

“AS A PERSON I AM A SYNTHESIS BETWEEN EUROPE AND AMERICA.”¹ INDIVIDUALISM AND THE EXPERIENCE OF EXILE IN THE FILMS OF FRED ZINNEMANN

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Broadening the horizon of both film studies and social sciences approaches to the cultural and creative industries by providing a historical perspective on an exemplary work biography in the Hollywood system, this Ph.D. project focuses on the work of Fred Zinnemann, a director hitherto neglected by film studies, in order to analyze the historical development of the modes of production in the film industry from an insider's point of view. The project aims to illustrate the continuities, but also the shifts and breaks between the conditions of the artistic production during the classical Hollywood period and today's creative industries' production scenes. With its choice of subject, the project also involves a particular focus on the question of exile, both as an element of Zinnemann's work biography and as a narrative trope in his films. At age 22, Fred Zinnemann emigrated in 1929 from Vienna, Austria, to the USA. His original aim was to learn about “American standard of talkies” in Hollywood and then return to his native Austria. Zinnemann ended up by staying and working for over half a century for different American studios, starting out as a studio director at MGM with a seven-year-contract and eventually becoming the director and even producer of films he wanted to realize from the 1960s onwards. Given the long run of his career which spans a number of major shifts in Hollywood's modes of production combined with the fact that the film industry has always been both a driver and a model for the creative industries more generally, Zinnemann's body of work and work biography provide us with a useful pathway to the study of the developments in the cultural and creative industries over the course of the 20th century, from the late Fordist models of the 1930s to the flexible specialization modes of production of the 1960s and the increasingly globalized operations of Hollywood in the 1970s.

Drawing on Sylvie Lindeperg's approach of describing a film as a discrete historical document as developed in her comprehensive study of *Nuit et Brouillard*³ (Alain Resnais, 1955), my work examines Zinnemann's films and the archival sources connected with them as “historical documents” for the development of the creative industries throughout the 20th century. Zinnemann's personal and business correspondences, together with a series of contracts as well as censorship and court cases documents, which so far have attracted little or no attention from film historians, provide us with a rich base of archival materials for a study of this type⁴. Neglected by auteur studies, but highly regarded as a practitioner of his craft inside the industry, Zinnemann's papers provide unique insights into the ways in which Zinnemann the artist operated and navigated inside the industry. In particular his case provides a template for a study of creative work in an industrial context that transcends the established analytical frameworks of art vs. commerce and artist vs. producer that dominate auteurist studies of the Hollywood scene. One of my working hypothesis is that Zinnemann's case may be considered to be exemplary for an understanding of

today's more flexible and fragmented structure of creative industries as Zinnemann's work biography sheds light on the freedom and the necessities in the working processes inside this economic body. Through an analysis of specific conflicts and their resolution, this study will reconstruct the working conditions under which Zinnemann produced his films with the larger goal of tracing the shift from film industry as a traditional cultural industry to a network-based creative industry of the contemporary type, and from quasi-industrial modes of production to more strongly individualized processes.

Two levels are to be examined: first, the detailed research of the film production process will trace the relation between the artist and the business of film production in the case of Zinnemann as a paradigm for the change in film industries from the fordistic era to "Hollywood" as an international production mode. Second, a close analysis of the films themselves will form the point of departure for a discussion on exile and individualism as topics of both Zinnemann's films and his work biography, thereby shedding new light on the debate about "film exile." In an industry that made more than a third of its profits from the foreign sale of films as early as the early 1930s, the Hollywood mode of production tends to integrate rather than segregate filmmakers in exile, benefiting from their cultural backgrounds and multi-faceted world-views in order to continue to appeal to as broad a global audience as possible. The second focus of the project, then, is an exploration of the experience of exile in film. Rather than focusing on the low-budget and art-house films that Hamid Naficy has brought together under the umbrella term of "accented Cinema"⁵ this project traces the experience of exile in Hollywood mainstream films and through an analysis of their mode of production. One recurring motif in Zinnemann's films makes his work particularly germane for this kind of study. In a corpus of 40 films produced over 48 years in a variety of genres and styles, almost all of his films – particularly the films where he acted as a producer, but also a number of his earlier studio films or the Stanley Kramer-producer western *High Noon* (1952) – deal with characters facing crucial lifetime decisions, usually decisions dealing with the problem of individual liberty vs. potential loss of liberty. While these are situations solidly grounded in mainstream American narratives of the victory of liberty over tyranny, and while none of the films overtly talk about life in exile and only a few directly tackle the delusion⁶ of the Nazi era (such as *The Seventh Cross*, 1943, which is based on Anna Seghers' novel about seven prisoners fleeing from a concentration camp in pre-war Nazi Germany), Zinnemann's films tend to deal with characters that could be interpreted as characters with a war experience and not wanting to go through the experience of 20th century totalitarianism again. Instead, these films extol the virtues of individualism and moral integrity as a way of avoiding a return to the barbarism of totalitarian mass movements that led to the destruction of the European Jewry, Zinnemann's parents among them. By treating film characters as "symbols" and "negotiators" of comprehensive messages in the sense of Jens Eder⁷, the project proposes to trace the experience of exile through both the films and their production histories, thus combining historical archival research with film analysis and a focus on film aesthetics. In so doing, the project ultimately aims to provide a model of analysis for future research into both the working conditions of creative industries and also the complex questions pertaining to the way in which an artist's individual experience in a globalized media environment expresses itself even in works that do not directly deal with that experience.

- 1 Fred Zinnemann in his interview with Max Kade, Hollywood 1986, Deutsche Kinemathek Berlin Archiv.
- 2 Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Vinzenz Hediger, Ruhr University; Co-Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Noah Eisenberg, New School for Social Research, New York.
- 3 Sylvie Lindeperg, *Spuren, Dokumente, Monumente. Filmische Verwendungen von Geschichte, historische Verwendungen des Films*, in Eva Hohenberger, Judith Keilbach (eds.), *Die Gegenwart der Vergangenheit. Dokumentarfilm, Fernsehen und Geschichte*, Vorwerk 8, Berlin 2003; Sylvie Lindeperg, *Nuit et brouillard. Un film dans l'histoire*, Odile Jacob, Paris 2007.
- 4 Zinnemann Collection, Margaret Herrick Library: "The Fred Zinnemann papers span the years 1923-1996 [...]. The collection contains production files, television files, story material, correspondence, and subject files." <http://www.oscars.org/library/collections/special/index.html>, last visit 9 May 2009.
- 5 Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema. Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2001.
- 6 Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer, *Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente* (1969), Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH, Frankfurt am Main 2001.
- 7 Jens Eder, *Die Figur im Film. Grundlagen der Figurenanalyse*, Schüren, Marburg 2008.