



#lotteisnersymposium

LOTTE EISNER: WRITER, ARCHIVIST, CURATOR

Programme

Friday 26th October

**Venue: Birkbeck Cinema, 43 Gordon Square,
London WC1H 0PD**

18.00

Welcome: Michael Temple (BIMI)/Julia Eisner
(KCL)/Erica Carter (KCL/GSSN)

Audio extracts from interviews, introduced by Julia Eisner

18.45

Film Screening: *The Long Vacation of Lotte Eisner*
(Sohrab Shaheed Saless, 1979) (60 mins)

20.00

Drinks reception: Birkbeck Cinema

Saturday 27th October

**Venue: Nash Lecture Theatre (K2.31), King's College,
London, King's Building, Strand**

9.30

**Registration: Small Committee Room
K0.31, King's Building, Strand**

- 10.00 Welcome: Erica Carter/Julia Eisner/Michael Temple
Nash Lecture Theatre K2.31, King's Building, Strand
- 10.30 **Panel: Finding Lotte Eisner**
Julia Eisner (King's College London)
Lotte Eisner: Pioneer of the Art and Craft of Collecting
- Naomi DeCelles (UC Santa Barbara)
Lotte Eisner Out and About: A Critic at Large
Chair: Erica Carter
- 11.40 **Coffee** - Chapters Cafeteria (Floor 2, King's Building)
- 12.00 Janet Bergstrom (UCLA)
The Evolution of Lotte Eisner's Writing on Murnau
Chair: Michael Temple
- 13.00 **Lunch** - Small Committee Room K0.31
(provided for speakers)
- 14.00 Film screening: *City Girl* (Murnau, 1930) (77 mins)
Introduced by Michael Wedel
- 15.30 **Tea** – Chapters cafeteria
- 16.00 Michael Wedel (Cinepoetics Center for Advanced Film Studies,
Berlin). *Faust* in America: *Sunrise* through the
looking glass of Lotte Eisner and Eric Rohmer
Chair: Erica Carter
- 17.00 **Round up** – Julia Eisner/Erica Carter/Michael Temple
- 17.30 End

Biographies

Janet Bergstrom

Janet Bergstrom, Research Professor of Cinema & Media Studies, UCLA, specializes in archivally-based, cross-national studies of émigré directors such as F.W. Murnau, Jean Renoir, Josef von Sternberg, Alfred Hitchcock and Fritz Lang as well as French/Francophone directors Chantal Akerman and Claire Denis. She has published five film-historical documentaries on DVD, most recently Josef von Sternberg – *Salvation Hunter* (Edition Filmmuseum, Austrian Film Museum, Vienna 2016) with Sternberg's *The Salvation Hunters* (1924).

Naomi DeCelles

Naomi is currently completing her dissertation, "(Re)collecting Lotte Eisner: Curation, displacement, and memory." In the thesis, she offers an in-depth study of the remarkable transnational career of journalist, archivist, and historian Lotte Eisner, framing Eisner's contributions to the discourse on cinema as an object of art historical inquiry within the context of the emergence and consolidation of academic Film Studies during the mid-twentieth century. Her areas of interest include cultural history, feminist historiography, and archive studies.

Michael Wedel

Michael Wedel is Professor of Media History in the Digital Age at the Filmuniversität Babelsberg KONRAD WOLF in Potsdam, and Co-Director (Sprecher) of the Cinepoetics Center for Advanced Film Studies in Berlin. He has written extensively on genre film (musicals war film, the German thriller and international fantasy film, and more recently drew together his writings on film history in the 2011 *Filmgeschichte als Krisengeschichte. Schnitte und Spuren durch den deutschen Film* (Film History as Crisis History. On the trail of a fractured German History, transcript 2011). His *Murnau and Modernity* will appear in German and English in 2019, alongside two further monographs with de Gruyter Publishers, *Pictorial Effects: Senses of Rupture. On the Poetics and Culture of Popular German Cinema*, and *Ort und Zeit. Filmische Heterotopien von Hochbaum bis Tykwer* (Place and Time. Filmic Heterotopias from Hochbaum to Tykwer).

Julia Eisner

Julia Eisner is working on a PhD project about her great-aunt Lotte Eisner, at King's College, London, supervised by Professor Erica Carter. Prior to her PhD project Julia was a BBC Radio 4 reporter and producer for 20 years making programmes and documentaries. She then changed career and took an LLB and an LLM at Birkbeck, University of London where she taught in the Law faculty for 7 years and worked as a research assistant on a European Law Project culminating in *The Making of the European Constitution* (2007). Following this research project Julia became Manager of the Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities creating a successful public-facing organisation presenting a programme of academic events. In January 2016 Julia left Birkbeck to concentrate on researching and writing. In November 2016, her programme *The Vigil* was broadcast on BBC Radio 4.

Lotte Eisner 1896 Berlin – 1983 Paris

Lotte Eisner was born into a prosperous middle-class secular Jewish family in Berlin where, with her older brother Fritz, she was educated at home by a stream of English governesses. Despite restrictions preventing girls from going to university, she successfully studied archaeology, art history and philosophy in Berlin, Freiburg, Munich and finally in Rostock where in 1924 she was awarded a PhD on the compositional development of Greek vases. After a stint working at archaeological excavations in Italy she began her career in journalism, writing arts reviews (particularly theatre) for the *Literarische Welt* and the *Berliner Tageblatt*. In 1927 a friend of her brother, Hans Feld, invited her to work as a staff journalist and critic on one of Berlin's many trade film newspapers – the *Film-Kurier*. In 1933, three months after Hitler's seizure of power, Eisner received a message that her name was on a regime blacklist. On March 31 she bought a first-class ticket and left for Paris on the overnight train, never to return to live in Germany.

In Paris, Eisner found work once again as a freelance journalist but this time for the *Internationale Filmschau* and *Theaterkritik*, both based in Prague, and for *World Film News* in London. At one point she used a variety of pseudonyms in her attempts to sell her writing - Harriet Eltern, Carola Eschen and Charlotte Ferrand. This work was supplemented by jobs as varied as babysitting, dog-walking, ghost-writing and translating. In 1936 Eisner followed up an advert in *Cinematographe* magazine, expecting to interview a couple of young men collecting and screening silent films. They were Henri Langlois and George Franju, who ran a film club, *Cercle du Cinéma*, and whose small library of films formed the embryonic beginnings of what became, after the Second World War, the Cinémathèque Française.

In 1940, soon after the Germans had occupied Paris, Eisner was rounded up in the one of the first 'raffles' and taken to the Vel d'Hiv (Vélodrome d'Hiver) an indoor cycling race track where she was held in transit along with 250 other single and mainly Jewish women. From there they were transported to Gurs, a concentration camp in the Pyrenees, originally constructed by the French in 1939 after the Spanish Civil War to imprison refugees and prisoners of war. By 1940 the French had begun to send 'undesirables' there, including Jewish refugees, French and Basque political activists. Eisner remained in the camp for 4 months until she escaped on foot to Montpellier and then on to Rodez and finally to the small town of Figeac in central France, where she was hidden with false papers, as Louise Escoffier, for four years. After the liberation of Paris, in 1944, Eisner went back to work at the re-formed Cinémathèque Française, where Langlois (now the General Secretary) appointed her Chief Curator, a job she retained for over thirty years. Eisner's focus during the first twenty years after the War was on collecting film and artefacts from the days of Weimar Cinema. She rediscovered the work of displaced film directors, set designers and cinematographers and travelled all over the world in order to bring back art work, set designs, films, stills, costumes and props to the archive at the Cinémathèque. At the same time and in her own spare time, Eisner was using the archive for research as she began writing her first book on Weimar silent film, which was published in French in 1952 as

L'Écran Démoniaque. Re-published and extended in 1965 and published in English as *The Haunted Screen* in 1969, the book gave Eisner an added dimension as she was now in demand for lectures, as a critic, a writer, a juror at film festivals and as a curator and archivist. After finishing *The Haunted Screen*, Eisner began her next book on *F.W. Murnau*, which was published in French in 1964 and won the Armand Tallier prize in 1965. Eisner's final book was a study of the films of her great friend, Fritz Lang, published in French in 1974 and in English in 1976.

Lotte Eisner's enthusiasm and keen interest in film and filmmakers, both past and present, never wavered and during the 1960s and 70s she became a support and mentor to the emerging group of young German filmmakers such as Schlöndorff, Fassbinder, Wenders, Achternbusch and Herzog.

In 1955 Lotte Eisner became a French citizen and to her great delight, a year before she died in 1982, her lifelong contribution to film and film archives was recognised by the French government when she was awarded the Chevalier de l'Ordre National de la Légion d'honneur and the Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres. In 2018 the town of Figeac honoured Lotte Eisner with a plaque to mark her four years in hiding during the war.

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