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Alternative

Film Culture in Inter-War Britain

JAMIE SEXTON

European film culture in the inter-war period has long been celebrated for fostering the first wave of avant-garde filmmaking. But many studies have focused upon France, Germany and the Soviet Union, ignoring the activity of the film industry in Britain. This is the first book-length study of a number of currents which opposed mainstream filmmaking and which championed film as an intellectual, modern art.

It traces the growth of new approaches to film through exhibition and writing on cinema, and looks at how this cultural formation shaped filmmaking. As such, it takes an interdisciplinary approach in which a study of independent filmmaking in this era is firmly placed within a cultural context, linking the ways in which films were presented, received and produced.

ALTERNATIVE FILM CULTURE IN INTER-WAR BRITAIN

In the first book-length study to concentrate specifically on Britain, Jamie Sexton examines the rise of avant-garde and experimental filmmaking between the wars. The book provides a detailed view of how modernist and anti-mainstream currents emerged in the film industry.

It traces the growth of new approaches to film through exhibition and writing on cinema, and looks at how this cultural formation shaped filmmaking. As such, it takes an interdisciplinary approach in which a study of independent filmmaking in this era is firmly placed within a cultural context, linking the ways in which films were presented, received and produced.

Sexton combines history with analysis of the films themselves, and looks at the operations of a key contemporary institution, the original Film Society.

Jamie Sexton is Lecturer in Film Studies in the University of Wales, Aberystwyth. His other books include *Cult Cinema: An Introduction* (with Ernest Mathijs, forthcoming 2009); *Experimental British Television* (edited with Laura Mulvey, 2007); *Music, Sound and Multimedia* (edited, 2007).

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Alternative Film Culture in Inter-War Britain

Jamie Sexton

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Introduction

From Avant-Garde Film to Alternative Film Culture

In earlier, more canonical accounts of avant-garde film practice in the inter-war period, a number of 'artist' filmmakers, as well as predominant artistic 'movements', were privileged, and these mainly stemmed from France, Germany and the Soviet Union, with a few isolated examples existing outside such countries.¹ In France and Germany, films such as *Ballet Mécanique* (Léger and Murphy, France, 1924), *Entr'acte* (Clair, France, 1924) and *Ghosts Before Breakfast* (Richter, Germany, 1928) were connected with already recognized artists who had worked in other media and who were associated with avant-garde movements such as Cubism and Dada. In the Soviet Union the situation was slightly different, in that many of the films celebrated were narrative features, yet there were also links with pre-existing avant-garde traditions (e.g. Eisenstein's involvement with the Moscow Proletkult). More importantly, however, these films were emerging from fierce theoretical debates about the nature and purpose of cinema. A few narrative films from outside the Soviet Union, often made within commercial frameworks, have also been canonized within histories and accounts of avant-garde film of the 1920s and 1930s, such as Weine's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Germany, 1919) and Gance's *La Roue* (France, 1922).

With the exception of the work produced by Len Lye in the 1930s, Britain has largely been absent from such 'canonical' accounts. My book attempts to chart a significant form of alternative film culture and associated productions in Britain during the inter-war period. Such an account necessarily has to move away from more traditional conceptions of a filmic 'avant-garde', beset as it is by a number of problems.

The Avant-Garde and Problems of Definition

The term 'avant-garde' is certainly not straightforward, but is, as Ian Christie has argued, 'an essentially contested concept, always open to dispute or redefinition'.² In the 1970s, when a new historical focus on avant-garde filmmaking emerged, it tended to be distinguished from mainstream cinema by a 'radical otherness'.³ Attention was paid to avant-garde filmmaking representing an alternative tradition of cinema, often focused upon the work of small-scale, independent productions by individual (or small groups of) artists. Thus, there was a distinction between commercialism and a serious, less compromised, exploration of the medium. Connected to such a view was the feeling that the avant-garde should in some way question mainstream cinema and the role it plays within everyday life. As A.L. Rees argues, in a more recent survey: 'The avant-garde rejects and critiques both the mainstream entertainment cinema and the audience responses which flow from it. It has sought "ways of seeing" outside the conventions of cinema's dominant tradition in the drama film and its industrial mode of production.'⁴

Another feature that was striking in 1970s avant-garde film theory, practice and history was the notion of self-reflexivity: many artists were concerned to explore the 'essential properties' of film. This was a tactic that was allied to avant-garde work in other media; for example, certain forms of abstract painting that rejected 'illusionist' forms of representation and instead experimented with the materials of the medium, so that subject matter became reflective (or form became content). This is a form of avant-garde practice that is in line with the influential art critic Clement Greenberg's argument that avant-garde art is 'absolute art', in which the artist turns away from 'subject matter of common experience' and towards a focus 'upon the medium of his own craft'.⁵ Such a turn has been criticized for being mere art for art's sake, yet has also been defended in more ideological terms, particularly so in the 1970s. For example, in the 'structural' or 'structural-materialist' films of Malcolm Le Grice and Peter Gidal, both of whom would construct historical traditions of avant-garde filmmaking, the exploration of film as film was a challenge to dominant modes of perception that were reinforced by the 'illusionist' dominant cinema. Through exposing the actual properties of film, the viewer could become engaged in a critical construction of the film experience, rather than absorbed in the realist film world. Such arguments have been criticized for the manner by which they assume modes of viewer response, assumptions that have been put in serious doubt through a number of

reception and audience studies. Nevertheless, the aim of producing a film that differs from mainstream features through aesthetics and ideological import has remained central to avant-garde filmmaking and theory.

It should also be noted that, throughout many of the histories constructed in the 1970s, and in more modern reflections on avant-garde film, the artisanal nature of production has been stressed as important: these are films made outside the industry, by small groups or individuals at low cost, often funded through private patronage or arts grants, and distributed and exhibited in locations such as film societies or museums.⁶ Yet, while the avant-garde is often portrayed in such a way, to align it completely with the 'artist's' film would be to overlook the centrality that many industrially produced films have played within avant-garde traditions (most notably the films of Eisenstein).

To return to Christie's comment on the 'contested' nature of the avant-garde, we have to take into consideration the different ways in which avant-garde filmmaking is defined, and that there may be more than a single avant-garde. According to A.L. Rees:

the avant-garde has traded under many other names: experimental, absolute, pure, non-narrative, underground, expanded, abstract; none of them satisfactory or generally accepted. This lack of agreement points to inherent differences and even conflicts within the avant-garde, just as it implies a search for unity across broad terrain. Because avant-gardes tend to spark off each other, this search is always open.⁷

This 'search' has been problematized to some extent by the emergence, at least since the mid-1980s, of revisionist histories of avant-garde cinema in the inter-war period, as well as the rise of postmodernism. Thus it is now common in overviews of avant-garde filmmaking for the actual concept to be scrutinized and examined, but not to be defined in any straightforward manner.⁸ A key revisionist history is Richard Abel's account of the French avant-garde, which occupies a large proportion of his comprehensive study of French cinema between 1915 and 1929.⁹ Abel focused here on a narrative avant-garde, but he placed this body of films firmly in the context of an alternative cinema network. Through focusing on this 'alternative network', Abel looked at how specialist film journals received films, and he analysed the types of films that were shown within this cultural milieu. Those films that have been canonized as 'avant-garde' were not straightforwardly differentiated from a number of other films at the time; rather, various critics perceived a number of films as progressive and innovative. These

could include 'artisanal' films, but they could also include commercial feature films or sponsored documentary films. There was not, at the time, a straightforward demarcation between such modes of cinema; even though they would be distinguished through classification, they would not automatically be differentiated ideologically.

During the inter-war period fixed conceptual divisions between types of film production did not exist; these are demarcations that have subsequently led to firm (if not always neat) distinctions between commercial mainstream cinema, art cinema and avant-garde/underground cinema. Instead, these types of films could all be seen and praised within the alternative cinema networks, alongside educational films, documentaries and early comedy shorts (to give a few examples). Such a network meant that there was a broad and hazy definition of the avant-garde in use at the time, as can be summed up in the following quotation from Jean Tedesco in 1923: 'The actual exhibition market of the film industry [...] is almost completely closed to one category of films. We have called them avant-garde films only for the purpose of better distinguishing them from the current production and not because of any preconceived idea of a chapel or school.'¹⁰

In this mode of classification, avant-garde films are those that slip through the net of 'official' culture only to be reinvigorated by a select group of film 'connoisseurs' (or, occasionally, they are films that are both popular and representative of cinematic art). At the time, because alternatives to mainstream film culture were scarce, specialist sub-distinctions were not as prevalent as they subsequently became. In this sense, avant-garde film referred to a broader array of films than it would in later years. In actual fact, unlike the later ciné clubs that emerged in the 1960s and which privileged independently produced films, film critics in the 1920s generally tended to locate the vanguard of film art as existing within industrially produced, narrative feature films.¹¹

There was, however, not only less use of the term 'avant-garde' in relation to film at this time, but also deep disagreement over its applications when it was employed. Many surrealist filmmakers who would fit neatly into canons of avant-garde filmmaking written over subsequent decades rejected the term 'avant-garde' because they thought of it as bourgeois.¹² It is because the term is so problematic that I tend to avoid using it frequently within this particular study. While I do think that many of the films that I survey can be called avant-garde, the remit of this work is broader in scope than such a term would imply. As I look at the emergence of a cultural network that aimed to provide an alternative to commercial cinema, in

terms of critical writings about film and exhibition sites, which—it was hoped—would feed into film production, I prefer to conceptualize my terrain of study as ‘alternative film culture’. The films that I study are thus related to this broader alternative network in some way, not privileging artists’ films, but engaging with and celebrating filmmaking considered artistically excellent and/or capable of opening up new pathways for the progression of film as art.

Such a conception, broad as it may be, needs to be qualified, for there are a number of ways in which film can be considered as art. While there were many differences between the ways that film art was defined within alternative film cultures across different nations as well as within particular nations, there were also a number of recurring tropes that seemed to bind these cultural networks together. (Such similarities undoubtedly facilitated the establishment of national and international networks in the first place.) These tropes are themselves reflective of an aesthetic outlook that is broadly modernist. They include: an insistence upon film as an art in its own right, which excluded the (conscious) mimicking of other art forms and an exploration of essentially filmic properties; a hostility towards ‘middle-brow’ artistic forms and a celebration of both the ‘popular’ and ‘high art’ (but with a preference for the latter); and a strong belief in the international nature of art, with a concomitant rejection of jingoistic, nationalist discourses.

In one sense, this brings us back to properties that have been associated with avant-gardism. Nevertheless, there are certain accounts of the avant-garde that are more rigidly constructed than this and which do not allow for the full inclusion of cultural activities that I intend to focus on. These include theories of the avant-garde that tend follow in the footsteps of Peter Bürger’s influential account of avant-garde art (which does not, it should be noted, investigate the medium of film).¹³ Here, the avant-garde is portrayed as an intensely political project, the aim of which is to counter the increasing commodification of art and to question the role of art within society. Andreas Huyssen’s study on the avant-garde can be seen as following this line, as can the work of Paul Willemen, who looks at film.¹⁴ Unlike Bürger and Huyssen, who saw the avant-garde as a failed historical project, Willemen perceives it as a more dynamic, continuing force. If avant-gardism is seen in such a political manner, the range of international alternative film cultures in the inter-war period is more identifiably modernist (even if they do contain avant-garde elements).

We should also be alert to the fact that ‘avant-garde’ as a term was only infrequently (and inconsistently) applied during this period. More often,

a number of other terms would be used in order to distinguish film art as a distinctive force: 'progressive' and 'artistic', for example, would be used to class any type of film into the vanguard of cinematic achievement, while classifications such as 'abstract', 'absolute' and 'experimental' would be used in preference to the phrase 'avant-garde'. Crucially, however, terms were often bandied about without attempts at conceptual clarification, which is what distinguishes many writings of this period from later, academic studies of film art. Thus, even though much of this serious, intellectual criticism and reflection on cinema fed into later theoretical work, it tended to be more impressionistic and speculative than the more rigorous conventions to which academic work generally has to conform.

Alternative Networks

Before focusing on British alternative film culture, it is necessary to provide a picture of similar activities occurring within other countries, for many such elements influenced, or intertwined with, British film culture. While the focus of my study is national, this was, as I have mentioned, a cultural formation that was international in outlook and in practice: that is, many cinéphiles involved in alternative forms of film culture believed that cinema was an international art; furthermore, this led to the formation of networks across national boundaries; various alternative formations exchanged information with each other, and there were also informal distribution exchanges.

While alternative film cultures arose within a number of different countries in the inter-war period, it was in France that isolated instances of such a culture first emerged, which would come to form the most widespread alternative cinema network in a single nation during the period. As Richard Abel has outlined in detail, the roots of such a culture began to materialize in the late 1910s and early 1920s, through the writings of a number of cinéphiles—including Louis Delluc, Léon Moussinac and the Italian Ricciotto Canudo—whose articles on film appeared in publications such as *Le Film* (first published in 1916) and *Ciné-pour-tous* (first published in 1919) and, perhaps most influential of all, *Cinéa* (the last two merged in 1923 to become *Cinéa-Ciné-pour-tous*).¹⁵ As Abel notes, these and other cinéphiles began to establish the film as a modern, unique art form and to map out the potential of this new art through attempts 'to isolate its specific features in order to analyze and evaluate specific works'.¹⁶ In *Cinéa* the much scrutinized and ambiguous concept of *photogénie* was developed, in which musical and poetic metaphors were employed to

sketch out an aesthetic avenue for film art, based upon 'rhetorical and rhythmic patterning'.¹⁷

This writing led to the creation of a number of ciné clubs and, eventually, to specialist cinemas devoted to the cinema as an art form. For example, the first major ciné club to emerge was CASA (Club des amis du Septième), established in 1921 and run by Ricciotto Canudo. Members took part in a series of lectures on the cinema as well as attending special film screenings. The Vieux Colombier, meanwhile, programmed by Jean Tedesco, was the first major cinema to form in 1924.¹⁸ These were followed by a number of other similar organizations, leading to a vibrant alternative film culture in France during the 1920s, which inspired a number of avant-garde filmmakers and also provided venues for their work to be shown and discussed.

Abel's groundbreaking research has led to a number of studies of alternative cultural networks in other countries, and while these may not have been as extensive as those established in France, subsequent research has shown that there did exist similar networks of writing about the cinema, showing films and delivering other related events (such as lectures and the organization of exhibitions). In the USA, for example, alternative exhibition was underway by 1925, when Symon Gould established the Screen Guild in New York, which arranged occasional programmes of experimental shorts and art films.¹⁹ Gould began the first continuous 'art film programme' the following year at the Cameo Theatre, and by the end of the 1920s there were a number of film guilds and small cinemas dedicated to the film as art in various regions across the country.²⁰ In line with such developments, informal distribution exchanges were set up (such as the Amateur Cinema League's lending library and Gould's own, apparently not very reliable, distribution services), alongside the emergence of writings on the art of the cinema in journals such as *Experimental Cinema* (1931–34).²¹

Likewise, networks of exhibition, distribution and writing on cinema occurred in many other parts of Europe, providing a crucial cultural setting in which film was valued and promoted, thus encouraging 'artisanal' productions that could then be shown at small cinemas, alongside a range of other films.²² These include the Gesellschaft Neuer Film (GNF, the Society New Film) and the Volksfilmverband für Filmkunst (VFV, People's Film Association for Film Art), which arose in Germany in 1928, alongside a number of intellectual discussions about the possibilities of cinematic art;²³ in the Netherlands the Filmliga was formed in 1927 and supported its programmes with a journal, *Film Liga*.²⁴ Ciné clubs, specialized theatres

and dedicated writings about the cinema as a new art also occurred in Belgium, Spain, Poland and, outside Europe, in Japan and Canada.²⁵ Film culture in the Soviet Union was, of course, different, yet fierce theoretical debates about the aesthetics of the medium have been charted during the inter-war period.²⁶

The British Context

This study outlines the context of an 'alternative' film culture within Britain, from which emerged a number of experimental films that were made outside the commercial industry. Such films cannot really be grouped together in any straightforward manner: although a number of films shared certain thematic preoccupations, others did not; some evidence similarities in formal construction, others conform to completely separate formal templates; some were made by a few individuals on a shoestring budget, others were made more expensively for industrial sponsors. In this sense, the investigation of an alternative culture and an examination of how a number of independent productions fitted into this cultural milieu is a more convenient and useful framework within which to undertake this study, as opposed to the employment of an avant-garde model.

As I have explained, many of the canonical avant-garde films have enjoyed privileged relations to other renowned artists or movements, in particular those connected to the fine arts. There were, of course, a number of modernist activities in the fine arts in inter-war Britain. Roger Fry's two Post-Impressionist exhibitions (in 1910 and 1912) are often seen as important landmarks in the arrival of 'modern art' to the country, and these gave rise to a number of artistic 'movements' (or at least groupings) in Britain. The Bloomsbury Group was perhaps the best known, although in reality it comprised a number of diverse artists and intellectuals, and was also connected with the London Group, an exhibiting collection formed in 1913 that encompassed a broad range of modern British artists (including the Camden Town Group and the Vorticists).²⁷ Influenced very much by French modern artists such as Cézanne and Gauguin, Bloomsbury critics Roger Fry and Clive Bell stressed the importance of form and railed against naturalist representation.

After the First World War, however, despite the appearance of other groupings—such as Wyndham Lewis's Group X and the Seven and Five Society—British modern art was marked more by, in Spalding's terms, 'a pursuit of the personal and idiosyncratic' than by group effort.²⁸ It was also marked by a retreat from the radical, abstract work that appeared before

the war, as artists returned to traditional modes of representation, even if these were inflected by formal concerns (evident in the re-emergence of landscape painting). In this sense, there is difficulty in linking filmmaking directly with any movements because of this lack of coherence. And while the 1930s saw more identifiable trends emerging, such as the influence of Surrealism and Constructivism on artists associated with Unit One,²⁹ as well as more realist movements (the Euston Road School, the growth of socialist realism), it is still difficult to link films directly with the fine arts. It is certainly true that there were many links between film and other arts, but these links tended to be sporadic. While film certainly was infused by broader artistic influences (both national and international), these links were often multiple and opaque. In short, such influences are often difficult to pin down in a direct fashion.

Ironically, the filmmaking activities associated with alternative film culture seem to share with modernist fine art in 1920s Britain a 'pursuit of the personal and idiosyncratic', which makes it difficult to categorize them in any neat and tidy manner. Paralleling the more identifiable trends in the art world of the 1930s, a modern film movement also emerged in that decade: the documentary film movement. Yet this movement's aesthetic legacy is predicated on a small number of films, and these films themselves are often shot through with diverse stylistic and thematic currents.

Despite this diversity, a number of themes and alliances did exist and these have, to some extent, influenced some of the chapter and section headings of this book. Overall, though, what brings these films together is that they can all, to some extent, be linked to the emergence of an alternative film culture, reflecting the concerns of the cinéphiles who wrote passionately about the cinema as a modern art form, often influenced by the films that were playing in film societies and repertory cinemas, and ultimately (except on rare occasions) being screened in such venues.

My study, then, attempts to map an alternative network of British film culture, and to look at a number of independently produced films that emerged from this culture. It is certainly true that some of the elements that I discuss have gained previous academic attention: a few, such as selected areas of the documentary film movement and Len Lye, have been the subject of attention for quite some time; others, such as the Film Society and the journal *Close Up*, have more recently undergone evaluation; other elements have still barely been touched upon. Yet no full-length study has thus far accounted for all these as interconnected areas of a British alternative film culture, which is where the significance of this book lies.³⁰

Within this study, then, I am keen to demonstrate that a number of independently produced films, some of which can be classed as avant-garde, were produced in Britain during the 1920s and 1930s, and to analyse these films in detail. I also want to stress the cultural context out of which these films emerged and which, in my view, significantly shaped them. This study is not merely a focus on film texts but also encompasses the exhibition of, and writing about, film. These foci demonstrate the practical struggles in constructing an alternative film culture, as well as the broad frameworks of thinking that helped to shape this culture. They also help illuminate the reception contexts within which such films circulated, at least in Britain.

My focus on a number of 'alternative' film productions during this period therefore contributes to a tradition and history of alternative British filmmaking, an essential component of any healthy film culture. The analysis of exhibition and writing, however, demonstrates the importance of a wider film culture in supporting such productions. Nevertheless, as I go on to show, there were sometimes tensions between the types of films that were produced and the broader cultural climate within which such films circulated (at least in Britain). While some of the films that I look at were championed, a number were ignored, and this undoubtedly fed into subsequent negative perceptions of 'avant-garde' filmmaking during the period. What follows is an attempt to delve beneath such negative perceptions in order to explore the dynamics and intricacies of an important period of 'alternative' British film culture.

The Network of Alternative Film Culture

The production of a number of small-scale, 'alternative' British films in the inter-war period was reliant upon a broader network of exhibition, distribution and criticism, elements that constituted an alternative 'network'. This network was both national and international, and while my focus on Britain leads me to concentrate on the former, the latter should not be ignored, for it shaped the British cultural situation in many ways.

In this chapter, then, I will outline some of the main themes that can be discerned within alternative film culture, in terms of exhibition programming and cultural approaches to the art of film; I will also spend some time analysing film writing in order to probe the main features of alternative film discourses. It is important to recognize the major components of alternative film culture, as it is only by doing so that one can fully get to grips with some of the chief influences upon the films that will be analysed. In addition, it is crucial to consider the discursive frameworks that existed, as these would have not only—to varying degrees—informed the attitudes of some filmmakers, but would also feed into the reception of the films themselves.

The whole production–distribution–exhibition–reception process can be seen as a loop in which each segment is constitutive of, and also influenced by, other segments in the chain. For example, without any form of distribution, there would be no films to exhibit, but likewise without an exhibition structure there would be no need for distribution. In terms of production, certain exhibited films viewed by filmmakers may seep into the production process (via direct or covert influence), while critical reception also constitutes a broad framework to which films should adhere if they are to be celebrated within cultural circles; otherwise, they risk the possibility of sinking without trace. (It may be the case that subsequent discursive frameworks find previously neglected films appealing for some reason, but if a film is neglected its chances of surviving posterity will

decrease.) Such frameworks are never homogeneous or static, but I do believe that at particular moments in time there are detectable certain ways of approaching film, specific aesthetic elements that are privileged over others, and it is these that I wish to tease out in the subsequent text relating to discourse.

I will focus on exhibition primarily through the (London) Film Society, which will serve as a case study of exhibition (and, less centrally, distribution). This focus on one institution is limited to the extent that it marginalizes other societies that emerged in the inter-war period. Nevertheless, I believe that this was the most important society: it was the first of its kind to spring up, and it influenced (indeed supported) many of the societies that emerged subsequently. In addition, the wealth of archival material concerning the Film Society, in relation to other societies, allows us to construct a much more detailed portrait of an exhibition outlet.

In terms of attitudes to film, these will mostly be sketched through the work published in specialist film journals, the main ones being *Close Up* (1927–33), *Cinema Quarterly* (1932–36) and *Film/Film Art* (1933–37). I will also look at some writing that appeared in book-length form, as well as other writing that appeared in newspaper articles, reports (in the case of John Grierson) and exhibition programme notes (in the case of the Film Society). I will investigate the emerging network and the surrounding discourses up to 1930, as the rise of sound marks a distinct break in attitudes towards film, which will be the focus of a later chapter. There will, however, be occasional references to the post-1930s situation in this chapter as it is not always possible to cut off a time period in so neat a fashion.

The Film Society and the Emergence of an Alternative Film Culture

Origins

Against the background of the continuing domination of British screens by American films, many of which were made along highly standardized lines, there arose an alternative movement of people who opposed the excessive commercialism of the film industry. They were drawn to cinema as a new and modern art form, rather than as a straightforward, industrial entertainment. While film was beginning to be discussed as an art in the 1910s, this was often done in relation to other, more established media, such as literature and theatre. This inevitably had an effect on the films made in Britain, with the film industry often relying on the stage or the novel for its

source material.¹ Literature and theatre provided respectable material with which to work, and an added incentive was that they also provided plots and characters already in cultural circulation. These adaptations were often perceived by intellectuals as too dependent upon their source material, a perception that endured until relatively recently.²

It is not my contention that such a view is correct; the growing research into early British cinema suggests that it is not.³ Nevertheless, it was a perception that shaped the manner by which a certain group of intellectuals created an alternative vision of cinematic art. These cinéphiles disputed the idea that film should merely act as a filter for 'respectable' media. While they did not totally reject theatrical or literary influences at this point, they did think that film should incorporate other elements according to its own particular strengths. They therefore wanted to establish the medium itself as something that was respectable, as the most modern and 'progressive' of art forms, with the potential to become superior to literature and theatre.

The domination of the commercial imperative was reflected in trade papers that mainly focused on film from a commercial angle. In newspapers, coverage of film was extremely limited and was overwhelmed by space devoted to other arts.⁴ While this was slowly beginning to change in the late 1910s and early 1920s, coverage was still not substantial. In the trade press cinema was still often treated as a business. 'Artistic' issues were sometimes addressed, but cinéphiles were often unhappy about the restrictions these papers imposed: Ivor Montagu, for example, complained about the demands of emphasizing 'commercial possibilities' when writing for the trade press.⁵ These cinéphiles played an important role in writing seriously about film in the press.

Sporadic articles looking at the art of film began to appear in the trade press, newspapers and other publications in the early 1920s, gradually becoming more regular. Iris Barry, for example, began to write a film column for the literary journal the *Spectator* in 1923; she also started a regular film column for the popular newspaper the *Daily Mail* in 1925.⁶ Caroline Lejeune had begun to write serious film criticism for the *Manchester Guardian* in 1922 and from 1928 wrote a regular, substantial film column for the *Observer*.⁷ Ivor Montagu, after writing for the Cambridge magazine *Granta* in 1924, also contributed on film for the *Observer* and the *New Statesman* in the mid-1920s, and later for the *Sunday Times*.⁸ Walter Mycroft wrote on film for both the *Evening Standard* and the *Illustrated Sunday Herald* in the mid-1920s,⁹ while Robert Herring wrote for the literary journal *The London Mercury* from 1926. It should be noted that Lejeune—unlike the other writers mentioned—was not a member of the