

## Report

### Project „Educational film practice in Austria“

#### 1. About the project: object of research, aims, expected output

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More information: <https://lehrfilmpraktiken.univie.ac.at>

There is no comprehensive research on educational film in Austria so far. This project aims to fill that gap, investigating the history of educational usage of film in Austria between 1918 and the late 1960s. The examined uses range from classroom projections and screenings for popular education to academic teaching and occupational training.

The object of research is educational film as a *practice*. This concept of practice encompasses not only the screened films, but also the institutions that commissioned and distributed them, the legal provisions enacted to regulate use of films in educational contexts, and the venues and set-ups of screenings. Educational screenings could take place in classrooms or commercial cinemas, in lecture halls or factory assembly rooms. The set-ups could include accompanying lectures by educators, tasks for the audiences, or the halting of a film strip in mid-projection. We use the concept of *dispositif* to describe how these different elements interacted with each other and with a screening's intended goal(s). The main thesis of the research project is that educational film practice materializes in the linkage between institutional policies, screening *situations* and the form, style, and content of the films screened. This emphasis on practice has implications for empirical research (combining films with printed documents, like instruction leaflets and lecture scripts, that have been traditionally stored in other repositories), as well as interpretation of the collected information (stressing how a film's meaning was affected by screening circumstances).

Research will be divided into two consecutive phases: In the first two years of the project, comprehensive research will be conducted in order to systematically collect data on the institutions, individuals, regulations, and venues involved and assess extant prints of educational films shown and/or produced in Austria within our timeframe. A database and media collection holding all gathered data and (intellectual property rights permitting) media objects will be published online open-access at the end of the project. In the third year, representative case studies are more thoroughly researched and analyzed.

Apart from the database and media collection and the dissemination of results in peer-reviewed publications and academic conferences, we are also planning an educational outreach program, discussing our results on the history of educational film in Austria with educators, high school students and stakeholders in popular education. As the moving image keeps challenging ideas of instruction and pedagogy—in the form

of online how-to's and explainer videos, heavily in use over the last months as a tool of 'distance education'—we expect our results to be instructive for the present day as well.

## 2. State of research

We aim to deliver a broad survey of relevant institutions, sites and modes of practice of educational film usage in Austria between 1918 and 1970 in the first two years. So we have dedicated our research so far on archives and libraries in Austria, typically with an overview visit followed by more in-depth research. This has been done in close conjunction with considerations of how to collect what kind of information (see **4. Planned presentation of research results**). For a more lively overview, see the Power Point presentation by key research Katrin Pilz (*Item 1*). Here's the short overview:

So far we have visited and viewed **film prints (and digital scans)** held at Austrian Film Museum, Österreichische Mediathek, Österreichisches Volkshochschularchiv, and Wiener Filmarchiv der Arbeiterbewegung. We have been collecting video files of foreign educational films relevant due to their crucial screening histories in Austria, including a title from the Bundesarchiv Filmarchiv in Berlin.

On the side of **archival paper records**, we already have (due to work by Katrin Pilz) digital copies of substantial holdings from Österreichisches Volkshochschularchiv, covering the film-related activities and correspondence of Vienna's Urania, the foremost site and distributor of popular education in Vienna for the first half of the 20th century.

Major **next steps** include sending a list of researched relevant film titles (collected in literature research by Christian Dewald and Vrääh Öhner) to Filmarchiv Austria in May, and the surveying and collection of written archival records, at Staatsarchiv and Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchiv, as well as in the archives of Austria's other provinces. Also, we plan to soon investigate some of the University of Vienna's collections of teaching aides, including but not only their film collections. A collection of educational slides will be examined at Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchiv.

We had project team sessions with, among others, experts on Austrian educational history (Winfried Göttlicher), media pedagogy (Christian Swertz) and photo history (Monika Faber, Margarethe Szeless) about relevant sources and issues, and visited the Österreichische Gesellschafts- und Wirtschaftsmuseum for a guided tour (Gernot Waldner).

In our reading of **primary literature** from our research timeframe we have mainly focused on

- institutional reports and journals ran by educators' organizations in Austria (*Das Bild im Dienste der Schule und Volksbildung*, 1924-1930; *SHB-Film-Post*, 1967-1962; *Mitteilungen der Abteilung Wissenschaftlicher Film*, 1962-1972)
- periodical articles from our timeframe searched for relevant keywords („Lehrfilm“, „Unterrichtsfilm“, „Schulkino“) online (searched by Nico de Klerk)

In this reading, we distinguish between (1) identifying pertinent topics and debates over the course of our timeframe, and (2) mining for relevant persons, institutions, sites of screenings, film and program titles (the aim being not completeness, but a survey of the spectrum, including what happened in the provinces, beyond the often-described activities in Vienna).

### 3. Educational film practice: concepts, case examples

We have come to stress the concept of practice mostly as a necessity we perceived during bottom-up research, drawing on preliminary investigations of some sites of educational film use in Austria. To us, the term of practice in this context encompasses (1) political, legal, and economic determinants; (2) film form, style, and content; (3) purpose and intended viewing modes; and (4) the material and institutional setup of film production, distribution, and presentation. The project asserts that educational film practice materializes in the linkage between these factors.

**Conceptually**, we started by looking through the use of the term „film practice“ in film studies (especially Janet Staiger), but some of us found more productive recent debates of practice in media studies, informed both by Actor Network Theory and media-ecological approaches. The former helps focus on how the materiality of machines and procedures interacts with institutional policies, pedagogical aims and cultural concepts in sometimes unexpected ways, while the latter stresses the situatedness of practice, challenging us to grasp the constituent elements and efficacy of a practice within its milieu, rather than judge it from a position of supposed superior knowledge. To get a useful handle on what educational film practice meant, we need to get into contemporaneous 20th-century debates about, among other things, pedagogy, science popularization and film amateur culture (on all of which we have experts on the team). This is all the more important as recent theorizations of media practice (Nick Couldry, Sebastian Giessmann, John Postill, Erhard Schüttpelz) are often informed rather specifically by the media and issues investigated by these scholars (from popular radio to blockchain), which makes their usefulness to our investigation vary.

One notion that has held true to us is the matter of reconstructing educational film *dispositifs*, drawing on the concept of the *dispositif* as re-tooled for a historical-pragmatic approach by Frank Kessler and Eef Masson. Masson's 2012 study *Watch and Learn* about classroom films in the Netherlands after 1940 remains an important touchstone in its focus on the settings created and the measures taken to realize a classroom screening's intended goal(s), as well as its investigation into how to read individual films' stylistic devices specifically in the light of such a setting.

**Question:** What underpins your ideas of film practice, or even educational film practice? Do you have suggestions or best-case examples for research into film practice that you would point us towards?

To give you a better idea of some questions of educational film *practice* that we have encountered so far, we connect them to three **case examples** we have dug into:

#### – **The combination of film and slides**

One of the main preliminary findings of our research is the frequent use of film in combination with slides, which seems to have been a constant within our timeframe at least in the use of films at school: In the journal *Das Bild im Dienste der Schule und Fortbildung* (1924-1930), researcher Christian Dewald found and catalogued numerous lists by educators defining (often in detail) „programs“ consisting of films (or film sections), slides and lecture texts (see *Item 2*). The persistence of this practice of combination of still and moving images in school education is driven home by box

formats such as the one photographed in *Item 3*: This box, found in the physics collection of a Viennese school and dating from the late 1960s to early 1970s, houses both slides and a Super8 film reel on the same topic. (Via a brochure related to this package, written text is again part of the mix as well.)

Some articles in *Das Bild* explicitly consider the institutional challenge of cataloguing such media combinations<sup>1</sup>—a question that is also relevant to our own efforts at documenting our research: What status can such pre-constituted programs (often without indication of an actual live performance) be granted within the logics of filmographic data entry? As educational film practice seems to be so much about reshaping existing media to fit teaching purposes, we will stress this practice also in our case studies, though the question remains whether we will be able to actually bring together different items used in such programs.

Another type of object that brings up issues of the relation between moving and still images is film reels collecting still image lectures, such as [*General Electric Lehrfilme*] (*Item 4*), which is one example from the collection of the Austrian Film Museum (no relation to Austria in production and distribution established, but intriguing). The length of this particular reel indicates that this is a collection of different presentations: likely individual educational film strips (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R8uR2IpFGfI>).

#### – Film gauge

*Lehrfilm Pathe-Baby. Im Walde. Beobachtungs- und Wortübung (Item 5)*, also from the collection of the Austrian Film Museum, is again pertinent to the matter of combining moving and still images, as this 9,5mm print contains notched intertitles that carry educational questions. But the film's gauge also brings up the matter of film gauge, which was much discussed—and of much consequence—among educational film advocates in Austria during the 1920s and 1930s: Given safety regulations that remained stricter than in Germany, 35mm suitcase projectors were not a legally viable option for many educational film screenings in Austria. This meant that during the 1920s the standard for film projection in educational settings endorsed by national organizations like the Schulkinobund was the „Schulkino“, a distinct room with a separate projector booth set up for 35mm projection in or near the school. The proclaimed ideal site of projection was the classroom, where films could be more smoothly be embedded into the lesson structure. But organization leaders were hesitant until circa 1930 to recommend to schools to invest in 16mm equipment, for reasons both technical (for instance, experimental research into the screen size deemed necessary for the purposes of effective classroom teaching) and organizational: While „Schulkinos“ were financed via additional screenings for paying customers and partially supported by parents' associations for each collective student screening, paying the expenses of classroom projection was seen as the most pressing challenge for changing film gauges.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, some teachers and university lecturers were using (and

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<sup>1</sup> See Heinrich Fuchsig, H.L. Schwarz: Begutachtung von Filmen, in: *Das Bild im Dienste der Schule und Fortbildung*, Issue 3, March 1, 1929, p. 46–50.

<sup>2</sup> See Josef Filip: Normalfilm oder Schmalfilm?, in: *Das Bild im Dienste der Schule und Fortbildung*, Issue 12, December 1, 1927, p. 214–220.

making) 9,5mm prints on their own, while the use of Pathé Baby catalogue-bought prints like *Lehrfilm Pathe-Baby* has not come up in our research so far.

For a practices perspective, debates about film gauge highlight how matters of film technology are closely connected to (and sometimes come in tension with) institutional policy and pedagogical concepts. Film gauges also figure in the polarity between empowering individual initiatives and striving for centralized norms and professional standards that seems to structure Austrian educational film organizations and their ambivalent relation to „amateurs“. Some of these dynamics are repeated when around 1970, film educational organizations are skeptical about the (industrial) push for video technologies, holding onto the tried-and-true standard of slides and 16mm film.<sup>3</sup>

**Questions:** Do the patterns described – concerning the combination of still and moving image, the use of different film gauges, or even a tension between individual initiatives versus efforts at centralization – strike you as familiar from the US in the same time frame? Are you aware of exchange between US educational film organizations and their European counterparts (Istituto internazionale per la cinematografia educativa, Internationale Lehrfilmkammer)?

– **What tasks do films get as a teaching aid?**

One rarity of *Item 5* among the films we have seen so far is that it not only presents material for observation, and knowledge to transmit, but already guides an activity. The viewer is asked by the intertitles to engage with what they will see in a specific, active way. (Like the first two issues, the matter of the films' forms and devices is intimately linked to ideas about the respective audiences of educational films, including questionnaires and experimental set-ups to establish norms of effectiveness for everything from shot duration and film runtime to choice of intertitle font. In this field again, the sharing of individual experiences mingles with stabs at establishing national and international standards.)

**Question:** Are you familiar with further ways of films already giving out educational exercises in their body?

#### **4. Planned presentation of research results**

Apart from the usual articles (including in an online journal that permits embedding different still and moving image materials), conference presentations and final conference, we aim to document our research results in a **project database and media collection**.

In keeping with the project's set-up of both broad overview research and case studies, the database and media collection will on the one hand contain collected information on relevant persons, organizations, screening venues, films, images and texts that we investigated during research and the relations between these, and on the other hand a display window for some examples considered in more depth.

The database will be published online (open-access) at the end of the project. As far as intellectual property rights allow, the media we collected will also be published

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<sup>3</sup> Vgl. Peter Levenitschnig: Gedanken zur 11. DIDACTA, in: *Mitteilungen der Abteilung Wissenschaftlicher Film*, Issue 13, 1972, p. 7–9.

online (open-access) at the end of the project. This will be most crucial for our case studies in which we want to represent the variety of practices, charting the range of purposes, target audiences, venues, institutional contexts, and stylistic features across the examined timeframe.

So far, we have taken the following steps: During the first six months we defined our schemas and parameters of collection (as well as standards for digitization) in close cooperation with and drawing on the expertise of the Horizon 2020 Innovation Action *Visual History of the Holocaust* (2019-2022, housed at Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Digital History and Austrian Film Museum), which is a project specifically about defining metadata standards. To make our datasets compatible with the current European film cataloguing standard EN 15907, we took as a starting point the metadata schema developed by DFF for European Film Gateway, which is relatively sophisticated in relation to different film versions, and compatible with EN 15907.

(For the EFG's metadata schema and vocabularies, see:

[https://www.efgproject.eu/guidelines\\_and\\_standards.php](https://www.efgproject.eu/guidelines_and_standards.php). For our model for film data, specifically, see *Item 6*.)

Based on our and *Visual History of the Holocaust's* common specifications, a core database is being developed by Austrian Film Museum and the company MaxRecall until end of May. For collecting and mining literature, we use (and will keep using until transferring the relevant entries to the database) a cloud project of the citation software Citavi. Until the database is finished, we also use shared lists (Excel, as well as within word documents for simpler lists) and folder dossiers to collect information for the moment. These are to be filled into the database once the core database and media collection infrastructure is available. The database will then be refined based on experience from the data import.

### **Questions:**

Do you have suggestions for best practice models

- for relational databases that connect films as well as venues and organizations?
- for the presentation of more in-depth case studies within such a database infrastructure (with display windows and the like)?

Do you have other hints, pleas or warnings after reading about the database and media collection?

## **List of items**

**Item 1:** Presentation on the state of the research project by Katrin Pilz:

*Educational Film Practice in Austria. Visual Research Report*

**Item 2:** Example of a directory of film and slide programs for school use:

N.N.: Methodische Richtlinien für die laufende Lichtbild- und Filmzusammenstellung der Arbeitsgemeinschaft, in: *Das Bild im Dienste der Schule und Volksbildung*, Issue 2, November 1, 1924, p. 29-32.

**Item 3:** Box containing both a film reel and slides on the same topic:

Photograph by researcher Christian Dewald, of an object from the Physics department media collection of the school GRG6 Rahlgasse, Vienna.

**Item 4:** Scan of a 35mm print, likely a collection of educational film strips:

*[General Electric Lehrfilme]* (archival title), Collection: Austrian Film Museum, 0002-03-1574

**Item 5:** Scan of a 9,5mm print, an educational film with questions in its intertitles:

*Lehrfilm Pathe-Baby. Im Walde. Beobachtungs und Wortübung*, Collection: Austrian Film Museum, 0901-09-0079

**Item 6:** Spreadsheet (and data model) for intermediate filmographic data collection for the research database and media collection (serving as a research tool and project outcome). It is modeled to include both films viewed as prints and digital files and relevant films only available from other data, and shared as an unkempt snapshot in its current state. This is why indication of sources is stressed, as well as events in a film's „life“. (See the tab „EDU\_Films\_Events“, which has not been used so far, as we are still collecting film lists from the literature).

Filename: Item-6\_Edufilm\_List\_Films\_2020-05-06.xlsx