65]

Benjamin's formulation written in 1940 lends itself as a theoretical description of Richter's practice at the very same time, namely the practice of

62 Drehli Robnik, "Among Other Things—a Miraculous Realist: Political Perspectives on the Theoretical Entanglement of Cinema and History in Siegfried Kracauer," in *Culture in the Anteroom: The Legacies of Siegfried Kracauer*, ed. Gerd Gemünden and Johannes von Moltke (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 263.

63 These ideas are expressed, for example, in Richter's *Filmgegner von heute—Filmfreunde von morgen*, *The Struggle for the Film*, and in his essay "The Film as an Original Art Form," *College Art Journal* 10, no. 2 (Winter 1951): 157–61, reprinted in *Film Culture* 1, no. 1 (1955): 19–23.

64 Richter, "Learning from Film History," 27.

65 Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt and trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), 255.

retaining images of the past which flash up at a moment of danger. The moment of danger is crucial in that it accentuates Richter's preoccupation with history in the 1930s and provokes him to devote a large part of his future career to the production of history.

From the correspondence, a key moment appears to be Richter's meeting with Hilla von Rebay and Solomon Guggenheim in Paris in 1939 shortly before the outbreak of World War II on the occasion of Rebay and Guggenheim's travelling Europe to collect abstract art. Richter comments on Guggenheim's enterprise in a letter to Rebay that he wrote from Paris twenty days after the declaration of war:

> to carry over from endangered Europe—all the important stages and works, especially the future-laden ones of the last generation—into receptive America, to plant the "cultural plants" directly into the soil of America, that is a great thought—that is *history*—what the man does.[66]

Involved in this transatlantic transfer of European works were two major New York art institutions that both had only recently started collecting films, the Museum of Non-Objective Painting (established in 1939), renamed the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in 1952 and devoted to abstract art, and the Film Library of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). In the late 1930s, Richter had a vivid transatlantic exchange of letters with the directors of both institutions, with Iris Barry from MoMA's Film Library and Hilla von Rebay from the Guggenheim Museum.[67] The main reason for the correspondence was Richter's notable personal film collection that in addition to his own films included avant-garde works from the 1920s by Viking Eggeling, Walter Ruttmann, Oskar Fischinger, Jean Renoir, Fernand Léger, Man Ray, and Joris Ivens—about twenty titles in total plus art works, among them Eggeling's estate. In other words, Richter had a sizable part of the material legacy of the European cinematic avant-garde in his hands, an internationally sought-after asset that Richter traded in for museum preservation of his and Eggeling's work and for immigration assistance

66 Letter, Hans Richter to Hilla von Rebay, September 20, 1939, Solomon R. Guggenheim Archives, New York, NY, Hilla Rebay Records, A0010/3031/18, emphasis in the original; my translation.
67 On MoMA's Film Library, see Haidee Wasson, *Museum Movies: The Museum of Modern Art and the Birth of Art Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Haidee Wasson, "Studying Movies at the Museum: The Museum of Modern Art and Cinema's Changing Object," in *Inventing Film Studies*, ed. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 121–48.

to the US for himself.[68] The transatlantic conversation between Richter and the two institutions illustrates the mechanisms of canon formation as a crucial part in doing film history and exposes the very materiality that film history is made with and made of. It draws attention to the role of objects—films, books, props, art works, etc.—and the material infrastructures in which these objects circulated, among them diplomatic circuits and in particular the "French consul's diplomatic bag" for bringing film prints through customs.[69]

Richter's correspondence with Iris Barry also discloses what ultimately caused Richter to write a history of the European and German film avant-garde. In a letter to Barry from Carabietta, Switzerland, on September 24, 1939, four days after the Paris letter to Rebay, Richter writes:

> Dear Mrs. Barry,
> [...] I regret that the authors of *Histoire du cinéma* [Maurice Bardèche and Robert Brasillach] don't know so well the evolution and the importance of the (elder) [G]erman avant-garde films, than they know the importance and evolution of the [F]rench. [...] Being informed that you are translating now *Histoire du cinéma* I may give you all the details and documents you may perhaps need.[70]

What Richter missed out was that Barry's translation had already been published in English in 1938 under the title *The History of Motion Pictures*—which again points to the materiality of history, here to the book as a physical object and to knowledge depending in some cases on translation, in all cases on physical circulation and access. Obviously, Richter in Switzerland had no

68 On the transatlantic transfer of Richter's film collection and Eggeling's estate and their deposit at MoMA and Guggenheim Museum, see Malte Hagener and Yvonne Zimmermann, "Viking Eggeling and European Avant-garde Cinema," in *A Cultural History of the Avant-garde in the Nordic Countries 1925–1950*, vol. 2, ed. Benedikt Hjartarson, Andrea Kollnitz, Per Stounbjerg, and Tania Ørum (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2019), 82–101.

69 Letter, Iris Barry to Hans Richter, December 21, 1937, in which Barry announces the return of Richter's *Rhythmus 21* to Henri Langlois at the Cinémathèque française after the Film Library had made a print for their archive and circulating library (MoMA, Department of Film Archive, Correspondence Files, Richter, Hans, A-39, 1936–1969). The French government offered the Film Library use of its diplomatic pouch for the transport of films to and from Paris (see Wasson, *Museum Movies*, 117). For a larger study of the role of material infrastructures and material cultural practices in the organization of power and governance, see Tony Bennett and Patrick Joyce, eds. *Material Powers: Cultural Studies, History and the Material Turn* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010).

70 Letter, Hans Richter to Iris Barry, September 24, 1939, MoMA, Department of Film Archive, Correspondence Files, Richter, Hans, A-39, 1936–1969.

access to the book and lacked knowledge of it being already finished and printed. Richter had been offering Barry his expert advice and assistance since January 1937 after reading the MoMA Film Library's catalogue and film programmes that Barry had mailed to Richter's address in Switzerland and that—according to Richter—presented an inaccurate picture of the European interwar avant-garde movement.[71]

True to the French original, *The History of Motion Pictures* devotes a fifteen-line paragraph to the German abstract films of the 1920s. Mentioned by name are Eggeling, Richter, and Ruttmann. Their films are described without giving the titles and evaluated as "strange productions [that] were not without their uses, although their mathematical coldness lacked the emotional quality characteristic of French films of the period." Singled out and lauded is Ruttmann for his *Berlin: Symphony of a Metropolis* (1927) because he liberated himself from the formulas of the former films.[72] Richter must have seen his and Eggeling's work underappreciated in these lines, fuelled perhaps by the fact that Eggeling's and his name do not appear in the index of the French original, which was possibly an oversight that Barry corrected in her translation. In response, Richter wrote his own paper on the avant-garde movement, which he submitted to Barry in 1942, explaining that "[t]here is nothing in film litterature [sic] about this movement up to now (except some nice pamphlets in [D]utch), but much confusion about it."[73] Barry read the paper "with much interest" and wished she knew what she could do about it except keeping a copy in the Film Library's files.[74]

Apparently, the German manuscript of *The Struggle for the Film* suffered the same fate. There is a nine-page typescript in English with numerous typing errors and handwritten corrections at MoMA's Department of Film Archive that summarizes the content of the book manuscript. The synopsis opens with a foreword that reads: "It is difficult to make a report about a book which has no clear conception. Some parts of the work may look confused but it is not always the translator's fault."[75]

71 Letter, Hans Richter to Iris Barry, January 29, 1937, MoMA, Department of Film Archive, Correspondence Files, Richter, Hans, A-39, 1936–1969.

72 Bardèche and Brasillach, *The History of Motion*, 252.

73 Letter, Hans Richter to Iris Barry, July 26, 1942, MoMA, Department of Film Archive, Correspondence Files, Richter, Hans, A-39, 1936–1969.

74 Letter, Iris Barry to Hans Richter, August 13, 1942, MoMA, Department of Film Archive, Correspondence Files, Richter, Hans, A-39, 1936–1969.

75 Hans Richter, "Der Kampf um den Film," typescript, 9 pages, undated, MoMA, Department of Film Archive, Correspondence Files, Richter, Hans, A-39, 1936–1969.

Barry read and translated from French to English, but apparently, she did not speak German. The first letters Richter sent to Barry, still written in German, are available in the archive in the original and in a handwritten English translation. Obviously, Barry had someone to do the translations. Richter soon took to writing in English and his mastery of the language quickly improved. While these observations may seem incidental, they illustrate Iris Barry and the Film Library's gatekeeping function in selecting and filtering not only films for the archive and the circulating library, but also writings on film history. Barry and the Film Library sorted out the "relevant" contributions, and writings in foreign languages had unequal chances to get past the gatekeeper. Thereby, French and German voices had still better chances to be heard compared to Dutch or Czech ones, for example, let alone non-Western voices.[76] Or, in other words, there were different degrees of marginality regarding the origins of writings and artistic production.

Richter had more luck with experimental film-maker Frank Stauffacher, who organized *Art in Cinema*, a series of programmes of avant-garde and experimental films, at the San Francisco Museum of Art in 1946. Stauffacher granted Richter's essay "A History of the Avantgarde," which Iris Barry had no use for, the prominent place as opener of his 1947 edited *Art in Cinema* catalogue.[77] This essay was the first published in the United States to present a comprehensive history of the European interwar avant-garde. The version of the origin, development and "decline" of the movement that Richter tells in this chronological story was followed by many more film historiographical accounts of that sort and cemented Richter's narrative into standard film history.[78] Among them were Richter's "The Avant-

76 The rich legacy of Czech film theory and criticism, for example, has only recently been acknowledged internationally with the edited collection by Jaroslav Anděl and Petr Szczepanik, *Cinema All the Time: An Anthology of Czech Film Theory and Criticism, 1908–1938*, trans. Kevin B. Johnson (Prague: National Film Archive, 2008).

77 Hans Richter, "A History of the Avantgarde," in *Art in Cinema: A Symposium on the Avantgarde Film Together with Program Notes and References for Series One of Art in Cinema*, ed. Frank Stauffacher (San Francisco: Society for Art in Cinema, San Francisco Museum of Art, 1947), 6–21. On the Art in Cinema's programmes, see Scott MacDonald, ed. *Art in Cinema: Documents toward a History of the Film Society* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006).

78 For a close analysis of Richter's essay in relation to Sara Kathryn Arledge's and Lewis Jacobs' accounts of a (pre-)history of the US experimental film movement, see Henning Engelke, *Metaphern einer anderen Filmgeschichte: Amerikanischer Experimentalfilm, 1940–1960* (Marburg: Schüren, 2018), 105–27; Richter, "A History of the Avantgarde," 6–21.

garde Film Seen from Within" in *Hollywood Quarterly* in 1949, which was published in German in the Viennese journal *Filmkunst: Zeitschrift für Filmkultur und Filmwissenschaft* a year later and in French in the journal *L'Âge du cinéma* the year after.[79] His 1949 essay "Avant-garde Film in Germany" was part of Roger Manvell's edited collection *Experiment in the Film*, also published in French in 1952 and in German in 1953.[80] The same interest had Richter's writing on "The Film as an Original Art Form," which was first published in *College Art Journal* in 1951 and reprinted in the first issue of *Film Culture* in 1955 as well as in P. Adams Sitney's 1970 *Film Culture Reader* and also included in a shortened German version in Gottfried Schlemmer's 1973 edited collection *Avantgardistischer Film 1951–1971: Theorie*.[81]

Historicizing modernist art became relevant after the war. Recurring debates about medium-specificity and film as legitimate art also fuelled respective discourses. And there was an increasing demand for the history of the interwar European cinematic avant-garde in the context of the emerging post-war US experimental film movement that looked for ancestors and a legitimizing tradition. Hence, Richter's history of the European cinematic avant-garde in the interwar period hit the nerve of time. Other histories that Richter could have written were not in demand, such as a history of the sponsored documentary film, in which Richter also had an important place in on both sides of the Atlantic, or a history of film pedagogy and the role of the Institute of Film Techniques at City College of New York in it. Hence, the "struggle for the film history" included the struggle of getting past gatekeepers, coming at the right time, and finding an audience.

79 Hans Richter, "The Avant-garde Film Seen from Within," *Hollywood Quarterly* 4, no. 1 (Autumn 1949): 34–41; Hans Richter, "Der Avantgardefilm von Innen gesehen," *Filmkunst: Zeitschrift für Filmkultur und Filmwissenschaft* [Vienna], 2 (1950): 135–40; Hans Richter, "Anatomie de l'avant-garde," *L'Âge du cinéma* 3 (June/July 1951): 3–6.

80 Hans Richter, "Avant-garde Film in Germany," in *Experiment in the Film*, ed. Roger Manvell (London: Grey Walls Press, 1949), 219–33; Hans Richter, "Histoire de l'avant-garde allemande (1918–1930)," *L'Âge du cinéma* 6 (1952); Hans Richter, "Der avantgardistische Film in Deutschland (von 1921–1951)," *Cinéaste: Zeitschrift zur Förderung des guten Films* [Göttingen], special edition on *Deutsche Filmtage Göttingen* (1953): 13–26.

81 Richter, "The Film as an Original Art Form," 157–61; reprinted in *Film Culture* 1, no. 1 (1955): 19–23, and in *Film Culture Reader*, ed. P. Adams Sitney (New York: Praeger, 1970), 15–20; reprinted in German "Der Film als selbständige Kulturform," in *Avantgardistischer Film 1951–1971: Theorie*, ed. Gottfried Schlemmer (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1973), 16–18. A shortened German version with the title "Vom Film als von einer werdenden, eigenen Kunstform" had already been published in 1954 in *Basler Schulblatt* 15, no. 3 (June 1954): 65–68.

Seizing the Past for the Present

Overall, Richter had a good sense of timing and knew how to attract attention. He was very aware of the flitting nature of the picture of the past and recognized that the moment to seize it at the outbreak of World War II had come. To quote Benjamin again:

> The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up again at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again. [...] For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.[82]

Richter's doing film history through writing, teaching, and film-making can be understood as producing visibility, as a practice of making the past visible to render it recognizable in the present "as one of its own concerns," to quote Benjamin again. This also accounts for Richter's post-war films, among them *Dreams That Money Can Buy* (1947), which features surrealist episodes written and presented by Richter and his modern art companions Max Ernst, Fernand Léger, Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp, and Alexander Calder. *Thirty Years of Experiment* (1951) and *Forty Years of Experiment: From Dada to Surrealism* (1961) are anthologies of Richter's own films from 1921 to 1951 and 1961 respectively. Both compendia include an on-film introduction spoken by Richter in which he historicizes his own filmic work as well as Eggeling's *Symphonie Diagonale*. Richter had nurtured Eggeling's legacy almost as carefully as his own, if not altogether altruistically, after Eggeling's untimely death in 1925.[83]

Speaking with Bruno Latour, these films can be described as "polytemporal" encounters in which "the past is not surpassed but revisited, repeated, surrounded, protected, recombined, reinterpreted and reshuffled"[84]—and thus made relevant for the present. This is certainly the case with *Dadascope* Part I (1956–1961) and *Dadascope* Part II (1968), the latter being Richter's last film in his long career. The two parts feature original Dada poems and prose from the years 1916 to 1922 spoken for Richter's film several decades later by the authors themselves. The list of authors features Hans Arp, Theo

82 Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 255.

83 On Richter's incorporating Eggeling's legacy, see Hagener and Zimmermann, "Viking Eggeling and European Avant-garde Cinema," 82–101.

84 Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 75. I thank Clara Podlesnigg for the reference.

van Doesburg (spoken by Nelly van Doesburg), Marcel Duchamp, Marcel Janco, Raoul Hausmann, Richard Huelsenbeck, Man Ray, Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, Kurt Schwitters, Tristan Tzara, Vladimir Vogel, and Richter himself. The poems, delivered in Dutch, French, English, and Dada gibberish, are introduced with playful intertitles and hurdy-gurdy and fairground music and accompanied by images from various origins, among them photos of the artists, clips from earlier Richter films and film projects (*The Minotaur* 1951, for example), and newly filmed short sequences that restage, recreate, and reshuffle typical Dada and surrealist film motives (eye balls, billiard balls and marbles, chessboard and chessmen, colours dispersing in water, thighs climbing ladders) as well as special camera effects (prismatic images), repetitions of images, and rhythmic editing. *Dadascope* is an original collage of images flashing up again in which the past is not surpassed, but protected and reinterpreted, redone and renewed for the present.

At the beginning I stated that I am not primarily interested in film history as an output, but in its making. But "doing film history" cannot always—and perhaps never—be clearly separated from "film history done." Upon Richter's turning eighty in 1968, MoMA honoured the jubilee with a film retrospective in connection with MoMA's exhibition *Dada, Surrealism, and Their Heritage*, in which Richter was present with two canvasses. MoMA's press release could be read as indicative of Richter's success in securing himself a prominent place in film and art history.[85] Richter is credited as "the artist-filmmaker, a former Dadaist, who first brought the abstract and a sense of the absurd to the motion picture," and his *Rhythm 21* is labelled as "the first of the animated abstract films."[86]

As mentioned before, my concern here is not whether these (and other) facts and figures of film history are correct, but how they have turned into facts and figures. Richter definitely got his work and his version of film history into "film history" as a result. At the same time, with his writing, teaching, film-making, and MoMA's retrospective, this history was restaged, rearticulated, and reiterated. Film history is never done, but constantly redone and undone as a polytemporal encounter of the past in the present and for the present. This chapter is no exception. The "struggle for the film history" has no end.

85 Museum of Modern Art, "The Museum of Modern Art to Present Hans Richter Film Retrospective: Artist, Painter, Dadaist Exhibits Forty Years of Film Fantasies," press release, no. 48, May 31, 1968, https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/press_archives/4053/releases/MOMA_1968_Jan-June_0070_48.pdf.

86 Museum of Modern Art, "The Museum of Modern Art to Present Hans Richter Film Retrospective," 1 and 3.

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