

The Photographic Turn in Visual Teaching Aids: Films and Slides for Schools in the Netherlands, 1911–1926

Introduction

According to the Dutch databases of digitized newspapers *Delpher.nl* and *Archieven.nl* reports on and advertisements for public illustrated lectures in the Netherlands began to appear in the 1870s. Initially sparse and dealing with a limited number of topics, their frequency skyrocketed as the 1890s progressed and photography-based slides became the norm. The illustrated lantern lecture had become a mass medium, not so much to entertain but rather to inform, instruct or educate. This boost coincided with a time, the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when the so-called social question demanded the concern of governments and citizens alike. The abominable working and living conditions of a fast growing proletariat, particularly in the cities, not only led to regulation and legislation, albeit slowly, but also to a host of private charity and uplifting activities, in both established and newly founded organizations (notably those inspired by the then popular Toynbee work). In order to reach their target groups collectively the illustrated lantern lecture became an important means. It remains doubtful whether these initiatives actually managed to reach the most destitute, but by the end of the 1890s the lantern lecture fulfilled a significant uplifting and educational purpose.¹ To some extent, academic outreach contributed to this social movement, too. Indeed, it is partly because of this presence in the public sphere that we know about the use of the lantern by universities. But what about schools, elementary as well as secondary?

For all we know lantern slide projections may have led a quiet, unnoticed life in school teaching, even though we suspect that they were used only sparsely. One reason

1 Not only doubt and uncertainty are characteristic of the current state of knowledge about the significance of the lantern lecture, negligence is, too. To date studies of the social question have not acknowledged the ubiquity and significance of the optical lantern's use, even after the launch of *Delpher.nl*. See for instance: Christianne Smit, *De volksverheffers: sociaal-hervormers in Nederland en de wereld 1870–1914* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2015).

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is that their energy sources must have posed serious obstacles, not just of handling and safety—explosion hazards in gas-lit projectors. But also their very availability could cause problems; in Amsterdam, for instance, as late as 1912 not all elementary schools were connected to the electricity grid.² And, secondly, while schools may have reached the disadvantaged, certainly after the 1900 *Leerplichtwet* (Compulsory Education Act), their activities were by definition of course largely intramural. Insofar as there was discussion about the lantern's use in elementary and secondary teaching there seem to be no traces of it in public sources, at least in newspapers, around the turn of the twentieth century. And while an early brochure devoted to demonstrative teaching aids used a broad definition that included all the senses as well as the spoken word, it did not address photography-based media.³ But cinema's rise to notoriety and the concern and controversy it caused would quickly change all that. And with it the lantern, too, was dragged into the spotlight.

In the following article we trace the debates on photography-based teaching aids that appeared in public discourse around 1910: their pedagogical and didactic merits, and their implementation. Clearly, reflections on film prevail, since there was much concern about its harmful effects on children. The first part of our text focuses on the rhetorical and, sometimes, anecdotal level of the debate, while the second part deals with the ways politics and science entered the fray.

I.

The value of the late nineteenth-century concept of visual education, according to media historian Jens Ruchatz, was that 'visual knowledge transmission functioned to convey a concrete, sensory impression of those, as yet unknown things for whose understanding it is a prerequisite.'⁴ It is no coincidence, probably, that the earliest discussions of visual education in the Netherlands were written about the subject of geography. Geography, of course, could obviously benefit from visuals, as they brought the outside world into the classroom. But while, in the words geography teacher Henri Zondervan, modern education *is* visual education, the necessary teaching aids were in his opinion underused, and when they were used at all, it was inadequately.⁵ Hence his rather general overview of various types of visual teaching aids—atlases and globes; educational walks; and pictures—and how

² 'Lichtbeelden op de Lagere Scholen te Amsterdam', *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 28 March 1912, evening edn., 1st section, pp. 1–2, <<https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010649873:mpeg21:p.001>> [accessed May 3, 2021].

³ Sikkel, J. C., *De aanschouwing in het onderwijs. Paedagogische bijdrage voor de Scholen met den Bijbel* (Amsterdam: s.n., 1902). A teacher and a reverend, Sikkel specifically meant God's word. The national Dutch (elementary and secondary) education system was officially secular, even though traditionally its curriculum was meant to educate students in both civil and Christian virtues. But during the nineteenth century there arose, besides public, government-funded schools, a variety of denominational schools with a more explicitly confessional curriculum; only in 1917 were these schools funded by government, too.

⁴ Ruchatz, Jens, *Licht und Wahrheit. Eine Mediumgeschichte der fotografischen Projektion* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 2003), pp. 228–29. The original German text reads: 'Der anschaulichen Wissensvermittlung kommt in diesem Kontext die Funktion zu, von noch unbekanntem Dingen jenen konkret-sinnlichen Eindruck zu vermitteln, der notwendige Voraussetzung für ihr Begreifen ist.'

⁵ Zondervan, Henri, 'Aanschouwelijkheid bij het aardrijkskundig onderwijs', *Vragen des tijds*, 1e deel, 1896, 235. <<https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB10:000736001:00007>> [accessed 23 November 2021].

they could be put to optimal service. It is here that the optical lantern was first mentioned in relation to teaching, although Zondervan ranks it with wall charts and other picture materials, unconcerned about the differences between them (size, whether or not they are projected, presence or absence of colour). As well, he dismissed the costs of a lantern and the problem of darkening a room as mere temporary inconveniences.

Four years later, a more practical consideration of the projection lantern was offered by assistant teacher F. J. A. Paesi. He discussed it in the context of the 'new direction' in teaching methods, particularly those that assisted pupils in understanding the world around them in visual ways. In the example he provides the optical lantern is used to reflect on a guided tour through a rubber factory. During this 'educational walk' photographs were being made that were afterwards used to illustrate pupils' compositions; later—days or even weeks after this instructive outing—they were used as an aide-mémoire in a lantern slide presentation to refresh pupils' knowledge acquired during the event.⁶ All three methods were part of the complete experience and seen as necessary for students to gain an understanding of the world: of soil, of raw materials, and how they are processed to make goods.⁷ The two abovementioned texts, however, remain the only retrieved sources on the use of the optical lantern for elementary and secondary school until the 1910s in the Netherlands. How can we explain this?

Despite the lantern's wide circulation ever since the 1890s, mostly in popular science lectures or for entertainment purposes, the lack of references in newspapers suggests that schools were not yet equipped to implement this new device on a large scale. As Jennifer Eisenhauer claims in her discussion of the history of the American usage of the lantern for educational purposes in art history, a technological device acquires its cultural meaning through discursive practices: 'Embedded within the magic lantern's emergence as a scientific and educational tool is a reframing of the relationship between object and viewer from a discourse of *magic vision* to one of *scientific vision*.' Such changes, according to Eisenhauer, were part of shifting concepts of 'vision, knowledge and subjectivity'.⁸ Hence she attaches more value to these discursive dimensions that caused a change in meaning than to technical improvements.

Unfortunately, however, Eisenhauer does not elaborate on the arguments that led to this new vision nor does she explicate the shifting meaning of the concepts. She accepts the shift at face value by simply observing that at the end of the nineteenth century the optical lantern was widely used as a tool for education and instruction, rather than entertainment. Despite this thin base to support her claim, her discussion of the mechanical improvements that led to the wider spread of the lantern in education at the end of the nineteenth century is very helpful with respect to the Dutch situation.⁹ As Eisenhauer observed, the role played by photography in making lantern projections suitable for educational purposes not only

6 By the time of the first educational film screenings the class outing appears to have been a common phenomenon; see: 'De bioscoop als school' *Leeuwarder Courant*, 12 June 1911, 1st section, 1, <<http://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010599160:mpeg21:p.001>> [accessed 3 May 2021].

7 A. F. J. Paesi, 'Naar aanleiding van een schoolwandeling', *School en Leven*, 31 May 1900, 611–13, <<https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MIMKB14:001557040:00001>> [accessed 3 May 2021].

8 Eisenhauer, Jennifer F., 'Next Slide Please: The Magical, Scientific and Corporate Discourses of Visual Projection Technologies', *Studies in Art Education*, 47, 3 (2006), 199–200.

9 *Ibid.*, 198–200.



Fig. 3.1. Logo of the Lantern Slide Association on a newsletter circulated in 1911. Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis. Documentatiecollectie Cultuur Nederland. Doos 12.8. Cultuur (V-Z) folder 8. Vereeniging tot het houden van voordrachten met lichtbeelden.

improved the quality of the slides, it also removed the association of imperfection due to ‘human intervention’ in painting or drawing images. Most relevant for the Dutch situation is her statement about the impact of the improvements of light and the availability of electricity on a wider scale.¹⁰ For instance, it took until the 1910s before Amsterdam was connected to the electricity grid and could count on a constant and reliable energy source to teach by means of the lantern.

Another important factor was the supply of educational lantern slides, which changed significantly after 1910 with the appointment of a new director of the Dutch *Lichtbeelden-Vereeniging* (Lantern Slide Association). Founded in 1898 to propagate and enable illustrated lectures, the association created a centrally housed lending collection of slides for all kinds of organisations and associations. Its new director introduced a policy that targeted schools and universities for its activities as well. The association appointed a new board of advisors, consisting of professors, schoolteachers, and other stakeholders who were asked to advise on relevant topics, images, and literature that could be used for the production of slides and accompanying texts.¹¹ As well it requested Royal Approval, which it was granted in 1911. This allowed the association to set up a photo studio to produce negatives, develop photographs, and make glass slides. And by hiring three photographers it was able

¹⁰ Ibid., 200–01.

¹¹ IISG. DCN. Box 12.8. Culture (V-Z) folder 8. *Vereeniging tot het Houden van Voordrachten met Lichtbeelden* (Association for the Delivery of Illustrated Lectures). Brochure announcing new management structure of the Lantern Slide Association; A. Dijkgraaf, ‘Het Bioscoopvraagstuk’, *Vragen des Tijds*, (1912), p. 116.

to create a 'photographic archive for the Netherlands', subdivided into the categories of geography and geology, art history, natural history, astronomy, medicine, agriculture, and 'stories for the young and the old'.¹² The educational orientation of the association as well as improvements in the technical set-up of the device, contributed to a series of trials to determine the feasibility of lantern projections in schools.

Initial Trial Screenings

More or less simultaneously with the first tests to establish the feasibility of the optical lantern in classrooms, a number of trial screenings were carried out with educational film projections. This circumstance allows one to see how the relative merits of each were formulated, argued—or taken for granted. The photographic turn in Dutch teaching aids took off in 1911 with trials in three municipalities: Leeuwarden, The Hague, and Amsterdam. While the first two focused exclusively on film, the one in Amsterdam was concerned with the affordances of the optical lantern. In the trials answers were sought to the question of the didactic value of the optical lantern and film.

The first initiative was undertaken by the mayor and aldermen of Leeuwarden, capital of the northern province of Friesland. On 12 and 13 June 1911, a special programme of films was screened for schoolchildren between the age of nine and twelve at the local Friso cinema theatre. The programme was put together with the help of educational experts.¹³ A newspaper report the following day concluded that the production of purpose-made educational films should receive more attention, while it also commented on the possibility of showing films beforehand, in the classroom, or a teacher's explanatory lecture during the screening.¹⁴ Three teachers, in a letter to the editor, were confident that any problem would be solved:

There is much, very much to improve. In the first place—no matter how beautiful the films were overall—it is imperative to have other pictures, taken directly from the school's curriculum. We won't bother with other defects; they do not alter the fact that film has proven to be suitable for implementation within the school.¹⁵

In the same town of Leeuwarden, a year after these trial screenings, city counsellor Zandstra believed that a trial with the optical lantern in elementary schools should be conducted as soon as possible. It is interesting to read in the report of the city council meeting that

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- 12 Joh. D. Hintzen, 'De Lichtbeelden-Vereeniging te Amsterdam', *De Groene Amsterdammer*, July 2, 1927, p. 4, <<http://historisch.groene.nl/nummer/1927-07-02/pagina/4#4/0.18/-115.27>> [accessed May 3, 2021]; 'De A. N. D. B', *Algemeen Handelsblad*, April 20, 1911, evening edn., 1st section, p. 1, <<http://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010337957:mpeg21:p.001>> [accessed May 3, 2021].
- 13 'De bioscoop als school' (12 June 1911), p. 1.
- 14 'De bioscoop als school', *Leeuwarder Courant*, 13 June 1911, 1st section, p. 1, <<https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010599161:mpeg21:a0004>> [accessed 3 May 3, 2021].
- 15 L. Bij de Leij, D. van der Schaaf, A. C. Nubé, 'De bioscoop in dienst van't onderwijs', *Leeuwarder Courant*, June 14, 1911, 2nd section, p. 7, <<http://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010599162:mpeg21:p.007>> [accessed May 3, 2021]. The original Dutch text reads: 'Er is nog veel, zeer veel te verbeteren; in de eerste plaats moeten er — hoe mooi deze films meerendeels ook waren — heel andere beelden komen, rechtstreeks gegrepen uit de leerstof der school. De overige gebreken kunnen we laten rusten; ze doen niets af aan het feit, dat de Bioscoop bewezen heeft, geschikt te zijn om in de school te worden ingeburgerd.'

besides often unsubstantiated debates about these two teaching aids' relative merits, personal stakes, too, could obstruct the assessment of their value. In this case, alderman of education J. A. A. Schoondermark, the driving force behind the abovementioned film screenings, opposed this motion, citing a research report on educational film screenings that the council awaited.¹⁶ The motion was voted down and nothing was heard of Zandstra's plan again.

In The Hague, secondly, the municipality appointed a committee, in December 1911, to investigate the significance of film for education.¹⁷ The committee's final report, partly based on data obtained abroad, was discussed in August 1913. The general conclusion was that film should best be seen as a complement to other teaching practices. Accordingly, the optical lantern had an important role to play in preparing pupils for subsequent film screenings, since, as the committee stated, the optical lantern 'had been already used' in classrooms.¹⁸ Again, the presence and usage of the lantern was taken for granted, its affordances or disadvantages were not part of the argument in this report. In the fall of 1913 the committee's most important conclusions were adopted: 'Attending film screenings in regular cinema theatres is not recommended'; 'It is desirable to combine the school cinema with the *Museum ten Bate van het Onderwijs* (Museum for the Benefit of Education) and other institutes that serve the general interests of education and teachers'.¹⁹ In 1916, it established such school screenings, initially within the premises of said museum.²⁰ In 1918 the renamed *Gemeentelijke Schoolbioscoop* (Municipal School Cinema) relocated to a building of its own,²¹ and in July 1920 the municipality took formal and financial responsibility.²²

Notwithstanding the fact that the lantern had already been integrated in the curricula of Amsterdam schools,²³ in 1911 the municipality of Amsterdam decided to do a trial with the regular use of the optical lantern for elementary education. The central question in this trial also dealt with the matter of the space where this way of teaching should take place: within the school or in a building especially equipped for that purpose. Despite

16 'Rapport', *Leeuwarder Courant*, December 11, 1912, 1st section, p. 2, <<https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010679815:mpeg21:p.002>> [accessed May 3, 2021].

17 'Schoolbioscoop', *Limburger Koerier*, September 26, 1913, 1st section, p. 2, <<https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB23:001174183:mpeg21:p.00002>> [accessed May 3, 2021]; David van Staveren, *De bioscoop en het onderwijs* (Leiden: A. W. Sijthoff, 1919), 16.

18 's-Gravenhage. De Bioscoop-Kwestie', *De Maasbode*, September 24, 1913, morning edn., p. 1, <<https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB04:000185081:mpeg21:p.001>> [accessed May 3, 2021]; Van Staveren (1919), 17–18.

19 'Uit de residentie. Rapport der bioscoop-commissie', *De Nieuwe Courant*, September 23, 1913, evening edn., 2nd section, p. 9, <http://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB15:000785212:mpeg21:p.00009> [accessed May 3, 2021] and similar newspaper reports over the next few days; 'De Bioscoop, II', *Het Vaderland*, October 5, 1913, morning edn. B, pp. 5–6, <<http://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB23:001512013:mpeg21:p.00005>> [accessed May 3, 2021]. The Museum for the Benefit of Education was founded in 1904; since 1986 it is called Museon.

20 'Museum ten Bate van het Onderwijs', *Het Vaderland*, April 19, 1916, morning edn., p. 1, <<http://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB23:001514134:mpeg21:p.00001>> [accessed May 3, 2021].

21 'Opening Gem. Schoolbioscoop', *De Maasbode*, August 30, 1918, evening edn., 2nd section, p. 2, <<http://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB04:000187986:mpeg21:p.006>> [accessed May 3, 2021] (and similar newspaper reports on this and the following days).

22 *Rapport van den Onderwijsraad* (1922), 47.

23 Schoolteacher A. Dijkgraaf bluntly stated this fact without any further validation. See: Dijkgraaf (1912), pp. 118–19.

the difficulties of actually getting this trial off the ground, a meeting was held to discuss the most pressing matters with respect to this visual teaching aid.²⁴ One of the aldermen of Amsterdam attending this meeting believed that the optical lantern should be set up in all schools, since he considered it an indispensable tool. However, the conditions for setting up the lantern in Amsterdam schools were problematic, because, as noted, not all of them were connected to the electricity grid. Furthermore, it proved to be extremely difficult and expensive to fully darken auditoria during the day.²⁵

These initial trials focused on a single medium rather than a comparison between the two — even though there was some talk of one (usually the lantern) alongside or in the service of the other (usually film). On top of that there was little reflection on the specific affordances of each medium nor on the results of these tests. Contrary to expectation, there was no thorough analysis to understand the potential of a new teaching aid nor an evaluation of the benefits for students' memories or the knowledge they had gained. In none of these cases such reflections are presented. However, in their direct aftermath a discussion blossomed about the desirability of the combination of both media.

Projecting Conditions

The subsequent debate between supporters and opponents of both media stemmed from the broader 'cinema question' (Dutch *bioscoopvraagstuk*). As Dutch film scholar Floris Paalman has argued, in the 1910s the debate about films for educational purposes was a direct consequence of the perceived social perils of 'regular' cinema.²⁶ Commentaries in the months following these first trials would return throughout the following decade: Which criteria should apply to make visual teaching aids acceptable in schools? And which conditions had to be fulfilled to make them function in an educational context? We review these commentaries on the basis of the following four points.

Technical Set-Up

The example of Amsterdam had shown that much of the functioning of these media depended on technical and logistical issues and possibilities. Various positions were held on this matter. Schoolteacher Jos Veerbaldt wrote in 1912 that each school should have an optical lantern. She actually preferred the lantern over film, since it was less distressing and the slides for educational purposes were easier to make than films.²⁷ The same position was taken by teacher J. Kruithof, who stated moreover that the optical lantern's distinct advantage was that it could be used anytime a teacher wanted to. Despite the difficulties of

24 'Lichtbeelden op de Lagere Scholen te Amsterdam', March 28, 1912.

25 Ibid.

26 Floris Paalman, 'Far and close: the Gemeentelijke Schoolbioscoop in Rotterdam', Marina Dahlquist, Joel Frykholm (eds), *The Institutionalization of Educational Cinema. North America and Europe in the 1910s and 1920s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019), 81.

27 Jos Veerbaldt, 'Vrouwenbeweging. Iets over bioscoop en projectielantaarn', *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, June 1, 1912, 5th section, pp. 17–18, <<http://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:011036017:mpeg21:p.017>> [accessed May 3, 2021]. Veerbaldt was the pseudonym of Josephine Baerveldt-Haver, a Dutch feminist who devoted herself to women's suffrage.

darkening the room, both considered the lantern an indispensable teaching aid.²⁸ Neither of them, however, reflected on such practical matters as the costs of darkening the room, of buying the optical lantern, and renting the slides.

Another schoolteacher, A. Dijkgraaf, argued for using both lantern and film projections in schools, preferably all schools. However, in order to fully use the potential of these media, schools needed projection equipment that could alternate between slides and film, such as the *Schulprojectionsapparat-Porta*.²⁹ But even though at this time projectors equipped for both media were pretty standard, all three of the abovementioned commentators failed to discuss other conditions, notably a connection to the electricity grid or having teaching staff capable of operating the lantern and/or film projector.

A final example on the reflection of film as a visual teaching aid in comparison to the optical lantern came from Dutch school inspector and later pedagogue J. H. Gunning Wzn., who was vehemently opposed to film as an educational tool, because he believed that film merely stimulated the senses. Despite possible reforms, films were continuous and therefore distressing. From a pedagogical perspective the optical lantern, because of its still images, was the right teaching aid.³⁰ In spite of his firm criticism, however, Gunning did not explicitly say why he preferred still over moving images. Of course, one can assume that this had much to do with the possibility of teachers' explanations of the visuals or of stimulating pupils to think for themselves. But it is striking to see how little evidence or arguments were brought into the discussion to convince their respective audiences.³¹ Two years after Gunning's referenced article '*Tegen de bioscoop*' (Against cinema) he reported on the newly invented device to stop the film at any moment in mid-projection. Despite this improvement he remained unconvinced of the pedagogical value of film.³²

Cinema Inside or Outside School?

These technical issues, in turn, led to the question whether lantern or film projections needed to take place inside school or outside, at a purpose-built, so-called school cinema. An interesting and relevant figure in this respect and especially in the further development of the debate was David van Staveren. He had been an elementary school teacher in The Hague since 1913 before he became the director of that city's Municipal School Cinema. Although he had no previous experience with or knowledge of educational cinema, he nevertheless considered it necessary to screen educational films in a school cinema: a separate establishment with professional machinery and knowledgeable staff, where films could be screened for a number of school classes at the same time.³³ However, not

28 J. Kruithof, 'De projectie-lantaarn in de school', *De School met den Bijbel*, November 7, 1912, pp. 301–02, <<https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMUBVU06:001767019:00005>> [accessed May 3, 2021].

29 Dijkgraaf (1912), 120–21.

30 J. H. Gunning Wz., 'Tegen de bioscoop', *Het Kind*, August 24, 1912, pp. 138–39, <<https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB14:002587017:00002>> [accessed May 3, 2021].

31 Paesi (1900), pp. 611–13; Ruchatz (2003), 228–29.

32 J. H. Gunning Wz., 'De bioscoop verbeterd. Een Nederlandsche uitvinding', *Het Kind*, June 13, 1914, p. 95, <<https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB14:002589013:00007>> [accessed May 3, 2021].

33 Bert Hogenkamp, 'Staveren, David van', *Biografisch Woordenboek van het Socialisme en de Arbeidersbeweging in Nederland (BWSA)*, <<https://socialhistory.org/bwsa/biografie/staveren>> [accessed May 3, 2021]; Van Staveren (1919), 7–9.

everyone agreed. In 1921, another schoolteacher, G. H. Wanink, polemicized with van Staveren about the necessity of school cinemas. Wanink argued that as the films that were shown had to be short, the trip to a separate building would be too time-consuming.³⁴ Moreover, unlike van Staveren, Wanink believed that the screening of films within schools was not an insurmountable problem, since teachers could be taught how to operate a projector and claimed they welcomed this medium in their classrooms.³⁵ No consensus was reached, but, more remarkably, nowhere in this polemic did either side substantiate why a school cinema was a good option or not.

What Did Children Get to See?

A general critique at the time was the persistently insufficient amount of proper educational films. The abovementioned schoolteacher A. Dijkgraaf argued for a central organisation entrusted with the production of educational films.³⁶ This future organization should take as an example the structure of the Lantern Slide Association and the support it had enlisted of a number of experts to ensure itself of high-quality slides, prints and books.³⁷ A board of advisors, consisting of educational specialists and teachers, among others, was indispensable. In order to emphasize the usefulness of film as a teaching aid, much attention should be directed to 'turn of the evil tide' of film and offer a clear focus on its potential as a valuable didactic tool.³⁸ Despite his enthusiasm for the optical lantern and its benefits for classroom teaching, Dijkgraaf appeared convinced of the added value of film, provided that it was significantly improved.³⁹

And room for improvement there was, according to a number of teachers, doctors, and psychologists. Already in 1907, a committee in the German city of Hamburg had reported on a series of controlled film screenings, apparently followed by a survey, which showed that they could be painful to the children's eyes, especially of those who already had eyesight problems. Such ailments had mostly to do with the rapid succession of images as well as their flicker.⁴⁰ German psychologist Robert Gaupp argued that children should not be exposed for long periods of time to film, since this would lead to exhaustion, dizziness and dimmed eyesight.⁴¹ For the same reason warnings were advanced about the lengthy exposure to the darkness during screenings. However, Dutch ophthalmologist D. M. Straub and an anonymous school

34 'Opbouw der maatschappij. De schoolbioscoop op nieuwe banen', *De Nieuwe Courant*, May 14, 1921, morning edn., p. 4, <<https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB15:000761069:mpeg21:p.00004>> [accessed May 3, 2021].

35 G. H. Wanink, 'De Schoolbioscoop, I', *De Bode: Orgaan van den Bond van Nederlandsche Onderwijzers*, September 23, 1921, pp. 3–4, <<https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMIISG10:000690034:00003>> [accessed May 3, 2021].

36 Veerbaldt (1912); J. H. Gunning Wz. (August 24, 1912), 128; Dijkgraaf (1912), 122. See also part II below.

37 Dijkgraaf (1912), 116.

38 *Ibid.*, 112.

39 *Ibid.*, 120.

40 Thierry Lefebvre, 'Flimmerndes Licht. Zur Geschichte der Filmwahrnehmung im frühen Kino', transl. from the French by Sabine Lenk, *KINtop. Jahrbuch zur Erforschung des frühen Films*, 5 (Basel — Frankfurt am Main: Stroemfeld/Roter Stern, 1996), 72–73.

41 J. Kruihof, 'Bioscoop-Vertooningen', *De school met den Bijbel*, October 10, 1912, pp. 236–37, <<https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMUBVU06:001767015:00004>> [accessed May 3, 2021]; Robert Gaupp, 'Der Kinematograph vom medizinischen und psychologischen Standpunkt', *Dürerbund. Flugschrift zur Ausdruckskultur*, #100 (1912), 4; see also: Lefebvre (1996), 76.

doctor were reported as stating that as long as film screenings did not last more than five quarters of an hour no damage would be done.⁴² Others were concerned about the damage film could cause to children's moral wellness. For instance, J. Kruithof, citing Gaupp and a Prussian government report, warned against the adverse stimulation of children's nerves and imagination by unseemly or hideous scenes.⁴³ As so often, however, substantiated arguments and research of measured dangers of film as a visual teaching aid were lacking. As a matter of fact, even as late as 1922 this was precisely the criticism of pedagogue Ph. Kohnstamm in his review of the *Staatscommissie Bioscoopgevaar* (State Committee Cinema Peril).⁴⁴

The Role of the Teacher

As van Staveren had made obvious, he was not impressed with the technical skills of schoolteachers. S. de Jong Ezn. stated that operating the projector was deemed impossible for teachers with no experience or technical know-how. In all likelihood their comments were informed by their preference for school cinemas, in The Hague and Rotterdam, respectively.⁴⁵ But while teachers were advised to leave the projector alone, others stressed the teacher's authoritative role as the one who controls the teaching aid instead of being controlled by it.

A much-heard argument in understanding the role of the teacher had to do with the preparations that needed to be taken care of before a classroom film screening. Commenting on a trial in the Belgian town of St Gilles, Dijkgraaf stressed the importance of a lecture, illustrated or not, before taking students to see a film. In other words, a solid preparation was required to make them understand what they were going to see. Moreover, he argued in his elaborate article that it was sometimes necessary to have both media available simultaneously: in order for children to memorize certain phenomena they needed to have the possibility to look at still as well as moving images — the former to explain the specific characteristics of a waterfall, for example.⁴⁶ This had also been one of the recommendations of the Hague investigative committee's conclusion on a school cinema: 'it is desirable to frequently use an optical lantern in all schools; it is indispensable for the preparation of film-based teaching.'⁴⁷ Finally, as a sufficient amount of educational films were lacking, fears arose that the curriculum would be determined by those films that were available rather than by the teacher. As Ph. Kohnstamm stated, it cannot be that the school is in the service of the cinema.⁴⁸

42 'De Bioscoop en de School', *De Preanger-bode*, November 8, 1913, evening edn., 2nd section, p. 5, <<https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB08:000125191:mpeg21:p.005>> [accessed May 3, 2021].

43 Kruithof (1912), p. 236.

44 'Het bioscoopgevaar', *Zutphensche Courant*, April 8, 1921, 2nd section, p. 5, <<https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMRAZ02:000407080:mpeg21:p.00005>> [accessed May 3, 2021].

45 S. de Jong Ezn., 'De bioscoop. IV', *De School met den Bijbel*, November 20, 1913, pp. 287–88, <<https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMUBVU06:001768021:00008>> [accessed May 3, 2021].

46 Dijkgraaf (1912), pp. 120–21; Paesi, (1900), pp. 611–61.

47 'Schoolbioscoop', *Algemeen Handelsblad*, September 24, 1913, evening edn., 2nd section, p. 7, <<http://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010651316:mpeg21:p.007>> [accessed May 3, 2021]. The original Dutch text reads: 'Het is wenschelijk op alle scholen geregeld de projectielantaarn te gebruiken; bij de voorbereiding van het bioscopisch onderwijs is deze onmisbaar'; Ph. Kohnstamm, *Bioscoop en volksontwikkeling* (Amsterdam: Nutsuitgeverij, 1922), 32.

48 *Ibid.*, 35.

The Next Stage of the 'Cinema Question': Regulations and Pedagogical Perspectives

In 1918, the cinema question took a new and interesting turn: the government became involved. On 2 November 1918, a state committee on the peril of cinema was set up to investigate what measures should be taken to combat the peril of cinema. By that time, it was argued, film shows were not considered dangerous in themselves anymore (as being harmful to the eyes, for instance), but their content was, both morally and socially, specifically for those under the age of eighteen.⁴⁹ Moreover, in the report's conclusion its members explicitly discussed on what grounds films for this age category should be censored. Newspaper reports at the time merely commented that these films should be approved or banned on the basis of their 'appropriateness' rather than on their 'admissibility'.⁵⁰ But what that actually meant remained unclear.

Simultaneously with the felt need for censoring film for the young, film as an educational tool was being institutionalized and embraced in The Hague. Van Staveren had been appointed director of its school cinema. For him films were not problematic at all, on the contrary: 'Film fills a lacuna in education. It is all about evoking images in the children's minds that will not fade too quickly or disappear altogether.'⁵¹ One of the members of the state committee, Andrew de Graaf, stated that films should above all be useful for 'instructive purposes'.⁵² An opponent of censorship, he wrote in one of his brochures: 'Only as school cinema, at the service of education and in the hands of competent pedagogues, something good might come of it.'⁵³ Similar arguments had been made by van Staveren, Dijkgraaf, and others in the context of creating pedagogically valuable teaching aids.⁵⁴

Many positions were taken, many opinions expressed, but most of them were rhetorical or anecdotal. In 1922, Dutch pedagogue Ph. Kohnstamm entered the discussion with his critical review, referenced above, of the government report on the perils of cinema. Kohnstamm was largely concerned with the lack of evidence for almost all its claims. He stated that, despite the presence of 'schoolmen' on the committee, it had lost an opportunity by not calling on pedagogues or psychologists. In his view films had no instructive value, as they

49 J. de R., 'Wij leven snel!', *De Bioscoop-Courant*, January 10, 1919, p. 2, <<https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMEYE01:000815002:00004>> [accessed May 3, 2021]; W. W. van der Meulen, 'Overheidstoezicht op de bioscopen', *Vragen des Tijds*, January 1, 1921, p. 436, <<https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB10:000773001:00444>> [accessed May 3, 2021].

50 'Staatscommissie bestrijding bioscoop-gevaar', *Algemeen Handelsblad*, October 16, 1920, morning edn., 2nd section, p. 5, <<https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010654776:mpeg21:a0129>> [accessed May 3, 2021] and many similar news reports over the following two weeks.

51 Van Staveren (1919), 5–6. The original Dutch text reads: 'De bioscoop vult een leemte in 't onderwijs aan. Het gaat er toch om, bij de leerlingen beelden op te roepen die niet al te spoedig zullen vervagen of geheel verdwijnen.'

52 A. de Graaf, 'De Bioscoop en hare gevaren', *De Getuige*, April 15, 1917, pp. 3–4, <<https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB13:002808032:00003>> [accessed May 3, 2021]; see also: H. de Bie, 'Nog eens de bioscoop', *De School met den Bijbel*, July 4, 1918, pp. 4–5, <<https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMUBVU06:001769001:00009>> [accessed May 3, 2021]; 'Nieuwe boeken: de bioscoop', *School en Leven*, February 26, 1920, pp. 428–30, <<https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB14:001608028:00006>> [accessed May 3, 2021].

53 Quoted in: 'Binnenland', *Het Oosten: Weekblad gewijd aan Christelijke Philantropie*, October 22, 1919, [unpaginated], <<https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMLIND01:001432043:00002>> [accessed May 3, 2021]. The original Dutch text reads: 'Alleen als school-bioscoop in handen van bekwaame paedagogen, in dienst dus van het Onderwijs, is er nog iets goeds van te verwachten.'

54 Van Staveren (1919) 7; Dijkgraaf (1912): p. 116; 'De bioscoop als school' (June 12, 1911).

invite passivity, while their tiresome flicker and glitter makes viewers forget their content.⁵⁵ Consequently, film was only functional for memory retention when students were familiar with the topic.⁵⁶ Additionally, ‘precise observation’ was hardly possible. In contrast, the still image was ‘indispensable’ for Kohnstamm, since this not only allowed closer and more sustained observation, but also enabled teachers to speak simultaneously with the visuals.⁵⁷ His other objection against film as an educational teaching aid was the fact that the school curriculum had to adjust to the available films, instead of the other way around.⁵⁸

Kohnstamm was the only person in this choir of comments to call for a ‘pedagogical psychological experiment’. Instead of just parroting other peoples’ words, what was needed was systematic research into the didactical value of still and moving images, the optical lantern and film.⁵⁹ And even though his abovementioned review also contained a few unsubstantiated statements, his call was issued precisely when such research was being prepared by his colleagues of the Municipal University of Amsterdam’s Pedagogical-Psychological Laboratory, which he directed at the time.⁶⁰

II.

The debates triggered by the introduction of photography-based teaching aids, film in particular, found their provisional peak in 1919, with the brochure *De bioscoop en het onderwijs* (Cinema and education), by the director of the Hague Municipal School Cinema, David van Staveren. With his boastful language the author seemed to have taken the flight forward, an evasive move to force the matter of film in education. He quickly dismissed a few of the common objections: that it would accustom students to cinemagoing and its corrupting effects, that it infringed on teaching time, and that film’s sheer visuality and pace left no time for reflection. With the last point he also skirted the issue of the relative merits of film and lantern projections. Instead, he insisted curtly and in passing that ‘the living image has a much more lasting impact than the standing image’; the latter, moreover, would ‘often only realize its full potential (...) alongside film’, whatever that was supposed to mean — unless this was an implicit reference to one of the Hague investigative committee’s recommendations that the lantern ‘is indispensable for the preparation of film-based teaching’; see note 47).⁶¹ Film, apparently, was the teaching aid everybody had been waiting for. And the school cinema was the place to see it in operation.

55 ‘Het bioscoopgevaar’ (April 8, 1921), 5.

56 Kohnstamm (1922), 33.

57 ‘Het bioscoopgevaar’ (April 8, 1921), 5.

58 Kohnstamm (1922), 34–35.

59 ‘Het bioscoopgevaar’ (April 8, 1921).

60 On page 33 Kohnstamm states in a footnote: ‘I am very pleased that my relevant remarks in this journal [*Volksonwikkeling*, March 1922, p. 280] have led to this investigation, the first thorough psychological research about the functioning of film that we possess.’ Original text: ‘Het verheugt mij zeer dat mijn desbetreffend eopmerkingen in dit tijdschrift IMAart 1921, p. 280) aanleiding hebben gegeven tot dit onderzoek, het eerste nauwkeurige psychologische onderzoek over de werking van den film dat wij bezitten.’ Quoted in: Kohnstamm (1922), 33.

61 Van Staveren (1919), 6; 5. The original Dutch texts read: ‘... dat het levende beeld van veel blijvender invloed is dan het stilstaande.’; ‘...ze zal vaak pas haar volle waarde verkrijgen (...) naast de film.’



Fig. 3.2. Titlepage of David van Staveren's brochure on cinema and education (1919). David van Staveren, *De Bioscoop en het Onderwijs* (Leiden: A. W. Sijthoff's Uitg.-Mij, 1919).

Indeed, Van Staveren's self-assertive brochure not only failed to extinguish the debates, it stoked the fire under another one: would the cinema come to the school or the school to the cinema? Over the next few years controversies over photography-based teaching aids, their exhibition, and their form broadened to brochures, reports, and books, while interest shown by politics and science in the late 1910s and early 1920s lent more weight to the matter. The national government, in the shape of a mixed Catholic-Protestant coalition Cabinet, entered the debate in 1919, after calls for financial support of a future national institute to secure the manufacture and distribution of proper educational films. And in 1922, science, in the shape of the Pedagogical-Psychological Laboratory of the Municipal University of Amsterdam, examined the high-minded claims made about the 'didactic value' of the new teaching aids.

The Reluctant State

The idea of a national film institute, provisionally called State Film Archive, arose from the wide agreement, the debates notwithstanding, that an ample stock of proper educational and information films was a long way away. For slides there was no such problem. As we have seen, after the Lantern Slide Association had reoriented its policy to school education, in 1910, it steadily increased its series of lantern slides—from an already considerable catalogue that it had begun to assemble since 1898—with the creation of a photographic archive.⁶² The persistent shortage of films, however, was not for lack of plans.

A few private, non-commercial attempts had been made to collect or produce films. The *Koloniaal Instituut* in Amsterdam had commissioned the making of a few dozen films in colonial Indonesia, then called the Netherlands East-Indies, in 1912–1913 and in 1917. They were explicitly meant for educational institutes at all levels in the Netherlands, besides museums, colonial exhibitions, etc. The institute also accumulated, mainly through donations, a large collection of lantern slides and photographs, from which it made more slides.⁶³ In 1917, moreover, it established its *Comité voor Lezingen en Leergangen* (Committee of Lectures and Courses) to train teachers of elementary and secondary schools in the use of visual teaching aids. Secondly, the *Nederlandsche Vereeniging Filmcentrale* (Dutch Association Film Centre), founded in 1917, had pledged to collect films on Dutch industry, agriculture, and other economic activities for distribution among schools, although not much was heard of it since. And in 1919 the *Vereeniging Nederlandsch Centraal Filmarchief* (Association Dutch Central Film Archive) was founded with the aim to collect films of Dutch historical and topical importance.⁶⁴ But while all three organisations focused

62 Hintzen (July 2, 1927), p. 4. At the time this article was published the Lantern Slide Association's slide collection consisted of c. 30,000 slides.

63 *Derde jaarverslag 1913* ([Amsterdam: Vereeniging 'Koloniaal Instituut', 1914], 15. The influential Swiss pedagogue Gottlieb Imhof considered the film and lantern slide collection of the Colonial Institute rich in content. Screened at the Schweizer Mustermesse, in Basel in 1922, a selection was provided for classroom screenings, introduced by Imhof and a representative of the Institute. Particularly the combination of still and moving images was much approved by teaching staff; see: Anita Gertiser, 'Domestizierung des bewegten Bildes. Vom dokumentarischen Film zum Lehrmedium', *Montage A/V*, 15, 1 (2006), 62–63.

64 'Ned. Centraal Filmarchief. Eerste filmkeuring: geen gelukkige keuze', *Het Vaderland*, 52, March 24, 1920, evening edn., A, p. 1, <<http://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010006520:mpeg21:p.001>> [accessed May 3, 2021]. This association hoped to play a national role in the shape of a state film archive that the abovementioned discussions in 1919 hinted at.



Fig. 3.3. Royal Institute for the Tropics in Amsterdam (Mauritskade), 1936. (Royal Institute for the Tropics: <<https://www.kit.nl/nl/over-ons/geschiedenis/#media-0-6017>>

on specific subjects (on which only the Colonial Institute seemed to have had sizeable collections, particularly photographs and slides), more was needed to serve a school's complete curriculum.

In fact, an initiative of wider scope had been launched in February 1912 by J. A. A. Schoondermark, the alderman of education in Leeuwarden. Heartened by the abovementioned, widely praised educational film experiment of the previous summer, he invited his peers and other relevant parties to a meeting in Utrecht to discuss film as a teaching aid on a coordinated, national scale. The meeting decided to set up a committee to investigate the possibility of educational film production and estimate a budget for a partnership of participating municipalities.⁶⁵ In 1913 this initiative was embraced by the *Vereeniging van Nederlandsche Gemeenten* (VNG; Association of Dutch Municipalities). This administrative umbrella organization was willing to finance the production of educational films on condition that it was supervised by experts and that sufficient municipalities and educational institutes at every level would participate.⁶⁶ This plan came to naught due to wartime circumstances. Indeed, the amount of films the VNG had proposed to produce—ten in the first year and five during every following

65 See e.g.: 'De school en de bioscoop', *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant*, 11 February 1912, morning edn., A, p. 6, <<http://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010032032:mpeg21:p.006>> [accessed 3 May 2021] and similar news reports over the following days.

66 'Schoolbioscopen', *De Nieuwe Courant*, 24 July 1913, evening edn., 2nd section, p. 7, <<http://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB15:000785060:mpeg21:p.00007>> [accessed 3 May 2021].

year — may well have been too ambitious in an economy cut off from supplies by neighbouring warring nations.⁶⁷

In May 1912, entrepreneur Maurits Binger launched another initiative with the foundation of two film companies: the *Maatschappij voor Wetenschappelijke Cinematographie* (Scientific Cinematography Co.) and the *Maatschappij voor Artistieke Cinematographie* (Artistic Cinematography Co.). A commercial venture, its goal was to ‘unite in a regular organization the various ways of utilizing film for industry, art, education, economy, and ethics, alternated with suitable entertainment.’ As well it put forward a proposal for a mobile, 1000-seat auditorium that could be erected all over the country and function as a school cinema.⁶⁸ In May 1913 the two companies were merged in the Scientific and Artistic Cinematography Co. During these two years they produced about two dozen documentary films before they became, in 1914, *Filmfabriek Hollandia* (Film Studio Hollandia). From that point onwards the company refocused on the production of feature fiction films. Its success, thanks to reduced foreign imports during the war years, lasted only until the early 1920s. The postwar removal of restrictions on the import and export of films, in March 1919, and the subsequent flood of American product sealed Hollandia’s fate; in 1923 it was declared bankrupt.⁶⁹ In the meantime, its documentary production had taken a backseat while the mobile auditorium had been totally forgotten.

Despite Hollandia’s failure, it became even clearer than before the war that the Dutch film market was too small to recover the costs of educational films proper. As late as 1931, historian Frances Consitt, in her investigation of film as a teaching aid in the much bigger British market, observed this problem, too: ‘Producers refuse to create educational films for a non-existent market.’⁷⁰ If educational institutes wanted to employ film as a teaching aid, they had no choice but to rely on commercial production and distribution companies, whose films also must have a theatrical release — or in the terms of the mission statement quoted above, ‘alternate with suitable entertainment.’ This, of course, significantly compromised the ideal of an educational film.

Van Staveren’s 1919 brochure clearly signalled his dependence on commercial parties: its front and back covers as well as its flyleaves carried advertising for two Dutch commercial distribution companies whose catalogues of ‘educational and scientific films’, of both domestic and foreign origin, served theatrical as well as nontheatrical venues. An overview of van Staveren’s school cinema programs featured a considerable number of their titles (despite the municipality’s investigating commission’s condition at the time that it only

67 *Rapport van den Onderwijsraad* (1922), 24; E. Bonebakker, ‘Utrecht’, *De Kinematograaf*, 19 April 1918, p. 3588, <<https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMEYE01:000768012:00012>> [accessed 3 May 2021].

68 ‘Wetenschappelijke cinematographie’, *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 8 May 1912, evening edn., 3rd section, p. 10, <<http://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010649940:mpeg21:p.010>> [accessed 3 May 2021]. The original Dutch text reads: ‘... die zich ten doel stelt door een vaste organisatie te vereenigen de verschillende toepassingen der bioscoop op het gebied van industrie, kunst, onderwijs, economie en etiek, afgewisseld door gepaste ontspanning.’

69 André van den Velden, Fransje de Jong, Thunnis van Oort, ‘De bewogen beginjaren van de Nederlandsche Bioscoop Bond, 1918–1925’, *Tijdschrift voor Mediageschiedenis*, 16, 2 (2013), 24; Eye Filmmuseum, <http://catalogus.eyefilm.nl/ce/Corporaties/wetenschappelijke_cinematographie> [accessed May 3, 2021].

70 Francis Consitt, *The Value of Films in History Teaching* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1931), 1.

show ‘purpose-made films’).⁷¹ Parenthetically, the same overview did not bear out his claim, quoted above, that lantern projections would realize their ‘full potential [...] alongside cinema’, as none are listed. A recent study of the Municipal School Cinema in Rotterdam, furthermore, lists a number of its programs screened in 1921 and 1922. Many of their titles, too, were commercially distributed nonfiction films, with a varying share of foreign imports.⁷² No wonder that, even as late as 1924, Dutch film producer-cum-cameraman H. C. Verkruijsen could write that ‘the educational film is not satisfactory yet.’⁷³

The abovementioned initiatives as well as the then current situation had been discussed during talks between experts and high-level government representatives, in 1919. What was clearly needed, according to the experts, was a counterbalance to the film entertainment business to make the kinds of film that would be useful for education and befit a state film archive. Moreover, given the reliance on commercial product, the government, it was argued, would lose the opportunity to assume a central role and control a field now largely left to the whims of private enterprise.⁷⁴ Eventually the government dismissed the suggestion, citing financial reasons. But in 1921 it reconsidered, possibly prodded by the recommendation to financially support associations and institutes that offer programs of instructive films or of suitable entertainment, a recommendation that was mentioned in the report by the State Committee to Combat the Perils of Cinema, published in October 1920.⁷⁵ The Elementary Education section of the Education Board, a government advisory body, was subsequently asked to appoint another commission to investigate the significance of film as a teaching aid. However, the commission’s work may have been a mere political maneuver; the conclusions submitted in its report of 1922 did not lead to any measures. But the government did follow up on the 1920 report on the perils of cinema with the 1926 *Bioscoopwet* (Cinema Law) and a national censorship office in 1928.

This decision has been attributed to what was called a ‘moralizing government.’ A study of that title defined this term as governance based on policies of ‘moral and cultural values and norms’. It claimed, moreover, that it reflected the attitude of Dutch governments from around the turn of the twentieth century until the Second World War as that of being a ‘night-watchman state’, concerned merely with the core tasks of foreign policy, national safety, public order, and good morals; only in case of threats to these matters would a government intervene.⁷⁶ As noted, cinema’s perceived perils to public order and morals, for instance, had indeed forced it into action. This was in line with interventions made in the past, albeit mostly on a local level, to curb fairgrounds or blood sports — a type of activities that strongly suggests that moral and cultural values were heavily informed by considerations of class and taste.

71 *Rapport van den Onderwijsraad* (1922), 48–51; ‘Uit de residentie. Rapport der bioscoop-commissie’ (23 September 1913), p. 9.

72 Paalman (2019), 86–91.

73 H. C. Verkruijsen, *De cultureele betekenis van het lichtbeeld* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1924), 62. The original Dutch text reads: ‘... de onderwijsfilm deugt nog niet.’

74 Expert statement by W. H. Idzerda, privatdocent Photography at the *Technische Hoogeschool Delft* (Institute of Technology, Delft) and at that time director at the documentary department of Hollandia Film Studio; ‘Appendix III’, *Rapport van den Onderwijsraad* (1922), 77–78.

75 ‘Staatscommissie bestrijding bioscoop-gevaar’ (16 October 1920).

76 J. H. J. van den Heuvel, *De moraliserende overheid: een eeuw filmbeleid* (Utrecht: Lemma, 2004), 7–8.

But there is more to be said against the notion of a night-watchman state in this context. First of all, it is not just a misnomer with regard to the period under consideration, it is obsolete, as the cited study failed to notice government legislation ever since the 1880s that addressed the excesses of the abovementioned social question by prohibiting child labour, limiting working hours, regulating housing construction or making elementary education compulsory.⁷⁷ Furthermore, the cited study's focus on censorship and exhibition, certainly a prominent issue until the late twentieth century, makes its argument self-fulfilling. It misses the view from below and the innovative ideas, particularly among a new generation of teachers around the turn of the twentieth century, that had created a new dynamism.⁷⁸ And due to its poor grasp of cinema history it misses part of the view from above, too, as Cabinets — both liberal and confessional — involved themselves from time to time in commissioning or sponsoring film *productions*, for reasons of colonial and military propaganda rather than morals or cultural values. For instance, the abovementioned films commissioned by the Colonial Institute, in 1912, had been made possible by the Ministry of Colonies, which had paid the filmmaker's salary during the year his commission lasted.⁷⁹ In 1916, the Ministry of War had commissioned a propaganda film on the Dutch army and navy, *DE LEGER- EN VLOOTFILM* (ARMY AND NAVY FILM; 1917).⁸⁰ Again the Ministry of Colonies, in 1926, commissioned a number of films about the Netherlands East-Indies.⁸¹ Eventually, though, national safety forced the government to enter the world of media itself: in 1934, in order to counter national-socialist propaganda and serve national interest by its own information, it created a state press service. So much for the night-watchman state.

Didactic Value

In 1922 two psychologists of the then recently founded Psychological-Pedagogical Laboratory of the Municipal University Amsterdam (Gemeente Universiteit) conducted two unique experiments.⁸² Unique in the Netherlands, that is. Because at the same time, and unbeknown to each other, a series of similar experiments was being conducted in the United States (in fact, its lead researcher, Frank N. Freeman, had conducted educational film experiments as early as 1918).⁸³ Both were concerned with the didactic value, or what the Americans called pedagogical effectiveness, of visual teaching aids. The Dutch experiments

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- 77 Ruud Koole, *Twee pijlers: het wankele evenwicht in de democratische rechtsstaat* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 2021), 184.
- 78 Jan Bank, Maarten van Buuren, *1900: hoogtij van de burgerlijke cultuur* (The Hague: Sdu, 2000), 229–64.
- 79 'Minutes of meeting board of directors Association 'Colonial Institute' (January 15, 1912)', Archive Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen (Royal Tropical Institute), file no. 219, quoted in: Janneke van Dijk, Jaap de Jonge, 'Johann Christian Lamster (187–1954)', van Dijk, de Jonge, Nico de Klerk (eds), *J. C. Lamster, een Vroege Filmer in Nederlands-Indië* (Amsterdam: KIT Publishers, 2010), 24.
- 80 Eye Filmmuseum, <http://catalogus.eyefilm.nl/ce/Corporaties/Ministerie van Oorlog>.
- 81 Eye Filmmuseum, <http://catalogus.eyefilm.nl/ce/Corporaties/Ministerie van Koloniën>.
- 82 G. Révész, J. F. Hazewinkel, 'Over de didactische waarde van de projectielantaarn en de bioscoop', *Paedagogische Studiën*, 4 (1923), 33–67; J. F. Hazewinkel, 'Over de didactische waarde van de projectielantaarn en de bioscoop', *Paedagogische Studiën*, 4 (1923), 169–84.
- 83 Frank N. Freeman, *The Handwriting Movement: a Study of the Motor Factors of Excellence in Penmanship, an Investigation Carried on with the Aid of a Subsidy by the General Education Board* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1918).

focused on film and lantern projections, while the American experiments also included stereographs, photographs and other, both visual and non-visual presentation modes. And whereas the Dutch experiments measured didactic value by the degree of retention in questionnaires or free compositions, the American experiments also tested understanding through multiple choice, completion, Yes and No tests, and right-or-wrong tests. In fact, these experiments were of a wider scope, as they also included practical matters, such as their correlation with the curriculum or the handling of visual materials.⁸⁴ But what the two series of experiments did have in common was that, for the first time, methods of instruction with visual materials were systematically and comparatively tested in the place where they were used, the classroom, rather than in unsubstantiated polemics in newspapers, brochures or government reports — what Freeman dismissed as ‘opinion’.⁸⁵

The Dutch experiment was conducted at an Amsterdam secondary school among c. eighty students at the ages of thirteen to sixteen. They were tested on their memories of lantern and film projections about geographical topics; the materials came courtesy of the Colonial Institute. The fact that this institute had slides and films on the same topics made the experiment, according to the two psychologists, ‘objective’. To guard this objectivity care was taken to adapt each slide projection to the length of its companion film.⁸⁶ As well the experiments were conducted without oral comments, because ‘surely only then’, they claimed, ‘could the results of film and slide be determined purely and independently of the comments’ subjective value.’⁸⁷ Test subjects were first and second graders, at the ages of thirteen to fourteen, for whom the topics — all about the Netherlands East-Indies — were new. A control group consisted of students in the third and fourth grades, who once had been instructed in some of these topics, albeit without visual aids. Over a period of four weeks all test subjects were shown two colonial topics. In the first week one class was shown a film, while a parallel class watched a slide projection about an identical topic; in the third week this procedure was repeated with another topic, while the visual aids were interchanged. In the week following each of these projections students were asked to write an essay about what they had seen, a method, the experimenters explained, to get a better sense of the visual teaching aids’ after-effect, which they defined as stabilised memory. Their preference for this method was based on demonstrated minor differences

84 Révész, Hazewinkel (1923), 43; Frank N. Freeman, ‘Introduction: problem and method of procedure’, Freeman (ed.), *Visual Education: a Comparative Study of Motion Pictures and Other Methods of Instruction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1924), 13; F. Dean McClusky, ‘Comparisons of Different Methods of Visual Instruction’, Freeman (1924), 84.

85 Freeman (1924), 3; see also McClusky (1924), 86.

86 In the American experiments a similar procedure was followed in various comparative experiments with parallel groups by taking material contained in a film — the object most resistant to invasive measures — and adapt it to other modes of presentation: ‘charts were taken directly from the film by projecting the film upon large cardboard sheets and tracing the outline of the picture upon it’; ‘by copying and reproducing orally the titles and subtitles and then supplementing these by a few additional sentences’ for a lecture; or to prepare material contained in a film ‘in the form of slides and a mimeographed text illustrated by photographic prints’ whenever permission was granted. Although reminiscent of Révész and Hazewinkel’s ‘objectivity’, Freeman uses the more modest term ‘identity’; Freeman (1924), 17, 29, 35, respectively.

87 *Ibid.*, 44. This method was abandoned in the second experiment; see: Hazewinkel (1923). The original Dutch text reads: ‘Alleen dan kon immers het resultaat van film en diapositief geheel zuiver, onafhankelijk van de subjectieve waarde van die verduidelijking, bepaald worden.’

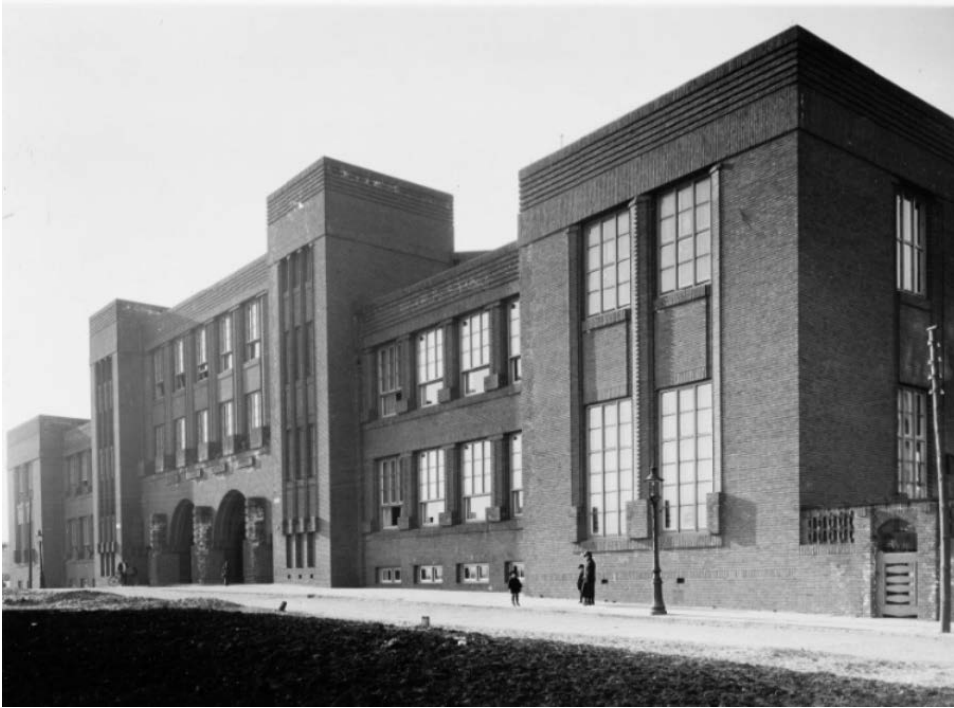


Fig. 3.4. Amsterdam Lyceum, site of the didactic experiments of Révész and Hazewinkel (Image via <<https://archieff.amsterdam/beeldbank/detail/abce87bb-8603-df67-64a8-54b9b91e50b0/media/703c42c4-94b9-9bf3-ffa3-c557ca946a5c?mode=detail&view=horizontal&q=Amsterdams%20Lyceum&rows=1&page=4>>).

between answering questions and writing essays.⁸⁸ In a follow-up experiment ten months later, in November 1922, another but unannounced essay assignment was given.⁸⁹ A new experiment was also conducted that included, besides the projections, oral comments by a teacher. To minimize individual differences between teachers, only one person was asked to deliver the lecture in a largely identical way, i.e. in length and emphasis.⁹⁰

‘Our investigations have shown that the energetic propaganda made for the film on the strength of its alleged didactic importance is not well-founded. On the other hand, its educational importance has not been disproved. The opinion of those who hold that the lantern slide is to be preferred to the film is supported by our results in so far as they put beyond a doubt the great didactic value of the former for pupils up to the age of seventeen, i.e. for the majority of our school population.’ That was the summary of their experiments’ most important conclusions,⁹¹ while the second experiment’s conclusion was that ‘it appears that the didactic value of film decreases more sharply than lantern

88 Ibid., 45–47.

89 Hazewinkel (1923), 169–70.

90 Ibid., 179.

91 G. Révész, J. F. Hazewinkel, ‘The Didactic Value of Lantern Slides and Films’, *British Journal of Psychology*, 15, #2 (1924), 197. This was a partial translation of the first experiments’ research results (its review of the literature was left out). The second experiment’s report was not translated.

slides among children beneath the age of twelve, *while neither method has at that point any didactic value without oral comments.*⁹²

Coming to an End

There is much to be said against these experiments. By initially omitting teachers' oral comments, for instance, comparison was enabled yet at the same time a setting was created that had little resemblance to and, therefore, probably less value for the very situation in which the experiment was conducted: a class. The ready-made lecture in the follow-up experiment also served 'objectivity' rather than naturalism. A serious omission, furthermore, is that the very setup of these comparative experiments precluded the realisation of the specific advantages of screening slides: simultaneous analysis and discussion. And an element that was not discussed at all was the presence of intertitles in the films, which at the time would be part of any complete print, most certainly nonfiction films. In contrast to slide projections, which lacked their common oral clarifications here, the films would have given pupils more information to understand or frame the images.⁹³ As there is no telling how this would have affected the results, caution is warranted. After all, the results focused on which and how many facts students were able to remember; it did not ask whether and to what extent they really understood what they had been watching.⁹⁴ As a matter of fact, the test materials' explicitness about temporal, spatial or ethnographic contexts left much to be desired. Finally, the experimenters' objective setup ignored contemporary, more child-centred educational approaches, such as the Montessori method or, indeed, the very location where they conducted their experiments, a secondary school that considered extra-curricular activities all-important for students' development, particularly in the lower grades.

What is an important fact, although a long time coming, is that these experiments were conducted at all. Praise is therefore due to Révész and Hazewinkel (as well as the American experimenters) for having put the debate regarding photographic teaching aids on a scientific footing, i.e. factually and verifiably rather than rhetorically and anecdotally. And that was less simple than it looks. Whereas the experimenters' discussion of the existing literature could rely on a small library, academic or polemic, on film, the section on the pros and cons of lantern projections mentioned no references at all — hence its more introspective character. It is all the more sad, then, that this first serious discussion of photographic teaching aids was for a long time also the last one in the Netherlands. A hopeful beginning turned out to be an unnoted ending, as the Psychological-Pedagogical Lab closed its doors not long after for lack of funding. In this country, as far as we know, a long silence in the field of experimental pedagogical media followed.

92 Hazewinkel (1923), 184. The original Dutch text reads: 'Het schijnt of dat de waarde voor het geheugen bij kinderen beneden 12 jaar bij het gebruik van film veel sterker afneemt, dan bij gebruik van diapositieven, *geen van beide methoden echter hebben dan nog didactische waarde zonder mondelinge toelichting.*'

93 Similar American experiments did not mention this difference between film and slide either. It seems unlikely that the Colonial Institute would have sent prints without titles, for the simple reasons that there weren't any; the making of title-less prints would certainly have been rejected as financially unwise or impractical.

94 For a more extensive evaluation of the experiments, see: Jan Elen, 'Beweging en stilstand: anders en toch weer niet', *Pedagogische Studiën*, 90 (2013), 27–30.

And with the adoption of the Cinema Law, in 1926, another thing came to an end. With its narrow focus on permits and censorship this piece of legislation clearly showed that guarding good morals was higher on the government's agenda than investing in education and heritage.⁹⁵ It left educational film largely to good intentions and the market. Insofar as school cinemas had not closed already before the end of the decade, the Great Depression would eventually finish them off. And a more structural problem, now that the government had clearly withdrawn from supporting the educational film sector, was that the Dutch film market became an essentially self-regulating affair. Soon it became the remit of an all-powerful organisation, the *Nederlandsche Bioscoop Bond* (NBB; Dutch Cinema League), which united cinema proprietors, distributors, and, since the early 1930s, producers that operated within Dutch territory. A particularly unfavourable measure for educational cinema was the stipulation, also adopted in 1926, that League members could only trade with each other, except when it concerned Dutch-made materials. But that, as we have seen, was just the problem.⁹⁶ While the Hague School Cinema continued the practice of acquiring its films abroad,⁹⁷ the Rotterdam school cinema was apparently able to continue showing a mix of self-made, donated or rented Dutch productions. Some relief came in 1936, when the League introduced its *List of no objection*, a registry 'of cultural, social or educational institutes that were allowed to screen films without NBB membership, but under strict conditions that prevented them from competing commercially with regular exhibitors.'⁹⁸ But by that time it was too little too late.

95 'Tekst der Wet. Wet van den 14en mei 1926 ter bestrijding van de zedelijke en maatschappelijke gevaren van den bioscoop', *De Bioscoopwet* (Alphen aan den Rijn: N. Samsom, 1927), 25–30.

96 The earliest official statement on this matter that we found was in a 1933 NBB brochure: *Statuten, reglementen, verhuur- en huurvoorwaarden en bedrijfsbesluiten* (Nederlandsche Bioscoop-Bond: Amsterdam, February 1, 1933), 52, Eye Filmmuseum, NBB Archive, 137. A1. folder 1.

97 'Voor de Haagsche Schoolbioscoop', *Kunst en Amusement*, January 23, 1926, p. 52.

98 Thunnis van Oort, 'Resurrection in Slow Motion: the Delayed Restoration of the Cinema Exhibition Industry in Post-war Rotterdam (1940–1965)', *European Review of History/Revue européenne de l'Histoire*, 24 (2017), 10; *Nieuwe leden- en zakenbesluit* (Nederlandsche Bioscoop-Bond: Amsterdam, February 10, 1936), 16, Eye Filmmuseum, NBB Archive, 137. A1. folder 1.