

***Kinoreformbewegung* Revisited: Performing the Cinematograph as a Pedagogical Tool**

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‘But what has become of pantomime drama today? In most cases it is having a brutalising effect on the audience through an accumulation of crimes and baseness in invented, realist dramas. Conradt inspected 250 dramas: “One could be generous and turn a blind eye on every single drama, thinking: that’s what life is like, sometimes. But looking at this whole sort of pictures and taking into consideration that in 150 plays there were 97 murders, 51 adulteries, 19 seductions, 22 abductions and 45 suicides, that 176 thieves, 25 prostitutes, 35 drunkards, an army of policemen, detectives and bailiffs made their appearance, then one has to understand that things cannot go on like that, or all morality will be destroyed”.’¹

This is a rather characteristic quote from one of the many publications by teachers, educators and pedagogues, who participated in the first phase of the German *Kinoreformbewegung* (cinema reform movement) between 1907 and 1915, continuing an earlier battle against trash and pulp literature. However, those participating in the movement should not be seen simply as enemies of moving pictures, even though most studies on the *Kinoreformbewegung* foreground their sometimes very violent criticism of cinema. As the name under which they were organised indicates, they wanted to reform the cinema business, both by improving the aesthetic quality of the films and by stamping out everything that in their eyes was harmful or unwholesome about the new medium. Inspired by predecessors such as Wilhelm Börner, Ernst Schultze and especially Heinrich Wolgast, who protested against trash literature,² a group of teachers in Hamburg founded in 1907 a commission for the protection of the youth. They protested against the unhealthy conditions in cheap movies houses³ and fought against ‘horrible dramas’, like the ones inspected by the protestant pastor Walther Conradt. The group wanted to have sensationalist stories replaced, in particular by non-fiction films, and started in

1912 to publish regularly lists of recommended films.⁴ These contained travelogues, industrial pictures, educational films on biological, chemical and physical phenomena as well as technical demonstrations.

In spite of the seemingly common goals of the various initiatives that in Imperial Germany worked towards a *Kinoreform*, a closer look at their writings and activities reveals that what is often perceived as a movement was in fact a rather heterogeneous conglomerate of individuals or interest groups: teachers, pedagogues, educators (Hermann Lemke, Adolf Sellmann, Willy Warstatt), academics (librarian Ernst Schultze or art theorist Konrad Lange), journalists, intellectuals, but also medical doctors (psychologist Robert Gaupp), churchmen (the above-mentioned Walther Conrad), lawyers, politicians or other representatives of the state (magistrate Albert Hellwig, civil servant Berkermann or Berlin's main censor Karl Brunner), and even people that were part of the film business (such as editor Emil Perlmann and free-lance journalist and author Hermann Häfker, both writing for the Düsseldorf trade journal *Der Kinematograph*).⁵ So there could be quite divergent views on how to achieve this reform.

In addition to efforts to improve and regulate cinema, in their reflections on the medium the reformers also developed interesting theoretical insights into the formal and aesthetic characteristics of film (as demonstrated in particular by Helmut H. Diederichs' pioneering work since the 1980s).⁶ Another aspect of the cinema reform movement's activities, however, has drawn less attention: in order to demonstrate that it was indeed possible to create a different kind of cinema show, various local and regional groups organised screenings that were meant to uplift and educate the audience. Their final goal was to establish their brand of educational screening as a model also for commercial film theatres. From 1909 onward, there were several initiatives to open municipal cinemas with regular programmes, whose commercial viability, however, proved to be too precarious.

In the following we will concentrate on the *Kinoreformer's* activities with regard to educational screenings. We will argue that the didactic principles according to which these were structured are firmly embedded in contemporary discourses on learning and memory, and that the German pedagogy reform movement provided arguments for the *Kinoreformer's* efforts to establish film as a teaching tool.

We will first look at Hermann Häfker's ideas concerning educational programmes and their composition, which we will then relate to psychological conceptions of memory at that time. In the next step, we will discuss some of

the pedagogical debates in turn-of-the century Germany, and how these could be used by the *Kinoreform* in their campaign for film screenings in schools. We will then return to the specific *dispositif* Häfker had conceived for his own presentations in order to see how these principles were translated into a concrete performance practice.

Programming: the Screening as a Multi-Media Event

In the very first issue of *Bild und Film. Zeitschrift für Lichtbilderei und Kinematographie*, the section ‘*Rundschau*’ (panorama) opens with an item on model shows (*Mustervorstellungen*).⁷ As the journal is published by the Lichtbilderei, a catholic institution created on 27 May 1909 by the editor Wilhelm Hahn⁸ to promote and facilitate the use of media in schools, this presentation of exemplary screenings has to be considered a programmatic initiative. From this issue dated March 1912 up to its last in 1914, *Bild und Film* reproduced various programmes, such as, for example, one from the ‘*Kosmographie*’ in Dresden plus several others organised by a Women’s Association in Magdeburg in cooperation with the local Teachers’ Commission.⁹ All combine cinematographic projections with recitations and music or songs. Some of the titles listed may refer to slides rather than views, but this is not specified. The programmes were thematic ones: in Dresden the audience enjoyed a ‘recitational-cinematographic evening’ on ‘Animals in Poetry and Life’, the cinematograph being in charge of providing the latter. The Magdeburg performances presented programmes on geographic regions: Scandinavia and the polar North, or the ‘Sunny South’.¹⁰

One year later, an article came to the conclusion that the *Kinoreformbewegung*’s efforts to establish educational screenings in commercial cinemas had failed, at least for the time being. Instead its author, the journalist Alfred Rosenthal, suggested they should rather turn to leagues, clubs and other associations. He listed seven different model programmes for specific organisations, which could be used as templates: one for a circle of aviation enthusiasts, one for a society for the protection of birds, one for medical doctors and staff, one for a women’s association, one for a veterans’ union, one for a colonial propaganda league and one programme for an evening dedicated to social issues. Again, these shows were to combine lectures, slides, films and music (maybe in some cases played from a gramophone), poems and songs, though not necessarily all of them in the same event.¹¹

According to Hermann Häfker, a central figure of the Lichtbilderei group, a projection (*Vorführung*) had to become a performance (*Vorstellung*) in order to create a maximum effect on the audience.¹² In his reflections on the organisation

of educational screenings, he particularly stressed the importance of pauses in order to give some rest to the spectators' eyes, and for the same reasons he suggested to introduce kaleidoscopic colour interludes or shadow plays.¹³ Most of all, Häfker warned against any form of sensory overload: music was to be used sparingly, either to complement the image (when dances are shown, for instance) or in its 'melodramatic' function, to enhance the rhythm or the atmosphere of the pictures. The lecture, with or without projection slides, should precede the screening of the films, during which there should be no verbal explanations.¹⁴

Häfker describes '*Schauspiele der Erde*' (Wonders of the Earth), one of the performances he organised together with his association 'Bild und Wort' (Images and Word) that can be summed up as follows: the lecturer provides a short general introduction, then turns to the first slide and explains what the show will be about, in order to prepare the audience for what they may expect. Then films are projected, beginning with a phantom ride through the Alps accompanied by railway sounds, which fade away once they have created the atmosphere. There are short breaks between the views, and the first part of the programme ends with a slide. Then the lecturer reappears and comments on a series of slides to explain what the audience has seen in the first section of the programme and to prepare them for the second part. The lights fade, and the audience can hear sounds of water to introduce a film showing a waterfall, etc.¹⁵

Häfker explicitly conceived of the screening as a performance, but he meant a kind of performance that had nothing in common with the commercial forms of showmanship. Some of the principles evident in Häfker's description have their origins in reform pedagogy, which wanted to shape the learning process in accordance with children's learning capacity: the insistence on variation and pauses in order to make possible continuous attention and contemplation, the separation of verbal address and moving pictures as well as the selective use of music in order to avoid sensory overload and the overfeeding of the audience, and finally the thematic approach combining various forms of expression, thus creating connections between, for instance, poetry, factual knowledge, music and visual information.

***Kinoreform* – Screenings and Theories on Memory**

One possible source for the pedagogic principles the *Kinoreform* set out to promote are contemporary theories on memory such as William James' treaty on memory in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890). According to Heike Klippel, James' concept is based on the idea that, in order to be retained in a human

mind, an impression has to be of a certain duration and substance. The stimulus needs to be intense, therefore it has to be repeated several times, but neither too often, nor in a monotonous way. Furthermore, the person experiencing a phenomenon needs to believe, to a certain extent at least, in the truthfulness of the sensory impression, which, in addition, has to be received with a fresh mind allowing a high level of concentration so that it can be easily reproduced.¹⁶ Häfker's programme in fact contains all these elements: the non-fictional moving images, both lifelike and spectacular, as a powerful, trustworthy and varied stimulus, accompanied by special sound effects enhancing their impact; the slides and comments providing the same information, but through different channels, and finally the pauses, to give rest to the spectators' eyes (and minds). Whether Häfker actually read James' treaty or another author writing about the 'physiology and pathology of the mind' (Henry Maudsley)¹⁷ is not known. It is striking, however, that the general principles that he outlined in his book are in line with the contemporary discourse on memory: his performances proposed a multi-sensory address through both moving and still images, verbal explanations and music, but were composed in such a way that they avoided sensory overload, provided the necessary periods of relaxation, and made use of documentary films as a guarantee for the authenticity of the material the audience was presented with.

***Kinreform* and the Principles of Pedagogy Reform**

Even though in the *Kinoreformbewegung's* texts we studied there are no direct references to contemporary initiatives of pedagogical reform (nor from the latter to the former), there clearly was ample common ground as well as shared values: a conservative critique of industrialisation and its consequences, in particular mass culture; the already mentioned fight against trash literature or films; anxieties about the decline of cultural values and institutions such as literature or theatre; and a generally nationalist attitude.

Reform pedagogy was directed against a tradition of learning built upon frontal lecturing, memorisation rather than understanding of subject matter, a strict separation of disciplines, abstract theory rather than practice, absolute authority of the teacher and physical punishment. In this context, again, contemporary theories on memory are relevant, but there is also another possible connection between pedagogy and *Kinreform*: new tendencies in teaching art.¹⁸

Understanding, not Learning by Heart

One issue divides pedagogues in this period: on the one hand there are scientists

such as Ernst Meumann (*Ökonomie und Theorie des Gedächtnisses. Experimentelle Untersuchungen über das Merken und Behalten*, Leipzig, 1912), Georg Elias Müller (*Zur Analyse der Gedächtnistätigkeit und des Vorstellungsverlaufes*, 3 vol., 1911–1917) or Müller's disciple Alfred von Sybel (*Über das Zusammenwirken verschiedener Sinnesgebiete bei Gedächtnisleistungen*, Leipzig, 1909), who insist that knowledge requires learning by heart and repetition. They advocate a relatively slow learning pace, optimisation of memory by disciplined attention and the elimination of all sources of distraction. But there are also critical voices: in her book *Die Vernichtung der Intelligenz durch Gedächtnisarbeit* (München, 1913) Mathilde Vaëring protests against learning by heart, which she sees as an obstacle to real understanding. The mechanical repetition that is involved consumes too much energy, which then is no longer available for the act of thinking. It dries up imagination and thus blocks the acquisition of new knowledge through an active understanding of things hitherto not learned. Memorising causes stupidity, she warns.

For most *Kinoreformers*, understanding trumps learning by heart. According to Sellmann, watching a film demands discipline, attention and concentration in order to observe and understand the film's subject.¹⁹ Nevertheless the pace can be too fast, as the psychologist Robert Gaupp explained.²⁰ He feared that looking at film images entailed the same risks as reading a book: children are exposed to an avalanche of information they have to digest in a very short time. Gaupp warned against the strain on a child's soul caused by an overload of impressions that the mind is unable to process. All *Kinoreformers* were convinced that film is not detrimental to imagination, on the contrary: images inspire a child and may even lead to following examples seen on the screen. Therefore they demanded that films should be chosen carefully.

Evidently, scientists studying memory and pedagogues shared some common beliefs. Nevertheless, it would take more primary source material to prove that teachers in that period were aware of the scientific experiments in the field of memo-techniques. According to Klippel, these and other studies on memory were widely published in specialised journals.²¹ Experiments to study the mind were popular at the end of the nineteenth century, and memo-techniques became more and more important. It is possible that teachers read these periodicals or learned from pedagogical journals, maybe even in the popular press, what happened in the field of memo-experiments. Dedicated teachers certainly would be interested in research on learning processes. Especially those working at the *Volksschule* (elementary school) were keen on reforming teaching methods. For them, a concept of memory such as Vaëring's provided arguments

to abandon the traditional methods and look for new and more efficient ones. Johann Friedrich Herbart's concept of a *Lernschule*²² (learning school) implied frontal lecturing and a strictly pre-choreographed programme for every lesson, organised around books, whose content had to be reproduced and repeated. Rather uninspiring for both pupils and teachers, it represented a humanistic ideal (studying classical languages, but no practical training) that fit the model of the lyceum. But in the eyes of many *Volksschule*-pedagogues this teaching style was inappropriate for the 'uncultured' children they were confronted with daily.

***Kinoreform* and Reform Pedagogy: Links, Contacts, Common Ground**

'No faction within reform pedagogy embraced the new technical, optical and acoustic teaching tools'.²³ This observation by Rudolf Kipp, specialist in audiovisual teaching tools, referring to films, slides and the phonograph, suggests that teachers pioneering moving images in school could hardly count on being supported by their colleagues, let alone school authorities.

But even if school reformers were not openly in favour of the new medium (and sometimes even vehemently against it) at least one of the major new pedagogical concepts that existed around 1900 can be considered essential for the introduction of film in school: the *Kunsterziehungsbewegung* (art education movement) in literature and art. Two of its representatives participated also in the *Kinoreform* and may have functioned as links: Konrad Lange, devoted to the reforming of art education, and Ernst Schultze, director of the public reading hall in Hamburg, who contributed to Alfred Lichtwark's influential reform art journal *Der Kunstwart*. Here, too, we can only hint towards some conceptual parallels, as claiming a more fundamental relationship would ask for a more thorough study of primary sources.

Alfred Lichtwark, a former teacher and director of the Kunsthalle Hamburg, also founder-editor of *Der Kunstwart*, and Ferdinand Avenarius were two eminent leaders of the *Kunsterziehungsbewegung*. They preferred a classroom where pupils were trained to observe, understand and reflect on what they see and hear instead of being 'stuffed' with knowledge out of books as in the old 'Herbart school'.²⁴ This can be considered a first step towards an alternative educational program, which over time would embrace modern didactic tools such as the film projector.

Heinrich Wolgast advocated educating the young eye to make the children receptive and help them understand the world they live in.²⁵ This is in line with

Sellmann's conviction that film, if accompanied by a lecture, trains a child's intellect and sense for reality.²⁶ Film and photography were appreciated particularly for their capacity to reproduce the real, which, precisely, prompted the *Kinoreformers'* rejection of dramatised story films.

Teacher Carl Götze even rejected reading as an inadequate tool, providing but 'second hand knowledge'.²⁷ Similarly, some *Kinoreformers* denounced the teacher's lecture for producing confused ideas in the pupils' minds, praising the cinematograph as 'first hand' informant.

Konrad Lange warned against illustrations in children's books and classrooms, claiming that they presented wrong impressions of nature, which caused unrealistic 'memory images'. Instead, he advocated studying the objects themselves.²⁸ In turn, the *Kinoreformers* saw film as a perfect substitute supplying an excellent reproduction of the object, and even helping to discover how things work as it can reveal phenomena invisible to human eyes. Fiction film, on the contrary, was rejected for creating a fantasy-image of the world.

More parallels between *Kinoreform* and the different strands in reform pedagogy, such as the '*Arbeitsschule*' (working school), conceived by Georg Kerschensteiner and Hugo Gaudig, or Wilhelm Dilthey's '*Erlebnispädagogik*' could be mentioned. Also, Ellen Key's famous book *Barnets Århundrade* (1900), published in 1902 in Germany as *Das Jahrhundert des Kindes*, one of the most widely read educational texts before and after the War, may have had some influence on the *Kinoreform* movement.

The Dispositif

These examples from reform pedagogical theories suggest at least some links to *Kinoreform* practice. Reading *Bild und Film* and other sources,²⁹ there were at the minimum eight municipal reform cinemas and other reform oriented screening facilities: in 1909 the *Ernemann Reformkino* in Dresden; in 1910 the *Kosmographia* in Dresden and the *Reform-Kino* in Braunschweig; in 1911 the *Reformtheater* in Bremen; in 1912 the *Gemeindekino* in Eickel (today Wanne-Eickel), the *Germania Saal* in Hagen and the *Musterlichtbildbühne* in Altona and last, but not least in 1914 the *Urania* in Stettin. So how were the performances organised?

Häfker describes in some detail the specific set-up of the hall in Dresden where his screening took place.³⁰ When the performance started, the screen, framed by a proscenium arch covered in a dark red plush material, was hidden behind a red velvet curtain. Four bay trees were added for decoration. The lectern stood

on one side of the screen, so that the lecturer could retreat behind the proscenium arch while the films were shown. The film projector and the lantern were situated behind the screen, as were the sound machine and the trio of musicians and their instruments consisting of a piano or harmonium, a cello and a violin. The lecturer and the technical section communicated through bell signals and an assistant signalled the projectionists when it was time to put up a new slide or start the screening of a film.

This set-up is most interesting, as it tries to maximise the effect of the moving images, which were projected without any verbal commentary, but were accompanied by sounds and occasionally by music. The whole set-up, including the musicians and during the film projection the lecturer, were all shielded from the audience's view in order not to cause any kind of distraction to the contemplative gaze of the spectators. The general principles formulated by Häfker thus find their counterpart in this particular *dispositif* of the screening.

Conclusion

The two reform movements evidently had much in common, but a thorough analysis of these parallels still remains to be done. It is certain that their ideas circulated in publications or during meetings such as the *Kunsterziehungstage* (Dresden 1901, Weimar 1903, Hamburg 1905) or congresses such as the one in Berlin in 1908 where '*Schulkinematographie*' was discussed. A first book – Georg V. Mendel's *Kinematographie und Schule* (1909) – provided theoretical reflections and practical guidelines. As a consequence, some teachers started to introduce film in the classroom or, more accurately, brought the classroom to moving picture houses. These initiatives were closely followed in books and periodicals for teachers and publications related to cinema (the series *Lichtbildbühnen-Bibliothek* and *Bild und Film*). The First World War put an end to these efforts. After the war, motivated teachers re-launched the idea of educational cinema – this time for good.

Notes

1. Lorenz Pieper, "Kino und Drama", *Bild und Film* 1, no. 1 (March 1912): 6. This and all subsequent translations are ours.
2. In 1891, Wolgast founded the 'Vereinigung deutscher Prüfungsausschüsse für Jugendschriften' (association for German juries examining literature for the youth), which prepared a list of appropriate readings for the young. His efforts led to the foundation in 1911 of the 'Zentralstelle zur Bekämpfung der Schundliteratur' (central office for the fight against trash literature) headed by Karl Brunner.
3. Teachers from Hamburg warned: 'Bad air can be noticed everywhere. The reason: insufficient ventilation, cigarettes and cigarette smoke. The bar service in the theatres during children's visits

- have already been the object of several court cases', quoted by Paul Ferd. Siegert, *Bürgerliches Selbstverständnis, Kinoreform und früher Schulfilm. Eine kulturwissenschaftliche Analyse* (MA-thesis, Universität Lüneburg, 1997, <http://dok.uni-lueneburg.de/texte/Kinoreform.pdf>, 23.3.2013), 95. The commission's report *Bericht der Kommission für 'Lebende Photographien'. Erstattet am 17. April 1907 und im Auftrage des Vorstandes von C.H. Dannmeyer*, was published by Gesellschaft der Freunde des vaterländischen Schul- und Erziehungswesens zu Hamburg. See also Rudolf W. Kipp, *Bilddokumente zur Geschichte des Unterrichtsfilms* (Grünwald: Institut für Film und Bild in Wissenschaft und Unterricht, 1975), 59.
4. See the commission's lists in Herbert Birett, *Verzeichnis in Deutschland gelaufener Filme – Entscheidungen der Filmzensur 1911–1920 Berlin, Hamburg, München, Stuttgart* (München, New York, London, Paris: K.G. Saur, 1980), 641–677.
 5. See also Thomas Schorr, *Die Film- und Kinoreformbewegung und die deutsche Filmwirtschaft. Eine Analyse des Fachblatts "Der Kinematograph" (1907–1935) unter pädagogischen und publizistischen Aspekten* (PhD-dissertation, Universität der Bundeswehr, München, 1990).
 6. See Helmut H. Diederichs, *Frühgeschichte deutscher Filmtheorie* (Habilitation, J. W. Goethe Universität, Frankfurt am Main, 2001, download at <http://publikationen.ub.uni-frankfurt.de/frontdoor/index/index/docId/4924>)
 7. "Mustervorstellungen", *Bild und Film* 1, no. 1 (March 1912): 19–22.
 8. See Siegert, 124.
 9. "Mustervorstellungen", *Bild und Film* 1, no. 1 (March 1912): 19–22.
 10. Ibid.
 11. Alfred Rosenthal, "Kinovorstellungen in Vereinen", *Bild und Film* 3, no. 8 (1913/13): 198–200.
 12. Hermann Häfker, *Kino und Kunst* (M.Gladbach: Volksvereinsverlag, 1913), 52. See Helmut H. Diederichs, "Naturfilm als Gesamtkunstwerk. Herman Häfker und sein 'Kinematographie'-Konzept", *Augen-Blick. Marburger Hefte zur Medienwissenschaft*, 8 (1990): 37–60, for comments on Häfker's theoretical reflections on film.
 13. Ibid., 53–63.
 14. Ibid., 57.
 15. Ibid., 60–61.
 16. William James as summarised by Heike Klippel, *Gedächtnis und Kino* (Frankfurt/Main: Stroemfeld Verlag, 1997), 21–32.
 17. According to Klippel, 32, Henry Maudsley in his book *Physiology and Pathology of the Mind* (London, 1867) is the first to suggest the 'concept of the organic memory'.
 18. The following ideas on memory studies and experiments are based on Klippel, 50–53, 57–59.
 19. See Adolf Sellmann, *Kino und Schule* (M. Gladbach: Volksverein-Verlag, 1914), 15.
 20. Robert Gaupp, "Der Kinematograph vom medizinischen und psychologischen Standpunkt", in Robert Gaupp, and Konrad Lange (eds), *Der Kinematograph als Unterhaltungsmittel* (München: Callwey, 1912), 5–9.
 21. See Klippel, 53.
 22. See Johannes von den Driesch, Josef Esterhues, *Geschichte der Erziehung und Bildung* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1925), 413.
 23. Kipp, 12.
 24. See Ludwig Prachauer, *Kunst und unerfüllte Pädagogik. Sieben Kapitel über Kunsterziehung und pädagogische Reformen* (Wien: Österreichischer Bundesverlag für Unterricht, Wissenschaft und Kunst, 1925), 13–17, 41.
 25. See Heinrich Wolgast, "Die Bedeutung der Kunst für die Erziehung [1902]", in Hermann Lorenzen (ed.), *Die Kunsterziehungsbewegung* (Bad Heilbrunn: Julius Klinkhardt, 1966), 18–19.

26. See Sellmann, *Kino und Schule*.
27. See Carl Götze, “Zeichnen und Formen [1901]”, in Lorenzen, 31.
28. See Konrad Lange, “Das Wesen der künstlerischen Erziehung (1901)”, in Lorenzen, 23.
29. For instance Kipp.
30. See Häfker, 59.