

TEMA MONOGRÀFIC

Educational Cinema in the Weimar Republic

Els films educatius a la República de Weimar

Anne Bruch

bruch@leibniz-gei.de

Georg Eckert Institute – Leibniz Institute for International Textbook Research (Alemanya)

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RESUM

La República de Weimar no només es considera un període històric per si mateix en termes dels seus difícils paràmetres socials i les circumstàncies polítiques que en van provocar el fracàs el 1933, sinó també com un avanç en la ràpida expansió dels mitjans de comunicació de massa. Especialment, les pel·lícules van ser considerades com el recurs mediàtic més important i influent en la modernització d'Alemanya després de la Primera Guerra Mundial. En conseqüència, els educadors progressistes creien que l'ús de pel·lícules educatives podria alterar a fons els mètodes d'ensenyament convencionals vigents. Al mateix temps es va dissenyar un nou currículum que va implementar l'educació cívica com a tema nou. Aquest article examina com i per què es van introduir pel·lícules educatives com a nou mitjà a les escoles. També explora els debats entre educadors, professors i productors de cinema, i discuteix de quina manera aquestes pel·lícules es van utilitzar per comunicar nous continguts docents en l'àmbit de l'educació cívica.

PARAULES CLAU: films educatius, República de Weimar, reforma pedagògica, didàctica dels films, educació cívica primerenca.

ABSTRACT

The Weimar Republic is not only seen as a historical period in its own right in terms of its difficult social parameters and political circumstances which led to its failure in 1933 but also as a breakthrough concerning the rapid expansion of mass communication. Especially film was regarded as the most important and influential media resource in modernizing Germany after the First World War. Accordingly, progressive educationalists believed that the employment of educational films could alter thoroughly the prevailing conventional teaching methods. At the same time a new curriculum was designed which implemented civic education as a novel subject. This article examines how, as well as why educational films were introduced as a new medium in schools. It explores also the debates among educationalists, teachers and film producers, and discusses in what way these films were utilized to communicate new teaching contents in the field of civic education.

KEY WORDS: Educational Film, Weimar Republic, Reform Pedagogy, Film Didactic, Early Civic Education

RESUMEN

La República de Weimar no sólo es vista como un período histórico por derecho propio en términos de sus difíciles parámetros sociales y circunstancias políticas que condujeron a su fracaso en 1933, sino también como un avance en la rápida expansión de los medios de comunicación de masas. Especialmente, el cine fue considerado como el recurso mediático más importante e influyente en la modernización de Alemania después de la Primera Guerra Mundial. En consecuencia, los educadores progresistas creían que el empleo de películas educativas podría alterar a fondo los métodos de enseñanza convencionales prevalecientes. Al mismo tiempo se diseñó un nuevo plan de estudios que implementó la educación cívica como un tema novedoso. Este artículo examina cómo, así como por qué, las películas educativas se introdujeron como un nuevo medio en las escuelas. También explora los debates entre educadores, profesores y productores de cine, y discute cómo se utilizaron estas películas para comunicar nuevos contenidos de enseñanza en el campo de la educación cívica.

PARAULES CLAU: Films educatius, República de Weimar, Reforma Pedagògica, Didàctica de los films, Educación Cívica Temprana.

I. INTRODUCTION

«It cannot be the aim of an educational film to replace teaching but to offer illustrative material. Similar to a visit to the zoo or museum. The film should transfer the experience of the immediate impression into the classroom. But it is a question of the artistic form whether the film is able to impart this impression or not. It is not sufficient, if a cameraman takes a journey around the world. The most beautiful Indian temple, the most peculiar natural spectacle remains dreary and trivial, if not captured by a film artist who has the sensibility for captivating shots, visual punchlines, demonstrative cinematography, and a vivid and experienced editing. These are not aesthetical antics, but rather resources that serve an immediate purpose. But educational workers do not like this approach. Tediousness is an integral part of the dignity of the lesson. The warm evocation of reality keeps them disconcerted. For this reason, they demand films which are plain sailing. A detached display of national reports and ethnological expositions, distance to the object, a systematic stringing together of instructive intertitles [...], and a schematic recording technology –these methods are applicable for atlases and textbooks, but the educational film should and cannot compete with them. But the teachers want them do so. They impede the artist. He shall deal with his camera like a surveyor with his theodolite. Like a civil servant with a visor in his neck. And they demand that the world displayed to children should be smooth and not frightful. In the classroom should prevail peace and order, even if outside violence, poverty and irrationality are at work. Like “from the sunny heights a small church sends its salutes down to us”. This and only this is desirable for the lesson».¹

This rather harsh satirical critique of German educational films was articulated by the established film theorist Rudolf Arnheim in the journal

¹ ARNHEIM, Rudolf. «Paukerfilme», *Die Weltbühne* [Berlin], vol. 28 (1932), p. 185-187 (translation by A.B.). Arnheim (1904-2007) was born in Berlin, he studied psychology, philosophy, art history and music with Max Wertheimer and Wolfgang Köhler. When the National Socialists came into power, Arnheim left Germany for Rome where he worked as an editor for the International Educational Film Institute which was established by the League of Nations in 1928. With the outbreak of the Second World War Arnheim moved to London before immigrating to the United States in 1940. In 1968, he joined the Faculty of the Psychology of Art at Harvard University as a professor. His most important book is ARNHEIM, Rudolf. *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1951. For further biographical information see BEHRENS, Roy R. «Rudolf Arnheim. The Little Owl on the Shoulder of Athene», *Leonardo* [Oakland, Ca.], vol. 31, no. 3 (1998), p. 231-233.

Die Weltbühne in 1932.² In his article «Paukerfilme»,³ Arnheim not only expressed his discontent with the aesthetical value of this film genre but also with the teacher's attitude towards this new educational media. Additionally, he stressed the fact that classroom films hardly employed the full potential of the cinematic art and complained about the frequently beautified reflection of reality in educational films.

Arnheim's critical conclusion of 1932 is in plain contrast with the spirit of optimism concerning educational films in the early 1920s. After the First World War, a lively debate among teachers, researchers and representatives of educational institutions revolved around the question how films should and could be utilized in primary, secondary as well as higher education. Most of the educationalists and film experts hailed classroom films as an innovative and groundbreaking resource which would help to improve teaching and enhance students' skills. Correspondingly, an entire infrastructure developed within a few years around this new educational medium. It included not only teacher associations, journals, national and international educational film institutes as well as regional and local film libraries but also a sophisticated film technology.

At the same time, a new school curriculum was designed which implemented the subject of civic education (*Staatsbürgerkunde*). Established by the Weimar Constitution in article 148, the aim of civic education was no longer to form an obedient subject but to educate a well-informed citizen. Therefore, principles of both political and social equality, in particular the right to vote, the right for education and equality of rights were principal aims of civic education lessons. Furthermore, this novel subject included teaching of democratic and moral education, civic awareness, tolerance, international reconciliation as well as economic and constitutional theory. All these different aspects of civic education required the production of new advanced teaching material with a higher knowledge content. Accordingly, teachers and lecturers considered the new media educational film as an appropriate instrument to

² *Die Weltbühne* was one of the most important journals in the Weimar Republic. Founded by Siegfried Jakobsohn in 1905, it became an influential forum for intellectuals during the 1920s. Its editors and contributors included prominent writers and publicists like Kurt Tucholsky, Carl von Ossietzky, Erich Kästner, Arnold Zweig, Lion Feuchtwanger and Else Lasker-Schüler. After the National Socialists came into power in January 1933, the journal was banned. The last issue was delivered in March 1933.

³ *Paukerfilm* is another expression for educational film. *Pauker* is a colloquial German term for teacher, but it comprises a slightly negative connotation.

disseminate knowledge and to accelerate new possibilities of learning and understanding.⁴

This essay outlines how, as well as why educational films were introduced as a new media in schools in the Weimar Republic between 1918 and 1933. It explores also the debates among researchers, teachers and film educationalists, and discusses in what way these films were utilized to communicate new teaching contents in the field of civic education.

2. EDUCATIONAL FILMS IN THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC

The question whether cinema is a suitable instrument for education is nearly as old as the medium itself. Many early observers believed that films contained an inherent educational purpose because of its technical ability not only to display motion and processes which were up to this point visually incomprehensible but also to collect images for documentary and representative purposes.⁵ Moreover, commentators emphasized the argument that cinema implied an inherent and unbiased reliability, and that the screened moving picture reflected a reality free from «the distortions of subjectivity, which builds on a discourse established over the second half of the nineteenth century that linked the photographic image to objectivity», as Oliver Gaycken has argued.⁶ At the same time, a more pessimistic discourse was established by traditional secular as well as clerical representatives of educational institutions. For them, especially fictional cinema seemed to have a pernicious suggestive influence over juveniles. Early cinema was associated with cheap amusement, fairground attraction and voyeuristic spectacle.⁷ Accordingly, they were afraid

⁴ GÜNTHER, Alfred. «Wann kommt der politische Aufklärungsfilm?», *Der Bildwart. Blätter für Volksbildung* [Munich], vol. 3 (1923), p. 64-67.

⁵ For the aspect of monarchical representation in cinema in Germany in the Wilhelmine era see PETZOLD, Dominik. *Der Kaiser und das Kino. Herrschaftsinszenierung, Populärkultur und Filmpropaganda im Wilhelminischen Zeitalter*. Paderborn: Schöningh Verlag, 2012.

⁶ GAYCKEN, Oliver. «The Cinema of the Future: Visions of the Medium as Modern Educator, 1895-1910», ORGERON, Devin; ORGERON, Marsha; STREIBLE, Dan (eds.). *Learning with the Lights Off. Educational Film in the United States*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 67-89 (p. 70); DASTON, Lorraine; GALISON, Peter. *Objectivity*. New York: Zone Books, 2007.

⁷ GUNNING, Tom. «The Cinema of Attractions: Early Films, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde», ELSAESSER, Thomas; BARKER, Adam (eds.). *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*. London: British Film Institute, 1990, p. 56-62.

that films would cause immoral behaviour and crime among adolescents.⁸ Cinema appeared to be a serious danger to the children's emotional and moral fitness which had to be protected and controlled.

With this mission in mind, teachers and educators were eager to introduce an educational reform of the cinema within the context of the more general so-called *Schmutz und Schund Kampagne* (filth and trash campaign).⁹ Their intention was to improve not only the content of films in general but also the venue of film screenings. As early as 1907 a commission was formed to study the effects of cinema on children by the *Gesellschaft der Freunde des vaterländischen Schul- und Erziehungswesens* (Society of Friends of the Schools and Instruction for the Fatherland) in Hamburg.¹⁰ And despite the fact that they came to the conclusion that so far films themselves and the cinemas created physical and moral side effects in children, they anticipated that films could be used for educational purposes after a serious revision of the film material and the cinema exhibition in the future. The representatives of the *Kinoreformbewegung*¹¹ (Movement for Cinema Reform) established a number of journals like *Der Kinematograph* (The Cinematograph, 1907-1935), *Bild und Film* (Image and Film, 1912-1914), and the subsequent *Der Bildwart* (The Image Guard, 1923-1934), as well as several film associations which operated primarily on a regional level. The increasing quantity of semi-official educational film societies, like the *Lichtbildbühnen* (Association for Images and Film) which were founded in Germany from 1910 onwards and were merged in the *Bilderbühnenbund deutscher Städte* (Association of German Cities for Images and Film) in 1918, helped to improve the discourse on the role and

⁸ HELLEWIG, Albert. *Schundfilms* [sic]. *Ihr Wesen, ihre Gefahren und ihre Bekämpfung*. Halle an der Saale: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1911; EADEM. «Schundfilme als Verbrechenanreiz», *Der Bildwart. Blätter für Volksbildung* [Munich], vol. 3 (1923), p. 62-64. For the medical discourse concerning cinema and juvenile crimes see also KILLEN, Andreas. «Psychiatry, Cinema, and Urban Youth in Early-Twentieth-Century Germany», *Harvard Review of Psychiatry* [Harvard], 14 (2006), p. 38-43.

⁹ For the campaign against «trash» in Imperial and Weimar Germany see KILLEN, Andreas. *Homo Cinematicus. Science, Motion Pictures, and the Making of Modern Germany*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017, especially chapter 2: «Film Reform, Mental Hygiene, and the Campaign against "Trash", 1912-34», p. 65-102.

¹⁰ KEITZ, Ursula von. «Wissen als Film. Zur Entwicklung des Lehr- und Unterrichtsfilms», KREIMEIER, Klaus; EHMANN, Antje; GOERGEN, Jeanpaul (eds.). *Geschichte des dokumentarischen Films in Deutschland. Vol. 2: Weimarer Republik 1918-1933*. Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 2005, p. 120-150, p. 120.

¹¹ Scott Curtis argues correctly that the term *Bewegung* (Movement) for the *Kinoreformer* is rather misleading because its supporters neither established a central organization nor passed a joint resolution. See CURTIS, Scott. *The Shape of Spectatorship. Art, Science, and Early Cinema in Germany*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015, p. 152.

function of educational film in Germany in the immediate aftermath of World War I. Furthermore, the first *Filmprüfstellen* (Film Assessment Offices) were set up in Berlin and Munich in 1919 with the purpose of viewing and evaluating films as to their suitability for the classroom and approving or rejecting them for this task.¹²

But despite the various institution which were responsible for classifying and distributing educational films under the auspices of the *Zentralinstitut für Erziehung und Unterricht* (Central Institute for Education and Teaching), there was neither a legal nor content-related definition of the term «educational film».¹³ Phrases like educational film, science film, classroom film, teaching film as well as research and instruction film were used synonymously referring on one hand to «the location/institution within the films were meant to be shown», and on the other hand «the practice they were supposed to support», as Eef Wasson has pointed out.¹⁴ Also, the use of the expression «educational film» reveals constantly changing applications, which, when summarized, can be disentangled into two different aspects. First, from an academic perspective, educational films were seen as a means of disseminating academic and scientific knowledge within in lower and higher education, vocational schools and universities. The focus in this case was as a detailed and objective visual reproduction of the phenomena of the physical world as possible. Secondly, cinema reformers held the view that a pedagogic approach must predominate if the films were to contribute to the education and moral guidance of young people. From an aesthetic and formalistic point of view, educational films were, first and foremost, documentary films with a pedagogical approach, a non-fictional content and a non-commercial purpose.¹⁵ The formal structure of these films consistently included intertitles, insertions, sequences with animated graphics, maps and charts as well as compilation elements and occasionally short staged scenarios containing narrative arrangements besides

¹² The Weimar Constitution prohibited measures of censorship.

¹³ KEITZ, Ursula von. «Wissen als Film. Zur Entwicklung des Lehr- und Unterrichtsfilms». Op. Cit., in partic. p. 126-129; it was not until 1931, at the Third International Conference of Educational Films in Vienna, that the categorization of educational films was outlined more specifically.

¹⁴ For the struggle to find and apply the correct term see MASSON, Eef. *Watch and Learn. Rhetorical Devices in Classroom Film after 1940*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012, p. 13 and p. 256. Although Masson refers to the Dutch classroom films, the same problem existed in Germany in the inter-war period.

¹⁵ In Germany, the more frequently used umbrella term for these films was *Kulturfilme* (Cultural Films). See HOFFMANN, Kay. «Germany», AITKEN, Ian (ed.). *The Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of the Documentary Film*. London and New York: Routledge, 2013, p. 293-297.

flashback arrangements. Furthermore, the films applied special camera effects like slow, stop and fast motion, dissolves and cinephotomicrographical techniques to improve the visualization of the subject and the mnemonic effect of the films.¹⁶

Films which were approved by the two *Filmprüfstellen* with the certificate of «educational» were allowed to be shown in schools, universities and public lectures. This procedure included also a tax relief for the positively rated films that led to the result that these films were frequently included in the regular film programme to reduce the tax expenses for the cinema performance. By March 1929 a total number of 2139 films was approved as educational but a close analysis of the films listed in the directory of the *Filmprüfstelle* unveils that not only documentaries were registered but also a large number of fictional as well as fairy tale films.¹⁷

In their effort to reform education via the new media of film, the educationalist, film experts and researchers involved in the debate were part of a much larger set of movements regarding democratization, urbanisation and modernization. Since the late 19th century, «the concept of “reform” as an expression of the sense of transition and as a plan for managing it took on special significance for self-understanding», according to Scott Curtis.¹⁸ A reform of the educational system on the basis of most recent pedagogical research was one of the central assignments of the German Empire. Priority was given to all transformations that would help to prepare the students efficiently for the requirements of Germany’s rapid industrialization. Not only supported the *Kinoreformbewegung* this task but also a number of educational films reflected content-wise the increasing urban and industrial developments. Simultaneously, its middle-class representatives insisted that films should be used as well for the purpose of political education. The so-called cinematic *vaterländische Erziehung* (patriotic education) included travelogues, animal films, nature studies films and films mirroring the political state of the German Empire. The various visual representations were supposed to advance

¹⁶ KREIMEIER, Klaus. «Komplex-start. Semiologie des Kulturfilms», KREIMEIER, Klaus; EHMANN, Antje; GOERGEN, Jeanpaul (eds.). *Geschichte des dokumentarischen Films in Deutschland. Vol. 2: Weimarer Republik 1918-1933*. Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 2005, p. 87-119; and REICHERT, Ramon. *Im Kino der Humanwissenschaft. Studien zur Medialisierung wissenschaftlichen Wissens*. Bielefeld: transcript-Verlag, 2007.

¹⁷ Altogether 3616 films were examined, and 628 films received the certificate *volksbelehrend* (of general educational value), only 325 films failed the review process. LAMPE, Felix. «Zehn Jahre Bildstelle». *Pädagogisches Zentralblatt* [Berlin], 9 (1929), p. 199-204 (p. 201).

¹⁸ CURTIS, Scott. *The Shape of Spectatorship*. Op. Cit., in partic. p. 148.

the patriotic sentiment and loyalty of the audience, and confirm appellatively the status quo of the Empire. Correspondingly, scenic performances of Wilhelm II were a favourite motif in films until 1918.¹⁹ But with the end of the German Empire and the establishment of the Weimarer Republic the reform movement changed its direction regarding political respectively civic education. A novel body of knowledge had to be developed and introduced in schools, textbooks and educational films.

3. THE INTRODUCTION OF CIVIC EDUCATION IN THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC

The Constitution of the German Reich, more commonly known as *Weimarer Verfassung* (Weimar Constitution) established in Germany a democratic parliamentary republic with a legislature elected under proportional representation in August 1919. Articles 142 to 150 channeled the procedure of educational institutions within the Reich. Public education was provided by state institutions and regulated by the government, with cooperation between the *Reich*, the *Länder* (federal states), and the local communities on a federal basis. Primary school was compulsory, with advanced schooling available to age 18 free of charge. The constitution also provided for private schooling, which was likewise regulated by the government. In private schools operated by religious communities, religious instruction could be taught in accordance with the religious community's principles.

The constitutional point of reference for a comprehensive civic education was article 148 which outlined its four main goals and tasks. First, all schools have to work towards *sittliche Bildung* (ethical and moral education), *staatsbürgerliche Gesinnung* (patriotic conviction), personal and occupational fitness in the spirit of German *Volkstum* (national customs and traditions) and international understanding. Secondly, in classes it has to be taken in consideration that feelings and beliefs of dissenters should not be offended. Thirdly, civic education and *Arbeitsunterricht* (practical vocational training) are school subjects, and every pupil will receive a copy of the constitution upon graduation. And finally, compulsory education including *Volkshochschulen* (adult education academies) have to be supported by the Reich, the federal states and communities.²⁰

¹⁹ PETZOLD, Dominik. *Der Kaiser und das Kino*. Op. Cit., in partic. p. 323.

²⁰ See *Reichsgesetzblatt* 1919, p. 1383; and HUBER, Ernst Rudolf. *Dokumente zur deutschen*

These principles were complemented by the guidelines of the Reich's School Conference for Civic Education in 1920, and the procedures published by the Committee for Civic Education of the Reich's ministry of internal affairs in 1923. Both texts communicated parameters that all subject matters should be permeated by the spirit of civic education. To achieve this objective, several fields of civic education, like constitutional theory, economics, administration studies and international understanding were made part of cross-curricular teaching and a separate school subject for graduating classes.²¹ Prima facie, the two regulations seem to be represent moderate principles, but certain parts of the texts allow a more conservative interpretation and reveal some revisionist tendencies.

Nonetheless the introduction of civic education as a new school subject was accompanied by a lively discourse on pedagogical theory and practical implementation in the classroom among teachers and educationalists.²² Special emphasis was placed on the principle of *Anschaunungsunterricht*. In these lessons, curricular knowledge was not supposed to be disseminated in an abstract manner but shaped by tangible materials, activities and visual instruction. Here, the pedagogical focus was less teacher-centered but concentrated on an autonomous learning experience as well as realistic and vivid stimuli for school children. Accordingly, teachers demanded both revised textbooks and illustrative teaching material. But within the discourse about civic education teaching material was considered as a problem. On one hand, educationalist assumed that particularly visual media had the chance to depict complex issues, but on the other hand the transfer of multifaceted political and social topics into comprehensible visualizations which were suitable for school children was an even more didactically challenging task.

Though, teachers were able to draw upon a vast repertoire of teaching materials, methods and audiovisual aids due to the fact that new technology found its way into the classrooms. This included not only role play games, newspaper reading groups, debating clubs, guided factory visits, editorial contributions to school magazines, field trips and excursions, but also a

Verfassungsgeschichte. Vol. 4: Deutsche Verfassungsdokumente 1919-1933. 3rd edition. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 1992, p. 151-179.

²¹ KUHN, Hans-Werner; MASSING, Peter (eds.). *Politische Bildung in Deutschland. Entwicklung – Stand – Perspektiven.* Wiesbaden: Springer-Verlag, 1990, p. 64.

²² BUSCH, Matthias. *Staatsbürgerkunde in der Weimarer Republik. Genese einer demokratischen Fachdidaktik.* Bad Heilbrunn: Verlag Julius Klinkhardt, 2016.

number of audiovisual devices like wall charts and placard newspapers, maps, slide projections series, and radio broadcasts especially prepared for school classes.²³ But it was in particular the media film that teachers and educationalists put their hope on. They were particularly captivated by «the ability of films to “bring learning to life” –promising a means to represent reality in a visual form and to animate the spoken and printed word», as Neil Selwyn pointed out.²⁴

In 1923, the leading specialist in legal matters concerning educational films, Alfred Günther phrased his aspirations as follows: «But the educational film still needs some content-wise development. The great advantage, the impressive and lasting instruction of the audience through the moving image, should not only be applied for pedagogical and scientific but also for political and patriotic matters of our nation and state. We Germans still miss the political as well as historically patriotic film, which Americans and Italians were able to develop a long time ago –especially during the war– as an effective propaganda weapon against us and which has successfully led to our damage all over the world».²⁵ This paragraph shows us that some experts were willing to redirect the pedagogical approach of educational film to the more strategic goal of propaganda. Although this opinion was incompatible with the political and pedagogical principles of impartiality, fairness and objectivity as expressed by such influential authorities like Georg Kerschensteiner,²⁶ a relatively large amount of educational films exposed certain tendencies of propaganda. By using ambiguous intertitles and language, maps as well as charts, these films produced a more emotional rather than rational response to the information presented. For example, educational films like *Der Rhein in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (The Rhine River in Past and Present, D. Felix Lampe, 1922), *Wege zur Kraft und Schönheit* (Ways to Strength and Beauty, D.: Wilhelm Prager, 1925), *Die Weltgeschichte als Kolonialgeschichte* (World History as Colonial History, D.: Hans Cürliis, 1926), and *Im Spreewald – Ein Bild deutscher Heimat im Wechsel der Jahreszeiten* (In the Spreewald – A Picture of German Homeland within the Changing of the Seasons, D.: Hubert

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 266-280.

²⁴ SELWYN, Neil. *Education and Technology. Key Issues and Debates*. 2nd edition. London, Oxford: Bloomsbury, 2017, p. 51.

²⁵ GÜNTHER, Alfred. «Wann kommt der politische Aufklärungsfilm?», Op. Cit., in partic. p. 65.

²⁶ KERSCHENSTEINER, Georg. *Der Begriff der staatsbürgerlichen Erziehung*. 6th extended edition. Leipzig, Berlin: Teubner, 1929.

Schonger, 1927) fulfil an explicit propagandistic purpose and can be placed within the framework of revisionist politics concerning the Versailles Peace Treaty.²⁷

4. CONCLUSION

Though Rudolf Arnheim's critique of educational films, quoted here at the beginning, seems to be rather harsh, it reflects however, the ambivalent and instable definition of the educational film genre. On one hand, we have a highly professionalized public discourse regarding the technological devices, pedagogical practices and the social arrangements for educational films as a new tool in the classroom, but on the other hand neither the aesthetical nor formal possibilities of cinematic techniques were in general applied to educational films. Considering the fact, that special effects were specifically invented and developed for science films, this detail becomes even more irritating. Instead, most educational films were based on a conventional rhetorical, narrative as well as aesthetical structure which generally displayed details, information and production processes. The possibility to visualize controversial attitudes which could help the students to create an independent democratic opinion was rarely used. Accordingly, the picturesque small church sending down its salutes to the audience, mentioned by Arnheim, is a metaphor for the pursuit of naïve harmony and uncritical dissemination of knowledge and information.

Although in the new Weimar Republic, the model for civic education was no longer the obedient subject but the educated citizen, authoritarian, selective and hierarchical traditions remained firm and many times maintained against democratic reform approaches, that aimed at more participation, openness and equality. A close analysis of educational films which were a reflection of the dominating political discourse reveal that educational media were an ambivalent instrument used often as a propagandistic device. Therefore, it is necessary not only to question the content of educational films in general but to implement comprehensive media education programmes.

²⁷ All four films are available online. For a close analysis of *Die Weltgeschichte als Kolonialgeschichte* see Annegarn-Gläß, Michael. «The German Colonies in Die Weltgeschichte als Kolonialgeschichte. The Use of Filmic Techniques in Colonial Revisions in the 1920s», *Journal of Educational Media, Memory, and Society* [New York, Oxford], 8/1 (2016), p. 14-29.