THE PROMISE OF CINEMA

GERMAN FILM THEORY 1907–1933

EDITED BY ANTON KAES, NICHOLAS BAER, AND MICHAEL COWAN

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS

University of California Press, one of the most distinguished university presses in the United States, enriches lives around the world by advancing scholarship in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. Its activities are supported by the UC Press Foundation and by philanthropic contributions from individuals and institutions. For more information, visit www.ucpress.edu.

University of California Press
Oakland, California

For credits, permissions, and acknowledgments, please see page 639.
The editors and publisher are grateful to the copyright owners for permission to republish material in this book. Despite great efforts, it has not been possible in every case to locate all rights holders and estates. The editors and publisher apologize in advance for any unintended errors and omissions, which they will seek to correct in future printing. Please address all inquiries to: University of California Press, 155 Grand Avenue, Suite 400, Oakland, California 94612.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Names: Kaes, Anton, editor. | Baer, Nicholas, 1985–editor. | Cowan, Michael J., 1971–editor.
Title: The promise of cinema: German film theory, 1907–1933 / edited by Anton Kaes, Nicholas Baer, Michael Cowan.
Other titles: Weimar and now ; 49.
Description: Oakland, California : University of California Press, [2016]. | "2016 | Series: Weimar and now: German cultural criticism ; 49 | Includes bibliographical reference.
Identifiers: LCCN 2015049570| ISBN 9780520219076 (cloth : alk. paper) | ISBN 9780520219083 (pbk. : alk. paper) | ISBN 9780520962439 (ebook).
Subjects: LCSH: Motion pictures—Germany—History—20th century. | Film criticism—Germany. | Motion pictures—History—20th century. | Film criticism.
Classification: LCC PN1993.5.G3 P765 2016 | DDC 791. 430943—dc23
LC record available at http://lccn.loc.gov/2015049570

Manufactured in the United States of America

25 24 23 22 21 20 19 18 17 16
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of ANSI/NISO Z39.48–1992 (R 2002) (*Permanence of Paper*).

Contents

8. Image Wars

9. The Specter of Hollywood

10. Cinephilia and the Cult of Stars

11. The Mobilization of the Masses

12. Chiffres of Modernity

SECTION THREE. CONFIGURATIONS OF A MEDIUM

13. The Expressionist Turn

14. Avant-Garde and Industry

15. The Aesthetics of Silent Film

16. Film as Knowledge and Persuasion

17. Sound Waves

18. Technology and the Future of the Past

INTRODUCTION

Even if the clattering of the film projectors disappears, there will be something—I firmly believe—"that functions like cinema."

Alexander Kluge, Cinema Stories (2007)

THE RISE OF DIGITAL MEDIA has provoked no shortage of debates about what cinema has been and will become. To some observers, film seems to be a thing of the past, an artifact of twentieth-century visual culture, a relic of the Fordist era with its industrial rhythms and distinct division of labor and leisure. Others point to cinema's unanticipated afterlives in film festivals and retrospectives, compilation films and museum installations, online archives and virtual cinephilic communities. From the latter perspective, cinema is not so much disappearing as morphing into exciting new forms and hybrids, whose uncharted trajectories bear an uncanny resemblance to the cinema's beginnings more than a hundred years ago. Looking back on the first decades of the twentieth century, we find a rich culture of theoretical speculation, as critics imagined the possible futures of what was then a "new medium." In this book, we hope to give readers a sense of these diverse futures of the past by reanimating the *promises* once associated with cinema—both those that were realized and those, in Siegfried Kracauer's words, that "history did not see fit to explore."[1]

The Promise of Cinema thus reconceives film theory as a field of possibilities, expectations, and propositions. Whereas scholars have conventionally viewed the corpus of "classical film theory" as concerned with defining the medium's specific, essential properties, this book highlights the multiple *potentialities* that cinema represented for film theorists, whose writings, as Rudolf Arnheim suggested, referred "not so much to what *is* as to what *can be* or *ought to be*."[2] Theorization of film, we contend, often occurred in the subjunctive rather than the indicative mood—one oriented toward an unknown, empirically unverifiable future that might diverge from all prior historical experience. In this regard, film theory exemplifies what Reinhart Koselleck has characterized as the modern period's expanding chasm between the "space of experience" and the "horizon of expectation."[3] Reconstructing a wide-ranging set of debates from 1907 to 1933, this sourcebook offers a glimpse into cinema's historical horizons, which were inseparable from the broader horizons of modernity as such.

1. Siegfried Kracauer, *History: The Last Things Before the Last* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener, 1995), 6.

2. Rudolf Arnheim, "Preface to the 1957 Edition," in *Film as Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), n.p. Emphases added.

3. Reinhart Koselleck, "'Space of Experience' and 'Horizon of Expectation': Two Historical Categories," in *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time,* trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 255–75.

The German-speaking world was one of the leading sites for theorizing the promise of cinema in the early twentieth century, as names such as Arnheim, Béla Balázs, Walter Benjamin, Bertolt Brecht, Lotte Eisner, Kracauer, and Hans Richter attest. Despite translations of seminal works by these figures, however, we still have no collection of early German film theory to complement existing sourcebooks in English devoted to the Chinese, Czech, French, and Russian contexts.[4] Assembling 278 texts, nearly all of which appear in English for the first time, this volume not only features lesser-known essays by the aforementioned figures but also situates their works within a much wider nexus of writings on film from the period—writings by a broad range of authors, including actors and filmmakers, journalists and philosophers, activists and government officials, doctors and educators, and many other voices that have come down to us only as "anonymous."

• • •

The project of expanding "film theory" beyond established figures was both motivated and facilitated by the shifts in our media environment, where digital collections and online resources are affording us unprecedented access to a searchable, ever-growing archive of materials beyond traditional canons. But this decision to broaden the material base also underlies an implicit argument about how we should understand and approach film theory itself. Amidst recent debates across the humanities on the origins, history, and fate of theory,[5] D.N. Rodowick has historicized the concept of film theory, arguing that the term's common usage has tended to "superimpose retroactively a picture of theory on a complex range of conceptual activities that may not have characterized themselves as such."[6] For Rodowick, what is called "classical film theory"—unlike the semiotic and psychoanalytical theories of later decades—can best be understood as an open set of interrogations, which sought to comprehend a medium that was itself unsettling established aesthetic categories. While sharing Rodowick's interest in reconceiving the history of film theory, we nonetheless diverge from his analysis in two notable ways. Whereas Rodowick seeks to replace the paradigm of "classical film theory" with what he calls an "aesthetic discourse"—one that extends from early studies by Vachel Lindsay and Hugo Münsterberg to the postwar writings of André Bazin and Kracauer—the present volume understands film theory as an entire network of discourses that approached film not only as a form of art and entertainment but also as a medium of culture, science, education, training, politics, philosophy, and governmentality. Furthermore, in contrast to Rodowick, who restricts his discussion mainly to well-known figures, we suggest that the contributions of so-called classical film theorists can best be read as part of a large and contentious culture of writing about film during the medium's first decades.

Early writings on film were grappling with an acute medial transformation, one that was fundamentally challenging prior frameworks of experience and knowledge. Appearing long before film study and theory were institutionalized—that is, when commentators necessarily came from a wide range of educational and professional backgrounds—

4. See George S. Semsel, Xia Hong, and Hou Jianping, eds., *Chinese Film Theory: A Guide to the New Era* (New York: Praeger, 1990); Jaroslav Anděl and Petr Szczepanik, eds., *Cinema All the Time: An Anthology of Czech Film Theory and Criticism, 1908–1939* (Prague: National Film Archive, 2008); Richard Abel, ed., *French Film Theory and Criticism: A History/Anthology, 1907–1939* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988); and Richard Taylor and Ian Christie, eds., *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896–1939* (London/New York: Routledge, 1988).

5. See, for example, Andrew Cole, *The Birth of Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (New York: Basic Books, 2003); and Ian Hunter, "The History of Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 32, no. 4 (2006): 78–112.

6. D.N. Rodowick, *Elegy for Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 71.

these writings were characterized less by systematic and exhaustive investigation than by speculative, heterogeneous, and open-ended exploration.[7] Although known primarily for their book-length studies, Arnheim, Balázs, Eisner, and Kracauer all began as film critics in the 1920s, publishing hundreds of texts in newspapers and journals—texts that were passionately "in the moment," responding to new films, emerging stars, technological and aesthetic developments, inaugural events, special screenings, censorship cases, economic crises, and political exigencies. Contributing to far-reaching and ever-shifting debates, these texts were adaptive and provisional in their approaches and styles of prose, lacking any fixed or dominant epistemological framework and engaging in a dynamic interplay with a medium that was itself *in statu nascendi*.

• • •

Reflecting this open-ended mode of early writing about cinema, Béla Balázs advanced the following understanding of "theory" in the preface to *Der sichtbare Mensch oder die Kultur des Films* (*Visible Man or the Culture of Film*, 1924):

> Theory opens up the broad vistas of *freedom* for every art. It is the road map for those who roam among the arts, showing them pathways and opportunities, so that what appeared to be iron necessity stands unmasked as one random route among a hundred others. It is theory that gives us the courage to undertake Columbus-like voyages of exploration and turns every step into a freely chosen act.[8]

Setting aside the imperialist resonances of the phrase "Columbus-like voyages"—and the entanglement of cinema and colonial ideology is more than evident in Balázs's contention that cinema will produce a "uniform type of the white race" throughout the world[9]—Balázs makes a remarkable argument here: far from uncovering inherent laws, "theory" is what first *enables exploration,* indicating the arbitrariness of current practices and revealing *alternative possibilities.* Theory is thus a "road map" not in the sense of a mathematical representation of organized space but rather in the sense of a creation of concepts that both liberates art and inspires its movement into unknown territories. This temporal structure—theory before rather than after the perfection of its object, theory as a facilitator of exploration rather than as a form of retrospective mastery—is something that Balázs shares with thinkers such as Kracauer, whose essay "Photography" (1927) would likewise attribute to consciousness the task of establishing "the *provisional status* of all given configurations."[10] But this interrogative gestus is also evident in the writings of countless other contemporaries across a wide variety of realms, whose theorization of cinema is similarly driven by what Robert Musil, in *The Man without Qualities,* famously called "a sense of possibility" (Möglichkeitssinn)—that is, a concern less with cinema in its current, often-compromised forms than with what it might become.

---

7. On this point, see also Francesco Casetti, "Theory, Post-theory, Neo-theories: Changes in Discourses, Changes in Objects," *CiNéMAS* 17, nos. 2–3 (Spring 2007): 33–45; and "Roundtable on the Return to Classical Film Theory," *October* 148 (Spring 2014): 5–26.

8. Béla Balázs, *Visible Man,* trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Early Film Theory:* Visible Man *and* The Spirit of Film, ed. Erica Carter (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 3.

9. Ibid., 14. In *Theory of the Film* (1948), Balázs would revise this passage, instead invoking "an international human type"; Balázs, *Theory of the Film: Character and Growth of a New Art,* trans. Edith Bone (London: Dennis Dobson, 1952), 45. See also Erica Carter, "Introduction," in Balázs, *Early Film Theory,* xxxviii.

10. Siegfried Kracauer, "Photography," in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays,* ed. and trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 62. Emphasis in the original.

This is not to argue that we should make no distinction between dedicated film critics and writers from other professional spheres whose interest in cinema was motivated by other questions. For one thing, readers will quickly notice in the following pages how many of those other voices, particularly as they intersected with the so-called *Kinoreform* movement (see chapter 7), greeted film with ambivalence or even downright hostility, regarding the new medium as a symptom of the broader ills and pathologies of modern society. It bears emphasizing, however, that even as such commentators disparaged film's actual, commercially driven uses, most of them maintained a tacit investment in the medium's prospects, whether in the realms of art, politics, science, or education. And it is the wager of this book that every one of these overlooked texts contains insights that might be called "theoretical." While this concept of theory is rarely addressed as explicitly as it is by Balázs, it is always present in a dormant sense—for example, in Berthold Viertel's 1910 account (no. 32) of the German and Austrian emperors watching themselves on film, where cinema's ability to challenge political sovereignty ("Is one allowed to copy majesty so wantonly? Is it not too much for one moment to have two, no, four kings?") is no less palpable than it will be a quarter century later in Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" (1936).

Early commentators adopted a variety of positions vis-à-vis cinema's present and future, its actual and potential uses, its dangers and utopian promise. But nearly all of them shared a fundamental sense that film was effecting and registering a revolution in virtually every area of life: the experience of space, time, and the body; the articulation of class, gender, and race; sexuality and social mores; the partition of private and public spheres; politics and forms of mobilization; the definition and functions of art; the ways that knowledge could be generated, applied, and disseminated; and the construction of "reality" itself. The debates here address cinema's role as both catalyst and seismograph of a host of massive and abrupt transformations that characterize German modernity: industrialization and urbanism; the emergence of a mass culture of consumption and distraction; the increasing precariousness of the cultural and intellectual elite; the multiple traumas of war, defeat, and the loss of colonies; failed revolution and new state-formation; and, finally, economic and political crisis. More than any other cultural form, cinema appeared as inextricably linked to processes of modernization, and the texts collected here view film as an indicator of the course that modernity was taking—and even as a signal of the paths that could yet be taken.

• • •

The temporal parameters of modernity are often contested, and the dates of the present volume deserve more precise explanation. While the "birth" of German cinema has traditionally been dated according to the first public screening of Bioskop films by the Skladanowsky brothers in Berlin's Wintergarten on November 1, 1895, most scholars today agree that such dates are at best heuristic placeholders and at worst misrepresentations of a medium that emerged from myriad technological, performative, and intellectual contexts. Such contexts were hardly rendered obsolete overnight, and some film historians have gone so far as to argue that the very term *cinema* is a misnomer for what, until shortly before 1910, was understood as the latest variation of long-familiar cultural forms and practices.[11] Thus, the awareness that cinema was becom-

11. André Gaudreault, "The Culture Broth and the Froth of Cultures of So-Called Early Cinema," in *A Companion to Early Cinema,* ed. Gaudreault, Nicolas Dulac, and Santiago Hidalgo (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 15–31.

ing a major and enduring force in public life—and consequently that something like a theory of this new medium was necessary—arose gradually and unevenly across different contexts.

For the purposes of this volume, 1907 offers a convenient starting date because it is the year when the first film journals were founded in both Germany and Austria. Among these journals, the earliest and most notable was *Der Kinematograph* (1907–35), published by Eduard Lintz in Düsseldorf. In its inaugural issue, on January 6, 1907, the editorial and publishing staff identified the publication as an "organ that reports on the latest achievements, shares information with a circle of interested parties on new technological developments, and also publishes important news from the realm of praxis."[12] The commercial success of *Der Kinematograph* quickly led to the founding of additional journals devoted to film, among them the *Erste Internationale Film-Zeitung* (Berlin, 1907–20), *Kinematographische Rundschau* (Vienna, 1907–21), and *Lichtbild-Bühne* (Berlin, 1908–39). As such publications suggest, it was evident by this point that film *mattered,* and understanding what cinema could become was now firmly on the agenda of public discourse.[13]

In contrast, the ending date of our volume was dictated by wider political developments. The National Socialists' seizure of power in 1933 forced countless Jewish and leftist film theorists to flee Germany, among them Arnheim, Benjamin, Brecht, Eisner, Kracauer, and Richter. (Balázs remained in the Soviet Union, where he had gone in 1931.) While these exiled figures would continue to write about film in new national and linguistic contexts, the German-speaking world, as Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener note, "lost its pre-eminent position" in the international debate about film.[14] Following the Nazi regime's systematic appropriation of cinema for diversion, propaganda, and warmongering, the medium's promise also appeared to have been irrevocably betrayed. At the height of its power in the 1940s, cinema had failed to engage with the Holocaust, as Jean-Luc Godard argues in his *Histoire(s) du cinéma,* stifling rather than enabling forms of resistance to the atrocities occurring across Europe. Not until a few decades later could one again invoke "German film theory," now in relation to figures such as Alexander Kluge and Hans Magnus Enzensberger and journals including *Filmkritik* (1957–84) and *Frauen und Film* (1974–).

• • •

In order to offer a "road map"—to borrow Balázs's term—through the period thus delimited, this book is divided into three sections of six chapters each. Arranged according to a loose and overlapping chronological progression, the sections all examine questions concerning cinema's promise and possibilities. Section 1 brings together writings that sought to comprehend cinema's imbrications with *transformations of experience.* Though disparate in their specific concerns, these texts all reacted to the sense that cinema was uniquely poised to register and assimilate myriad aspects of modern life. Chapter 1 examines cinema's power to address the senses: to dazzle spectators with magical displays, jolt them with nervous thrills, or confound them with optical illusions. Recalling the

12. Redaktion und Verlag, "Geleit-Worte," *Der Kinematograph* no. 1 (January 6, 1907).

13. See Anton Kaes, ed., *Kino-Debatte: Texte zum Verhältnis von Literatur und Film, 1909–1929* (Munich: DTV, 1978); Sabine Hake, *The Cinema's Third Machine: Writing on Film in Germany, 1907–1933* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1993); Helmut H. Diederichs, *Frühgeschichte deutscher Filmtheorie: Ihre Entstehung und Entwicklung bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg* (Habilitation, University of Frankfurt, 1996).

14. Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener, *Film Theory: An Introduction through the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 2.

nineteenth-century visual culture studied by Jonathan Crary,[15] all of these texts assume a thoroughly *embodied* spectator, one both fallible and eminently excitable. More often than not, "sense perception" meant vision, of course, and a number of texts included here attempt to work through the modes of "visual pleasure" (Serner, no. 15) offered by the new medium.

Chapters 2 and 3 consider the ways in which film was linked to shifting conceptions of space and time. Contemporary observers were fascinated by cinema's ability to transport spectators to foreign and even extraterrestrial spaces, but they also pinned divergent hopes on the medium's status as what Alexander Kluge would later call a "time machine"[16]—one able to record segments of time, fragment them through montage, and stretch or contract them through the techniques of slow motion and time lapse. These reflections on space and time are followed in chapter 4 by a set of texts examining what Friedrich Sieburg called "the magic of the body" (no. 52), that is, the heightened visibility and affective power of bodies shown on the silent screen. Chapter 5 presents a range of texts on film spectatorship and sites of exhibition, from early, working-class *Kientopps* (Döblin, no. 63) to erotic cinemas (Tucholsky, no. 71) to the gentrified picture palaces of the 1920s (Pinthus, no. 74). Chapter 6 concludes the section with a number of texts that consider cinema with respect to existing aesthetic norms, either by transforming the cinema into a form of art (e.g., the debates around the *Autorenfilm*) or by adapting the very definition of art to a modern age defined by speed, concision, and fragmentation (Friedell, no. 78).

Section 2 turns to questions of *film culture and politics.* Beginning with the Kinoreform movement, in which psychologists, educators, and moral leaders first sought to regulate film's influence, especially over women and youth (chapter 7), the section goes on to examine cinema's status vis-à-vis state power (chapter 8), from the "The German Kaiser in Film" (no. 108) through the propaganda battles of World War I to the censorship cases of the late Weimar Republic. Chapter 9 focuses on the precarious position of the German film industry in the face of Hollywood's ever-increasing hegemony, and chapter 10 considers audience investment in the institution of cinema and its star system, highlighting the entertainment industry's massive influence in Weimar democracy. Chapter 11 follows these discussions with writings on the roles cinema could play in mass mobilization, whether by socialist revolutionaries or by members of the emerging Nazi Party. Lastly, chapter 12 steps back to examine seminal reflections on film as a medium of philosophical thought, one that could facilitate broader insights into the modern condition.

Section 3 brings together essays that strove to comprehend various *configurations of the medium,* especially with regard to its evolving technological and aesthetic potentials. In chapter 13, we encounter discussions of expressionism, dream states, and the fantastic, all of which probe the possibilities of film as a modernist, anti-mimetic medium. Chapter 14 examines the discourse around the radical uses of cinema by the avant-garde as it made "absolute films" and entered into a fraught relationship with the film industry. In chapter 15, we examine aspects of silent film aesthetics, including set design, lighting, and camera technique. Chapter 16's selections approach the cinema as an instrument of knowledge and persuasion in science, culture, and

15. Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990).

16. Alexander Kluge, "Zu einer Stein-Konstruktion," in *Foto-Assemblagen*, ed. Udo Klückmann, Klaus Heinrich, et al. (Berlin: Medusa, 1979), 29.

commerce. We turn in chapter 17 to the major technological shift of the late 1920s: the advent of sound. Finally, chapter 18 assembles reflections on film technologies, their histories, and their possible futures. Resonating with recent studies in media archaeology, this chapter features early explorations of television, 3-D, color, and expanded cinema.

• • •

Providing a heuristic analytical grid, these sections and chapters represent an initial attempt to map a vast area of writing, much of which is still unexplored.[17] While they could, of course, be read in any sequence, our division seeks to convey broad, if uneven, discursive shifts. The earliest writings on cinema were overwhelmingly concerned with film's role as a gauge of changing modes of experience. Writers from the Wilhelmine period sought to grasp the newness of cinema as a representational form, its ability to render modernity legible, and the challenge that its rapid and disjunctive aesthetics posed to the traditional arts. During the Great War, politics became an explicit and dominant concern, and commentators began to think intensely about cinema's relation to the masses, its potential as a tool of mobilization and political propaganda, and its role in forging national communities and collective identities. Finally, the 1920s, a decade in which film attained greater cultural legitimacy, saw efforts to define film's specific qualities and to forge a language and repertoire of aesthetic means (e.g., camera movement, montage) that would lend cinema a unique identity among the arts. At the same time, this decade of film history—one also marked by greater institutionalization and professionalization—witnessed the emergence of new forums for specialized thinking about film technologies, avant-garde experimentation, and cinema's uses in science, industry, and advertising.

This temporal division should not suggest that there was no media theorizing or political thinking before the First World War nor that the imbrications of cinema and modern experience became any less important in later years (a proposition refuted by Benjamin's work alone). Rather, we are acknowledging that specific sets of concerns moved to the fore at particular historical junctures. The three sections of this book trace large-scale shifts in film discourse, but they also include numerous texts that look backward and forward in order to call attention to the impossibility of confining any single mode of interrogation to rigid temporal parameters. Organized around historical debates or theoretical issues, the chapters in this volume present a full trajectory of responses to particular issues. Following Kracauer, one might refer to the series of texts in the various chapters as "sequences," that is, "successive 'solutions' of problems originating with some need and touching off the whole series."[18] By arranging the texts into these discrete temporal "sequences" (rather than according to an overall chronology), we hope not only to render the volume's materials conceptually coherent and manageable for readers but also to acknowledge each historical moment's heterogeneity and *Ungleichzeitigkeit*

17. The archive for German writings on film in the period covered by this book is immense; in a 1930 brochure on German trade publications, Erwin Ackerknecht listed 160 film periodicals, about half of which are now available on microfilm. These titles include influential trade papers that appeared daily in the late 1920s, such as *Der Kinematograph* (1907–35) and the *Film-Kurier* (1919–45), as well as fan magazines that often stopped after just a few issues. In addition to these film-related publications, most newspapers (there were sixty daily papers in Berlin alone) and lifestyle magazines featured film reviews and articles about cinema. The present book can only offer a glimpse into the overwhelming mass of archival sources; most still await discovery.

18. Kracauer, *History,* 144. See also George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962).

(nonsimultaneity)—a concept theorized in the interwar years by German thinkers such as Wilhelm Pinder, Erwin Panofsky, and Ernst Bloch.[19]

Within the volume's eighteen chapters, all texts are introduced with editors' comments, which highlight their contributions to the theorization of cinema's promise and possibilities in the early twentieth century. Resisting any unifying generalizations, these comments signal some of the events, debates, and other immediate circumstances to which the authors were responding. Our interest in recovering the historical dimensions of the texts is matched, however, by a commitment to conveying their relevance today. Following Walter Benjamin's argument in *The Arcades Project* that "the true method of making things present is to represent them in our space (not to represent ourselves in their space),"[20] we forego any attempt at self-transposition into the past and instead analyze early-twentieth-century documents in dialogue with contemporary issues. Our hope is that the texts throughout this sourcebook will continue to gain new, unanticipated meanings, illuminating our ever-shifting media environment and its attendant theoretical concerns.[21]

• • •

With its dual temporal focus on the historicity and actuality of early-twentieth-century texts, the present volume seeks to contribute to understandings of German film theory in three major ways. First, it allows us to see the broader context in which cinema could appear to well-known theorists as a key cultural form of modernity. Alongside Benjamin's and Kracauer's analyses of cinema's "shocks" and "distractions," we encounter a vast array of writings on cinema and modernity from other commentators, such as government advisors, sociologists, or advertising theorists. In these writings, words like *tempo, nervousness, thrill, astonishment,* and *novelty* abound as efforts to understand the transformations of everyday life that modernity had wrought. If many of these texts strike us today as reactionary, others stand out for their euphoric tone. But the important point—and the one that becomes visible with sufficient historical distance and a large enough archival base—is that all the authors were observing the *same* phenomena. From Alfred Döblin's description of working-class audiences "spellbound" by the cinema's "white eye" in 1909 (no. 63) to Wilhelm Stapel's anxious observations on the revolutionary "homo cinematicus" in 1919 (no. 103) to Ernst Jünger's reactionary-modernist reflections on the new audience of mass types in 1932 (no. 188), the authors of nearly all the texts collected here understood film as a medium of modernity, one deeply implicated in the emergence and workings of twentieth-century mass culture.

Second, this expanded range of articles allows readers to better comprehend the cultural and linguistic specificity of writings by Balázs and other well-known theorists who were well acquainted with wider debates on cinema in Germany and Austria. Such debates have transnational ramifications, and one can draw links, for example, between the emergence of cinema reform movements in Germany and America; the rise of the avant-garde in Germany, France, and Holland; or the forging of a left-wing film culture

19. See Wilhelm Pinder, *Das Problem der Generation in der Kunstgeschichte Europas* (Berlin: Frankfurter Verlags-Anstalt, 1926); Erwin Panofsky, "Reflections on Historical Time," trans. Johanna Bauman, *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 4 (2004): 691–701; and Ernst Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times*, trans. Neville and Stephen Plaice (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

20. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project,* trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 206.

21. On the goal of conveying both the historicity and actuality of film theory, see also Johannes von Moltke, "Out of the Past: Classical Film Theory," *Screen* 55, no. 3 (Autumn 2014): 398–403.

in Germany and the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, many of the epistemological framings of German-language debates were also informed by specific intellectual traditions such as *Kultur* (culture) and *Bildung* (education), both of which had been valorized and discussed extensively since the German Enlightenment. When Balázs titled his study *Visible Man or the Culture of Film,* for example, he understood the term *Kultur* according to a Germanic tradition linking *Kultur* to the idea of *Bildung* as the holistic cultivation of an ensemble of human faculties; it was precisely this organic notion of *Kultur* that the technological medium of film had seemed to threaten. Similarly, the Schillerian concept of aesthetic education arguably informed debates among German educators and psychologists about the effects of cinema on child development (see chapter 7); the efforts of the *Kulturfilm,* a German variant of documentary based on ideals of experiential education (chapter 16); and Balázs's 1925 speech to an annual conference of educators on the *Bildungswerte* (educational values) of film art (chapter 4, no. 54). The terms *Kultur* and *Bildung* provide just two examples of the many latent "protocols" of early German film theory, which become visible only when theoretical writings are reinserted into their cultural-linguistic context.

Third, the scope of this volume allows readers to see more clearly the ways in which early film theory was always already a form of media theory—one whose open, interrogative quality anticipates our efforts to assimilate "new media" today. Many of the key topics of contemporary media studies—animation, immersion and distraction, participation and interactivity, remediation and convergence, institutional and nontheatrical uses of cinema, amateur filmmaking and fan practices, democracy and mass media—were already part of early film-theoretical discussion and can be fruitfully teased out of the texts in this volume. Such thoughts and questions were not entirely new even in the 1910s and '20s; most of them can be traced back to the visual and media culture of the nineteenth century and even before.[22] But our present environment of proliferating screens and media platforms allows these aspects of early film culture to come to the fore in new ways, revealing the latent futures harbored within archives. The present volume thus embraces an understanding of the contemporary moment that Thomas Elsaesser describes as an ever-shifting "enunciative position" from which the past is constantly reorganized in constellation with present concerns.[23] Eschewing any approach that assumes we know what the cinema is, has been, and will become, this volume features historical writings that explore cinema's manifold horizons—writings that suggest actual futures, as well as the many roads not taken.

• • •

Although the three categories outlined above—film and modernity, film and cultural context, and film and media theory—loosely correspond to our section divisions, each one also cuts across the book as a whole. This means, of course, that the form of the present collection is provisional, its categorizations necessarily tentative. Much as Aby Warburg perpetually reorganized his *Mnemosyne Atlas* in the 1920s, we have gathered, arranged, and

22. Siegfried Zielinski has been particularly insistent on this point. See his *Deep Time of the Media: Toward an Archaeology of Hearing and Seeing by Technical Means,* trans. Gloria Custance (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 7–8. See also Erkki Huhtamo, "Dismantling the Fairy Engine: Media Archaeology as Topos Study," in *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications,* ed. Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 44–45; and Jussi Parikka, *What is Media Archaeology?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), 13.

23. Thomas Elsaesser, "The New Film History as Media Archaeology," *CiNéMAS* 14, nos. 2–3 (2004): 75–117; here 78.

repeatedly repositioned the texts before settling on a working assemblage. In this regard, we have adopted the role of curators who place artifacts into creative constellations; while we suggest pathways through the book's immense archive of materials, we also encourage readers to establish their own links cutting across the various sections and chapters.

To offer one example: though many of the texts reproduced here embrace notions of artistic and medial "specificity" as part of an effort to legitimate cinema, one could also construct an entirely different genealogy of conceptualizing cinema in terms of intermediality. Such a trajectory would include all of the early efforts—palpable throughout chapter 1—to position cinema with respect to existing forms of visual culture, such as variety shows, naturalist theater, sports, the circus, amusement parks, and phantasmagoric illusions. But it would also include the myriad reflections of the avant-garde on cinema as a form of "painting with time" (Walter Ruttmann, no. 201) or "music for the eyes" (Bernhard Diebold, no. 202); experiments with film and modern dance (Rudolf von Laban, no. 58); writings on mixed media (Kurt Weisse, no. 4; Heinrich Strobel, no. 249); and efforts to position cinema with respect to emerging media such as radio (Herbert Jhering, no. 267; Kurt Weill, no. 268) and television (which Rudolf Arnheim discussed under the name "Radio-Film" in 1932; no. 276).[24]

An anthology informed by a narrower definition of film theory might limit itself to discussions of medium specificity and "film as art," or to canonical theorists and texts. But in our era of expanded audiovisual media and their concomitant genealogies, we are aware that such a shared consensus can no longer—if it ever could—be taken for granted. Cinema is and was many things. It was defined and redefined by countless voices, projects, and relationalities. For any sourcebook seeking to understand what German film theory might mean for us today—what sorts of promises it still holds, "even if the clattering of the film projectors disappears"—it is imperative to take seriously the anonymous murmuring that subtended "classical film theory," lending it the expansive relevance and vitality that it always possessed.

24. On the intermedial concerns of classical film theorists, see Doron Galili, "Intermedial Thought in Classical Film Theory: Balázs, Arnheim, and Benjamin on Film and Radio," *Germanic Review* 88, no. 4 (2013): 391–99.