

Introduction

IT IS BROADLY UNDERSTOOD that Lotte Eisner's interventions in the field of academic film and media studies are twofold: she established a major archive of interwar German cinema at the Cinémathèque française, and she wrote some of the first postwar scholarly studies about the aesthetic and historical contexts of Weimar-era films and filmmakers. It is also known that she had a PhD in art history, that she worked as a film critic in the 1920s, and that she lived in exile for many years. Often, she is remembered as a satellite of the larger-than-life company she kept: Louise Brooks, Werner Herzog, Fritz Lang, Henri Langlois. Over the course of decades, she has become a dusty fixture of the dutiful literature review. Eisner's best-known publication, *The Haunted Screen*, has been reissued at regular intervals in English since its 1969 translation and, gradually, consensus has calcified around an assessment of the book as rather dated, to the point that assertions to this effect have taken on the routine quality of a refrain in introductory remarks to English-language Weimar cinema surveys.

Yet, for having become so familiar, Eisner has receded in the discipline's intellectual history; we think we know her work, and we assume that the edges and extent of its generative potential have been reached. Embedded in this assumption, however, is a central paradox: her archival and scholarly work is widely used and often cited, but no substantial study of Eisner's corpus at large has been made, and her work is often acknowledged in ways that diminish the significance of its contributions. Her doctoral dissertation and journalism have remained obscure, glancingly engaged when they are mentioned at all. The fact that her archival and scholarly work in the postwar period were shaped by her status as an exile is usually assumed, but, aside

from the occasional reference to her memoirs, she rarely figures in studies of the German expatriates who fled the Nazi regime and the war.

One reason a survey of her interwar work hasn't been done may be that Eisner herself disparaged it in her later years. In the interviews she gave to journalists, cineastes, and scholars, she often described this period of her life with reference to a set of anecdotes featuring the celebrities of 1920s Berlin, preferring to regale her interlocutors with irreverent, sometimes outlandish stories about Leni Riefenstahl or Bertolt Brecht, rather than describe in detail the scope or importance of her own work. Another explanation of this oversight is that her later work has been understood by some influential commentators to bear the strong influence of her training in art history and film criticism and to have, as a consequence, less traction in the realm of film studies proper, less portability beyond the ken of Weimar cinema. However, the work of other prominent film theorists of the period who approached film aesthetics and politics from an art historical vantage point—such as Erwin Panofsky and Rudolf Arnheim—has been engaged in depth and at length. There are also notable examples of film critics and archivists, some of whom published in the same journals as Eisner did—including Béla Balázs, Iris Barry, André Bazin, and Siegfried Kracauer—the translation and exegesis of whose work has occupied generations of film scholars.

It is also possible that in addition to Eisner's cues and the meanderings of scholastic fashion, a decisive factor in the relegation of her work has been the series of interruptions visited upon her career by political, economic, and social turmoil, which resulted in the fragmentation of her work in academic, journalistic, archival, and film historiographical domains, all of it scattered across four languages and six decades. Added to these practical difficulties of access is the problem of the work's metaphorical legibility; for some of the same reasons that it was possible and interesting, her work is also peculiar, sometimes difficult, and, like its author, resistant. Eisner was born into and raised with a great deal of privilege, yet she also experienced grave hardship and inequity throughout her adult life. The qualities that give her early work its verve—her powers of observation, intellectual independence, and deep reservoir of cultural reference—find their verso in the characteristics that make her a slippery or troubling subject for recuperation today: her single-mindedness, a measure of prejudice, and, in certain contexts, a propensity toward disputatious individualism. A voracious and discerning consumer of culture, she often wrote with striking clarity, yet her judgment could be harsh, sometimes hasty. In her memoirs, which she dictated to her caretaker,

Martje Grohmann, Eisner summed up her life's work as the refinement of this power:

MARTJE GROHMANN: Why did you want to write your memoirs?

Bluntly put: who cares about your life, which you have dedicated to other creative people? One reads the memoirs of Buñuel because he is a great director, but the memoirs of a film historian?

LOTTE EISNER: You may as well ask: why does the principal witness keep her mouth shut during a murder trial, although she might exonerate the accused? I am something of a witness of our cultural history. My private life, which I have never taken very seriously, has repeatedly crossed with the lives of our most important intellectual innovators. . . . I believe in destiny. My destiny was to discover people like Bert Brecht, Peter Lorre, Satyajit Ray, Shadi Abdel Salam, and Henri Langlois. I had a nose for originality and a gift for putting my discoveries into words. I saw that as my life's task, rather than marrying and raising children. Others can do that better than I. Fate has helped me, though I was often in mortal danger. It has saved me so that I might finish my work.¹

About a quarter century before this weighty destiny befell her, Lotte Eisner was an eccentric and creative child. Bridling at convention and its enforcers, she was possessed of an appetite for literary and theatrical fiction matched in its intensity only by her boisterous imaginative faculty. How she came to see herself as a key witness, rather than a defendant—and to understand murder, justice, and cultural history as intertwined with one another in her own narrative of identity—is as much a story of her professional life as it is of her personal life, in spite of her protestations of not having taken the latter very “seriously.” Why the only and undesirable alternative to such testimony would have been marriage and children, in Eisner's view, was likewise a function of the period, places, and circumstances under which she lived.

In the five chapters to follow, I trace Eisner's upbringing, her doctoral work, and her careers as a journalist, as an archivist, and as a film historian, indicating both continuities and interruptions, and highlighting aspects of Eisner's work that can be clarified with reference to certain contemporary film studies discourses. While this study is framed chronologically, makes extensive use of Eisner's memoirs and personal reflections, and indicates salient life events as influences on her work and legacy, it is primarily concerned with charting Eisner's development as a key figure in the intellectual history of film studies and with embedding her professional trajectory within the larger histories that shaped the reception of her work; that is to

say, I do not attempt to provide an exhaustive study of Eisner's biography. This is both a methodological choice—the disciplinary context in which I have researched and written is that of film studies, and my interest is in contributing to that field in particular—and a practical one. Eisner's personal papers have a somewhat fraught history in terms of ownership, and while there exist several troves of her correspondence in publicly accessible archival collections, a current project by one of her great-nieces, Julia Eisner, draws on exclusive access to the primary archive of Lotte Eisner's personal papers, and it promises to offer a biographical study of its subject. In certain respects, this coincidence has functioned as a limitation on the present project: the absence of any previous dedicated secondary studies or biographical literature on Eisner, compounded with the opacity of the personal archive has meant that it has not been possible to verify certain claims made in Eisner's memoirs and interviews, and there are indications that a great deal of the correspondence she conducted in the postwar period—some of it personal, some of it professional, much of it hybrid—was diverted to her home addresses; if it survives, it may be in the family's archive.

Given the dearth of attention to Eisner's early work, however, there is no shortage of fresh material outside that archive. I have focused on Eisner's contributions to the aesthetic, economic, and historiographical analysis of film and film industries, attending to the intellectual and cultural histories from which Eisner emerged and in which she participated. I have worked with Eisner's numerous publications and the portion of her correspondence that is held in public archives, including the voluminous administrative archives of the Cinémathèque française, the personal papers of Herman G. Weinberg held at the New York Public Library, some personal correspondence of Fritz Lang's held at the University of Southern California, Edouard Roditi's at the University of California, Los Angeles, and Sohrab Shahid Saless's at Werkstatt Film, Oldenburg, Germany. Eisner's memoirs and the interviews she gave serve throughout this study as important sources of biographical information and historical context, yet as I discovered in my research, Eisner reflected on the people and experiences that had marked her life most strongly—particularly in her later years—in strategic, self-consciously rhetorical narratives. As feminist media historiographers have shown, autobiography and personal testimony can take on a critical and generative significance beyond the individual or the anecdotal in cases where the standard historiography fails or refuses to take account of minority groups. I have looked to the self-reflexive praxis of scholars working in

the domains of feminist and queer historiography for guidance in my own efforts to understand and historicize Eisner's work and its legacy in the field of scholarly film study.

In addition to offering a few framing remarks, this brief introduction surveys the reception of Eisner's work in English-language film and media studies, emphasizing the gaps and inconsistencies in that discourse. I describe the ways I dealt with certain of these gaps, how I contextualized some of the inconsistencies, as well as how I gauged the frictions between Eisner's early ambitions and the tumultuous circumstances under which most of her professional life was lived. This approach draws strength from comparative readings of Eisner's autobiographical remarks and a critical address of the strategic qualities and rhetorical investments of these narratives, as much as it does from a wide-ranging survey of her scholarly and journalistic work. With attention throughout to the issues of historiography in what reception there has been of Eisner's work in the secondary literature, I show that reading her doctoral dissertation, interwar journalism, and archival correspondence together with her memoirs can reframe the conventional wisdom on Eisner and her work.

At stake is not only the recognition of a marginalized female scholar and a revision of the intellectual history of academic film studies, but an opportunity to observe the ways that gendered, linguistic, and institutional privilege shapes historiography. The development and institutionalization of film studies in the popular and trade press, as well as in archival and scholarly contexts, involved the legitimization of certain ethics and poetics of the archive and cultural history over others; one of the fundamental and broadly relevant findings of this study is that the latter are ripe with potentialities in our contemporary moment.

THE POLITICS OF CITATION, CRITIQUE, AND RE/MEMBERING

Citations, acknowledgments, and commentary—typically engaging either Eisner's academic or archival work, largely ignoring her film criticism—tend to fall into three general categories: critiques of her Weimar cinema survey *The Haunted Screen* (*L'écran démoniaque*, 1952, 1965; English editions 1969, 1973), citations of *F. W. Murnau* (French, 1964; German, 1967, 1979; English, 1973) and *Fritz Lang* (English, 1976; French, 1984) recounting biographical

or historical information reported therein, and accounts, often framed as personal remembrances, of her archival work at the Cinémathèque française. While *The Haunted Screen* remains Eisner's best-known publication, it is frequently misunderstood and misrepresented. Many familiar with *The Haunted Screen* think of it as a catalog of Weimar cinema that demonstrates how certain films prefigure the aesthetics and politics of Nazism: an inaccurate assumption based on a common elision. Eisner does discuss a reified Germany and German mentality, but these are addressed in the context of Romanticism, rather than Nazism, and her analysis is rigorously constrained to film and art historical contexts. For Eisner's readers familiar with the sociology and history of Weimar-era right-wing political theory, Romanticism bridges, albeit crookedly, to Nazism via reactionary modernisms and the Conservative Revolution, by dint of what Jeffrey Herf calls a "selective tradition."² Although pointed references—including the book's epigraph by Leopold Ziegler—indicate a familiarity on Eisner's part with the literature of that selective tradition, it is not the case that *The Haunted Screen* speculates on the connections between Romanticism and Nazism via Weimar cinema; indeed, quite the opposite. This widespread misreading is probably due, in part, to the long shadow of Siegfried Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler* (1947) and to the fact that the two volumes are often read in conjunction. Both books were written by former film critics and German Jews in exile, both were published in the postwar period, and both deal with (and to an extent, codify) a Weimar film canon; because of these passing similarities, *The Haunted Screen* is often discussed as a foil or counterpart to *From Caligari to Hitler*. For her own part, Eisner resented these comparisons, expressing her frustration candidly in private correspondence and publicly in oblique references to the tendentiousness of certain methods of film historiography that cut their evidence to measure.

Arriving about a generation after the first English-language Weimar cinema scholarship boom in the 1980s—a wave which itself followed the earliest postwar studies of the period by several decades—the impulse to compare *The Haunted Screen* and *From Caligari to Hitler* in the same breath is common to many of the revisionist histories of Weimar cinema published around the turn of the millennium.³ These third-wave histories offered fresh archival and historiographical insights, in part as a function of their own historical moment; *die Wende*, the centenary of cinema, and a reinvigoration of early cinema studies in the United States beginning in the mid-1990s all contributed to this increase in scholarly attention. As Sabine



FIGURE 1. Eisner the *raconteuse*, in her Neuilly-sur-Seine apartment. Still from *Lotte Eisner in Germany* (S. M. Horowitz, 1980).

Hake points out, “German unification has allowed cultural critics to think about central aspects of German culture, history, and national identity,” in no small part due to the increased accessibility of the DEFA (Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft) archives and catalogs.⁴ In a review of the edited collection, *Expressionist Film: New Perspectives* (2003), Noah Isenberg observes that “film scholars have been knocking heads with Kracauer and Eisner since their respective works first appeared,” and goes on to describe “Kracauer’s teleological understanding of Weimar cinema” as “an easy target.”⁵ This passage is paradigmatic in that Isenberg groups Kracauer and Eisner together, but outlines a critique of Kracauer’s methodology alone; even the most self-reflexive comparisons of Kracauer and Eisner tend to conform to this pattern. Claudia Lenssen’s thoughtful essay on the history of reception of Eisner and Kracauer, for example, identifies some of the key problems in the existing literature and clearly articulates the need for a complete study of Eisner’s work, including the interwar journalism. However, the bulk of Lenssen’s short essay is focused on Kracauer’s work and its reception; Lenssen’s engagement of Eisner is restricted to a rehashing of select biographical details from the memoirs and a gloss on Eisner’s postwar books.⁶ In *Weimar*

Cinema and After, Thomas Elsaesser remarks that “There have been many objections to *From Caligari to Hitler* and *The Haunted Screen*, ever since they were published, with Kracauer’s methodology and Eisner’s assumptions continuing to arouse criticism,” but all seven works Elsaesser references in this claim’s corresponding footnotes critique *From Caligari to Hitler*. Not a single one deals in detail with Eisner’s work.⁷

When Eisner’s work, especially *The Haunted Screen*, is directly engaged, it is almost always in parallel to Kracauer’s; evocatively, Elsaesser has referred to Kracauer and Eisner as “the Scylla and Charybdis” of Weimar film studies. Although he grants that Eisner is “persuasive on the intertextualities between film, theater and painting,” he maintains that “the term ‘influence’ fails as an explanatory concept.”⁸ Instead, Elsaesser suggests that attention to the “institutional, semi-industrial, profit-driven context in which these individuals were constrained or encouraged to work” is a more productive avenue of inquiry.⁹ Granted, Eisner’s commentary in *The Haunted Screen* on industrial workflows is typically—although not always—couched as supporting detail for her stylistic analysis. As a prime counterexample to Elsaesser’s claim, I would highlight Eisner’s interest in the industry-standard *Regiensitzungen*, or production meetings, in *The Haunted Screen*.¹⁰ Moreover, such interest in the industrial labor practices and their import for film style is indisputably central to the monographs she wrote on both Murnau and Lang, and in the introductions to each, she anticipates Elsaesser’s criticism, remarking that interested parties might read *F. W. Murnau, The Haunted Screen*, and *Fritz Lang* as part of one larger, overarching project.¹¹ Indeed, in the private and administrative correspondence spanning decades that is held at the Cinémathèque française, Eisner discussed a planned volume devoted exclusively to the work of interwar German set designers, in which she hoped to more clearly make the case that the production culture of filmmaking teams and the collective spirit in which they worked contributed to a hallmark style of the German industry in that period.

Elsaesser further argues that *The Haunted Screen* suffers from a preoccupation with the individual filmmaker, to whom is attributed what he calls a “will-to-style.”¹² From this argument also flows the critique that the book is apolitical in its single-minded focus on aesthetics; or that it is retrograde in its interest in the auteur and his psyche. Along these lines, Hake has made the claim that both *The Haunted Screen* and *From Caligari to Hitler* evince a “profoundly anti-modernist” bent and can only be construed as “self-consciously German in [their] preoccupation with problems of identity and

the metaphysics of space.”¹³ The first of these claims is belied by the methodological and rhetorical significance of interviews and testimony by the presumed auteur’s collaborators: for *The Haunted Screen*, Max Reinhardt is less a lone mastermind than a node in a network, Murnau’s vaunted stylistics are the product of an innovative team comprised of set designers, cameramen, screenwriters, and actors, and the genius of Pabst consists entirely in his collaboration with brilliant actors.¹⁴ Thus, “Reinhardt,” “Murnau,” and “Pabst” serve as shorthand references to artistic, industrial, and social clusters. Furthermore, a careful survey of her interwar writing reveals that Eisner’s interest in filmmaking teams as collaborative creative units began in her first months at the *Film-Kurier*. Over her five-and-a-half year tenure there (August 1927–March 1933), she published scores of articles, opinion pieces, reports, interviews, and reviews treating the topic, and she initiated a column that would grow to include the contributions of other *Film-Kurier* editors, titled “Das Feuilleton des Autors,” which emphasized the importance of collaboration in the German industry by way of short profiles of the conceptualization and production processes of prominent German filmmakers, including screenwriters, art directors, and cinematographers. In her work at the Cinémathèque française, and in the numerous scholarly publications that emerged from this archival work, Eisner continued to develop her thesis that the characteristic feature of the interwar German film industry was the production collective, an argument that preceded and contrasted in important ways with the branch of auteur theory propounded by the influential French critics and cineastes associated with the *Cahiers du cinéma*. Without reference to a comprehensive survey of Eisner’s interwar work, much less a thorough study of her archival praxis or her extensive correspondence on the topic in the postwar period, the claims Elsaesser and Hake make seem plausible, but reading across Eisner’s oeuvre it is clear that her conception of authorship and style is more nuanced and more firmly grounded in a firsthand, fine-grained understanding of the production culture of the period than either Elsaesser or Hake are inclined to grant.

Superficially, the archetypal reactionary preoccupation with authenticity—a cardinal concern for conservative aesthetic and nationalist discourses of purity and entitlement, including many of the long twentieth century’s European fascisms—appears to be fundamental to the discussion of many films in both *The Haunted Screen* and *From Caligari to Hitler*, as Hake suggests. Yet attentive tracking of the contexts in which the notion of authenticity figures for each reveals that in *The Haunted Screen* it is typically deployed

either as a synonym for verisimilitude, adherence to genre convention, or on-location shooting, all stylistic and aesthetic questions that Eisner engaged from her very first *Film-Kurier* contributions onward. In *From Caligari to Hitler*, authenticity is at stake in discussions of artifice or fakery (as contrasted to nature or the natural, under the aegis of stylistic realism), and it is the criterion of Kracauer's assessments of ideology—that is, the relative explanatory powers of various ideological constructions.

The contrast between Eisner's medium-specific application and Kracauer's much broader, ponderously value-laden usage rhymes with another important divergence: throughout *The Haunted Screen*, Eisner's operative unit of film analysis is the sequence and, as a result, emphasis is placed on movement and composition in time, whereas in *From Caligari to Hitler*, the fundamental units of Kracauer's analysis are text, plot, and, on occasion, the still image. Eisner's discussion of *Pandora's Box* (*Die Büchse der Pandora*, G. W. Pabst, 1929) is exemplary:

[Lulu] is the centre of attraction, and Pabst succeeds in devising an infinite variety of seduction scenes to show her to advantage, as when Dr. Schön comes into the flat wondering how to tell his mistress that he is getting married. The camera catches his nervousness as he paces up and down the room; the ash from his cigarette burns a table-runner, and he fiddles with a bibelot, as Jannings had fidgeted with a liqueur glass in *Variety*. Then a skilful [*sic*] shot-and-reverse shot shows us Lulu observing him. She sinks back into the cushions, moves, lies on her front half-reared like a sphinx, while Schön goes up to her and sits down.¹⁵

Eisner makes the case that Pabst's films are distinguished by the subtlety of characterization and mood achieved in collaboration with his actors, building her critique around an analysis of movement, space, and body language. Picking out Fritz Kortner's agitated characterization of Dr. Schön—his back to Lulu, we cut to a close-up of him turning the toylike lamb figurine on the mantelpiece slightly in its place, so it, too, can avoid Lulu's inquiring gaze—Eisner compares this detail to the trifling petulance of Emil Jannings's Boss Huller in *Variety* (*Variété*, E. A. Dupont, 1925). As his wife, played by Maly Delschaft, washes their dinner dishes, Huller childishly tips a small liqueur glass to and fro with one hand, bickering with her about going back to the thrills of his acrobatic work in favor of his domestic post-injury routine, a notion suggested by the arrival of their scantily clad houseguest, Bertha-Marie (Lya de Putti). Schön and Huller are each in conflict with a woman

whose will they resist, and the idle, toying characterization given by Kortner and Jannings, respectively, emits in each case a powerful affective charge; this man is dissembling and manipulative, that one, fickle and selfish. By contrast, Kracauer's address of the film focuses on what might be called paratextual critique:

Contemporaries considered *Pandora's Box* a failure. A failure it was, but not for the reason most critics advanced. They held that Pabst was fundamentally wrong in making a silent film from a literary play whose meaning depended mainly upon the fine points of its dialogue. However, the film's weakness resulted not so much from the impossibility of translating this dialogue into cinematic terms as from the abstract nature of the whole [Frank] Wedekind play. It was a texture of arguments; its characters, instead of living on their own, served to illustrate principles. Pabst blundered in choosing a play that because of its expressive mood belonged to the fantastic postwar era rather than to the realistic stabilized period. The outcome of his misplaced endeavors was a film which, as [Harry Alan] Potamkin puts it, "is 'atmosphere' without content."¹⁶

For Kracauer, questions of critical reception, adaptation, and textuality notwithstanding, the fundamental problem with the film is that it was stylistically out of step with the progression identified in *From Caligari to Hitler*; it is the exception that proves the rule. When he does attend to visual stylistic analysis in this volume, Kracauer tends to cite still images, rather than sequences. A pose, carefully tracked by Kracauer from *New Year's Eve* (*Sylvester*, Lupu Pick, 1923) through *Warning Shadows* (*Schatten*, Arthur Robison, 1923), *The Street* (*Die Straße*, Karl Grune, 1923), *The Holy Mountain* (*Der heilige Berg*, Arnold Fanck, 1926), *Secrets of a Soul* (*Geheimnisse einer Seele*, G. W. Pabst, 1926), and *Tragedy of the Street* (*Dirnentragödie*, Bruno Rahm, 1927) is illustrative: in *New Year's Eve* (*Sylvester*), "while his mother caresses him as if he were a child, [the protagonist] rests his head helplessly on her bosom." In Kracauer's view, "It is noteworthy that, far from being repudiated, his singular gesture of capitulation reappeared, almost unchanged, in various German films, indicating that his instinctive reluctance to attempt emancipation might be considered a typical German attitude. It is an attitude which results from the prolonged dependence of the Germans upon a feudal or half-feudal military regime—not to mention the current social and economic motives enforcing the perpetuation of this attitude within the middle class."¹⁷

For Kracauer, the image figures less as a filmic composition, or an aspect of characterization in acting style than as a static relational trope to be

dissected with the aid of historical economic, social, and political contexts. In this particular case, the vulnerabilities of his argumentative strategy are laid bare: Kracauer proposes a scathing, patriarchal interpretation—presumably, it is a perverse “capitulation” because grown men shouldn’t be comforted by their mothers—yet the embrace itself might just as plausibly be construed through less toxic optics as a gesture of affection, solidarity, or care. Furthermore, the other six instances of male characters being comforted by female characters that Kracauer inveighs against and describes as a pervasive, reprehensible tendency among German men appear in a mere 1.3 percent of the total body of films cited in his book at large: they are hardly “typical,” then, in any usual sense.¹⁸

Leaving aside questions of language and translation, Eisner’s work seems to suffer in almost all instances for being associated with Kracauer’s; the political impetus and implications of *The Haunted Screen* have been deemed objectionable on the grounds both that they are too strident (and too similar to Kracauer’s in *From Caligari to Hitler*) and that they aren’t quite strident enough.¹⁹ Tellingly, the most recent edition of *From Caligari to Hitler* contains a six-page appendix listing inaccuracies in the text—mostly consisting of mistakes in the reported release dates of films, although some are more troubling, such as citations that have not been substantiated or gross errors in the characterization of a film’s plot or production—but it also contains a thirty-six page, painstaking introduction by Leonardo Quaresima that frames and qualifies the errata and opens up the work in valuable ways. None of the English-language editions of *The Haunted Screen* contains supplements as scrupulous or as generous as these. In fact, they have no supplements at all.²⁰

The second general category of acknowledgments—citations and references to Eisner’s work, rather than commentary on it—is the most prolific. By and large, *F. W. Murnau* and *Fritz Lang* are cited by contemporary scholars in neutral tones; the depth and breadth of research represented therein have made these monographs indispensable to studies of individual films, filmmakers, and technologies alike. These volumes have come to be so widely relied upon that it would be a challenge to find a study dealing with Weimar cinema culture that does not use or cite Eisner’s work in some capacity. Yet in narratives about the intellectual history of Weimar cinema studies, even straightforward citations of her work tend to fall back on diminutive language in describing Eisner and her work. Barry Salt’s pugna-cious article-length survey of Weimar cinema studies scholarship on Expressionism circa 1979, “From Caligari to Who?,” takes aim, as its title suggests,

first and foremost at Kracauer, and it differs from most second-wave studies in that Salt declines to lump Eisner's work in with his critique of Kracauer's.²¹ However, in the service of his larger argument—that Expressionism in the interwar German cinema has been too vaguely defined to date—Salt makes a handful of misleading, even false claims about the existing literature, mostly concerning what has or has not been addressed. Citing only John Willett's previous work on Expressionism as a positive influence on his own understanding, Salt overlooks Rudolf Kurtz's 1926 *Expressionismus und Film* along with a raft of short articles and encyclopedia entries Eisner published in the postwar period, and he misrepresents what little work of Eisner's he does engage.

Among the mistakes Salt makes in his survey are the following: first, he claims that nobody has yet addressed the stylistic variations within a single film's mise en scène, costume, and acting styles, or allowed that single elements might be properly considered Expressionist while the rest of the film might not. In point of fact, Eisner made this argument as early as 1949—thirty years prior to Salt—in an article for *La Revue du cinéma*, titled, “Aperçus sur le costume dans les films allemands,” as well as in all editions of *L'écran démoniaque* and *The Haunted Screen*. Salt also boldly claims that the Danish influence on German film, especially in terms of lighting, “seems to be unknown to everyone who has written on German cinema of the 20s,” yet Eisner treats this theme in an exhaustive 1957 entry on Expressionism and cinema for the *Enciclopedia dello spettacolo*, elements of which she reprised in the third chapter of *The Haunted Screen*, titled, “The Spell of Light: The Influence of Max Reinhardt.” In the latter, she argues, “Max Reinhardt was far from being the sole source of the German cinema's celebrated treatment of light and shade. There was also the contribution of the Nordic filmmakers (the Danes in particular) who invaded the German studios: Stellan Rye, Holger Madsen, Dinesen, for example. They brought with them, at a time when Expressionism had still not crystallized into a recognizable style, their love for nature and their feeling for chiaroscuro.”²² Salt wrongly claims to have inaugurated the study of numerous stylistic features and producers of Weimar cinema, including: the importance of Asta Nielsen's acting style; the supernatural themes in the work of Henrik Galeen and Paul Wegener; German attitudes toward the French seen through the lens of the Frederick the Great films of the twenties; the influence of Murnau's collaborative approach on his film style; and the importance of formalized directorial control for the interwar German cinema style. In reality, Eisner had discussed

each one of these topics with subtlety and specificity decades prior to Salt's intervention.²³ But his address of Eisner is most obtrusively problematic when it is direct. Arguing that previous work has overlooked Expressionist theater as an influence on German cinema, Salt claims: "Even Lotte Eisner's *The Haunted Screen*, which has a deal of pertinent information on the influence of Max Reinhardt on the German cinema, says nothing on this point."²⁴ Begrudging Eisner the standard phrasal modifier (e.g., "a good deal") and implying that her original analysis is less useful than the "information" she reports, Salt also misrepresents her work; aside from the shorter passages and numerous footnotes discussing Expressionist theater that a hurried glance might not catch, the book's thirteenth chapter, "The Handling of Crowds" begins with a section on *Metropolis* subtitled, "The Influence of the Expressionist Choruses and Piscator": a beacon all but the most lackadaisical reader ought to notice. He continues by offering the ostensibly novel insight that Karl Heinz Martin, César Klein, and Robert Neppach all directly influenced German cinematic Expressionism, a fact Eisner had established thirty years earlier in the pages of *La Revue du cinéma*, and that even Salt's target, Kracauer, well knew.

Salt's difficulties might be chalked up to a lack of familiarity with Eisner's work and the German-, Italian- and French-language secondary literature in which she participated, but no such explanation can be offered in the case of other commentators who were aware of the extent of Eisner's scholarship and belittled it nevertheless. Perhaps due to his investment in staking a distinct space in the secondary literature for his own work, Elsaesser characterizes Eisner's analysis of the Mayer-Murnau collaborations of the early twenties as too focused on "a specific art historical style or . . . a unique or unified *Weltanschauung*," in contrast with his own interest in the team as a subgenre unto themselves (which he calls "Murnau's 'corporate identity'") within the larger genre of Expressionist filmmaking, itself "a *genus* with a strong family resemblance between its individual specimen[s], and a collectively worked (proto-)type."²⁵ Elsaesser goes on in the next paragraph to explain the consistency of style and thematics as a result of the imbrication of all levels of above- and below-the-line labor on these films, using Eisner's original research as the source and substantiation of these claims, acknowledged in a brusque footnote.

Paradoxically, Eisner functions as the problem and the source of its solution: the task *Weimar Cinema and After* mandates for itself is to correct misunderstandings Elsaesser claims Eisner set in motion, but the new

information and fresh perspectives brought to bear on these alleged misunderstandings are in fact the cornerstones of Eisner's own monograph and are implicit in *The Haunted Screen*. Yet Elsaesser's balky relationship to Eisner's work is perhaps nowhere more obvious than in his chapter on Murnau. Bafflingly, Elsaesser states midway through the first page of the chapter that "As with so many other directors of the silent era, chief honour [for contemporary access to and appreciation of Murnau's work] must go to Henri Langlois, his assistant Lotte Eisner and the members of the *nouvelle vague*, whom Langlois's Paris Cinémathèque provided with their filmic education," in spite of the fact that the second sentence of this very chapter had been annotated with the admission that Eisner's monograph "is still the most important study of Murnau's life and work, and the source I am drawing on for much of the biographical information."²⁶ The chapter's first in-text acknowledgment of Eisner—the one that will register most prominently for the majority of Elsaesser's readers—is as Langlois's "assistant" and second fiddle, yet as the footnotes and an attentive reading of the chapter at large attest, it is as sole author of a seminal text in the field of film studies that Eisner matters for this chapter.²⁷

It's worth dwelling for a moment longer on this assertion, since it offers a useful example of another problematic tendency in the secondary literature: the description of Eisner as a helper and subordinate to Langlois. Without an understanding of the distinctive, independent archival and historiographical praxis Eisner forged in her time there, particularly in terms of the philosophical differences between Eisner and Langlois and the degree to which Eisner directed the Cinémathèque française's interwar German acquisitions efforts, Elsaesser's description of her merely as Langlois's "assistant," and his claim that *The Haunted Screen* was addressed to Langlois as her "benefactor," might pass muster.²⁸ In view of the evidence to the contrary—in the Cinémathèque's administrative archives, and in Eisner's scholarly work—it is clear that not only do such descriptions misallocate credit, but they fundamentally misunderstand the dynamics of labor, publicity, and mythmaking that have been well documented in the literature about the Cinémathèque's turbulent midcentury organizational politics.

A third family of texts about Eisner is comprised of tributes and celebrations published during her lifetime and after her death in 1983 that work to articulate—in the connective and enunciative senses—and to reanimate a particular narrative of her life and legacy.²⁹ While they usually gesture at the connections among her critical, scholarly, and archival work, these essays

tend to do so in a biographical mode and along a linear chronology, their authors slipping into anecdotal, sometimes worshipful registers. Richard Roud's exemplary "The Moral Taste of Lotte Eisner" is peppered with pithy details and aperçus gathered from conversations with Eisner, and it closes with the remark: "To have met Lotte Eisner was a privilege; to have known her was to have known a representative of the best of German intelligence, wit and warmth."³⁰ A moving tribute to their relationship, Roud's reflections on Eisner's work and contributions are displaced by memorialization of a bygone, of the trope of the noble German: the emphasis is placed on what has been lost, rather than what might persist or remain vital past the point of her death. In addition to their resonances in the postwar period, particularly in terms of denazification, the tributes in this vein to Eisner qua German can be read, to a certain extent, as exchanges in the marketplace of social capital. Werner Herzog, for example, has been particularly effusive about Eisner's involvement in his early career, but, as I explore in the conclusion, the benefits of that imprimatur flowed both ways, and they can be difficult to parse. It is clear that Herzog's take on Eisner's significance, in the absence of any substantial, positive arguments to the contrary, has come to be widely accepted. However, I argue that there are important aspects of her work that go entirely unaddressed in that frame of reference. Furthermore, coded narratives about Eisner proffered by Herzog and other young filmmakers who knew her in her last decades—focused on her physical frailty, her fragility, her nurturing impulses—have contributed, in concert with the underlying assumptions made by many film scholars, to an informal consensus that revisiting her better-known work, let alone looking into her little-known work, is unlikely to yield much.

Yet there have been important exceptions to the larger trends in the secondary literature identified above. Laurent Mannoni was one of the young men at the Cinémathèque française whom Eisner mentored, but, unlike others, he has consistently advocated in his own scholarly work for a revision of the mythology around Eisner's role there, recuperating her archival work and, to a limited extent, her postwar scholarship in his 2006 volume dedicated to the history of the Cinémathèque française, as well as several articles.³¹ Mannoni's work, while illuminating, is oriented exclusively toward the context of the Cinémathèque française, works primarily with source materials held there, and engages the broader contexts of academic film study or Eisner's other careers only peripherally.

More recently, there has been further work in key areas. Julia Eisner's research in the family archive promises to shed further light on Lotte Eisner's

postwar years and her work at the Cinémathèque française. A symposium convened by Erica Carter and Julia Eisner in the fall of 2018 also showcased the work of Janet Bergstrom, who affirmed the importance of Lotte Eisner's archival and scholarly work. Bergstrom indicated in her presentation the relevance of Eisner's work on Murnau in particular, but Bergstrom's work is by no means alone today in reverberating with the impact of Eisner's scholarship and archival praxis. Michael Wedel's contribution to the symposium took some steps toward placing Eisner's dissertation in context, although the bulk of his talk was devoted to a comparative reading of Eisner's and Éric Rohmer's uses of the terms *Stimmung* and *Umwelt* and to the reasons that Rohmer may have drawn on Eisner's work without citing her, rather than on the original context of her dissertation, or the somewhat complicated problem of Eisner's own modes of citation and reference with regard to these terms.³² Classicist Patrick Schollmeyer recently echoed the call for a comprehensive intellectual historicization and disciplinary contextualization of Eisner's dissertation and career in film journalism and scholarship, suggesting that reservoirs of interest beyond Anglophone film study continue to precipitate.³³

The reception of Eisner's postwar work and the neglect of her interwar journalism have as much to do with the dynamics and politics of institutionalized film study in the academy as they do with the ways Eisner described and contextualized the work and herself as its producer. Therefore, these recent stirrings suggest that the present moment is opportune for reexamination of both those descriptions on Eisner's part and the work itself.

STRUCTURE AND SCOPE

In the first chapter, "Fräulein Doktor Eisner," I open by discussing Eisner's commentary on her family life and her disclosures in the memoirs and interviews on her childhood experience of gender dysphoria. In reading Eisner's later recollections of her first days, we gain an understanding both of how she understood herself to have moved in the world as a child and young person and what she would later conceive of as the larger forces shaping that movement—that is, her experience of choice and the later reflections on what had conditioned, or, in some cases, voided her choices. Important historical factors include the changing, contested status of women in the academy in Germany during this period and the ways that gender and class

figure in Eisner's narrative—set forth in her memoirs, as well as in numerous interviews given from the 1950s through the 1980s—about her education, writing style, and intellectual interests. From there, I move to place Eisner's doctoral training as an art historian and her 1924 dissertation in context, providing a stylistic analysis of the text and a summary of her contributions therein. Indicating the ways it participated in contemporaneous academic art historical and archaeological discourse, I highlight the elements of her dissertation that anticipate her later journalistic and scholarly work.

In the second chapter, "A Reluctant Bellwether: Dr. L. H. Eisner and Flapper at the *Film-Kurier*," I present a detailed assessment of Eisner's journalism published in the *Film-Kurier* from 1927 to 1933 and offer an analysis of some of the political, aesthetic, and philosophical commitments evinced by this voluminous body of work. Glossing the characteristics of the publication at large, and the larger trends during the period of Eisner's tenure, I show the ways her writing style and areas of coverage changed over time, and the themes and approaches that persisted throughout, bringing to light selections from this corpus that have not been reproduced or discussed elsewhere in English-, German-, or French-language scholarship to date. I situate this body of work within the larger debates of the period about film aesthetics and politics. I pay special attention to the publications in which she broached novel perspectives on key contemporaneous discourse, and the areas in which Eisner thought and wrote outside the mainstream. In the latter cases, I argue, we discover the vital interwar cinema culture anew and find new opportunities and points of engagement for film studies in the present.

The third chapter, "*La seule historienne*: Exile, Salvage, and Community at the Cinémathèque Française," traces the early years of Eisner's exile and her time in hiding during the Occupation, showing how these experiences shaped her archival work at the Cinémathèque française, where she honed a theory and practice of transnational, multilingual collection, preservation, and access as chief curator. I argue that the historiographical underpinnings of her archival work in the postwar period were shaped by the wholesale destruction wrought on the social, economic, political, and institutional networks that she and many of her colleagues and peers from the interwar period had relied upon for sustenance and community. Grounded in original research I conducted in the administrative archives of the Cinémathèque française, this chapter engages contemporary secondary literature on archive theory and queer historiography to flesh out a description and analysis of

Eisner's methods in the context of the period. I argue that the received wisdom regarding Eisner's role at the Cinémathèque and the value of her often highly personalized archival praxis is overdue for a revision, and I suggest several angles from which I believe particularly productive rereadings are possible.

In the fourth chapter, "‘Lacunae Everywhere’: Iterative Historiography and the Midcentury Palimpsests," I focus on Eisner's scholarly publications—comprising over seventy articles and several books, including *L'écran démoniaque* and *The Haunted Screen*, *F. W. Murnau*, and *Fritz Lang*—which she continued to revise, expand, and reshape in each successive edition. Taking its title quotation from Eisner's own assessment of the state of film historiography circa 1953, this chapter performs a close comparative analysis of Eisner's postwar publications, tracing her research methodology, the historiographical stakes of her work, and the ways she nuanced signal concepts and lines of argumentation. The problematic ways that Eisner has been cited and elided find some explanation in the organizational, institutional, and social dynamics of the postwar milieux in which she worked and published; yet they also spring from the ways Eisner explained her work and addressed her intended audiences, and from the associations she avoided and alliances she spurned. One of the key interventions this chapter makes is to place these postwar scholarly publications in context, both in terms of Eisner's doctoral work and interwar journalism, and in the emergent field of academic film studies in France and the United States.

The conclusion, "The Woolly Mammoth of the Cinémathèque," covers Eisner's later years as a symbolic figure for young filmmakers associated with New Wave movements in France and Germany. During this period, Eisner enjoyed greater recognition within a larger community of filmmakers and scholars than at any other point in her life, yet the narrative that began to solidify then about the scope and significance of her work was incomplete and ultimately foreclosed many of its most interesting potentialities. Returning to the mythmaking process alluded to in this introduction that Eisner, Roud, Herzog, and others set in motion, I assess what was lost in the fashioning of these myths and demonstrate what is gained by a more robust understanding of her work. I ground this discussion in the comparative narrative and stylistic analysis of a pair of documentaries about Eisner—*Die langen Ferien der Lotte H. Eisner* (*The Long Vacation of Lotte H. Eisner*, Sohrab Shahid Saless, 1979) and *Lotte Eisner in Germany* (S. M. Horowitz, 1980)—that take divergent approaches to mediating displacement and exile; one conforming

to received notions about the nature of her accomplishments and legacy, the other suggesting a more complex, open-ended approach to her life and work. I close this final chapter with a reflection on the stakes and risks of recuperative reading and on what my own historiographical commitments have been.

In excavating Eisner's early work and evaluating the impact of exile and displacement on her career, I bring her work and the arc of her career into sharper focus and highlight a novel opportunity to consider the relation of labor and gender to the emergence and circulation of theories of film history, aesthetics, and culture. I am wary of the additive model of historical recuperation and have made an effort to relate my critique in this particular case to larger structures and norms. Eisner's rich and generative body of work over multiple domains has been hiding in plain sight, and the ways of seeing characterized by this occlusion have resulted in many other oversights. In conversation with feminist historiography, this project brings new evidence to bear on long-standing debates about popular culture, historiography, and the archive in the context of seismic political and economic shifts in twentieth-century European and US history. Reading Eisner's memoirs, dissertation, interwar journalism, and the extensive administrative and personal correspondence from the postwar period alongside her more familiar scholarly publications, I argue, may not only help us to reorient the lodestars of early film theory, but to sketch new constellations in the intellectual history of the field, thereby freeing up lines of inquiry that have been hitherto blurred or dimmed by habits of seeing and the vantage points from which a disciplinary imaginary has been plotted.

All translations from German, French, and Italian into English, unless otherwise noted, are my own; in the cases of authors whose work has already circulated for many years in English translation, such as André Bazin, I have opted to quote from previously published translations rather than to retranslate excerpts myself. Eisner's writing voice in German, particularly during her time at the *Film-Kurier*, is expressive and highly original. In her later years, she often remarked that writing style was among the most important aspects of her journalistic craft, in addition to being a special point of pride. In my translations of German-language source texts, I have worked to give a sense in English of my own impressions of the style, tone, and diction in German, resulting in looser, more idiomatic renderings where possible: a "domesticating" translation per Lawrence Venuti's dichotomy. In contemporaneous reviews of her postwar French-language publications—particularly