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Rewriting Film History with Images: Audiovisual Forms of Historiography

13 A Televisual Cinematheque

Film Histories on West German Television

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Abstract
Research on film historiography usually focuses on academia and film cultural institutions. The contribution of public television to this field has largely been ignored. This chapter highlights TV as a multiplier and agent of film history, alongside cinematheques and film archives, university programmes, journals, festivals, and other practical and intellectual networks. It focuses on West Germany, and specifically the *Filmredaktion* (film unit) of Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR), based in Cologne. However, this case study also more generally indicates how, in the 1970s to the 1990s, the combination of public financing and state support, an educational mission, and a specific generation of cinephile auteurs and commissioning editors managed to turn European public television into an important site of film historiography.

Keywords: television, education, West Germany, emigration, early cinema, film history

Public Funding Meets Educational Mission Meets Cinephilia

Which media, channels, and infrastructures have been instrumental in promoting and disseminating film history and creating genuine forms of film historiography? An intuitive answer to this basic question evokes different moments, places, and contexts. Many of them are mythical and have long been canonized: Henri Langlois and his Cinémathèque française or MoMA's film library in New York, George Sadoul's six-volume *Histoire générale du cinéma* (1948–1954), the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) conference in Brighton in 1978 with its symposium on "Cinema 1900–1906" which epitomizes the (re)discovery of early cinema, or the Cinema Ritrovato

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festival in Bologna (since 1986). Others refer us to historiographies within the moving image tradition, like Jean-Luc Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988–1998), Thom Andersen's and Noël Burch's *Red Hollywood* (1996/2013), or to the well-established practice of appropriating and rewriting elements of film history in the "found footage" genres of experimental cinema and video art—Matthias Müller, Peter Tscherkassky, Gustav Deutsch and Hanna Schimek, Douglas Gordon, Candice Breitz, Peter Delpeut, to name but a few. This spectrum of film historiographical sites and constellations could easily be enlarged and complemented by lesser known examples of the same type. To Sadoul's study, we would have to add more recent, equally impressive undertakings like Hamid Naficy's *A Social History of Iranian Cinema* (four vols., 2011–2012) or Elisabeth Büttner and Christian Dewald's experimental history of Austrian cinema (*Das tägliche Brennen* [2002] and *Anschluß an Morgen* [1997]); to the festival in Bologna, we might add Paolo Cherchi Usai's Nitrate Picture Show (since 2015); to the examples from found footage Klaus Wyborny's *Elementare Filmgeschichte* (1974), the works of Abigail Child, or Christian Marclay's 24-hour real-time installation *The Clock* (2010).

If we abstract from these individual examples and relate them to their structural contexts, the landscape of film historiography first and foremost includes the areas of academia and film cultural institutions (cinematheques and festivals), of cinema and contemporary art. Of course, the rise of the internet and the emergence of the "digital humanities" have changed the assets of film historiography considerably, as initiatives like "Project Arclight" demonstrate.[1]

Conspicuously enough, television does not figure on this list.[2] Its contribution to film (and media) historiography has more or less stayed off the radar of scholarship.[3] Reasons for this are manifold: Access to TV archives is notoriously difficult, the attention that has been devoted to the televisual contribution to film production (in Germany, that is) remained focused on the prestigious and well-funded "*Fernsehspiel*" departments and commissioning editors like Günter Rohrbach, Peter Märthesheimer, and Joachim von Mengershausen, who acted as co-producers of Fassbinder,

1 See Charles R. Acland and Eric Hoyt, eds., *The Arclight Guidebook to Media History and the Digital Humanities* (Sussex: REFRAME Books, in association with Project Arclight, 2016).

2 It should be noted, however, that a work like Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma* was essentially co-produced by French television.

3 An exception is Hans-Helmut Prinzler, "Filmgeschichte im Fernsehen," in *Recherche: Film. Quellen und Methoden der Filmforschung*, ed. Hans-Michael Bock and Wolfgang Jacobsen (Munich: edition text + kritik, 1997), 247–55. Prinzler gives a useful overview that includes other channels than WDR and other important protagonists of the field like (amongst others) Hans Brecht (NDR), Hubert von Spreti (BR), and Brigitte Mehler (ORB).

Wenders, and Kluge, and were instrumental in the emergence of "New German Cinema."[4] The institutional division between film studies and TV studies is also likely to have its share of responsibility for the lack of interest within the community of cinema studies.

In the following essay, I want to shed light on the important role that television played as a multiplier and agent of film history, alongside cinematheques and film archives, university programmes, journals, festivals, and other practical and intellectual networks. My focus is West German television, and in particular the *Filmredaktion* (film unit) of Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR), based in Cologne. However, it should be emphasized that the field of research is larger than that. Ideally, its scope would be global, but there is reason to assume that the specific economic and legal framework of European public broadcasting TV of the decades between the mid-1960s and the 1990s has proved to be a particularly fertile ground for film historical thinking. Kevin Brownlow's BBC and Channel 4 programmes including the thirteen-part series *Hollywood* (co-directed by David Gill, 1980), or Claude-Jean Philippe's unparalleled *Encyclopédie audiovisuelle du cinéma* (1978)[5] are cases in point. They indicate how, for some decades, the combination of public financing and state support, an educational mission, and a specific generation of cinephile auteurs and commissioning editors managed to turn television into an important multiplier and promoter of film historiography.

The Golden Age of Television

"Not one foot of film stock for television!" ("*Keinen Meter Film ans Fernsehen!*")—this slogan, expressed by a film producer at a meeting of the

4 See, for instance, Wim Wenders' speech when Joachim von Mengershausen was awarded the "Ehrenpreis der deutschen Filmkritik" in 2016: "Without the completely new approach to media of this editorial team, one can say with a clear conscience, the boom of German film in the 1970s would not have taken place, or only to a limited extent. The careers of people like Hellmuth Costard, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Hans W. Geissendörfer, Reinhard Hauff, Klaus Lemke, Edgar Reitz, Helma Sanders-Brahms, Volker Schlöndorff, Rudolf Thome, Margarethe von Trotta or my humble self would not have taken place. Also, directors like Peter Beauvais, Tom Toelle, Peter Zadek and last but not least Wolfgang Petersen grew up here." Wim Wenders, "Rede für Joachim von Mengershausen," *Verband der deutschen Filmkritik*, February 15, 2016, https://www.vdfk.de/joachim-von-mengershausen-2487.

5 Made in 1978, the *Encyclopédie audiovisuelle du cinéma* covered French Cinema from its beginnings to the 1950s in forty episodes. It was produced by the French channel FR 3 in collaboration with "Seuil audiovisuel," a short-lived attempt of the publisher Éditions du seuil to establish an audiovisual branch.

Spitzenorganisation des deutschen Films (Association of Film Producers, SPIO) in 1955, is typical of the antagonism between TV and cinema that was prevalent in the 1950s, when TV started to spread and become popular in West Germany.[6] Mutual distrust, ignorance, or even boycotts were the norm. In the mid-1960s, however, things changed, and TV began to cooperate with and embrace its former enemy. ARD, ZDF, and the third channels[7] started to implement film/cinema units into their structure whose primary mission was to select and schedule movies from both the past and present, and to accompany them with specifically commissioned educational programmes. First Reinold E. Thiel and Wilhelm Roth, then Georg Alexander and Wilfried Reichart were the pioneers in this field at WDR. In 1970, Alexander and Reichart were joined by Werner Dütsch. Some years later, Helmut Merker and Roland Johannes also became members of the (all male, one has to remark) editorial team.

A number of factors coincided and helped turn the period between 1970 and the mid-1980s into a "golden age of television."[8] Most importantly, the young commissioning editors running the film unit all had cinephile backgrounds. Before joining the WDR, they had been active in film societies, film clubs, and cinematheques (Dütsch), they worked as film critics (Reichart), or served as members of editorial teams at film journals like *Film* (Georg Alexander) or *Filmkritik* (Roth and Thiel). Secondly, licensing German and international films for television was comparatively easy and inexpensive. Once an interesting auteur was spotted or rediscovered, the budget allowed for the scheduling of an extensive series of films. This led to comprehensive retrospectives of John Ford, Max Ophüls, Ernst Lubitsch, Yasujirō Ozu, and many others, but also of B-movie directors like Jack

6 See Dietrich Leder, "Theater, Literatur, Kino: Vermischte Künste," in *Am Puls der Zeit. 50 Jahre WDR. Vol 1: Der Sender: Weltweit nah dran. 1956–1985*, ed. Klaus Katz et al. (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2006), 211–18, and Prinzler, "Filmgeschichte im Fernsehen."

7 Until the advent of private television in the 1980s, public television in Germany was structured according to the federal political structure and organized regionally, with a nationwide umbrella institution called ARD (Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland) forming the first TV channel. It was only in 1963, after a long debate, that the Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF) was established to add a second public channel to the existing one. One of the tasks of the "third channels" was to provide news programmes and cultural content that took regional specificities into account. Financing and political inclinations between the different channels within ARD varied substantially.

8 See Michael Girke, "Das goldene Zeitalter des Fernsehens. Ein Gespräch mit Werner Dütsch," *Film-Dienst* 12 (2006): 8–11. In the following paragraph, I draw on arguments that I have developed in more detail here: Volker Pantenburg, "TV Essay Dossier, I: The Case of Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR)," *Critical Studies in Television* 14, no. 1 (2019): 106–38.

Arnold or less established movements such as the Brazilian Cinema Novo and other exponents from Third Cinema. A recollection of Georg Alexander, head of the film unit from 1969 to 1980, conveys the range of possibilities in those days:

> We had an annual budget, from today's point of view, just peanuts. And then we sat together as film enthusiasts and cinephiles and everyone brought forward their favourite director. When you checked the lists of available films, you said: "Oh, it would be nice to do a John Ford series or an Ozu series or a Sternberg series." [...] It was that simple back then.[9]

Thirdly, TV audiences grew in number while cinema was in decline. In 1976 only 115.1 million tickets were sold—a modest fraction of the all-time high of 817.5 million tickets sold twenty years earlier that was never matched since. Television had become an important competitor (and economic factor) since audiences preferred to stay at home and the supply of cultural goods diversified. Moreover, for films that would not have had a chance to be theatrically released, television became an option to be considered.

Finally, a fourth factor is important to note: the first West German film schools—the Deutsche Film- und Fernsehakademie Berlin (dffb) and the Hochschule für Fernsehen und Film München (HFF)—had been established in 1966 and 1967, respectively. Hence, in the early 1970s, the first generation of graduates (or, in the case of dffb, expelled students) were in the job market and looking for opportunities to work. Many students at dffb had undergone (political) radicalization in 1967 and 1968, involving the occupation of the school and its renaming as the "Dziga Vertov-Akademie," and the production of agitational films like *Herstellung eines Molotow-Cocktails* (*How to Build a Molotov Cocktail*) (attributed to Holger Meins, who later joined the Red Army Faction) or *Brecht die Macht der Manipulateure* (*Break the Power of the Manipulators*) (Helke Sander, 1967–1968), opposing the Springer press (infamous for its tabloid *Bild*) and its promotion of the Vietnam War. The confrontation between students and the school's directors, which had been palpable since the beginning, eventually led to the expulsion of eighteen students from dffb in November 1968, including Hartmut Bitomsky and Harun Farocki, while Günter Peter Straschek had already been expelled

9 Michael Baute and Stefan Pethke, "'Was wir machen wollten, haben wir gemacht.' Gespräch mit Georg Alexander über die WDR-Filmredaktion," in *Kunst der Vermittlung*, http://www.kunst-der-vermittlung.de/dossiers/kino-im-fernsehen-wdr/gesprach-mit-georg-alexander/.

earlier in the same year.[10] Commissioning editors at WDR like Angelika Wittlich (one of the few women), Dütsch, or Thiel had known aspiring directors like Sander, Bitomsky, or Farocki either from their time at film school, common publication platforms—particularly the monthly journal *Filmkritik*—or other cinephile and political contexts.

In the political climate of the late 1960s and early 1970s, WDR had the reputation of leaning much more to the left than other public channels—a tendency that provoked the designation "Rotfunk."[11] Significantly, Harun Farocki's first film after his expulsion, *Inextinguishable Fire* (1969), about Dow Chemical's involvement in napalm production, was produced hastily at the end of 1968, since WDR had budget to spare.[12] Finally, the situation also benefitted from the fact that, among the so-called "Dritte Programme," WDR, located in Cologne, covered the biggest terrain and hence had a considerably larger budget at its command than the other third channels.

Headed from 1969 to 1980 by Georg Alexander, the WDR film unit of the 1970s pursued three different interlocking agendas. First and foremost, it licensed old and new films, many of which had never been shown—neither on TV nor in German cinemas. Initially two, then later three slots in the weekly schedule were reserved for either existing films or self-produced programmes. Reichart recalls:

> We had a budget for the whole year and knew how much we could buy. And then we went to many festivals and bought new films there: one or two of us went to Cannes, someone else to Venice and yet another one to Montreal or San Sebastian and so on. This way, we informed ourselves about the latest productions. And, of course, we read most of the international film magazines, compiled lists, and then organized screenings. We often went to other countries and watched the films we had on the lists. All over Europe and then also in Asia and America.[13]

10 See Hans Helmut Prinzler, ed., *dffb. Zehn Jahre Deutsche Film- und Fernsehakademie Berlin* (Berlin: dffb, 1976), and Fabian Tietke, "Dies- und jenseits der Bilder—Film und Politik an der dffb 1966–1995. Teil 1: 1966–1969," *dffb Archiv* (2016), https://dffb-archiv.de/editorial/dies-jenseits-bilder-film-politik-dffb-1966-1995.

11 See Josef Schmid, "Intendant Klaus von Bismarck und die Kampagne gegen den 'Rotfunk' WDR," *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 41 (2001): 349–81.

12 See Harun Farocki, *Zehn, zwanzig, dreißig, vierzig. Fragment einer Autobiografie*, ed. Marius Babias and Antje Ehmann (Cologne: Walther König, 2017), 138–40.

13 Michael Baute and Stefan Pethke, "'Nicht nur Filme zeigen.' Ein Gespräch mit Wilfried Reichart über die WDR-Filmredaktion," in *Kunst der Vermittlung*, http://www.kunst-der-vermittlung.de/dossiers/kino-im-fernsehen-wdr/nicht-nur-filme-zeigen/.

The activity of broadcasting the films and making geographically or historically unknown terrain visible for the viewers was often complemented by commissioning educational programmes about the directors and movies, fulfilling the so-called *Bildungsauftrag* (educational mission) prescribed by official regulations. The form of these programmes showed a great variety, and they ranged from interview-based reports about current cinema via monthly or weekly magazines to close readings of individual auteurs or single films. Early on, Enno Patalas had produced a seminal forty-five-minute programme entitled *Ernst Lubitsch. Eine Lektion in Kino* (*A Lesson in Cinema*, 1971) that accompanied a Lubitsch retrospective.[14] Rearranging motifs and recurring patterns in Lubitsch's films and adding a sharp voice-over, Patalas provides a sophisticated structuralist reading without resorting to any academic jargon. In Lubitsch's movies, he recognizes "not works, singular, self-contained, distinctive, but series, processes, progressing in changing mutations."[15] Patalas' engagement with Lubitsch is close to the material and analytically precise, but at the same time theoretically informed and poetic in the way he reveals the consistency of Lubitsch's forms and constellations. In a similar fashion, programmes, often comprising several episodes, were devoted to Fritz Lang or to the British documentary tradition, focusing on Humphrey Jennings and Basil Wright.[16]

Two different temporalities of "film history" in the programming endeavours of the WDR can be distinguished. The first type of programmes, addressing film history in a straightforward manner, has already been mentioned: Large retrospectives of films by Mizoguchi, D. W. Griffith, or specific Hollywood genres as well as of more popular genres and movements like science fiction showed an ongoing engagement with cinema's past. On the other hand, there were programmes that focused on current trends by showing and contextualizing new developments in world cinema. By allowing ample time to assess what was happening in the present, the programmes provided rich material for future film historians. Three examples can illustrate this kind of "anticipated historiography": Wilfried Reichart, one of the founding members of "X-Screen" in Cologne (Wilhelm and Birgit Hein's crucial venue for avant-garde cinema), conceived a multi-part series on "New American Cinema" in 1968, when films by Brakhage, Mekas, and

14 See Hans Helmut Prinzler and Enno Patalas, eds., *Ernst Lubitsch* (Munich and Lucerne: Bucher, 1984), 60–80.

15 Ibid., 62.

16 *Fritz Langs Deutsche Filme* (Klaus Kreimeier, three parts, 1971), and *Telekritik: Über "Song of Ceylon"* (Harun Farocki, 1975).

many others had begun to make a splash in Europe;[17] Adolf Winkelmann and Christian Rittelmeyer—members of the Kasseler Filmkollektiv—shot a three-part series "The Other Cinema," which gives a panorama of the political and aesthetic avant-garde in West Germany in 1969; finally, Peter B. Schumann, one of the experts on Latin American culture and cinema, presented *New Brazilian Cinema* (1968; three parts of thirty minutes each).

To give a more detailed account of the film historiographical approaches, I now want to turn to three programmes that feature different subjects and topics and used significantly different methods, thus highlighting the amplitude of the spectrum of engagement with film history on television.

Straschek: Film Emigration from Nazi Germany

Günter Peter Straschek's *Film Emigration from Nazi Germany* is 289 minutes long. It was broadcast in five episodes in late 1975 by WDR each week on a Tuesday at 9:15 pm—practically prime time. The filmmaker conducted over eighty interviews in Europe and the US.[18]

Straschek's concept for the series was deceptively simple: He attempted to track down and interview as many film people as possible who were forced to emigrate from Germany in 1933 and the following years. In doing this, he was determined not to restrict his research and the interviews to well-known directors or screenwriters. On the contrary, he insisted on covering every activity that had a bearing on film: secretaries, copyright lawyers involved in the film business, cinema owners, etc. In doing so, he explicitly turned against the "widespread barbarism disguised as modernism" with which the fates of the emigrants are graded according to their level of fame, as he noted in a radio programme at the time: "In some circles [Albert] Einstein's emigration is regarded as worse than the gassing of little Abie, of communists, homosexuals, gypsies, and other socalled 'elements.'"[19]

17 Reichart later ran a WDR series called "Experimente," that showcased work by experimental film-makers and video artists.

18 At a shooting ratio of 1:8, around forty hours of film must have been exposed. Unfortunately, no interview material apart from the finished series has been preserved. Thanks to the research done by the curator Julia Friedrich at Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Straschek's *Film Emigration* and his earlier short films have attracted new attention. See her excellent catalogue: Julia Friedrich, ed., *Günter Peter Straschek. Emigration–Film–Politik* (Cologne: Walther König, 2018).

19 Günter Peter Straschek, "Die deutsche Filmemigration nach 1933, Teil 1: Der tägliche Gang zum Konsulat," radio feature, *Sender Freies Berlin* (SFB), broadcast on May 21, 1974.

More than forty interviews made it into the finished programme, including directors like Arthur Gottlein, John Brahm, Anatole Litvak, and Frank Marischka; composers like Bronislaw Kaper; secretaries like Renata Lenart; actors and actresses like Camilla Spira, Herbert Grünbaum, Carl Heinz Jaffé, Gitta Alpàr, Paul Henreid, Dolly Haas, and Ingeborg Theek; screenwriters like Egon Eis, Jan Lustig, Georg Froeschel, and Frederick Kohner; film historians and journalists like Lotte Eisner and Käte and Hans Feld; editors like Lothar Wolff and Rudi Fehr.

When Straschek contacted Werner Dütsch at WDR in 1973, the project had already been on his mind for several years. Its first idea goes back as far as 1967, when Straschek published an article entitled "Before, during and after Schicklgruber" (Schicklgruber was the name of Hitler's father, before he changed his family name) in the journal *kino*:

> The history of the German talkies was determined in part by the film workers fleeing the country: producers, cinematographers, screenwriters, composers, actors, and directors Benedek, Berger, Bernhardt, Brahm, Dieterle, Kosterlitz (Koster), Lang, Litvak, Marton, Ophüls, Oswald, Preminger, Sierck (Sirk), Siodmak, Thiele, Ulmer and Wilder. […] This great loss, unparalleled in the history of film, which the German talkies had to deal with in the early 1930s, was not followed after 1945 by what are termed reparations.[20]

Five years later, in 1972, Straschek planned an interview with William Dieterle, but the director died before they could arrange a meeting. Time was pressing, contemporary witnesses who had personally experienced film emigration more than three decades prior were getting old. In 1973 and 1974, shooting was carried out for the television series in Europe and the United States. The initial plan for four forty-five minute episodes grew during the course of production to five episodes lasting almost one hour each.

Film Emigration is remarkable first and foremost for the time it allows the interviewees to convey their recollections and stories of increasing oppression and humiliation in Germany; of the different stages of exile in Switzerland, France, England; of the difficulties of leaving their home country and trying to start again in a different context with different rules, a different language, and often under dire circumstances. Straschek films the interviews in long and static, uninterrupted takes. As with Straub/Huillet, whose work Straschek saw as representing the greatest possible

20 Günter Peter Straschek, "Vor, während und nach Schicklgruber," *kino* 6 (November 1967): 3.

aesthetic and political integrity, the dynamic occurs elsewhere, above all in speaking—in this case, in the gradual production of words and sentences while remembering. In watching this, we are turned into witnesses who experience how film-makers, screenwriters, editors, actresses, daughters, sons, and secretaries themselves bear witness to departures and arrivals under violent duress, to the difficulties and defeats of exile, of the loss of language and employment. This experience is only possible because the conversations are allowed to develop without cuts, so that apart from the act of speaking and remembering, the gaps and absences are also thoroughly registered. One senses not only the violence of expulsion and exile, but also the double dispossession of language and memory. By giving time and space to both, *Film Emigration from Nazi Germany* is also a gesture of retribution.

In conventional television journalism (then as now) it would be unthinkable to show Anatole Litvak's hesitancy for six whole minutes, without editing, as he tells of his arrest and subsequent interrogation in Berlin: his struggle for words, the pauses and tentative corrections of what he has just said, his gestures (tapping out the pipe in his hand), the attempt to make up for missing terms by explanatory hand movements. Hartmut Bitomsky has pointed to the political dimension of this faltering: "It seems to me that exile is chiefly evinced by a transformation of language and expression, the destruction of vocabulary and grammar while retaining the old ideas and maxims, and a great deal of caution and self-censorship," he writes. "The series is an anthology of how pauses, slips of the tongue, faltering and forgetting are politicized."[21]

In *Film Emigration*, such linguistic and gestural movements between speech and lapsus, making a start and faltering, are embedded in a more comprehensive historiographic movement that extends throughout the five episodes in both time and space. The conversations begin with memories of Germany and Austria, with the reasons for emigration, accompanying the emigrants to their various places of exile and chosen countries (England, France, China, and the US), and looking at the circumstances there before finally returning with a number of the exiles to Europe in the last episode.

Straschek also uses excerpts from films. Again, their duration defies the conventions of journalism: The first episode starts with a three-minute segment from *The Führer Gives a City to the Jews*, the film about the concentration camp Theresienstadt that the actor and KZ inmate Kurt Gerron was forced to make for the Nazis in 1944; an extract from a speech by Joseph

21 Hartmut Bitomsky, "Straschek lässt Emigranten sprechen," *Filmkritik* 227 (November 1975): 527.

Goebbels from February 1933 is shown at much greater length than we are accustomed to see on TV, so that we hear how his defamation anticipates the physical terror carried out against the Jewish population and culminates in the open threat that "one day our patience will run out, and then the Jews will find their impudent, lying traps plugged." In later episodes, Straschek quotes extensively from Hollywood productions in which German emigrants were typecast as Nazis, thus cynically putting them into the role of their persecutors.

Film Emigration exceeded the scope of a TV programme. Together with his wife, Karin Rausch, Straschek also pursued the plan to publish an encyclopaedia of film emigration in two, maybe three volumes. It was supposed to become a comprehensive compendium with biographical entries of all the exiles they could find. Straschek was immersed in the project for over three decades, but the constantly growing reference book was never to appear. "All things considered I must, however, admit," as Straschek said in 1988 during a two-part radio programme on libraries, "that we had taken on much too much; hopelessly overtaxed and toward the end simply drained, we were often at the end of our tether"—also or, indeed, above all because the researches in archives and libraries were for him like "wading through blood and murder."[22]

Bitomsky/Dütsch: *The Golden Age of Cinematography*

If Straschek's *Film Emigration* is a monument of memory and confronted the West German TV audience in 1975 with their (not too distant) past, the WDR film unit was also invested in unburying and recovering earlier moments of film history. *The Golden Age of Cinematography* (Bitomsky/Dütsch) is a three-part documentary on early cinema.[23] It attests to the close links between the WDR film unit and the monthly journal *Filmkritik*. Bitomsky, who directed and wrote the script, had become part of the editorial team and one of its most prolific and polemic authors in 1974.[24] As a director/

22 Günter Peter Straschek, "Besuch mich mal im Lesesaal: Erfahrungen mit dem materiellen Gedächtnis," *Sender Freies Berlin* (SFB), radio feature, part 1, broadcast on March 21, 1988.

23 *Das Goldene Zeitalter der Kinematographie*, dir. Hartmut Bitomsky and Werner Dütsch, script: Hartmit Bitomsky, production: WDR, Cologne, Part I: 44 min, first broadcast September 14, 1976; Part II: 43 min, first broadcast September 21, 1976; Part III: 44 min, first broadcast September 28, 1976.

24 For a comprehensive analysis of Bitomsky's oeuvre, see Frederik Lang, *Hartmut Bitomsky. Die Arbeit eines Kritikers mit Worten und Bildern* (Wien: Synema, 2020).

author at WDR, he had made two programmes on Humphrey Jennings for the editorial department "Telekritik," and a ninety-minute essay on John Ford that accompanied an extensive Ford retrospective.[25] *The Golden Age* was co-directed by Werner Dütsch. Its forty-five-minute segments were devoted to the first twenty years of cinema and its predecessors in the nineteenth century. It was broadcast on September 14, 21, and 28, 1976. Parallel to this, the September issue of *Filmkritik* was entirely devoted to the project. The baroque subtitle of this issue reveals the scope of the endeavour and reveals the Benjaminian subtext that runs through the project: "About inventing, the economy, the interior design, about the medium of traffic and the capital cities, about the discovery and the exhibition of the world, about reproduction, crime and fun, about Méliès and the bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century."[26] Both manifestations of the project, the TV programme as well as the *Filmkritik* issue, are montage pieces compiling a variety of written documentation, photos, and drawings. The nucleus of this impressing fresco are films from the first two decades of cinema whose source material came from the Cinémathèque Gaumont in Paris, the Deutsche Kinemathek Berlin, the British Film Institute, and Degeto,[27] amongst others.[28] They cover a wide spectrum and range from anarchic comedies like *Première sortie d'une cycliste* (Pathé frères, 1907), via documentary views like *Ein Lokomotivtransport der Sächsischen Maschinenfabrik in Chemnitz durch die Straßen am 28.6.1898 nachmittags 2 Uhr* (Guido Seeber, 1898) to early pornography and colonial footage shot in Tangier and Morocco.

Many of the films are shown from beginning to end; this is the primary impulse: to provide evidence of the variety, anarchy, and liveliness of early cinema at a time when the public image of silent films was reduced to the comedies of Laurel and Hardy, Chaplin, and others, that were often ridiculed by adding a Dixieland jazz soundtrack and making fun of their antiquatedness. In broadcasting early cinema on TV, a substantial component of the

25 In chronological order: *Unter einem Himmel schwarz von Häusern von erloschenen Bränden schwarz*, dir./writer Hartmut Bitomsky, production: WDR, Cologne, 34 min, first broadcast October 14, 1975; *Der Schauplatz des Krieges. Das Kino von John Ford*, dir./writer Hartmut Bitomsky, production: WDR, Cologne, 91 min, first broadcast May 12, 1976; *Humphrey Jennings*, dir./writer Hartmut Bitomsky and Angelika Wittlich, production: WDR, Cologne, 67 min, first broadcast November 3, 1976.

26 Hartmut Bitomsky, "Das Goldene Zeitalter der Kinematographie," *Filmkritik* 237 (September 1976): 393.

27 Degeto (an acronym for Deutsche Gesellschaft für Ton und Bild) is the company that acquires and licenses films and other programmes (above all fiction films and TV series) for ARD. It also acts as a producer and co-producer, commissions dubbing of foreign films, etc.

28 For a detailed list, see the production file of the programme at the WDR archives.

turn–of-the-century vernacular culture was transmitted via the medium of popular culture of the 1970s—transcending the realms of academia and the archival world.

Despite the variety and heterogeneity of the films and visual material of the three episodes, the episodes have individual focal points. At the beginning of the first part, after the coloured shots of a serpentine dancer, we see numerous horses pulling blocks of stone into a city. At its end, we are shown footage of the construction of skyscrapers in New York. The big city is (dramaturgically) the framework of this first episode of Bitomsky's programme, and at the same time it is (sociologically, mentally) the context in which early cinema was born. Within this loose framework, consideration about the metropolis (Friedrich Engels about London), about the importance of chase sequences, about the voyeurism of early erotica and the complicity between photography and film with criminology and identification find their place.

In the second episode, cinema is contextualized in the series of inventions of the nineteenth century culminating in the Paris World Exhibition in 1900. In a Marxist inflection, cinema's alliance to colonial wars and the globalization of capitalism is also touched: "Imperialism spreads like infections that, in turn, spread with it. The visual exploitation of the world follows. Cameramen, camouflaged as tourists consuming the visible world, show how blacks paint white socks on their calves before going to work."[29]

In the third episode, programmatically starting with the Lumière film *La Sortie des usines* (1895), the proximities and distance between cinema and labour are explored. *The Golden Age* ends on a melancholy note:

> The era of tinkering, improvising and magic is over. The films are getting longer and they look more elaborate. They begin to be sophisticated and try to control their effect on the audience. The history of cinema as an art begins. Above all, this means that directors and actors and authors can make their mark. And that means, above all: they can calculate their saleability better. The first stars appear whose names are known. For the movie audiences, that means that the ticket prices went up.[30]

As this quote (and many others in the *Filmkritik* issue) shows, Bitomsky and Dütsch argue against any notions of primitivism. Early cinema is not

29 Bitomsky, *Das Goldene Zeitalter der Kinematographie*, 425.

30 Bitomsky/Dütsch, *Das Goldene Zeitalter der Kinemtatographie*, episode 3.

seen as the deficient starting point of a medium and cultural technology that came to perfection in the twentieth century, but as the peak of various technical and cultural inventions of the nineteenth century. This entails a revisionist concept of progress and history that is explicitly stated in the journal. A paragraph entitled "To distance oneself from contempt" formulates a critique of any kind of retrospective feeling of superiority when faced with the early years of the moving pictures:

> However, the cinematograph is not the beginning of film history, but the end of a cultural history of the nineteenth century. And just like we must learn to see the cinematographic apparatus as a variation and a partial composition of different experiences and devices of the nineteenth century, we must also learn to see the films as an archive of images, stories, places, and imaginations of people which nineteenth-century culture had produced.[31]

One of the primary models for Bitomsky's approach is Walter Benjamin; he is referenced early on in the *Filmkritik* issue with quotes that belong to the *Arcades Project*, and the amalgamation of discourses around modernity, art, technology and capitalism is obviously indebted to him (even if the *Arcades Project* was only published a few years later, in 1982). However, as Frederik Lang reminds us in his dissertation on Bitomsky, there is a second, less canonical model for the assemblage of quotes and fragments that, in sum, add up to a cultural historical mosaic: Humphrey Jennings' *Pandæmonium*, which was not published in the mid-1970s, but had been available to Bitomsky in a copy while he was working on his two WDR programmes on Jennings. Similar to Benjamin, Jennings attempted to recount cultural history by compiling and composing quotes and excerpts that span the period from 1660 to 1886. The subtitle of the published version of his comprehensive manuscript is "The Coming of the Machine as Seen by Contemporary Observers." As Jennings specifies in his introduction of the final book, which contains 372 excerpts on almost 400 pages: "In this book I present the imaginative history of the Industrial Revolution. Neither the political history, nor the mechanical history, nor the social history nor the economic history, but the imaginative history."[32]

31 Bitomsky, *Das Goldene Zeitalter der Kinematographie*, 401.

32 Humphrey Jennings, *Pandæmonium 1660–1888: The Coming of the Machine as Seen by Contemporary Observers*, ed. Mary-Lou Jennings and Charles Madge (New York: The Free Press, 1985), xxxv.

If Jennings and Benjamin provided the blueprint of a history told in fragments and quotations, Michel Foucault's concept of archaeology is also present in *The Golden Age*. His *L'Archéologie du savoir* (1969) had been published in German translation in 1973. Following the programmatic statement "TO REWATCH THE OLD FILMS IS, ABOVE ALL, AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL LABOUR," Foucault is quoted at length:

> Archaeology tries to define not the thoughts, representations, images, themes, preoccupations that are concealed or revealed in discourses; but those discourses themselves, those discourses as practices obeying certain rules. It does not treat discourse as *document*, as a sign of something else, as an element that ought to be transparent, but whose unfortunate opacity must often be pierced if one is to reach at last the depth of the essential in the place in which it is held in reserve; it is concerned with discourse in its own volume, as a *monument*. It is not an interpretative discipline: it does not seek another, better-hidden discourse. It refuses to be "allegorical."[33]

In *The Golden Age*, this kind of materialistic discourse analysis is present in privileging presentation and juxtaposition over interpretation. While the *Filmkritik* issue displays the large amount of research in the background, Bitomsky only sparingly uses commentary and quotation in the TV series. The journal, however, hints at the scope of research behind the TV programme. An attempt of illuminating the diverse components of practical and intellectual discourse that came together in the "cinematographe": Marxist theories of commodification and globalization, Freudian insights into scopophilia and voyeurism; a complex reflection of realism, vitalism, and animism.

It is worth noting that this programme was produced two years before the FIAF conference in Brighton with its focus on "Cinema 1900–1906" took place—an event that put early cinema on the map of film historiography and initiated what was (later) termed "New Film History." A number of approaches to the subject in TV programmes—Noël Burch's *Correction, Please* (1979) and his *What Do Those Old Films Mean?* (1985) or Charles Musser's *Before the Nickelodeon* (1982)—may well be seen as televisual epiphenomena of this event. However, they could also indicate that the Brighton event was less singular in its period than it has come to be seen retrospectively. Bitomsky himself continued his foray into early cinema and its rich cultural

33 Bitomsky, *Das Goldene Zeitalter der Kinematographie*, 395. The quote is from Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972), 138–39.

milieu with a four-part programme called *Kulturrevue* (1979), again produced by the WDR film unit and Werner Dütsch.

Film in Germany: Rewriting German Film History

My final example is a series of five to seven programmes that Werner Dütsch conceived in 1981–1982. It was not realized in its projected form, but is highly significant in its take on film history. Two conceptual papers of eleven pages each have survived and give a good impression of the project.[34] The title of the draft (and of the potential series) is "Film in Germany." Neutral as this title may sound, it already implies an argument, as Dütsch writes: "'German film history' is explicitly not mentioned in the title, since it is supposed to be about identifying the white spots left by the previous film historiography."[35] Hence, what is at stake is a revisionist perspective, a counter-narrative that runs against the grain of the established classifications. To specify its impulse, Dütsch first sets up the common historical grid usually attributed to German film history: "1895 to 1913: Early history; 1914 to 1918: The apprentice years; 1919 to 1929: The blossoming of silent cinema; 1929 to 1932: Sound film/realism; 1933 to 1945: Relapse and abuse; since 1945: Bad echoes, not much positive from East or West; since the 1960s, with young and new German cinema, a big recovery."

In this conventional sequence of distinct periods, Dütsch detects "comparisons from biology (growing up)" and "a dubious concept of progress: from early history to the shabby industrial products to auteur cinema." Moreover, he criticizes the fact that the historiographic parameters usually come from different disciplines: industrial history for the early years ("primitive beginnings, improvements, etc."), art history ("willingly employed for silent cinema"), and sociology ("for everything failed—Nazi- and post-war period"). The recipe that is meant to counter these deficits of conventional film historiography is then given. "The series is supposed to enter areas that are missed out in the scheme sketched above—in constant change (of authors, methods, topics)." Suggested topics that Dütsch then briefly lays out include "Cinema in Germany before 1914," "Popular cinema of the 1920s," "Foreign

34 Werner Dütsch, "Film in Deutschland, 1895–1981," programme draft, August 22, 1981. The two versions of the exposé have been preserved in Harun Farocki's estate. Thanks to Antje Ehmann and Harun Farocki GbR. The following quotes are from this draft.

35 In German: "'Deutsche Filmgeschichte' kommt im Titel ausdrücklich nicht vor, soll es doch gerade darum gehen, die weißen Flecken auszumachen, die die Filmgeschichtsschreibung hinterlassen hat."

films in German movie theatres," "The tradition of subsidies/lacking capitalism in cinema," "From Wintergarten to shoebox theatres" ("A 'History' of film spectatorship from 1895 to 1982"), "German cinema and Hollywood," "Silly audiences and bad movies," "Kracauer, taken at his word," "Kracauer II: The redemption of physical reality," "Nazi cinema: Contradictions," "Propaganda and how it potentially does not work," "Middle-class cinema," "Ernst Lubitsch in Germany," "Germany 1945 to 1948: Seen and heard at the movies," "The Selpin case and cinema in the Nazi era."

The second draft, dated May 6, 1982, basically confirms these parameters.[36] Again, Dütsch begins ex negativo by explicitly stating what this series is not aiming at: not at a "systematic account," not "a 'history' (with early history, progress, etc.)," not the usual historiographic approaches. Some of the suggested topics have become more specific, individual authors are projected. A programme with the working title "Cecil B. DeMille meets Konrad Adenauer" is supposed to shed a different light on film culture in Germany in the 1950s, a period that usually connoted "seamless continuation of Nazi film people, provincial fug, 'Americanization.'" Instead, the popularity of cinema in this decade is to be taken seriously—"never have so many people gone to the movies, never were there more film releases." Manfred Blank, a member of the editorial board of *Filmkritik* and the director of WDR programmes on Bresson, Antonioni, and Huillet/Straub, is listed as the projected author.

We are left to speculate about the reasons why this series did not see the light of day. Since Dütsch intended it to be a loose sequence of individual programmes without an explicit serial framing, some existing programmes can be linked to Dütsch's initial plan. *Deutschlandbilder* (1983), for example, is explicitly mentioned in the 1982 outline. Its synopsis reads as follows:

> On a detour via the Kinemathek in Denmark, well over a hundred documentary films from the Nazi era are now accessible at the Kinemathek in Berlin: short films which were produced not primarily for the cinema than for all kinds of teaching. Traffic education, sports, culture, highways, hygiene, country, and people. All in all, films that show how something should be, but whose modest means of production unintentionally make them permeable to documentary aspects (more so than Nazi feature films, for example). Of course, also a lot of ideology (which is easy to decipher today). Enough material for a new documentary film to be compiled.

36 Werner Dütsch, "Film in Deutschland. Überlegungen zu einer Sendereihe," programme draft, May 6, 1982, Harun Farocki GbrR.

As it turned out, Hartmut Bitomsky and Heiner Mühlenbrock, dffb students at the time, took on the task to make this film. Their *Deutschlandbilder* was broadcast in October 1983, and it became the starting point for Bitomsky's trilogy on Germany, together with *Reichsautobahn* (1986) and *Der VW-Komplex* (1989). A programme on Peter Lorre (*Peter Lorre: Endless Exile*), planned to be done by Wolf Eckart Bühler, most likely became *The Double Face of Peter Lorre* (1984), made by Harun Farocki and Felix Hofmann.

The End of Film History on Television

The three projects from the decade between 1975 and 1985 show the spectrum with which film history was approached by means and within the parameters of television. Even if the choice does not claim to be representative, they highlight different types of cinema and different approaches: There is Günter Peter Straschek and his particular take on oral history, carried out in a Straub/Huilletian manner, with compositional rigor and the necessary patience; there is Bitomsky and Dütsch's media archaeological excavation of early cinema and its contextualization in the cultural history of the nineteenth century. And there is Dütsch's elaborated, albeit unrealized, attempt at rewriting German film history by concentrating on individual disjunctive and heterogeneous case studies. What the examples have in common is that they make ample use of the specific capacities of the moving image. Approaching cinema with its own means (images, sound, montage, commentary, duration, etc.), they offered an answer to the conundrum of the "unattainable text" described by Raymond Bellour in 1975.[37] As has often been proclaimed for the video essay of the last decade, they benefited from the potential simultaneity of the film (the object of study) and various modes of commenting (analysis, historiographic thinking, etc.).[38]

How and why did this "Golden Age of Television" end? In the 1980s, a number of factors changed and made it increasingly more difficult to integrate film history in the programme. With the implementation and success of private television—in 1984, RTL and the channel which later became Sat1 started, followed by Pro7, Vox, MTV Germany, and other music channels—audience ratings became more important. In a long interview

37 Raymond Bellour, "The Unattainable Text," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 19–28.

38 On some connections between WDR programmes and the format of the video essay, see Volker Pantenburg, "Towards an Alternative History of the Video Essay: Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR), Cologne," *NECSUS* (Autumn 2017), Section "Audiovisual Essay."

after his retirement, Dütsch recalls the early years, where the quantity of spectators did not have immediate effects on programming:

> Audience figures were measured from time to time, but the discussions were about the quality of the programme, not about these figures. The results had a rather modest influence. Television addresses a huge audience, but at the same time you know nothing of its opinions. You may have satisfactory or unsatisfactory audience figures, but you still do not know how the audience reacted. These surveys did not clarify if someone really liked the programme. […] Ratings started to get important with the increasing success of private broadcasters and then they became more and more relevant. For certain departments, and budgets, it could mean either promotion or death.[39]

Legal issues of copyright also became increasingly complicated since studio archives began to realize that their assets were of monetary value. In 1997, Hans Helmut Prinzler noted: "Film historical work on television is increasingly made more difficult by the inappropriate licensing ideas of rights holders for the compensation of used film clips."[40] To circumvent licensing and expensive rights, Bitomsky devised an elegant *dispositif* by either quoting films via frame enlargements as photographs (*Cinema and Death*, 1988) or resorting to VHS tapes that were explicitly shown on monitors in an experimental setting of live commentary (*Cinema, the Wind and Photography* [1991] and *Kino, Flächen, Bunker* [1991]).

If the presence of film history on television increasingly diminished in the 1980s, cinema's centennial in 1995 provided one last opportunity to approach film history on a large scale: Martina Müller produced *Cinématographe Lumière*, a series in seven parts of around ten minutes each. Harun Farocki focused on one of the first motifs of film history in *Workers Leaving the Factory* (1995), Hartmut Bitomsky directed a workshop in the Nederlands Film Museum on films from the 1910s and transformed it into an essay film called *Playback* (1996).

Today, in retrospect and almost thirty years later, it seems that the celebration of a hundred years of cinema ironically marked the final moment of a serious intellectual discourse on cinema on German public television. The "End of Cinema," much discussed at the time, might in fact have been the "End of Film History on Television."

39 Michael Girke, "Das goldene Zeitalter des Fernsehens. Werner Dütsch im Gespräch mit Michael Girke," unpublished, longer version of the interview published in *Film Dienst*.

40 Prinzler, "Filmgeschichte im Fernsehen," 254.

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