12 What Was a Film Society?

Towards a New Archaeology of Screen Communities

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Abstract
Focusing on German film culture of the early twentieth century, this chapter outlines a new approach for examining the emergence and development of film societies in the context of a broader associational culture. To that end, it draws on insights from media archaeology and histories of sociability to approach the film society as a phenomenon at once more diverse than generally acknowledged and held together by a desire to shape a nascent medium by influencing how the public engaged with it. Following a broad discussion of this approach, I outline three key categories—what I call *relations*, *productions*, and *ideas*—that can help us understand specific aspects of film societies: their genealogy, their operations, and their legacy.

Keywords: film societies, film culture, media archaeology, German cinema, Austrian cinema, useful cinema

How should we approach the history of film societies today in the age of "post-cinema"?[1] This question implies another one: What is—or what *was*—a film society anyway? Not long ago, that question might have seemed to have an obvious answer; film societies were those art house groups that flowered shortly after World War II as organizations where devoted cinephiles could come together and share their passion for cinema around a steady supply of quality films, ideally in a cinematheque. More recently,

1 This chapter is also included, in a revised version, in the book *Film Societies in Germany and Austria 1910–1933: Tracing the Social Life of Cinema* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2023).

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the origins of what is often called the "film society movement" have been pushed backwards to the interwar period, with several studies illuminating the flowering of a cinephilic culture—and its attendant social formations with bases in specialty cinemas such as the Studio des Ursulines in Paris or the Filmtheater de Uitkijk in Amsterdam—in the late 1920s and 1930s.[2] 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.[3] But despite this expansion, 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 *art house* cinema, or as one recent handbook puts it, "a cinema of quality, independent of financial interests."[4]

There might be reason, however, to revisit this narrow definition at a time when communities around screen media are beginning to look very different. Today, social media groups, campus VR clubs, associations for "serious gaming," and even data visualization societies are likely shaping people's experience of screen media to a greater extent than traditional art house film clubs, which survive mostly as relics of a mode of screen experience that has become historical.[5] But this shift is not simply about how we understand media communities in the present. We can also ask if the film society itself

2 See Christophe Gauthier, *La Passion du cinéma: cinéphiles, ciné-clubs et salles spécialisées à Paris 1920 à 1929* (École 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; 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). See also Andres Janser, "Es kommt der gute Film. Zu den Anfängen der Filmclubs in Zürich," in *Home Stories. Neue Studien zu Film und Kino in der Schweiz*, ed. Vinzenz Hediger, Jan Sahli, Alexandra Schneider, and Margit Tröhler (Marburg: Schüren, 2001), 55–71.

3 See Girish Shambu, *The New Cinephilia* (Montreal: Caboose Books, 2014).

4 "un cinéma de qualité non inféodé aux puissances d'argent." "Ciné-Club," in *Dictionnaire du cinéma*, ed. Jean-Loup Passek (Paris: Larousse, 2001), 260.

5 On data visualization societies, see, for example, Elijah Meeks, "Introducing the Data Visualization Society," *Medium*, February 20, 2019, https://medium.com/data-visualization-society/introducing-the-data-visualization-society-d13d42ab0bec. On VR 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*, June 2, 2016, https://www.businessinsider.com/rabbit-hole-vr-stanford-2016-5?r=US&IR=T. On serious gaming societies, see the web pages of the Serious Games Society (https://seriousgamessociety.org/) and the Serious Games Association (https://www.seriousgamesassociation.org/)

was *ever* as monolithic an institution as we sometimes assume. Examining the emergence of film societies in the German-speaking world, this chapter argues that we need to widen our view considerably to understand the historical film society not as an institution inherently or inevitably about artistic appreciation, but as a media association more broadly, through which spectators learned to interact with emergent screen media in different ways. The last sentence also implies a further methodological reversal. 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 helped to teach people how to think about cinema and also how to interact with it: not only what to watch, but also *how* to watch, how to love (and hate) the movies, how to engage with film culture more broadly, how to talk and write about cinema, and how to manage their own exposure to a new and evolving medium. In what follows, I discuss both the diversity of early film societies in the German-speaking world and some of the continuities linking them, before proposing three methodological theses for studying film societies more broadly.

Towards an Expanded History of the Film Society

Revisiting the film society with different historiographical questions in mind is also suggested by recent changes in the discipline of film history. In particular, the rise of attention to previously neglected types of "useful cinema" means that we no longer take for granted the assumption—once so central to the legitimation of film studies at the university—that film history is first and foremost a history of auteurs, styles, and aesthetic movements. Research into the long histories of scientific, educational, industrial and advertising film has brought into view entire sectors of forgotten film activity, which are arguably more consequential for our current media universe than the history of art and aesthetics.[6] Not surprisingly, such domains of

6 Thomas Elsaesser long promoted the study of such films under the title S/M film-making (surveillance and military, science and medicine, sensing and monitoring, storage and memory). 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 Vinzenz Hediger and Patrick Vonderau, eds., *Films That Work: Industrial Film and the Productivity of Media* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009); Charles R. Acland and Haidee Wasson, eds., *Useful Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Yvonne Zimmermann, ed., *Schaufenster Schweiz: Dokumentarische Gebrauchsfilme 1896–1964* (Zurich: Limmat, 2011); David Orgeron, Marsha Orgeron, and Dan Streible, eds., *Learning with*

professional film production and exhibition came with their own forms of sociability, which means that film societies, too, came in a diverse array of models hardly limited to the art house scene. Hence, 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? In the German-speaking world, there were numerous groups in the 1920s and 1930s that could be classified as art house societies in the Parisian mould: groups such as the Kinogemeinde: Vereinigung der Kinofreunde in Vienna, founded in 1926, the Filmstelle ETH in Zürich (founded 1922), or the German groups Gesellschaft Neuer Film (founded 1928) and Deutsche Liga für unabhängigen Film (founded 1931), both dedicated to the screening of avant-garde and experimental film (see fig. 12.1). But there were also many other types of film society. This includes groups dedicated to a political understanding of film like the Volksverband für Filmkunst, colloquially known as the Volksfilmverband or "Popular Film Association" (founded 1928), which had close affinities to similar workers' film clubs in the UK, Holland, and France. But it also includes more professional societies, such as the Deutsche Kinotechnische Gesellschaft (founded 1919), dedicated to the promotion of film as a technological industry (see fig. 12.2). All of these were preceded by a longer history of film societies, starting with the wave of educational groups—known as "kinematographische Studiengesellschaften" (cinematographic study societies)—in the 1910s, which were the first large-scale associations expressly designed to probe the possibilities of the new medium (see fig. 12.3).

An investigation of this expanded history of film associations can clearly draw on (and contribute to) useful cinema studies, but it might take another methodological cue from recent work in media archaeology. Media archaeology has been arguing for some time 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 dead ends and ephemeral or marginal developments, which might just as easily have come to define our media universe, and which can take on renewed relevance

the Lights Off: Educational Film in the United States (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); and Bo Florin, Nico de Klerk, and Patrick Vonderau, eds., *Films That Sell: Moving Pictures and Advertising* (London: Palgrave, 2016). 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).


DIE
DIESJÄHRIGE
GENERALVERSAMMLUNG
DER KINOGEMEINDE

fand am vergangenen Samstag unter Vorsitz des Präsidenten Igo Sym im Klubheim der Kinogemeinde statt.

Fig. 12.1. General assembly of the Kinogemeinde.

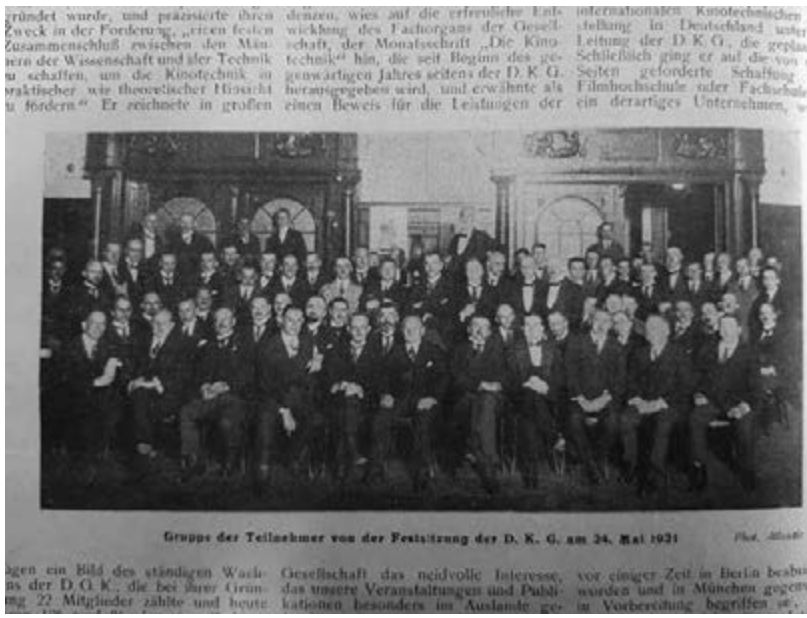

Gruppe der Teilnehmer von der Festsitzung der D. K. G. am 24. Mai 1921

Fig. 12.2. Deutsche Kinotechnische Gesellschaft, 1921.

Kirche mit ihren starren Offenbarungsdogmen oder der als Besitzrecht beanspruchten Wahrheiten seitens metaphyischer Philosophie-Systeme, lediglich durch wissenschaftlich-kritische Forschung der Wahrheit immer näher zu kommen und die Menschheit hinaufzupflanzen strebt.

D'Alembert teilt mit allen Enzyklopädisten das tragische Schiksal, daß sie die Morgenröte der neuen Zeit, die Verwirklichung ihrer Ideale vorbereiten, jedoch nicht erleben durften. Keiner von ihnen war Zeuge der französischen Revolution, die den Menschen das Selbstbestimmungsrecht und das Recht der eigenen Persönlichkeit gebracht und sie von den letzten Eierschalen der mittelalterlichen Scholastik befreit hat, die mit Hilfe der staatlichen Macht, der unerbittlichen Inquisition und der unduldsamen Geistlichkeit der Menschheit fast das Denken selbst verboten hätte. Unter der Leitung dieser Philosophen wäre die französische Revolution von 1789 wahrscheinlich auch nicht zu der Blutorgie des leidenschaftlich aufgewühlten Volkes ausgeartet, wenn auch solche mächtigen Umwälzungen nach dem Ausweis der Geschichte gemeiniglich nicht mit Rosenwasser gemacht werden. Wir müssen jene tapferen Geisteskämpfer als die Bahnbrecher der neuen Zeit feiern, die uns die Freiheit des wissenschaftlichen Forschens gesichert und dadurch ermöglicht haben, auf Grund einer tieferen Naturerkenntnis zu einer neuen, immer wahreren Weltanschauung zu gelangen. Das soziale Staatsideal, zu dem wir uns jetzt seit ungefähr einem Menschenalter bekennen und in seinen Anfängen praktisch verwirklichen, haben jene Männer uns gelehrt, und wir wollen diese kurze Abhandlung mit der hoffnungsvollen Prophezeiung des großen Weisheitslehrers D'Alembert schließen, daß die fortschreitende Aufklärung, ungeachtet zeitweiser Verdunkelung durch äußere rückfällige Einflüsse, ihre Leuchten unaufhaltsam aufstecken wird.[1])

Kinematographische Studiengesellschaft E. V. zu Berlin Treptow-Sternwarte

Eine Kinematographische Studiengesellschaft E. V. ist am 2. Februar 1913 im Hörsaal der Treptow-Sternwarte unter zahlreicher Beteiligung von Gelehrten und Interessenten begründet worden. Der engere Vorstand wurde wie folgt zusammengesetzt:

Dr. F. S. Archenhold, 1. Vorsitzender
Prof. Dr. Eberlein, derzeitiger Rektor der tierärztlichen Hochschule zu Berlin, 2. Vorsitzender

[1]) Herr Dr. Eugen Hirschberg stellt uns vorstehende Skizze zur Verfügung, die nach seinem Buche gefertigt ist. Die philosophischen und biographischen Erläuterungen nehmen teilweise fast den Charakter kurzer Abhandlungen an und enthalten eine Fülle wertvoller Belehrung für das Verständnis jener geistreichsten Epoche der modernen Geschichte. In gebotenen Umrissen behandeln sie alle bedeutenden Männer der neueren Philosophie mit ihren Systemen von Descartes bis Kant, bisweilen mit kurzen Hinweisen auch auf den heutigen Standpunkt der wissenschaftlichen Anschauungen. Mangels jeder philosophischen Propädeutik in unseren höheren Lehranstalten war es eine dankenswerte Aufgabe des Übersetzers des „Discours préliminaire", mit diesem „Prunkstück akademisch-populärwissenschaftlicher Darstellung", wie Dr. R. Salinger in der Besprechung des Buches sich ausdrückt, den Philosophiebeflissenen, wie auch weiteren philosophisch interessierten Kreisen eine brauchbare Einführung in die Philosophie und eine vollständige Übersicht über ihren Entwicklungsgang von Bacon bis zur neueren Zeit in die Hand zu geben. Die Redaktion

Fig. 12.3. Announcement for Kinematographische Studiengesellschaft.

today as sedimented forms of media interaction begin to frazzle.[7] Like many media archaeological objects, film societies were highly ephemeral and unstable phenomena—most lasting only a few years—which came in a *diverse* array of forms, particularly in the early decades when cinema's calling had yet to be determined.[8] It behoves us, then, not to limit our view of the film society to a single model of aesthetic appreciation. No less important were the educational, technological, and political groups that also studied the new medium in the early twentieth century and articulated templates for comprehending it.

Of course, one could argue that an archaeology of the film society would differ from media archaeology on account of its focus on social and cultural phenomena rather than technology. But it is important to remember that media archaeology is itself hardly a monolithic field. While "Berlin School" theorists such as Friedrich Kittler—whose work is foundational for media archaeology though he never identified explicitly with that term—and Wolfgang Ernst have tended to attribute historical agency to technological hardware and infrastructures, other scholars such as Kelly Gates, Lisa Gitelman, and Jonathan Sterne have argued for a more complex relation between technology and culture, showing, for example, that "culture" (discourses, expectations, uses, etc.) plays a crucial role in determining not only how certain technologies evolve, but also how they become intelligible in the first place.[9] Film societies represent one key cultural context of cinema, and one that did not simply react to technological developments, but often helped to shape them—and indeed to create the space in which certain technologies became desirable. For instance, early educational groups were some of the first to articulate a need for projectors that could be paused, long before such projection technologies became a reality, and the same groups—combined with advertising societies—helped to establish the

7 See, for example, Jussi Parikka, *What Is Media Archaeology?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 12–13.

8 I use the term "diverse" in the sense outlined by Siegfried Zielinski who (drawing on Stephen J. Gould's efforts to bypass teleological thinking in geological history) 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, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 7.

9 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, MA: MIT Press, 2008); Kelly Gates, *Our Biometric Future: Facial Recognition Technology and the Culture of Surveillance* (New York: NYU Press, 2011).

cultural framework in which portable projection devices (for classrooms, exhibitions, shop windows, etc.) could become a desideratum.[10] Perhaps more important, for my purposes here, is the branch of media archaeology that explores the archaeologies of "imaginary media," both in the sense of media that never realized and of the social imaginaries that surround exiting media.[11] 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 well to understand what they imagined cinema to be, and what legacies those imaginaries have for us.[12]

A third postulate of media archaeology relevant to a new history of film societies is that an exploration of film culture 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 "beginnings," attending instead to the complex links between film and other technological media that preceded it, so we can also examine the gradual emergence of "film-specific" societies from other sorts of groups that had long accompanied industrial modernity in the nineteenth century. In other words, as much as film societies looked forward (to the cinephilic culture of European art house film), they also looked *backward*.[13] In particular, they could draw on a long tradition of what social historians generally 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 and the concomitant retreat of traditional bonds (family, church, village, etc.) as people and information

10 See Michael Cowan, "Taking It to the Street: Screening the Weimar Advertising Film," *Screen* 54, no. 4 (2013): 463–79; Michael Cowan, "Interactive Media and Imperial Subjects: Excavating the Cinematic Shooting Gallery," *NECSUS* (Spring 2018), https://necsus-ejms.org/interactive-media-and-imperial-subjects-excavating-the-cinematic-shooting-gallery/.

11 See especially Eric Kluitenberg, "On the Archaeology of Imaginary Media," in *Media Archaeology*, ed. Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka (Oakland: University of California Press, 2011), 48–70.

12 Here I am drawing on a point first put forward by Malte Hagener, who wrote of the ciné-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).

13 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.

became more mobile.[14] In the German-speaking world, such societies were part and parcel of what had become known as *Vereinskultur*, a highly regulated sphere of voluntary organizations ranging from political causes to charity groups to preservation societies, which helped to structure leisure time in the early twentieth century.

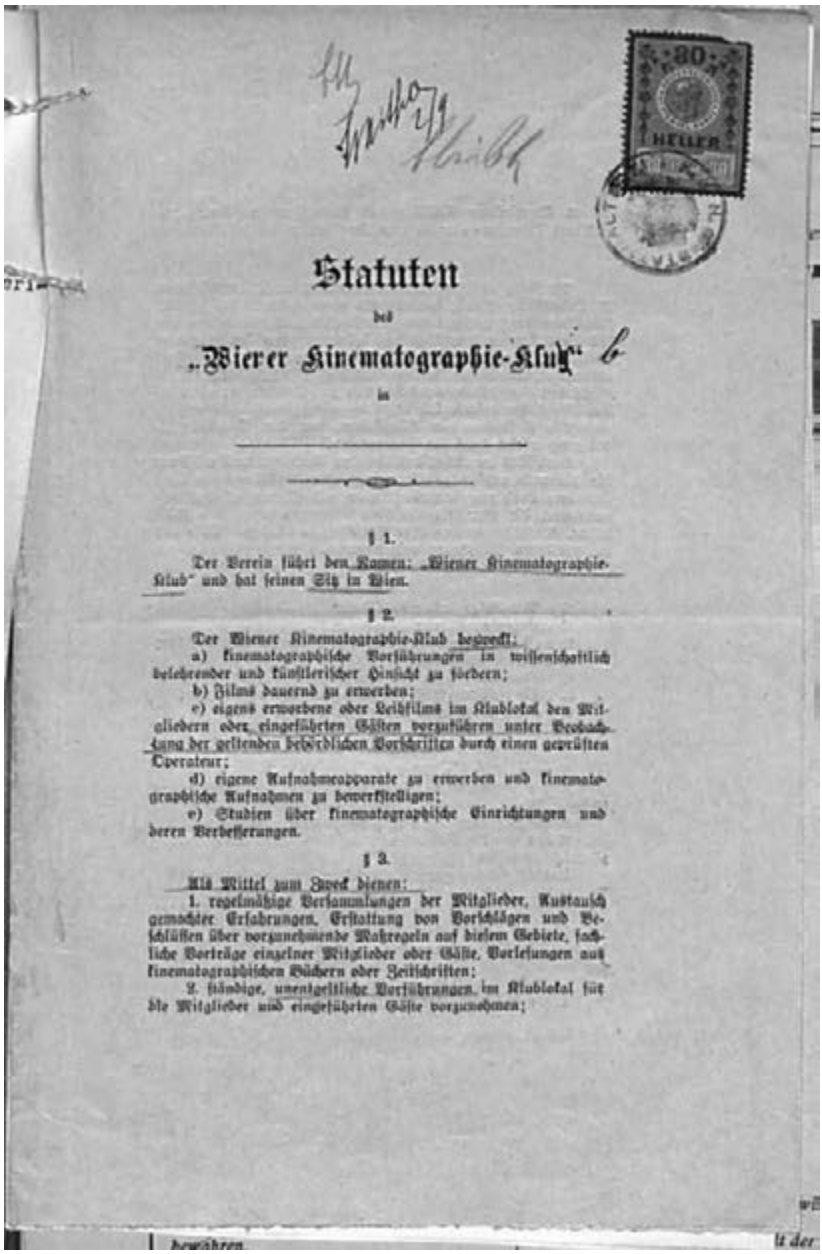
Film societies took up residence within this social context, and while we can distinguish them from other groups by their (more or less) exclusive focus on film, they were still one type of *Verein* among others. Indeed, the earliest film societies drew explicitly on other models of voluntary associations ranging from reading clubs and amateur scientific circles to photographic societies and revolutionary theatre associations. Early film societies in Germany followed the rules imposed upon such associations by the Reichsvereinsgesetz of 1908, for example, by publishing statutes, electing a management board, informing the authorities of meetings, and often gaining entry to the official registry of associations, the Vereinsregister (see fig. 12.4). But they also followed the conventions of voluntary associations, such as the maintaining of a *Vereinsheim* (often a specialty cinema and its adjacent café) where discussion could take place. And like many existing *Vereine*, they understood their mission as one of regulating and "elevating" the leisure time of their members by providing frameworks for self-cultivation and self-betterment. 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."[15]

More specifically, the first film study societies had direct links to the world of popular education and amateur science. In Berlin, the "Kinematographische Studien-Gesellschaft" was founded in 1913 by Friedrich Simon Archenhold, the head of the Treptow Observatory and editor of the popular astronomy journal, *Das Weltall* (which also published the film society's statutes).[16] But the group hardly saw itself as a niche phenomenon, interested

14 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, Vol. 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.

15 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.

16 See "Kinematographische Studiengesellschaft E.V. zu Berlin Treptow-Sternwarte," *Das Weltall* 13 (1913): 350–52.



Statuten

des

„Wiener Kinematographie-Klub"

in

§ 1.

Der Verein führt den Namen: „Wiener Kinematographie-Klub" und hat seinen Sitz in Wien.

§ 2.

Der Wiener Kinematographie-Klub bezweckt:

a) kinematographische Vorführungen in wissenschaftlich belehrender und künstlerischer Hinsicht zu fördern;

b) Films dauernd zu erwerben;

c) eigens erworbene oder Leihfilms im Klublokal den Mitgliedern oder eingeführten Gästen vorzuführen unter Beobachtung der geltenden behördlichen Vorschriften durch einen geprüften Operateur;

d) eigene Aufnahmeapparate zu erwerben und kinematographische Aufnahmen zu bewerkstelligen;

e) Studien über kinematographische Einrichtungen und deren Verbesserungen.

§ 3.

Als Mittel zum Zweck dienen:

1. regelmäßige Versammlungen der Mitglieder, Austausch gemachter Erfahrungen, Erstattung von Vorschlägen und Beschlüssen über vorzunehmende Maßregeln auf diesem Gebiete, fachliche Vorträge einzelner Mitglieder oder Gäste, Vorlesungen aus kinematographischen Büchern oder Zeitschriften;

2. ständige, unentgeltliche Vorführungen im Klublokal für die Mitglieder und eingeführten Gäste vorzunehmen;

Fig. 12.4. Statutes of the Wiener Kinematographie Klub, 1910.

in a single sub-category of film; alongside the production of scientific and educational film, their statutes also envisioned the "ennoblement of popular entertainment film" as one of their central missions and their

screenings regularly included fiction film.[17] A similar phenomenon can be observed in Austria, where one of the first film societies, the Kosmos Klub für wissenschaftliche und künstlerische Kinematographie, sought to associate itself with one of the most prevalent German clubs for amateur science, the Kosmos Klub der Freunde der Natur. Not by chance, the Kosmos film club chose as its central organ the journal *Film und Lichtbild*, published by the same "Kosmos" publishing house that ran the amateur science group's journal: *Kosmos. Handweiser für Naturfreunde*, as well as other scientific journals, such as *Mikrokosmos* (the official journal the Deutsche Mikrologische Gesellschaft founded by popular science author Raoul Francé) (see fig. 12.5). Of course, the very term *Kosmos* was clearly meant to harken back to the most popular book of amateur science in the nineteenth century, Alexander von Humboldt's *Kosmos. Entwurf einer physischen Weltbeschreibung* (1845–1862).[18]

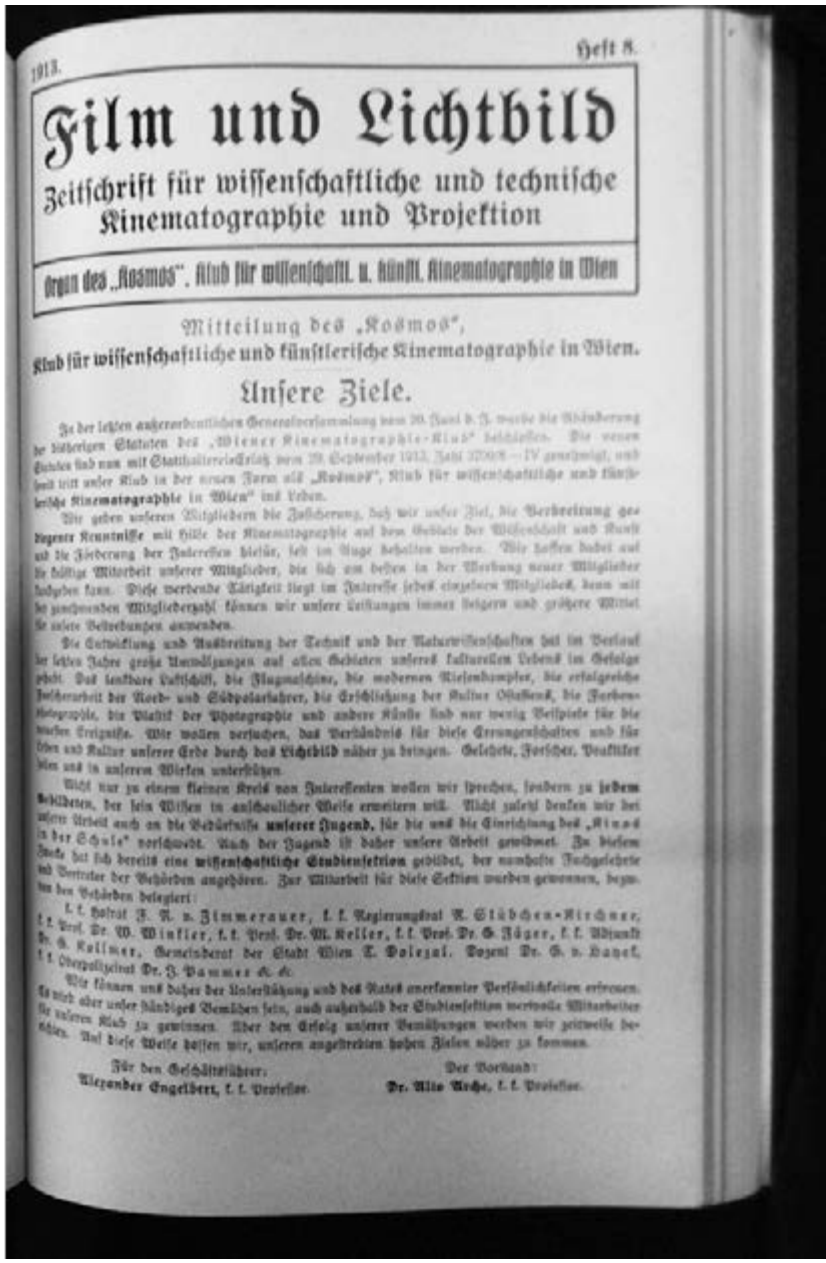
But if early film societies drew on models of associations for popular science, they undoubtedly did so in order to confront a *new* phenomenon. In this sense, it is surely no coincidence that the rise of film study societies in the German-speaking world coincided with the cinema reform movement around 1912. Both movements were responding not to the "invention" of film as a medium, but to its institutionalization within daily life, at a time when movie theatres were rapidly expanding and moving into the city centres. (The key phrase of the time was that movie theatres were "shooting up out of the ground like mushrooms."[19]) In many cases, the same players were involved in both cinema reform and early film societies.[20] What separated the two, at least analytically, was their focus: where cinema reform foregrounded efforts to curb cinema's perceived nefarious effects, film societies sought out ways of elaborating productive uses of cinema. Thus 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

17 Ibid., 351.

18 In Zürich, the aforementioned Filmstelle ETH actually began in 1922 as a film society in this scientific mould, before transforming into an art house society in the 1930s. See Janser, "Es kommt der gute Film," 58–62

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

20 Partly for this reason, Frank Kessler and Sabine Lenk see early educational societies as *part* of the cinema reform movement. See Frank Kessler and Sabine Lenk, "*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, 2015), 163–73. I prefer to see them as separate, though linked, movements.



1913. Heft 8.

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

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

Unsere Ziele.

In der letzten außerordentlichen Generalversammlung vom 20. Juni d. J. wurde die Abänderung der bisherigen Statuten des „Wiener Kinematographie-Klub" beschlossen. Die neuen Statuten sind nun mit Statthaltereierlaß vom 29. September 1913, Zahl 37808—IV genehmigt, und somit tritt unser Klub in der neuen Form als „Kosmos", Klub für wissenschaftliche und künstlerische **Kinematographie** in Wien" ins Leben.

Wir gehen unseren Mitgliedern die Zusicherung, daß wir unser Ziel, die Verbreitung gediegener **Kenntnisse** mit Hilfe der Kinematographie auf dem Gebiete der Wissenschaft und Kunst und die Förderung der Interessen hierfür, fest im Auge behalten werden. Wir hoffen dabei auf die tätige Mitarbeit unserer Mitglieder, die sich am besten in der Werbung neuer Mitglieder betätigen kann. Diese werbende Tätigkeit liegt im Interesse jedes einzelnen Mitgliedes, denn mit der zunehmenden Mitgliederzahl können wir unsere Leistungen immer steigern und größere Mittel für unsere Bestrebungen anwenden.

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 modernen Riesendampfer, die erfolgreiche Forscherarbeit der Nord- und Südpolarfahrer, die Erschließung der Kultur Ostafrikas, die Farbenphotographie, die Plastik der Photographie und andere Künste sind nur wenig Beispiele für die großen Ereignisse. Wir wollen versuchen, das Verständnis für diese Errungenschaften und für Leben und Kultur unserer Erde durch das **Lichtbild** näher zu bringen. Gelehrte, Forscher, Praktiker sollen uns in unserem Wirken unterstützen.

Nicht nur zu einem kleinen Kreis von Interessenten wollen wir sprechen, sondern zu **jedem** Gebildeten, der sein Wissen in anschaulicher Weise erweitern will. Nicht zuletzt denken wir bei unserer Arbeit auch an die Bedürfnisse **unserer Jugend**, für die und die Einrichtung des „Kosmos in der Schule" vorschwebt. Auch der Jugend ist daher unsere Arbeit gewidmet. In diesem Sinne hat sich bereits eine **wissenschaftliche Studiensektion** gebildet, der namhafte Fachgelehrte und Vertreter der Behörden angehören. Zur Mitarbeit für diese Sektion wurden gewonnen, bezw. von den Behörden delegiert:

k. k. Hofrat F. R. v. Zimmermann, k. k. Regierungsrat R. Stübchen-Kirchner, k. k. Prof. Dr. W. Winkler, k. k. Prof. Dr. M. Keller, k. k. Prof. Dr. G. Jäger, k. k. Adjunkt Dr. G. Kallmus, Gemeinderat der Stadt Wien K. Dolezal, Dozent Dr. G. v. Hanel, k. k. Oberpolizeirat Dr. J. Pammer & a.

Wir können uns daher der Unterstützung und des Rates anerkannter Persönlichkeiten erfreuen. Es wird aber unser ständiges Bemühen sein, auch außerhalb der Studiensektion wertvolle Mitarbeiter für unseren Klub zu gewinnen. Aber den Erfolg unserer Bemühungen werden wir zeitweise bescheiden. Auf diese Weise hoffen wir, unseren angestrebten hohen Zielen näher zu kommen.

Für den Geschäftsführer:
Alexander Engelbert, k. k. Professor.

Der Vorstand:
Dr. Alto Arche, k. k. Professor.

Fig. 12.5. Announcements by the Kosmos Klub für wissenschaftliche und künstlerische Kinematographie.

about cinema's "harmful excesses" ("*schädliche Auswüchse*") to "make the undeniable advantages of cinematographic technology useful for various sciences."[21] The Kosmos club would take up where this opening editorial left off, recruiting members from Vienna's middle classes and creating a specialty cinema in the seventh district to explore cinema's uses as a tool for scientific learning.

The larger point here is that early film societies were involved in an effort to manage this new institution of cinema by elaborating templates for interacting with it and influencing the direction it took. Indeed, not unlike people confronting the digital turn today, 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 and steer the new medium in the desired direction. For the educational groups mentioned above, film was part of a visual turn—one that included the use of slide lectures, which these groups also promoted heavily—that would utterly change the way learning took place. For example, Adolf Mahel, vice president of the Viennese Kastalia Society for Scientific and Educational Cinema (founded 1912), presented the new film society as a response to a general transformation to a post-Gutenbergian universe, in which learning would now be visual and experiential rather than rational and bookish: "Letters only have flickering life, and even the most tasteful lecture by a teacher or professor, even the most compelling instructional methodology, can never attain the value of simply beholding something and experiencing it for oneself."[22] The cinematograph would enable such "autonomous experiences" (for example, by virtually transporting school children out of the artificial environment of the classroom and into nature itself), and within this context, Kastalia would work to create the conditions in which educational film could thrive within the curriculum by systematically introducing projection equipment into schools in all of Vienna's twenty-three districts.[23] But they also sought to create an audience capable of channelling film's remarkable experiential power into productive education ends, primarily by working out detailed models of

21 *Film und Lichtbild* 1, no. 1 (1912): 1.

22 "Der Buchstabe hat nur flackerndes Leben, und selbst der gediegenste Vortrag des Lehrers, des Professors, die zwingendste Methodik seines Unterrichtsverfahrens, kann nie den Wert einer einfachen Anschauung, eines Selbsterlebnisses erreichen." Adolf Mahel, "Kastalia!," *Kastalia* 1, no. 1 (June 1912): 2.

23 See, for example, "Vereinsbericht," *Kastalia* 1, no. 4 (1912): 12–13.

film pedagogy—determining, for example, what times of day were most propitious to film reception,[24] how best to lead discussions of films after screenings, and so on.[25]

For later political film societies, on the other hand, film—which by this point had assumed the shape of a vast entertainment industry—was quickly replacing newspapers as the key mass medium for political organization and the terrain on which the great battle of ideas would be waged. Thus Willi Münzenberg, a prominent left-wing journalist who collaborated with the Volksfilmverband, could write in that society's journal *Film und Volk* in 1928:

> It is high time that revolutionary workers' organizations recognized that, just as their bourgeois enemies once founded printing presses, created newspapers, and covered the land with a network of literary distribution agencies, so they are today doing something similar—and to an even greater extent—in the domain of cinematography through the construction of cinema studios, the creation of distribution offices, and the acquisition of cinema theatres.[26]

Hence groups such as the Volksfilmverband sought to create the infrastructural conditions in which left-wing film-making could thrive (which turned out to be a particularly challenging undertaking on account of resistance by both the film industry and the authorities), but also to produce a *critical* audience that could resist the seductions of the mainstream film industry and see through to the ideological underpinnings of bourgeois film, even in its seemingly "apolitical" manifestations.[27]

24 See, for example, "Das Arbeitsprogramm der Kastalia," *Kastalia* 1, no. 5 (December 1912): 1–2.

25 See, for example, Adolf Mahel, "Neue Bahnen," *Kastalia* 3, no. 5–7 (1914): 52–53.

26 "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." Willi Münzenberg, "Film und Propaganda," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 9–10 (November 1929): 5.

27 In the first article of the first issue of the society's journal, *Film und Volk*, Franz Höllering declared that one of the group's central objectives lay in the "Aufklärung der Massen über die Ausbeutung, deren sie noch in ihren kargen Ruhestunden durch eine Filmindustrie ausgesetzt sind, die ihr Klassenfeind [...] beherrscht und kontrolliert." Franz Höllering, "Vorwort," *Film und Volk* 1, no. 1 (March 1928): 4.

Film Society as Organization: Key Continuities

Examining groups such as Kastalia and Volksfilmverband side by side, the differences between them stand out, and one might ask whether such an expansive take on film societies risks inflating the contours of the object beyond any useful recognition. But we should not ignore some of the continuities between these different social projects. The earliest educational film societies may not look much like their art house or political descendants at first glance, but they helped put into place many of the protocols that would continue to characterize the more familiar film societies for decades to come. One of the most basic continuities was a dialectical relation to the developing film industry, where the organization of movie-goers (or, in some cases, film producers) was intended to influence the direction the industry at large would take. As already noted, film societies emerged at a moment when cinemas were going mainstream. That is, they accompanied and reacted to the transformation of the "cinematograph" into the "cinema" understood as an institutional form of mass leisure activity.[28] Within that context, these were self-consciously *prescriptive* undertakings (quite literally so, as they 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 interested in film, but also to *make* people take interest in film, and to shape the expectations, tastes, and behaviour of consumers in ways that would *force the industry to listen*.

Though they might have conceived of this endeavour in different ways, nearly all film societies described it as a mission to "elevate" cinema through the promotion of quality film. This goes almost without saying for art house groups such as the Viennese Kinogemeinde, which sought to legitimate cinema as a seventh art. Established in 1926 by film-maker Friedrich Porges, largely under the influence of the well-known Parisian ciné-club model, the group explicitly described as its central goal "the elevation [...] of the film industry in Austria" ("*die Hebung* [...] *des Lichtbildwesens in Österreich*").[29] But thirteen years earlier, the statutes of the Kosmos educational film club sounded an almost identical note when they stated that the group

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

29 "Die Kinogemeinde ist konstituiert! Eine würdig und hoffnungsvolle Gründungsversammlung," *Mein Film* 44 (1926), 4.

sought to promote all initiatives "which serve to elevate and ennoble cinematography" ("*die der Erhebung und Veredelung der Kinematographie dienen*").[30] Similarly, the Deutsche Kinotechnische Gesellschaft, formed under the influence of the American Society of Motion Picture Engineers, sought to help the German film industry towards "the elevation of its own products" ("*die Hebung der eigenen Erzeugnisse*").[31] Of course, the content of these various calls for elevation (*Hebung*, *Erhebung*) might have differed from group to group, along with the understanding of "quality" film, which migrated from educational to artistic and/or ideological criteria.[32] But they shared a certain relational position vis-à-vis the industry. They also shared certain strategies, such as encouraging members to shame distributors who included too many "bad" films, cinemas that showed films under suboptimal conditions (false speed, damaged screens, etc.), or equipment manufacturers who failed to take sufficient pride in their work. The basic idea was summed up already by the editors of *Kastalia* in response to a reader's letter in 1914: "If anyone can reform cinema programmes quickly and radically, it is the public itself."[33] Fourteen years later, a writer for *Film und Volk* would repeat the same sentiment in varied form: "It is a well-known fact that any improvements to the quality of a product—and film is one product among others—can only result from pressure by consumers. Only the dissatisfaction of purchasers forces manufacturers to produce better wares."[34] In this way, film societies involved their members in a collective mission to *take hold* of the institution of cinema and steer 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 manifested itself concretely in questions of independent distribution networks and screening spaces, for example, in the ever-present question of *specialty* cinemas. I have already mentioned the most famous

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

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

32 The Volksfilmverband wavered between artistic and ideological criteria, and this was in fact one of the major tensions within the group. As the more left-wing members came to the fore of the group in later years, they explicitly sought to subordinate aesthetics to political considerations (*Tendenz*). See, for example, Alfred Piepenstock, "Klassenkunst," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 2 (December 1928): 6.

33 "Wenn jemand rasch und gründlich die Kinoprogramme reformieren kann, so ist es das Publikum selbst." "Redaktionelles," *Kastalia* 2 (1913), slide 10.

34 "Es ist 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." S. Alher, "Revolution von Unten," *Film und Volk* 1, no. 5 (August 1928): 4.

examples (Studio des Ursulines in Paris, Filmtheater de Uitkijk in Amsterdam). But such institutions had precursors in the period of cinema reform known in German as *Musterlichtbühne* (model movie theatres). Often funded by local councils in order to bypass profit-driven distribution companies, such specialty cinemas were promoted as spaces that would protect audiences from harmful films and direct them towards the good. But they were already the subject of some debate, as observers such as Otto Theodor Stein warned that too much "segregation" from the industry would harm efforts to influence film production at large.[35]

The earliest film societies saw such independent cinemas as part of their remit. Kastalia, for example, set out from the beginning to build a dedicated educational cinema, which was realized in 1913 under the title Universum Kino in Vienna's fifteenth district (see fig. 12.6). A year later the Kosmos Klub für wissenschaftliche und künstlerische Kinematographie founded a similar institution dubbed the "Kosmos Theater" nearby in the seventh district. And here, the continuities between early and late groups take on a tangible dimension since Vienna's first art house film club, Kinogemeinde, would adopt the very same space in 1926, only changing the name to Kosmos Kino. The idea of the specialty cinema was still central to the Volksfilmverband in 1928, which included among its original three-point plan (alongside a regular events schedule and the eventual production of their own films) the founding of an independent "first-run theatre" (*Uraufführungstheater*) for workers' films in Berlin.[36] Although that goal was eventually abandoned, it once again went hand in hand with a larger tension around the relative values of working inside and outside the industry that informed the Volksfilmverband throughout its existence (with the more left-leaning members increasingly pushing to bypass the industry altogether).

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 key role of discussion and exchange. Film societies were not about watching films naively, but about inculcating certain modes of watching guided by speech. This is evident in the earliest film societies, which were still navigating the line between illustrated lectures and film screenings; groups like the Kosmos Klub and Kastalia—along with many other associations that began to use film at the time—regularly accompanied their screenings with scientific lectures, as did affiliate institutions such as the Urania Scientific Theatre, which first introduced film into

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

36 See Rudolf Schwarzkopf, "Unser Ziel und Weg," *Film und Volk* 1, no. 1 (March 1928): 20.

Fig. 12.6. Universum Kino programme, 1913.

its programme in 1911. Speech was crucial here, as Adolf Mahel put it in the same Kastalia presentation cited above: "Eye and ear should be placed simultaneously into the service of understanding. The unfurling image accompanied by flowing speech! The ear hearing what the eye leaves in silence! The eye seeing what the word conceals!"[37]

37 "Auge und Ohr sollen gleichzeitig in den Dienst der Auffassung gestellt werden. Das rollende Bild von fließender Rede begleitet! Das Ohr hörend, was das Auge verschweigt! Das Auge sehend,

But the presence of words wasn't just for film pedagogy in the narrow sense of educational cinema for schools. In fact, the film society is one place where the film lecture far outlasted its disappearance from most mainstream cinemas. The Viennese Kinogemeinde, for instance, still held regular lectures in the mid-1920s on topics such as "Welt und Natur im Film," "Die Gefahren des Kameramanns," "Tiere im Film," "Die Mode im Film," "Filmtempo in Amerika," and so on.[38] As for the Volksfilmverband, the group at first prescribed a rather standard programme of screenings accompanied by introductory lectures, but it increasingly turned to "stand-alone lectures" because it also wanted (here anticipating later apparatus theorists) to teach its members about the ideological work of the film industry—in production techniques, finance, and censorship—without the danger of "seduction" by the pleasures of film viewing.[39] For its part, the Deutsche Kinotechnische Gesellschaft, which met in the rooms of the Photochemical Department of the Technical University in Charlottenburg, was perhaps the most formalized of all the groups in this sense; as its statutes prescribed, the group began each meeting with an expert lecture by one member on a particular aspect or domain of film technology, which was often followed by the screening of excerpts to demonstrate the points discussed.[40] (Sometimes the same material was screened back to back on different projection equipment to demonstrate distinctions in quality.) In each of these cases, lectures and discussion were part of an evolving mission to train certain types of film viewing and certain competencies. Film societies, that is, were never simply about watching films, but about blending vision and discourse in ways that would create certain types of viewers.

Of course, "discourse" here was clearly not limited to live speech. Most film societies—and nearly all of the ones discussed here—also ran print journals, part of whose mission was to model the kinds of competencies desired in members. This happened through the 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" published in the journals *Film und Lichtbild* and *Kastalia* through the "technological criticism" instituted by the Deutsche kinotechnische Gesellschaft to the

was das Wort verbirgt!," Mahel, "Kastalia," 2. Or as the director of Kastalia, Josef Kopetsky, put it in another article: "Es muß der Gesichtssinn durch den Hörsinn unterstutzt werden." Josef Kopetzky, "Kind und Kino," *Kastalia* 1, no. 5 (1912): 7.

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

39 The point was discussed in a pivotal article in *Film und Volk* announcing changes for the group's second year. See "Das zweite Jahr," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 3 (April 1929): 15.

40 See, for example, "Die zweite ordentliche Sitzung der D.K.G.," *Kinotechnik* 2.9 (1920).

aesthetic criticism of *Mein Film* (the journal of Kinogemeinde) and the more politically minded "critical film reports" in *Film und Volk*.[41] Early on, groups such as Kastalia quite literally understood film criticism and reports as a means of preparing audiences to watch films and deepen their knowledge of visual material that went by too quickly on the screen.[42] Film criticism remained one of the central mechanisms by which film societies sought both to anticipate and supplement the act of watching films. In many cases, journals also allowed for reader participation, not only in letter columns, but also in more "serious" contributions, such as the column "Mein größtes Filmerlebnis" in *Mein Film* or the practice of reader-authored film criticism introduced in later issues of *Film und Volk*.[43] Here, the journals sought to function in a manner akin to the newspaper in Benedict Anderson's 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 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 rather frameworks for learning how to relate to cinema: how to love the movies, how to behave in movie theatres, and how to watch with more informed eyes, but also what to read and know about cinema, how to judge film technology, how to become a political cinema-goer, 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 became part of everyday life in the 1910s.[44] And in this way, they taught audiences to cultivate particular models of *a cinematic self*. This pedagogical dimension—which happened through the combinations of word and image

41 For more on the development of film criticism, see especially Helmut Diederichs, *Anfänge der deutschen Filmkritik* (Stuttgart: Verlag R. Fischer und U. Wiedleroither, 1986).

42 See, for example, "Unsere künftige Jugendbeilage," *Kastalia* 1, no. 4 (1912): 10.

43 See, for example, "Der Arbeiterkorrespondent meldet sich!," *Film und Volk* 3, no. 1 (January 1929). For more on the columns in *Mein Film*, see my article "Learning to Love the Movies: Puzzles, Participation and Cinephilia in Interwar European Film Magazines," *Film History* 27, no. 4 (2015): 32–33.

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

in meetings, at events, and on the pages of society journals—was a key point of continuity from the earliest educational societies that appeared around 1910 to the political and artistic societies of the late 1920s.

Studying Film Societies: Three Theses

Having discussed some of the genealogies and continuities of film societies during cinema's first decades, I want to use the remaining space in this chapter to propose three theses for studying them. I will call these theses *relations*, *productions*, and *ideas*. The first (and properly interdisciplinary) thesis is that we should always look for *relations* when studying social formations like film societies. 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 come from? What was their own professional training? What else did they write? And what questions did they look to cinema to answer?

The writers for early film society journals came from the world of education and popular science (for example, microscopic societies), and they looked to cinema to answer pedagogical questions formulated in that other domain: for instance, 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 the Deutsche Kinotechnische Gesellschaft, on the other hand, came largely from the professional spheres of manufacturers and engineers (such as the Verein Deutscher Ingenieure), which is perhaps why this 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 factory production. A group like the Volksfilmverband, for its part, found an obvious model in the long tradition in left-wing cultural organizations, including the *Volkstheater* movement from the late nineteenth century, but also less-known groups (often in the orbit of the German communist party) such as the *Kultur- und Sportkartelle* that dotted German cities in the late

1920s. At the same time, many writers for Volksfilmverband came from the world of journalism (including pioneers of undercover investigative journalism like Leo Lania), which perhaps explains why they—more than any previous group—understood cinema 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 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, understood in the Foucauldian sense of productive power. This means that we need to identify and analyse the mechanisms by which film societies sought to produce subjectivities, habits, and ways of relating to cinema. This goes for overtly pedagogical groups like Kastalia, 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 inculcating models of self-cultivation, such as the many puzzles and contests run by groups such as the Viennese Kinogemeinde, which offered a more ludic form of cinephilic training designed to legitimate certain forms of film knowledge and "know-how" (particularly around stars) and to allow readers to demonstrate it in their submissions.[45] Thus in order to research film societies, we need to learn to read between the lines, as it were, and look for those moments in which the protocols and the pedagogy of film societies were being worked out in ways that might not be apparent at first glance.

There is an important caveat to make here. Examining modes of productive power 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 actually thought, felt, or acted is fraught with difficulties. In some cases, we can get an idea of who the members of a given film club were; the Kosmos Klub, for instance,

45 See Cowan, "Learning to Love the Movies," 26-29.

published its member list in *Film und Lichtbild*, showing that most adherents came from middle-class professions (bank clerks, electricians, architects, attorneys, etc.) (see fig. 12.7). This provenance might tell us something about who was interested in the new cinematographic study societies (i.e. who saw them as a means of self-betterment), but not how audiences actually behaved within the group. Occasionally, one also finds telling anecdotes, such as the newspaper reports of Volksfilmverband screenings documenting audience interjections or the spontaneous singing of "The International." 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's crucial to remember that such audience input was carefully curated and selected by journalists and magazine editors, and it cannot really tell us whether audiences actually followed all of the precepts of a given film society. We should, instead, be asking *why* certain letters and texts were selected (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 reconstruct what audiences really thought or felt, but to reconstruct the kinds of *templates* of knowledge, affect, and behaviour—in short, the blueprints of cinematic selves—these groups elaborated. 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 film onto digital platforms.[46] I would take issue, however, with Casetti's use of the singular here. Already in his reading, the "idea of cinema" turns out to harbour a conglomeration of different ideas about film experience, ranging from the modernist interest in perceptual stimulation to Eisensteinian constructivism to the Bazinian idea of film as a phenomenological revelation of the real.[47] And the need for plurality becomes all the more

46 See Francesco Casetti, "The Relocation of Cinema," *NECSUS* (Autumn 2012), https://necsus-ejms.org/the-relocation-of-cinema/.

47 To be fair to Casetti, he is well aware of this potential multiplicity, but his experiential paradigm nonetheless tends to insist on one common denominator of filmic experience. "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." Ibid.

später namhaft gemacht.

Mitgliederbewegung:

Außer einer großen Anzahl früherer, vom Wiener Kinematographie-Klub übergetretener Mitglieder sind in der Zeit vom 4. bis 30. November l. J. folgende neue Mitglieder dem „Kosmos" beigetreten:

a) Ordentliche Mitglieder.

Grünwald Rafael, Kassenchef des Bürgertheaters, Wien.
Grünwald Samuel, Kaufmann, Raab.
Fleischmann Michael, Kaufmann, Raab.
Russo Alfred, Fabrikant, Wien.
Russo Emil, Privatier, Wien.
Hubenthal Leopold, Privatier, Wien.
Hiedl Ferdinand, Oberbeamter, Wien.
Höller Hugo, Privatbeamter, Brunn a. G.
Liebisch Rudolf, Fabrikant, Barnsdorf.
Luther Karl, Dekorationsmaler, Wien.
Schwarz Rudolf, Kaufmann, Wien.
Schuster Ernst, Beamter, Wien.
Heliczer Bernhard, Beamter, Wien.
Dr. Hirschl Berthold, Wien.
Dr. Stark Max, Hof- und Gerichtsadvokat, Wien.

b) Außerordentliche Mitglieder.

Russo Henri R., Kaufmann, Wien.
Grill Hermann, k. k. Rechnungsrevident, Wien.
Stern Ignaz, Inh. der Fa. Stern u. Steiner, Wien.
Pollitzer Karl, Kaufmann, Wien.
Spielmann Bernhard, Elektrotechniker, Wien.
Kollmann Olga, Beamtin, Wien.
Kollmann Robert, Beamter, Wien.

Der Geschäftsführer:
Marek m. p.

Fellner Alfred, Privatbeamter, Wien
Mändl Leo, Buchdruckereibesitzer, Wien
Schwimmer Max, Kaufmann, Wien
Pollak Max, Filialvorstand d. Österr. Union, Wien.
Adler Jetti, Schneiderin, Wien.
Schacht Max, Beamter, Wien.
Mauer Hanna, Beamtin, Wien.
Schächter Jonas, Kaufmann, Wien.
Feldhorn Julius, Inkassant, Wien.
Gies Isidor, Kaufmann, Wien.
Bottner Franz, Friseur, Wien.
Lang Jacques, Kaufmann, Wien.
Frönzl Richard, Kaufmann, Wien.
Sedlmayer Rudolf, Cafétier, Wien
Rzabek Karl, Druckereibesitzer, Wien
Elias Adolf, Ingenieur, Wien.
Marik Ignaz, Professor, Wien.
Löw Otto, Bankbeamter, Wien.
Jellinek Friedrich, sen., Fabrikant, Wien
Jellinek Friedrich, jun., Fabrikant, Wien
Schißler Franz, Prokurist, Wien.
Kohn Leopold, Wien.
Pannzen Leopold, Kaufmann, Wien
Welber Hermann, Kaufmann, Wien
Gibian Otto, Disponent, Wien.
Wallner Hans, Architekt, Wien.
Luschinsky Karl, Ritter v., Wien

Der Vorstand:
k. k. Professor **Dr. A. Arche**, m. p.

Werbet Mitglieder!

Fig. 12.7. Member list of the Kosmos Klub.

apparent if we factor in those seeming "losers" and "dead ends" that I have been considering here: cinema as experiential education, cinema as national technology, cinema as mass medium and political force, and so on. Such ideas were not only, and not primarily, the inventions of individual theorists, but the result of the kinds of negotiations at work in collective formations like film societies.

Not all of these ideas could emerge at the same time, and it is probably no coincidence that the paradigms I have been considering came onto the scene when they did. Educational cinema was a logical place for film societies 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 societies coagulated in the wake of World War I. 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.[48] While there was some attention to art in early film societies (particularly in the area of *Kunsterziehung* [art education]),[49] it was not until the mid-1920s, with the consolidation of the star system and the rise of auteurs like Fritz Lang and Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau, that a society for the appreciation of "film art" could gain sufficient intelligibility and legitimacy to become a paradigm for a film society. And not surprisingly, Kinogemeinde saw as its central mission the legitimation of film art next to the powerful world of Austrian theatre.[50] Finally, the idea of cinema as a political medium, while it had some precursors in sporadic writings on film and mass psychology,[51] could in many ways only take full shape after World War I, when the propagandistic powers of cinema and other media had been discovered and exploited. But the Volksfilmverband was 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 Volksfilmverband was founded).[52]

In each case, certain practices already existed and certain 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 *attached* them to cinema, as it were, 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 *Kinotechnik*, which 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* was born at a propitious moment: the terrain had been prepared and its time had come. The profession of German cinema

48 As the editors of *Kinotechnik* put it in one of the many manifesto-like editorials that opened each issue of the journal: "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." "Was wir wünschen," *Kinotechnik* 2, no. 1 (1920): 5. See also, for example, A. Weber's discussion of the Treaty of Versailles in "Einblicke und Ausblicke," *Kinotechnik* 3, no. 3 (1921): 87–89.

49 See, for example, Alois Wurm, "Kunsterziehung und Geschmackssinn," *Bild und Film* 1, no. 1 (1912): 1; Friedrich Felix, "Film im Zeichenunterricht," *Film und Lichtbild* 2 (1913): 80.

50 See Cowan, "Learning to Love the Movies," 19–28.

51 See, for example, Herman Duenschmann, "Kinematograph und Psychologie der Volksmenge. Eine sozialpolitische Studie," *Konservative Monatsschrift* 69, no. 9 (1912): 920–30.

52 For a typical discussion, see, for example, Ebbe Neergard, "Die Soziologie des Films," *Film und Volk* 2, no. 5 (June 1929): 4–5.

> 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.[53]

Film societies quite consciously sought to act as frameworks for such processes of condensation and crystallization. By bringing people together in a common meeting space and 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 we inevitably use, such as "organization" or "social formation," have unhelpful overtones of status.) Here we might take a methodological cue not from media archaeology, but from the field of laboratory studies. That field, which emerged in the 1980s, might have little to do with cinema at first glance. But it is relevant to a topic like this one because it has sought to hammer home a view of laboratories as spaces of epistemological production, rather than spaces for the "discovery" of objective facts. In doing so, it draws attention to the conditions of knowledge production, including all of the contingent cultural, social, and political factors that inevitably influence such processes 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.[54]

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,

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

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

but always 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—including the negotiations, conflicts, and antagonisms—by which ideas of cinema were crystallized and legitimated.[55] 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 experiences modelled, and so on? What associations came to dominate in a given idea of cinema, and 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 static association resulting when like-minded people get together, but as an evolving project for the production of subjectivities and ideas.

The three keywords outlined above—*relationality*, *production*, *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 modes of productive power tell 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 was, 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 of these models of cinema and movie-going were taken up by academic film studies, but all of them survive in one form or another, and film historians can chart their subsequent migrations. For instance, the educational paradigm that crystallized in groups like the Kosmos Klub did not disappear with World War I. 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), Munich's Studiengesellschaft für das Film- und Kinowesen (founded 1919), and the Stuttgart Kinogemeinde (founded 1921).[56] And the educational paradigm

55 Ibid., 141.

56 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 World War I. See "Kinematographische Studien-Gesellschaft," *Der Lehrfilm* 2 (1921): 18.

would go on, after World War II, to migrate into television (where educational programming peaked in the 1970s), only to merge back into cinema with the arrival of IMAX theatres and science centres in urban centres in the late twentieth century, which is partly why there is such renewed interest in the tradition in film studies 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 scholars. Indeed, the Deutsche Kinotechnische Gesellschaft was one of the few groups, among my examples here, 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.[57]

As we know, art house cinema and political cinema became the mainstay of most academic film studies in the 1970s. But as suggested by the discussion of useful cinema studies above, their status as the self-evident object of academic film studies may be losing ground today. Most self-proclaimed film societies today still follow the art house model, and they tend to exist around institutions that cling most tenaciously to the vision of film as art (universities, cinematheques, film museums, etc.). But historically, film societies were something much 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 ourselves to the narrow concept of the art house film club. We might do better to look at the kinds of societies mentioned at the outset of this chapter: gaming societies, VR societies, and so on. Those societies may not share the historical film society's letter, but they do share a certain *spirit:* namely the desire to make sense of our own experience of media change and to shape its future, which once again feels multiple and indeterminate.

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

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