Neue Sachlichkeit and Avant-Garde.
An Introduction

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Neue Sachlichkeit keeps attracting the attention of the public, as most recently overview exhibitions as Neue Sachlichkeit in Dresden (Dalbajewa 2011) or Der zweite Aufbruch in die Moderne. Expressionismus – Bauhaus – Neue Sachlichkeit (Stamm 2011) have shown. The same goes for exhibitions devoted to individual artists from the context of Neue Sachlichkeit, as those on Christian Schad (Tempel 2009) or on Paul Citroen (Keuning 2008) Scholarship, too, has kept on dealing with this phenomenon from the late Sixties onwards. The dissertation by Helmut Lethen (1970) and the anthology by Henri R. Paucker (1974) were the first peaks of that line of research. An increasing interest of academics is recognizable from the 90s onwards, with among others books by Jaap Goedegebuure (1992) and Ralf Grüttemeier (1995) on Dutch literature, Helmut Lethen (1994) on the intellectual and anthropological dispositions of Neue Sachlichkeit, Sabina Becker (2000) on German literature and Blotkamp and Koopmans on painting (1999), not to forget more recent publications as Die (k)alte Sachlichkeit, edited by Moritz Baßler and Ewout van der Knaap (2004) on the occasion of the 65th birthday of Helmut Lethen, or Steve Plumb (2006) who puts his main focus on painting.

When overlooking this academic reception of Neue Sachlichkeit, one could say that there seems to be a turning point around 1990. From the Sixties onwards, the picture drawn of Neue Sachlichkeit was dominated by the views of its opponents in the artistic and ideological debates of the Twenties and Thirties. Those critics condemned the Neue Sachlichkeit for a lack of artistic transformation of reality by sticking too close to reality (a lack of
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Gestaltung in terms of Lukács), for a lack of politically desirable views and position takings (for Ernst Bloch *Neue Sachlichkeit* was the doctor at the hospital-bed in which capitalism lay), or for both (cf. Grüttemeier 1995: 7-52). Until the early Nineties, these normative views were basically reproduced by literary historians as adequate descriptions. In other words: *Neue Sachlichkeit* was criticised by scholars basing their judgment on opposing poetics and political views taken from contemporary opponents of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*. There is nothing wrong with an opposing poetics, of course – but a differentiated description and analysis of *Neue Sachlichkeit* remains out of reach when scholars basically do what is the job of artists, critics, publishers etc.: step into the trenches of the poetic battlefields (cf. Grüttemeier 1995: 52; Becker 2000: 26f.).

From the mid-Nineties onwards, research tends to pay greater attention to the *Neue Sachlichkeit*-proponents themselves by reconstructing their poetics, views and artworks as one side of the debates of the Twenties and Thirties to be brought into light. This research can be divided into two branches. The first one, started off again by Helmut Lethen (1994), tried to reconstruct the intellectual dispositions and instructions (‘Verhaltenslehren’) of the period in between the wars as circling around the “cold persona”, constructed by Helmuth Plessner, Carl Schmitt and Ernst Jünger. The above mentioned volume *Die (k)alte Sachlichkeit* already in its title-pun refers to *Verhaltenslehren der Kälte* and *Neue Sachlichkeit*, though astonishingly enough relevant contributions to Lethen’s scholarly milestone are generally lacking from the book (cf. Oster 2005). The second branch focuses on the poetic and critical texts circling around *Neue Sachlichkeit* and on the artistic production itself (cf. Grüttemeier 1995, Becker 2000), by trying to direct new, not opponent-biased searchlights on *neu-sachliche* texts, paintings, buildings, photographs, music etc. in order to see what relevance they might have in nowadays critical debates and scholarship on *Neue Sachlichkeit*. It is this second branch of research that the present volume wants to contribute to.

The picture that can be derived from the contributions in this book confirm, to start with, what publications as those by Hans Anten (1982) or Wolfgang Fähnders (2010) have already shown: *Neue Sachlichkeit* has basically been a German and Dutch enterprise. The fact that in both countries the same notions are used – *Neue Sachlichkeit* and Nieuwe Zakelijkheid (directly translated from the