3. Advertising and Avant-Gardes: A History of Concepts, 1930–1940

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Abstract
The chapter takes advertising as an umbrella term for persuasive communication. Looking at screen advertising as a specific type of communication – one that is made to persuade – the documentary, educational films, and avant-garde works of the 1930s and early 1940s come into view together under the label of advertising. Focussing on the work of John Grierson, Paul Rotha, and Hans Richter, the chapter shows how debates among intellectuals, pedagogues, and artists on both sides of the Atlantic revolved around concepts of propaganda and education to promote democracy. The chapter contributes to the field of useful cinema studies by mapping the transnational network of people, ideas, and materials involved in using moving images as tools for shaping the human mind.

Keywords: avant-garde, documentary, educational film, propaganda, democracy, useful cinema

I look on cinema as a pulpit, and use it as a propagandist.[1]
John Grierson

I look upon cinema as a powerful, if not the most powerful, instrument for social influence today.[2]
Paul Rotha

1 John Grierson, 'Propaganda: A Problem for Educational Theory and for Cinema', *Sight and Sound* 2, no. 8 (Winter 1933–1934): 119.
2 Paul Rotha, *Documentary Film: The Use of the Film Medium to Interpret Creatively and in Social Term the Life of People as It Exists in Reality*, in collaboration with Sinclair Road and Richard Griffith (London: Faber & Faber, 1968 [1935]), 25.

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> *Much less has been written* [...] *about why and from where the cinema really derived its particular spirit and particular artistic, organizational, technological, political and economic, i.e., social form, and hence about its 'usefulness' to society.*[3]
>
> Hans Richter

In his book *The Democratic Surround*, Fred Turner traces the origins of multimedia and the countercultural psychedelic 1960s back to World War II, arguing that these phenomena are rooted in a liberal effort to produce a 'democratic personality' as a democratic alternative to the 'authoritarian personality' endorsed by totalitarian regimes.[4] Facing the growing menace of fascism, the production of a *new* 'New Man' – the democratic American citizen, defined as a highly individuated, rational, and emphatic mindset that embraced racial and religious diversity – called for intellectuals and artists to develop new, 'democratic' modes of communication. Multi-image, multi-sound-source media environments, or what Turner calls 'surrounds', were considered the democratic answer to single-source mass media. Refugee artists from the Bauhaus, such as architect Walter Gropius and multimedia artists László Moholy-Nagy and Herbert Bayer, put themselves, following Turner's main argument, in the service of this democratic social vision. Together with American intellectuals, they created 'democratic' environmental multimedia techniques and the networks of ideas and people that would survive well into the 1960s. In doing so, they joined forces to defeat totalitarianism and thus became 'propagandists' for democracy.

If Turner retraces the genealogy of multimedia back to the early 1940s to reclaim a new understanding of the origins of contemporary multimedia, the aim of this chapter is somewhat related. It intends to provide what could be called a prequel to Turner's analysis of European avant-garde artists committing themselves to the creation of new media forms with the purpose of educating for democracy.[5] The focus of this contribution is on the 1930s and early 1940s and on projects that were developed in Europe both by avant-garde artists and within the documentary film movement, with the ambition to reform cinema as an educational tool to produce

3 Hans Richter, *The Struggle for the Film. Towards a Socially Responsible Cinema*, ed. Jürgen Römhild, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 23.

4 Fred Turner, *The Democratic Surround: Multimedia & American Liberalism from World War II to the Psychedelic Sixties* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2013).

5 Turner's *The Democratic Surround* is already a prequel to his book *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005).

democratic citizens that would resist totalitarian forces. These projects contributed to the building of transatlantic networks of educational film culture in the service of democracy.

Advertising as a Category for Film in the Service of Persuasion

To unravel the complex transnational relations and exchanges of ideas, films, and people that revolved around the creation of an art of film for selling democracy, this study brings the British documentary film movement into dialogue with the European film avant-garde and the American progressive educational movement under the umbrella term of advertising. Advertising, for that matter, is understood here neither as an institution nor as a genre. Instead, the term refers to objects, networks of ideas, and practices related to film in the service of *persuasion*. In this sense, advertising stands for a specific form of communication: one that addresses its addressees with specific goals to change their thoughts and actions; one that is sponsored by interest groups, be they governmental, corporate, non-profit, or other. The notion of advertising in this chapter serves as an approach to link historical theories of the documentary, propaganda, and education together and to look at them as methods of persuasion to reframe contemporary debates among intellectuals, pedagogues, and artists on both sides of the Atlantic that revolved around the concepts of propaganda and education to promote democracy.

As historical terms, advertising and propaganda witnessed a new prominence as a means of mobilizing public opinion during World War I. The term *propaganda* carried pejorative connotations in the interwar years, particularly in the United States, because of its overuse and its association with lies. Beginning in 1933, the Nazi government instituted a strict regulation of terminology, drawing a distinction between *Werbung*, for economic advertising, and *Propaganda*, for the propagating of political ideas. Elsewhere, *advertising*, *public relations*, *propaganda*, and *education* were still used interchangeably and terms would often be conflated, but there were also intense discussions about how to define and interpret these terms. Most prominently, debates flourished in the advertising industry, which had professionalized in the 1920s and produced a cohort of 'experts' such as Walter Lippmann and Edward L. Bernays, to name but two, whose theories in no minor way also served to advertise advertising.

However, considerations about how to conceptualize and use media (including film) for social intervention were equally significant in European

interwar film culture, informed not only by advertising theories but also by art movements such as Russian constructivism. Disputes about propaganda and education in the service of democracy were also lively among avant-garde and documentary film-makers, as this chapter will show. To use *advertising* in this setting as a broad category for film in the service of persuasion brings to light the underlying ideas – some shared, others divergent – that informed these debates and helps to place these discourses, which are often considered separately, in conversation with each other. Such an approach has several implications: first, it means, as mentioned above, that I do not refer to advertising as a particular institutional field, 'the advertising industry', as most studies on the relationship between the avant-garde and advertising in the 1920s do.[6] Second, it implies that advertising is not narrowed down to a particular body of advertising film in the narrow sense of the term, in other words, the typical cinema and television commercials. Instead, I consider advertising as a pragmatic category that includes all kinds of films that share a particular form of communication: one that is made to persuade.[7] Thus, it is persuasion, in concert with sponsorship, that serves as a criterion to involve cinematic forms such as the documentary and avant-garde cinema as objects of investigation in a study of screen advertising. Understood in this sense, advertising appears to be a form of communication that seeks to influence the minds, hearts, and deeds of its addressees. It intends to induce cooperation and it is a tool for social management. From a historical perspective, there has been an ongoing debate among practitioners and scientists alike whether to consider advertising or propaganda as the main category or as a subcategory. In using advertising as the umbrella term for the 'art of mass persuasion', I do not follow communication historians Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, for example, who hold that 'advertising is the most ubiquitous form of propaganda in our society',[8] but rather

6 See, among others, Michael Cowan, *Walter Ruttmann and the Multiplied Image: Avant-Garde and Sponsored Film Culture Between Weimar Modernity and National Socialism* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014); Michael Cowan, 'Advertising, Rhythm, and the Filmic Avant-Garde in Weimar: Guido Seeber and Julius Pinschewer's *Kipho* Film', *October* 131 (Winter 2010): 23–50; Sabine Hake, 'Das Kino, die Werbung und die Avantgarde', in *Die Spur durch den Spiegel. Der Film in der Kultur der Moderne*, ed. Malte Hagener, Johann Schmidt, and Michael Wedel (Berlin: Bertz, 2004), 193–206.

7 On the distinction between advertising as a genre and a pragmatic category, see Yvonne Zimmermann, 'Advertising and Film: A Topological Approach', in *Films That Sell: Moving Pictures and Advertising*, ed. Bo Florin, Nico de Klerk, and Patrick Vonderau (London and New York: Palgrave, 2016), 23–24.

8 Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 2nd ed. (Newbury Park, London, and New Dehli: Sage, 1992), 117.

side with the likes of Johann Plenge, a German sociologist and pioneer in propaganda studies who, in 1922, regarded propaganda as a particular form of promotional communication, in other words, advertising.[9]

From this perspective, screen advertising is not limited to the selling of goods and services, but is deeply involved in the shaping of ideas and attitudes. It is part of the history of what has been called 'useful cinema' – in German called 'Gebrauchsfilm' (utility film). This research field has in recent years been very productive for the study of so far largely overlooked 'ephemeral' and 'orphan' films, such as science and industrial films, educational and classroom films, newsreels and home movies.[10] The epistemic gain from such a take on advertising is that it brings together bodies of films, institutions, and media cultures that have traditionally been viewed as distinct categories and discussed separately in film studies – such as avant-garde, documentary, and educational cinema. In her article on the emergence of educational film in the 1920s and its relation to documentary film proper, Laurel E. Ahnert has recently shown how such distinctions between different categories of non-fictional film were made by contemporary actors, most prominently by John Grierson, and how these distinctions primed later film theorists and historians to adopt those categories for analysis – even though, as Ahnert convincingly demonstrates, the educational films of the 1920s were not dramatically different from documentary films of later decades.[11]

Reconsidering non-fictional film from the perspective of screen advertising, as this chapter intends, questions the boundaries between the categories of avant-garde, documentary, and educational film in new ways. Studies on the British documentary film movement typically address the documentary film as a particular form of educational cinema, while discussion of the movement's relations to the avant-garde is often limited to the influence of Soviet cinema and its montage style. Examinations of the relationship between the documentary and the avant-garde on the other hand tend to focus on formal elements and emphasize, as Bill Nichols does in his contribution to the topic, the radical potentialities of the 1920s avant-garde

9 Johann Plenge, *Deutsche Propaganda. Die Lehre von der Propaganda als praktische Gesellschaftslehre* (Bremen: Angelsachsen-Verlag, 1922).

10 See for example Vinzenz Hediger and Patrick Vonderau, eds., *Films That Work: Industrial Film and the Productivity of Media* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009); Charles R. Acland and Haidee Wasson, eds., *Useful Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Devin Orgeron, Marsha Orgeron, and Dan Streible, eds., *Learning with the Lights off. Educational Cinema in the United States* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

11 Laurel E. Ahnert, 'The Factual Treatment of Actuality: The Emergence of Educational Film in the 1920s and its Relation to Documentary Film Proper', *InterDisciplines* 1 (2013): 77–101.

while at the same time criticizing Grierson's commitment to government and corporate sponsorship for harnessing these radical aesthetic – and social – potentials.[12]

My attempt here is to bring the documentary, the avant-garde, and educational film together within the framework of advertising to retrace discourses, ideas, and visions that ran across various institutional, cultural, and geographic milieus. The goal is to reconsider the triad as intersecting and overlapping fields that shared the central idea of film as a tool for teaching democracy. This is to help overcome not only 'a false division between the avant-garde and documentary' that, according to Nichols, obscures their necessary proximity,[13] but also an equally false division between the avant-garde, educational cinema, and advertising. Behind this is the idea that a transatlantic *histoire croisée* or entangled history[14] of the European avant-garde and the documentary film movement from the perspective of advertising can bring to light an underlining pedagogical impulse that connects the avant-garde with the documentary film movement and educational cinema. At a politically critical moment in time, and following the strong media effects theory, they shared the belief that moving images were powerful tools for influencing the masses. And both the documentary film movement and educational cinema worked on the same project: the development and deployment of this tool – film – for training about democracy.

In the following, I draw on the writings by John Grierson and Paul Rotha, on the one hand, and on a body of writings and sponsored films by German avant-garde artist Hans Richter, on the other hand, to provide insights into the theories and methods that were developed by these film-makers to produce democratic citizenship with the help of moving images. Thereby, different models of screen advertising emerge that were grounded in divergent notions of propaganda and education due to diverging political ideologies.

Grierson and Rotha are probably the most prominent representatives and most influential promoters of the British documentary film movement.

12 Bill Nichols, 'Documentary Film and the Modernist Avant-Garde', *Critical Inquiry* 27, no. 4 (Summer 2001): 583. Nichols detects three pre-existing elements – photographic realism, narrative structure, and modernist fragmentation – that in combination are involved in the appearance of documentary, along with a new emphasis on the rhetoric of social persuasion (p. 582).

13 Ibid., 581.

14 On the concept of 'entangled history', see Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, 'Vergleich, Transfer, Verflechtung: Der Ansatz der *Histoire croisée* und die Herausforderung des Transnationalen', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 28 (2002): 607–636; *De la comparaison à l'histoire croisée* (Paris: Seuil, 2004); 'Beyond Comparison: *Histoire Croisée* and the Challenge of Reflexivity', *History and Theory* 45, 1 (2006): 30–50.

Rotha's book *The Film Till Now: A Survey of World Cinema*, first published in 1930, and his study *The Documentary Film*, which followed in 1935, are both pioneering books on film history. Grierson's definition of documentary (as 'the creative treatment of actuality') and his construction of the documentary tradition have had a lasting effect on the historiography of non-fiction film. Grierson's conceptualization of the documentary as a state-sponsored instrument for public management that is 'primarily concerned with attitudes of mind'[15] characterizes the documentary unmistakably as a form of useful cinema – and of screen advertising.

To include Richter's work from the late 1930s and early 1940s in this study is less obvious. Richter is best remembered for the abstract films he made together with the Swedish painter Viking Eggeling in the early 1920s (alongside Walter Ruttmann, the third 'pioneer' of German abstract or 'absolute' cinema). Still well-known, if less studied than his abstract works, are Richter's Dadaist and surrealist shorts from the late 1920s, among them *Vormittagsspuk / Ghosts Before Breakfast* (1928); *Rennsymphonie / Race Symphony* (1928); and *Alles dreht sich, alles bewegt sich / Everything Turns, Everything Revolves* (1929). Other aspects of Richter's work, such as his corporate-sponsored films from the 1930s and his involvement with documentary theory in the service of democracy during his exile in Switzerland (1937–1941) have largely been neglected. Likewise, little scholarship exists on Richter's contribution to documentary pedagogy after he immigrated to the United States in 1941. Excavating Richter's theoretical and practical work in democratic film pedagogy (while in exile on both sides of the Atlantic) reveals Richter's deep imbrication in the documentary tradition and calls for a reassessment of his contribution to documentary film culture and screen advertising. More importantly, from the point of view of advertising, it provides a new avenue of research to reconsider the relationship between the avant-garde, the documentary, and educational film within the economic framework of corporate and government sponsorship. Indeed, sponsorship as the basic principle of funding non-fiction film is a shared feature that integrates the allegedly distinctive cultural fields into a useful cinema and screen advertising culture that saw films neither as money-making commodities nor as autonomous works of art, but as tools for social management. Finally, Richter's work in the 1930s and early 1940s opens up a transatlantic perspective on the concepts and dramaturgies of film as a tool for teaching democracy under the shackles of war.

15 John Grierson, 'The Documentary Idea: 1942', in *Grierson on Documentary*, ed. Forsyth Hardy (London and Boston: Faber & Faber, 1979 [1946]), 117.

Paul Rotha, Hans Richter, and the Notion of Propaganda

In his book *The Struggle for the Film: Towards a Socially Responsible Cinema*, a manuscript written between 1934 and 1939 (finally published in full in 1976 and translated into English in 1986, although parts of it were in circulation in contemporary articles), Hans Richter dedicates a short page to propaganda in which he explicitly refers to Paul Rotha and his notion of propaganda: 'the English documentarist Paul Rotha arrives at the view that propaganda can also be a means for a progressive cinema – namely, so long as the ends it serves remain social ones'.[16] Richter rejects Rotha's understanding of propaganda expressed in the book *Documentary Film*, first published in 1935, arguing that Rotha 'forgets that propaganda does not allow independent thought, it persuades by presenting pre-prepared, apparently illuminating thought models in advance of their conclusions, refusing to recognise the audience's freedom of decision'.[17] Richter concludes his short criticism on Rotha:

> To make propaganda for truth, thought and judgement is one dramatic principle; propaganda for the concealment of the truth and for an uncritical reception is something else. – It is misleading to give the two the same name, for they strive for two different goals and must necessarily use different methods if they want to reach those goals.[18]

The dispute illustrates a larger concern about the nature of propaganda and its relationship to public relations, information, instruction, and education that was equally prevalent among academicians in the United States, who developed a theory and pedagogy for analysing contemporary propaganda. Debates on propaganda emerged in different fields, from progressive critique and communication research to practitioner expertise, after World War I. 'Propaganda anxieties' haunted liberal thoughts and politics in the United States from World War I to the Cold War, as Brett Gary illustrates in his study *The Nervous Liberals*.[19] Edward L. Bernays, American pioneer of public relations and advocate of the contested term 'propaganda', famously stated

16 Richter, *The Struggle for the Film*, 143.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 Brett Gary, *The Nervous Liberals: Propaganda Anxieties from World War I to the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999). See also Charles R. Acland's study *Swift Viewing: The Popular Life of Subliminal Influence* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012) on the popular concern about subliminal messages and 'hidden persuaders' since the 1950s.

that the only difference between propaganda and education is the point of view: 'The advocacy of what we believe is education. The advocacy of what we don't believe is propaganda'.[20] Bernays's view conflicts with the progressives' favoured definition of propaganda as a covert and institutionally promoted threat to intelligent public opinion and participatory democracy – a threat that fuelled the mission of progressives to expose propaganda, as J. Michael Sproule explains in his book *Propaganda and Democracy*.[21]

In Britain, the documentary film movement deliberately wrote itself into a 'propagandist tradition', holding that a cinema 'pursuing the ends of propaganda and persuasion' had largely been responsible for the documentary method.[22] For Rotha, while serving the needs of propaganda (a term that for him was interchangeable with public relations), the documentary fulfils an instructional purpose at the same time. Indeed, propaganda and education are so closely related and interconnected that Rotha does not even try to draw a distinction between them, admitting instead that 'it would be extremely difficult to define where instruction begins and propaganda ends'.[23] Importantly, Rotha sees in propaganda a valid instrument for democracy, and in documentary its most effective method.

If Rotha refrains from clearly distinguishing propaganda and education, he does draw a line between totalitarian and democratic propaganda, arguing that totalitarian propaganda is based on a single idea, and, as a consequence, is the more powerful:

> It asks for an unquestioning obedience by the individual in the interest of the State. It thereby relieves the individual of all the obligations of citizenship save that of acquiescence. The State and its leaders do all the social thinking which, in democracy, is demanded of the individual.[24]

To prevent the success of competing governmental systems and to preserve democracy, imparting citizenship knowledge is therefore perceived as the immediate task.[25]

Richter, however, maintained his understanding of propaganda while in exile in New York, holding that information and propaganda were not

20 Edward L. Bernays, *Crystallizing Public Opinion* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1923), 212.

21 J. Michael Sproule, *Propaganda and Democracy: The American Experience of Media and Mass Persuasion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

22 Rotha, *Documentary Film*, 92.

23 Ibid., 57.

24 Ibid., 207.

25 Ibid., 206.

only two different techniques for the interpretation of facts – the one more objective, the other more dramatic – but they also represented two different social concepts.[26] What is notable about this debate is the fact that Richter was deeply involved in this discussion revolving around the right type of persuasion in advertising film culture and that he worked on the very same artistic problems as the documentary movement – problems that challenged democracy. These problems originated in modern mass society and gained urgency with the rise of authoritarian and totalitarian political systems. Richter's increasing engagement in the fight for democracy throughout the highly critical political circumstances of the 1930s while in exile in Switzerland came out of Richter's basic idea of the social function of cinema and of art in general. In this sense, the subtitle of his book, 'Towards a Socially Responsible Cinema', can be read as a programme. To a large extent, Richter's pamphlet echoes Rotha's concern about cinema's failure, largely due to the logic of the film industry's economic organization, to deal with the important social issues of modern existence. In this respect, Richter speaks of the social mandate of the official cinema as being a mandate to 'anaesthetize' the audience. The remedy should be what Richter calls 'the progressive cinema', an educational cinema whose task it is to develop the audience's capacities for thought and judgement so that 'they can link the action on the screen with their own lives'.[27]

Fundamentally, such educational cinema is conceptualized both by Rotha and Richter (as well as Grierson) as an alternative to the film industry and theatrical circuits. The avant-garde's involvement in this alternative, largely non-theatrical, government and corporate-sponsored useful cinema and advertising screen culture allowed the avant-garde to remain true to its self-proclaimed principle of 'independence'. This might seem to contradict the avant-garde's self-conception. Yet, the anti-institutional attitude, which theorists of the avant-garde such as Peter Bürger consider a key feature of the avant-garde, was directed against the film industry and the commodities it produced, and not necessarily against other institutions that operated – such as the avant-garde – beyond commercial cinema circuits in the non-theatrical field and that produced films that were not conceived as commodities, but as tools for persuasion. Among these institutions were corporations, educational organizations,

26 Hans Richter, 'Post-War Planning on Documentary Film', unpublished typescript, [1942], 3 (MoMA Archives, Hans Richter C.XIV.5).

27 Richter, *The Struggle for the Film*, 133.

and the state. Independence from the film industry was to be found in the 1930s, after the coming of sound, only in the non-commercial sector and in cooperation with commissioning bodies. Therefore, Rotha could very well maintain that 'propaganda appears to present an alternative to the harsh cash basis for film production'.[28] This may explain why making commercials and sponsored documentaries did not, in the self-conception of the avant-garde, corrupt the self-proclaimed principle of independence. It only did so in later avant-garde discourses that emerged in the context of the post-war experimental film movement in the United States that was opposed to any utilitarian use of the medium, be it commercial, educational, or ideological, and celebrating artistic self-expression instead. These later discourses have retrospectively overshadowed and obscured the nature of the avant-garde in the 1930s and its involvement in advertising screen culture.

The social concern shared by Rotha, Richter, and many other filmmakers such as Joris Ivens or Alexander Hackenschmied (also known as Hammid) seems to confirm the traditional claim of studies on the cinematic avant-garde in Europe that, in the early 1930s, a shift in focus occurred from a primarily aesthetic to a more social perspective, and that this shift from formal experiment to social engagement went hand in hand with an abandonment of abstract cinema and film poetry for the sake of documentary. The reasons for this shift from poetics to politics are considered to be manifold, owed to changes in technology (introduction of sound), economy (documentary providing a solid foundation for production), and politics (political radicalization, rise of totalitarian systems), which together led to a 'functional differentiation' of the avant-garde in the 1930s and the dispersal of the movement.[29] This tendency to move from formal experimentation towards a greater engagement with the social or political context was also contemporarily proclaimed by Richter himself.[30]

Yet I think we should not succumb too easily to the danger of constructing a simple dichotomy between formal experimentation and social perspective.

28 Rotha, *Documentary Film*, 65.

29 See Malte Hagener, *Moving Forward, Looking Back: The European Avant-Garde and the Invention of Film Culture, 1919–1939* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007).

30 See, for example, Richter's film lecture with the speaking title 'Vom Avantgardefilm zum Dokumentarfilm' ['From Avant-Garde Film to Documentary'] in which he demonstrated, with the help of movie excerpts, the avant-garde's shifting focus from form to content, described in Harry Goldschmid, 'Die internationale Filmwoche in Basel', *Das Werk: Schweizer Monatsschrift für Architektur, Freie Kunst, Angewandte Kunst* 26, no. 7 (1939): 12–18.

To acknowledge the avant-garde's rejection of artistic autonomy and to take its attempt to integrate art and life seriously, to use Bürger's terms again,[31] can prevent us from creating a false divide between aesthetics and politics. Richter was explicit on this point in an interview with Léo Sauvage in 1937 about his sponsored films: 'I explore aesthetic problems not in isolation, but in relation to the realities posed by life'.[32] If we are to take the refusal of artistic autonomy seriously, we may on the one hand acknowledge (if not rediscover) the social and profoundly educational dimensions of the aesthetic explorations of the medium in the 1920s. On the other hand, we may reconsider the aesthetically less advanced sponsored documentaries as genuine formal experimentations into film's capacity to cope with the challenges that society poses – challenges that, in the case discussed here, call for the development of filmic methods for training about democracy. I will come back to this point later on. Suffice it to say, for the moment, that the avant-garde and the documentary film movement were allies in rejecting artistic autonomy and in attempting to reconnect art with life. If Richter discards Rotha's notion of propaganda, we can nevertheless ascertain a shared recognition that art is a social function and that it cannot be considered apart from materialist orderings of the society.[33] Hence arises the social responsibility of the artist.

John Grierson, Hans Richter, and the Theory of Education

If Paul Rotha refuses a clear distinction between propaganda, information, instruction, and education, arguing that they are relational and gradually overlapping categories, John Grierson goes one step further and declares propaganda and education as one. Defining propaganda as 'the art of public persuasion',[34] or, as he puts it elsewhere, 'the constructive management of public affairs',[35] Grierson holds that propaganda is the new democratic education:

31 Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 50.

32 Léo Sauvage, 'Hans Richter: Un des maîtres de l'avant-garde allemande voudrait collaborer avec Méliès', *Cinémonde* (Paris), no. 458 (27 July 1937). My translation.

33 See Rotha, *Documentary Film*, 66ff.

34 Grierson, 'Propaganda', 119.

35 Quoted in Peter Morris, 'Re-thinking Grierson: The Ideology of John Grierson', in *Dialogue: Canadian and Québec Cinema*, ed. Pierre Véronneau, Michael Dorland, and Seth Feldman (Montreal: Médiatexte, 1987), 21–56, here 45.

> In other words, the key to education in the modern complex world no longer lies in what we have known as education but in what we have known as propaganda. By the same token, propaganda, as far from being the denial of the democratic principle of education, becomes the necessary instrument for its practical fulfillment.[36]

Education for citizenship was at the centre of concerns in democratic states and in authoritarian and totalitarian regimes alike. The same anxieties occupied the minds of modernist artists and film-makers, if we think of the importance of visual education and the schooling of the senses in Russian constructivism, the work of Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov in the service of the creation of the 'New Man' or the Bauhaus, and László Moholy-Nagy's theoretical and practical work on 'New Vision'.[37] Grierson and Richter can be viewed as representatives of two different theories of citizenship education in democracy based on different political ideologies. They allow us to exemplify and specify the involvement not only of the documentary movement but also of members of the avant-garde in a larger project of modern education of the masses. A comparative perspective on Grierson's and Richter's theoretical and practical work at the crossroads of propaganda and education brings to light theoretical differences as well as shared ideas regarding the conception of citizenship and the formation of a cinema that influences political views and habits and educates for democracy.

In 'Education and Total Effort' (1941), Grierson highlights the need to revolutionize educational outlooks and methods while criticizing democratic educational theory as wrong in itself and proceeding on an altogether false assumption – namely,

> the mystical democratic assumption that the citizen can be so taught to understand what is going on about him that he and his fellows in the mass can, through the electoral and parliamentary process, give an educated and rational guidance to the conduct of the state.[38]

36 John Grierson, 'Education and Total Effort' [1941], in *Grierson on Documentary*, 139.

37 On László Moholy-Nagy's work, see, for example, Elizabeth Otto, 'A "Schooling of the Senses": Post-Dada Visual Experiments in the Bauhaus Photomontages of László Moholy-Nagy and Marianne Brandt', *New German Critique* 107, vol. 36, no. 2 (Summer 2009): 89–131; on his filmic work, see in particular Jan Sahli, *Filmische Sinneserweiterung: László Moholy-Nagys Filmwerk und Theorie* (Marburg: Schüren, 2006).

38 Grierson, 'Education and Total Effort', 134.

Grierson's critique of a key postulate of democratic theory, that of the 'rational citizen', was deeply influenced by the theories of Walter Lippmann and Harold D. Lasswell. Peter Morris, Ian Aitken, Jack C. Ellis, and most recently Stephen Charbonneau have contributed in-depth studies of Grierson's political ideology and his intellectual and aesthetic formation during his postgraduate years in Chicago, Hollywood, and New York in the 1920s.[39] While Morris underlines that Walter Lippmann's book *Public Opinion* (1922) crystallized for Grierson key neoconservative ideas that were already familiar to him and that would become dominant to his ideology, Aitken argues that Grierson's views are closer to the liberal objectivist theories articulated by John Dewey and C.A. Ellwood than to Lippmann's anti-democratic and elitist theory expressed in *Public Opinion*. Aitken nonetheless acknowledges that Grierson absorbed two views from Lippmann and Lasswell: the diagnosis of a lack of knowledge in citizens owed to the complexity of the modern world and, as a consequence, the necessity of an elite of experts to govern and guide society. From Lasswell, Grierson may have also adopted an understanding of propaganda as a necessary tool of managed society that, as a mere tool, as Lasswell underlines it, 'is no more moral or immoral than a pump handle', and that 'the only effective weapon against propaganda on behalf of one policy seems to be propaganda on behalf of an alternative'.[40]

These ideas had a formative influence on Grierson's views on democracy, propaganda, education, and documentary film. They laid the foundation for Grierson's belief that the chief problem of propaganda in a democracy does not lie in proving its necessity, but rather in 'developing its wise and democratic use along the path of education'.[41] Education, for Grierson, is 'the key to the mobilization of men's minds to right ends or wrong ends, to order or chaos'.[42] And the democratic interpretation of education, spelled

39 Morris, 'Re-thinking Grierson'; Ian Aitken, *Film and Reform: John Grierson and the Documentary Film Movement* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990); Jack C. Ellis, *John Grierson: Life, Contributions, Influence* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000); Stephen Charbonneau, 'John Grierson and the United States', in Zoe Druick and Deane Williams, eds., *The Grierson Effect: Tracing Documentary's International Movement* (London and New York: British Film Institute, 2014), 13–28. See also Martin Stollery, *Alternative Empires: European Modernist Cinemas and Cultures of Imperialism* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000).

40 Harold D. Lasswell in his 1933 article for *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, quoted in Sproule, *Propaganda and Democracy*, 69.

41 John Grierson, 'Propaganda and Education' [19 October 1943], in *Grierson on Documentary*, 146.

42 John Grierson, 'Education and the New Order' [1941], in *Grierson on Documentary*, 123.

out as 'the process by which the minds of men are keyed to the task of good citizenship',[43] makes propaganda and education one.[44] In other words, for Grierson, democratic education meant promoting good citizenship and selling democracy.

Grierson's educational theory is informed by anti-rationalistic views of the public mind, which began to emerge in the late nineteenth century and were particularly strong in Europe in the fields of sociology and philosophy. A major influence was Gustave Le Bon's work on the psychology of the crowd (*La Psychologie des Foules* [1895] / *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* [1896]). Regarded as the founder of mass psychology, Le Bon published studies on the irrationality of the crowd and the role of the unconscious in mass society, which influenced not only Sigmund Freud and Max Weber but also informed the avant-garde and gained wider public acceptance due to the experience of World War I. Also in the United States, the idea of society's irrationality began to challenge the traditional liberal faith in reasoned public opinion. As Sproule shows, these European influences helped to lay an intellectual foundation in the United States upon which a post–World War I propaganda consciousness could be built.[45]

If Hans Richter, profoundly affected by the irrationality and futility of World War I, shares the anti-rationalistic view of modern mass society, which finds salient expression in Richter's participation in Dada, Richter advocates for a different theory of education than Grierson to cope with the allegedly irrational character of mass society. However, two aspects complicate the study of Richter's ideas of education. As Stephen C. Foster has underlined, few artists spanned the movements of early 20th-century art as completely as did Hans Richter. He was a major force in the developments of expressionism, Dada, constructivism, surrealism, and of abstract cinema. After his immigration to New York, Richter contributed to modernism in the United States, thus serving as an important conduit between the American and European art communities.[46] Richter's position towards modernity is complex and ambivalent; it shifted with changing political and social circumstances. Second, Richter's long and eventful career, marked by several exiles, was historicized and interpreted in retrospect in many books, essays, and interviews by the artist himself, thus providing scholars

43 Ibid., 122.

44 See Grierson, 'Propaganda and Education', 155.

45 Sproule, *Propaganda and Democracy*, 33.

46 Stephen C. Foster, ed., *Hans Richter: Activism, Modernism, and the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1998).

with ready explanations that, as is typical for memory stories, give structure, sense, and closure to life and work while glossing over discrepancies and inconsistencies. Accordingly, Richter's retrospective interpretation of his own career has to be read with some precaution and, if available, verified by contemporary sources, as is my attempt here.

Malcolm Turvey, in his essay 'Dada between Heaven and Hell: Abstraction and Universal Language in the *Rhythm* Films of Hans Richter', argues that in responding to problems of modernity, Richter's abstract films intend to reconcile conflicting tendencies of liberty and order, chaos and structure. They try to restore the putatively lost balance between reason and unreason.[47] Turvey aligns Richter's search for a universal language with the critique of rationality expressed by Friedrich Schiller in his essay 'On the Aesthetic Education of Man' (1795). In this treatise, Schiller sees fine art as an instrument to restore the balance between the different faculties or drives lost in modernity. Turvey's argument is based on Richter's retrospective interpretation of Dada put forward in his book *Dada Art and Anti-Art* (1964) and not contextualized in contemporary writings and discourses; the question of whether Richter was more influenced by Schiller or by Friedrich Nietzsche lends itself to debate. Significant for this study, however, is the recognition of Richter's complex position between rationalist and anti-rationalist traditions and the acknowledgement of a counterbalancing impulse that characterizes Richter's views to better understand Richter's pedagogical ideas and educational efforts that he developed in the 1930s and early 1940s upon working within a non-theatrical, non-fictional useful cinema culture characterized by sponsorship and persuasive rhetoric.

In his aforementioned book *The Struggle for the Film*, Richter distinguishes between propaganda and education by stating that propaganda is too one-sided, since its only aim is to further a particular cause whereas the aim of education, by contrast, is 'a harmonious and meaningful formation of the whole man'.[48] If it is sufficient for propaganda to hammer in ideas, education, according to Richter, aims to awaken people and stimulate them to use their own abilities.[49] In a liberal democratic tradition following the legacy of the Enlightenment, Richter shows much more faith in the mental capacities of humans to think than does Grierson, who, in the line of Lippmann and other neoconservative thinkers, criticizes the belief in the capacity of the masses

47 Malcolm Turvey, 'Dada Between Heaven and Hell: Abstraction and Universal Language in the *Rhythm* Films of Hans Richter', *October* 105 (Summer 2003): 13–36.

48 Richter, *The Struggle for the Film*, 143.

49 Ibid.

to make reasonable decisions as 'mythical democracy'. As a consequence, Grierson does not want people 'to know everything about everything all the time', holding that this is impossible, but to see society 'emancipated from its confusion and bewilderment, and given some imaginative leadership in the articulation of a faith'.[50]

It is important to acknowledge that both Grierson and Richter were equally puzzled by problems of political education, and in that, they can be considered characteristic European intellectuals of the 1930s, but it is also evident that they followed different theories. Grierson's model of democratic education is clearly based on the idea of public management. Richter also wanted 'cinema to intervene actively in the consciousness and emotional life of its spectators', but with the aim 'to bring the spectators into conscious contact with reality and to put into their hands or heads the means whereby they can recognize their real interests and act accordingly'.[51] According to Richter, the aim of cinema must be to induce the audience to think.[52] Trusting the mental capacities of the audience and believing in the power of education to produce rational citizens, Richter wanted to train audiences to think rather than to persuade them to conform to authorities, even if they are democratic. Whereas Grierson's educational model rests upon the power of persuasion, the goal of Richter's concept of education, in the tradition of Enlightenment, is emancipation.

Despite apparently different political and educational concepts to sell democracy, both Richter and Grierson share with their contemporaries a belief in film as an efficient tool for manipulation emerging from an underlying conception of citizenship – and spectatorship – that is based on the notion of citizens/audiences as deficient and therefore in need of guidance and instruction. This basic idea of the ignorant and passive citizen/spectator that must be activated, made aware of the social situation, and trained by an elite of experts has been at the foundation of modern art and society.[53] The same concept of modern spectatorship as mass audience with a passive attitude that is prone to manipulation and that needs activation – through persuasion, education, or alienation – underlies modern art and philosophy from Bertolt Brecht's theatre pedagogy to critical theory and the Frankfurt School.

50 Grierson, 'Education and Total Effort', 136.

51 Richter, *The Struggle for the Film*, 131.

52 See ibid., 164.

53 For a cultural and political history of audiences in the United States, see Richard Butsch, *The Citizen Audience: Crowds, Publics, and Individuals* (New York: Routledge, 2008). Butsch's study reveals that the judgement of audiences against the standards of good citizenship has been a constant in the changing history of attitudes towards audiences.

Searching for New Methods to Advertise Democracy: Documentary and the 'Film Essay'

Sharing the idea that the purpose of cinema is civic training for democracy, both Grierson and Richter considered the reformation of educational film and the finding of new cinematic methods for teaching citizenship to be salient. Grierson presents the documentary as the formal solution to what he terms 'the central problem of the age: that of the creating of a "mature citizenry"',[54] arguing that

> the only methods which will convey the nature of the society are dramatic methods. That is why the documentary film has achieved unique importance in the new world of education. It does not teach the new world by analyzing it. Uniquely and for the first time it *communicates* the new world by showing it in its corporate and living nature.[55]

Much has been written on the documentary tradition, its educational impulse, and its formal innovation. And recent studies have highlighted that this tradition was part of a larger useful cinema – and, as I suggest – advertising film culture.[56] Lesser known, however, is Hans Richter's similar effort to search for a new cinematic form for democratic education. In this quest for a new dramaturgy to produce a democratic citizenry, Richter draws a distinction between the official, obscurantist cinema and a progressive, enlightening cinema. If it is the aim of the progressive cinema 'to intervene actively in the consciousness and emotional life of its spectators', as Richter claims, 'special methods have to be developed by which to carry out that aim'.[57] Finding a new dramaturgy that reaches the masses and develops the audience's capacities for thought and judgement and that, following Brecht's dictum of 'the pleasure of learning', at the same time satisfies 'the masses' need for spectacle and entertainment' becomes the aesthetic problem and artistic challenge for Richter during his exile in Switzerland.[58] Richter's sponsored films from the late 1930s can be interpreted as experiments to turn cinema into an art of mass enlightenment and non-fictional film

54 Quoted in Aitken, *Film and Reform*, 57.

55 Grierson, 'Education and the New Order', 129.

56 See, for example, Lee Grieveson and Colin MacCabe, eds., *Empire and Film* (London and New York: Palgrave, 2011); Lee Grieveson and Colin MacCabe, eds., *Film and the End of Empire and Film* (London and New York: Palgrave, 2011).

57 Richter, *The Struggle for the Film*, 131.

58 Ibid., 133.

into a weapon for democracy. His involvement in screen advertising during exile was thus more than just a job to make ends meet, but prompted by a serious political concern.

In 1940 Richter came up with the 'film essay' as a novel cinematic form and solution to this very problem. In an article in the Swiss daily newspaper *National-Zeitung*, Richter presented the film essay as 'a new type of documentary film' that was capable of visualizing what cannot be seen: 'the invisible world of imagination, thoughts, and ideas'.[59] Unlike manufacturing processes or the workings of a machine, abstract thoughts and ideas cannot just be recorded and thus *reproduced* by the camera, but need to be *produced*; that is, they must rendered visible and thus understandable, with the specific techniques of film. Like Dziga Vertov and Jean Epstein, Richter saw in cinema an epistemological instrument to reveal reality, thus sharing the belief in the capacity of cinema to open the eyes of the masses.[60] Also in Grierson's theory, revealing reality was also a precondition to create a persuasive film.[61] Similar to Grierson's approach with the documentary film, Richter developed and implemented his concept of the film essay within the institutional framework of corporate and government sponsorship. This is noteworthy also in regard to the essay film tradition in which Richter, together with Alexandre Astruc, figures as a precursor – despite the fact that the essay film as it emerged in the post-war period was first developed by auteurs belonging to the French nouvelle vague as a means to break with 'propagandistic' non-fictional film and advertising screen culture after World War II.[62] It is equally important to notice that Richter's concept of the film essay corresponds only in part with the personal, subjective, and highly self-reflexive essay film from later

59 Hans Richter, 'Der Filmessay: Eine neue Form des Dokumentarfilms', *National-Zeitung*, no. 192 (25 April 1940). Reprinted in Christa Blümlinger and Constantin Wulff, eds., *Schreiben Bilder Sprechen: Texte zum essayistischen Film* (Vienna: Sonderzahl, 1992), 195–198. English translation: 'The Film Essay: A New Type of Documentary Film', in *Essays on the Essay Film*, ed. Nora M. Alter and Timothy Corrigan, trans. Maria P. Alter (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 89–92.

60 In his insightful book on revelationist cinema, Malcolm Turvey includes Vertov, Epstein, *Béla Balázs*, and Siegfried Kracauer in the revelationist tradition. Neither Richter nor Grierson are considered. See Malcolm Turvey, *Doubting Vision: Film and the Revelationist Tradition* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

61 See Grierson, 'Propaganda and Education', in particular 155.

62 See Thomas Elsaesser, 'The Essay Film: From Festival Favorite to Flexible Commodity Form?' [2015], in *Essays on the Essay Film*, 243. See also Timothy Corrigan, *The Essay Film: From Montaigne, After Marker* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

periods discussed in recent scholarship. Richter's idea of the film essay is a documentary form in which

> the filmmaker is not bound by the depiction of external phenomena and the constraints of chronological sequences, but, on the contrary, has to enlist material from everywhere, the filmmaker can bounce around freely in space and time. For example, he can switch from objective representation to fantastic allegory and from there to a staged scene; the filmmaker can portray dead as well as living things, and artificial as well as natural objects – as long as they serve the purpose of making visible the fundamental idea.[63]

Richter mentions a number of films that, in his eyes, have the potential for further development of this allegedly new type of documentary film, among them films by the French group around Jacques Brunius (*Violons d'Ingres* [1939]), films by the Belgian Henri Storck (*Regards sur la Belgique ancienne* [1936]), and the works of the British documentary movement by Alberto Cavalcanti, Basil Wright, and Grierson, all produced for and sponsored by the Empire Marketing Board and the General Post Office.[64] Richter also labels two of his own works film essays: *Inflation* (1928) and *Die Börse als Barometer der Wirtschaftslage* (*The Stock Exchange*, 1939), a film on the evolution, the functioning, and the importance of the stock exchange. The film was sponsored by the Swiss Stock Exchange in Zurich, with the goal to restore the confidence of private investors in the institution of the stock exchange, which had suffered drastically from the Great Depression. In other words, it advertised the Swiss stock market.

To render visible and intelligible the history, workings, and importance of the stock exchange, Richter uses a large variety of visual material, both still and moving, from all kinds of sources: images of historical paintings, drawings, and engravings; re-enactments and emblematic images to reanimate the past; documentary footage shot for the purpose; and stock footage both from third-party documentaries and newsreels as well as from Richter's own earlier films, among them shots from *Alles dreht sich, alles bewegt sich / Everything Turns, Everything Revolves* (1929). This compilation of heterogeneous visual material serves to illustrate the voice-over commentary that copiously narrates the genealogy of trade from barter to immaterialized

63 Richter, 'The Film Essay', 91–92.

64 Richter, 'Der Filmessay', reprinted in *Schreiben Bilder Sprechen*, 197. The title of Storck's film that Richter gives *L'histoire de l'ancienne Belgique*.

finance. In his famous study on the compilation film *Films Beget Films* (1964), Jay Leyda discusses Richter's concept of the film essay, underlining that Richter compiles pre-existing film not merely to record and document, but to express ideas through the juxtaposition of images.[65] The technique of compilation and collage also characterizes Richter's filmic work in the United States, most obviously *Dadascope I* (1956–1961) and *Dadascope II* (1968), in which shots from Richter's past films accompany a soundtrack composed of poems by Dada poets recorded between 1916 and 1922.

Die Börse was awarded 'best film' at the Swiss national exhibition held in Zurich in 1939. This showcase of national achievements in art and industry, in history and politics, was an instance of non-theatrical film culture in full bloom with multiple institutional strands of film culture converging, among them the avant-garde, pedagogues, and private enterprises. Five of the seven sponsored films Richter made during exile in Switzerland were produced for this very occasion, among them *Die Börse*.[66] The exhibition registered 10.5 million admissions (the country had a total population of four million then) and was the most popular public event on national ground to date.[67]

Die Börse has raised scholarly controversy: some critics have dismissed the film as a naïve advertisement for modern capitalist economy that corrupts Richter's own political ideas. Thomas Tode, for example, holds that the film 'does no credit to a filmmaker who once was a secretary of education of a republic of councils'.[68] Others have celebrated *Die Börse* as an implicit critique of capitalism and as an instance of formal resistance.[69] Both interpretations are based on the same understanding of sponsored film-making and working within advertising screen culture as inevitably creating a moral, political, and/or artistic conflict that forces the author to either compromise or resist. To accuse Richter of betraying his revolutionary ideals from the late 1910s

65 See Jay Leyda, *Films Beget Films: A Study of the Compilation Film* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 30f.

66 On the Swiss national exhibition, see Yvonne Zimmermann, 'The Avant-Garde, Education and Marketing: The Making of Nontheatrical Film Culture in Interwar Switzerland', in *The Emergence of Film Culture: Knowledge Production, Institution Building, and the Fate of the Avant-Garde in Europe, 1919–1945*, ed. Malte Hagener (Oxford and New York: Berghahn, 2014), 199–224.

67 If we want to believe the statistics, each visitor spent an average of 100 minutes watching films. See Schweizerische Landesausstellung 1939 Zürich, ed., *Administrativer Bericht, vorgelegt vom Liquidationskomitee der Schweizerischen Landesausstellung 1939* (Zurich: Schweizerische Landesausstellung, 1942), 115.

68 Thomas Tode, 'Ein Bild ist ein Argument: Hans Richter und die Anfänge des Filmessays', *Navigationen* 2, no. 2 (February 2002): 103.

69 Urs Stäheli and Dirk Verdicchio, 'Das Unsichtbare sichtbar machen: Hans Richters *Die Börse als Barometer der Wirtschaftslage*', *Montage AV* 15, no. 1 (2006): 108–122.

and early 1920s is to forget that the avant-garde's 'revolutionary frame of mind' changed 'according to changing historical conditions', as William C. Wees has put it,[70] and to neglect the avant-garde's imbrication in educational film, useful cinema, and advertising screen culture. The film stands as an example for the potential confluence of objectives connected with film sponsorship. For the sponsor, *Die Börse* served – and still serves – as an advertising film: on its first release, it promoted the stock exchange to regain the confidence of private investors. Ever since 1939, Swiss Stock Exchange in Zurich has been screening the film on anniversaries and other special occasions, bestowing a memorial function on the moving images for the corporation.[71] At the same time, for Richter, the brief of the commissioner (to persuade investors to invest in the stock market again) was an aesthetic challenge, and *Die Börse* was a genuine search for a new documentary method to make visible – and understandable – ideas and arguments on the screen. Persuasion or influence (the sponsor's perspective) and education (the film-maker's perspective) do not necessarily contradict each other, but may go hand in hand or side by side quite smoothly within the framework of a non-theatrical film culture that depended on sponsorship and believed in the persuasive power of moving images.[72]

In this context, it might be the moment to briefly bring up the question of the film-makers' earnestness about their involvement in questions of propaganda and education in the service of democracy. In his book *Claiming the Real*, Brian Winston doubts whether Grierson cared about reform or only about film: 'Yet he did not really mean this. It was nothing more than rhetoric for the sponsors' ears; for Grierson, too, was only concerned with film'.[73] Winston interprets Grierson's oratory for reform as pure rhetoric or business talk to please sponsors. Since it was vital for non-fiction film producers to sell the advertising potential of film to sponsors and persuade them of the usefulness of investing in moving images, Grierson's as well as Rotha's and Richter's social engagement can be seen as a means to an

70 Open letter attacking the International Experimental Film Congress held in Toronto in the spring of 1989, in which members of the 1980s experimental film generation rebelled against former avant-garde discourses and practices; quoted in William C. Wees, 'The Changing of the Garde(s)', *Public*, no. 25 (2002): 18.

71 *Die Börse* was preserved and restored by the Swiss Film Archive in 2006.

72 For a more detailed analysis of *Die Börse* and Richter's concept and practice of the film essay see Yvonne Zimmermann, 'Hans Richter and the *Filmessay*: A Media Archaeological Case Study of Documentary Film History and Historiography', in *A Companion to Documentary Film History*, ed. Joshua Malitzky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, forthcoming).

73 Brian Winston, *Claiming the Real: The Grierson Documentary and Its Legitimations* (London: British Film Institute, 1995).

end – to acquire sponsorship. But even if this was the case, it does not necessarily preclude a personal commitment to the cause. In Richter's case, there is a strong pedagogical impulse that runs through his entire work. Seen from a larger political and sociocultural perspective, non-fiction film emerged and developed within projects of social reform and had been aligned with education, alongside persuasion, from the beginning. As the books by Sproule and Gary illustrate, anxieties about propaganda and education for democracy occupied the minds of intellectuals, politicians, and artists alike, and it is rather implausible that either Grierson or Rotha and Richter devoted so much theoretical and practical work on the matter for pure business interest without any personal conviction.

Selling Democracy across the Atlantic: Transatlantic Exchange of Educational Film Culture

In Switzerland and later in New York, Richter incessantly advocated theory and practice for the film essay, but he had less success in branding the 'film essay' as a new method for educational cinema than Grierson had in branding the 'documentary' as such. Nevertheless, Richter played an important role in the transatlantic exchange of educational film culture, even though his contribution is by no means as well-known as Rotha's who, upon his visit to New York in 1937–1938, introduced 'the whole documentary idea of public service using social purpose for progress' to the United States.[74] In its very first issue in 1938, *Business Screen* provided a platform for Rotha to familiarize an American readership with the British documentary film. Rotha took the opportunity and introduced British documentary film as a player in 'the revitalization of citizenship, without which, its makers believe, democracy cannot continue to exist'.[75] Invited by Iris Barry, curator of the Museum of Modern Art's (MoMA) Film Library, Rotha spent five months at the Film Library, where, as Barry and Richard Griffith recounted in 1942, 'as special assistant to the director, he lectured and conferred with educational authorities and film producers in an effort to encourage the consistent and planned production of fact films in the United States'.[76] Rotha brought

74 Paul Rotha, *Documentary Diary: An Informal History of the British Documentary Film, 1928–1939* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1973), 171.

75 Paul Rotha, 'British Documentary Films Offer American Business Some New Opportunities', *Business Screen* 1, no. 1 (1938): 25–26, here 26.

76 Iris Barry and Richard Griffith, 'The Film Library and the Film of Fact', in *The Museum of Modern Art Film Library Films of Fact 1942* (Museum of Modern Art, Department of Film Archive,

with him a selection of British documentary films that received their first screenings in the United States and became part of MoMA's Circulating Film Programs.

As Stephen Charbonneau has underlined, Rotha's visit, upon which he advanced a particular view of educational cinema for civic training – namely, Griersonian documentary – was part of a broader effort to mobilize educational and propagandistic cinema in the United States in the 1930s.[77] Within the larger context of the progressive education movement that recognized the lack of citizenship skills as a major threat to democracy, cinema as a mass media was viewed both as a danger and a promise for democracy. To teach about and with film became a major issue for the academy, philanthropic foundations such as the Rockefeller Foundation, schools, and, during World War II, also the state. The Payne Fund Studies, which researched the effect of movies on children's behaviour; programmes such as the 'Secret of Success' and 'Human Relations Series of Films', which used edited Hollywood film shorts to teach character education and human relations in schools; and film appreciation programmes intending to produce better consumers of film that would put pressure on Hollywood to produce better films[78] contributed to a broad film culture in an educational setting.[79] The documentary was part and parcel of this broad educational film culture, and so were members of the European avant-garde and documentary film movement whose paths crossed again in New York in the late 1930s and the early 1940s.

In this respect, it is noteworthy that even though Hilla von Rebay, curator at the Museum for Non-Objective Painting (later the Guggenheim Museum), helped Richter to obtain a visa for the United States (in exchange for Richter's

Circulating Film Programs), 3.

77 Charbonneau, 'John Grierson and the United States', 13–28.

78 Film appreciation in the United States in the 1930s parallels to some extent the avant-garde's intention to improve film taste in cine-clubs and film societies to increase the demand for – and supply of – aesthetically and morally 'good' films.

79 On the Payne Fund Studies, see Garth S. Jowett, Ian C. Jarvie, and Kathryn H. Fuller, *Children and the Movies: Media Influence and the Payne Fund Controversy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). On character education with Hollywood films, see Craig Kridel, 'Educational Film Projects of the 1930s: Secrets of Success and the Human Relations Film Series', in *Learning with the Lights Off*, 215–229; and Charles R. Acland, 'Hollywood's Educators: Mark May and Teaching Film Custodian', in *Useful Cinema*, ed. Charles R. Acland and Haidee Wasson (Durham, NC and New York: Duke University Press, 2011), 59–80. On film appreciation programmes, see Eric Smoodin, '"What a Power for Education!": The Cinema and Sites of Learning in the 1930s', in *Useful Cinema*, ed. Charles R. Acland and Haidee Wasson (Durham, NC and New York: Duke University Press, 2011), 17–33; and Lea Jacobs, 'Reformers and Spectators: The Film Education Movement in the 1930s', *Camera Obscura* 22 (January 1990): 29–49.

personal collection of abstract films, that is),[80] upon arriving in New York in spring 1941 Richter presented himself primarily as a documentary film-maker. He lectured, amongst other engagements, at the Association of Documentary Film Producers in June–July 1941 and became a member of the association the same year.[81] He also developed three projects for film essays – 'The Monroe Doctrine', 'The Four Freedoms', and 'The Role of Women in America' – all in the service of democracy, freedom, and human rights, but Richter failed to find sponsors and establish himself as a documentary film-maker. During the war, Richter, like Siegfried Kracauer, also invested in the analysis of film propaganda.[82] Richter focussed not only on the 'totalitarian' propaganda by Nazi Germany and fascist Italy that were at the core of Kracauer's critical attention, but also included examples from the Soviet Union that, according to Richter, would activate the audience in the spirit of the new government. In his two articles published on the topic, as well as in many unpublished typescripts, Richter also discussed recent filmic efforts from Britain and the United States that would turn documentary film into a weapon for democracy to defeat fascism.[83] In doing so, Richter inserted himself in the US tradition of progressive propaganda critique and analysis. This tradition is most prominently aligned with Harold D. Lasswell and his scientific study of propaganda. The efforts to develop a theory and pedagogy of propaganda analysis led to the inception of the Institute for Propaganda Analysis in 1937, which institutionalized the progressive belief

80 Richter contributed Viking Eggeling's *Symphonie diagonale* (1924) and his *Rhythmus 21* along with works by Ruttmann and Oskar Fischinger to the Museum of Non-Objective Painting's film collection that originated in the early 1940s. On this and Richter's negotiation with MOMA, see Malte Hagener and Yvonne Zimmermann, 'Viking Eggeling and European Avant-Garde Cinema', in *A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries 1925–1950*, vol. 2, ed. Benedikt Hjartarson, Andrea Kollnitz, Per Stounbjerg, Marianne Ølholm, and Tania Ørum (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 82–101.

81 See *Documentary Film News* 1, no. 6 (September 1941): n.p.

82 On Kracauer's studies on Nazi propaganda films at the MOMA Film Library, see Dennis Culbert, 'The Rockefeller Foundation, the Museum of Modern Art Film Library, and Siegfried Kracauer, 1941', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television* 13, no. 4 (1993): 495–511; Brett Gary, *The Nervous Liberals: Propaganda Anxieties from Word War I to the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 114–118.

83 See Hans Richter, 'Die Entwicklung des politischen Films', *Deutsche Blätter* (Santiago de Chile) 2, no. 1 (1944): 21–24; and Hans Richter, 'Der politische Film (II)', *Deutsche Blätter* (Santiago de Chile) 2, no. 2 (1944): 17–20, both articles reprinted in: Karsten Witte, ed., *Theorie des Kinos* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972), 61–63. See also the unpublished nineteen-page manuscript 'Secret Weapons… to Beat Hitler' (1942), in which Richter analyses German propaganda films to learn from them for democracy (Museum of Modern Art Archives: Hans Richter C.XIV.5).

Figure 3.1: Hans Richter teaching at the Institute of Film Techniques at City College New York, 1947 (Hans Richter, 'Films: A Fighting Weapon', The City College Alumnus 43:1 [September 1947]: 11).

that, to sustain democracy, average citizen must learn how to think for themselves.[84]

However, Richter's most important contribution to educational film and advertising screen culture in the service of selling democracy in the United States was his teaching at the Institute of Film Techniques at City College New York. The Institute was founded by documentary producer Irving Jacoby in 1941 with the immediate aim to fill the government's need for trained specialists to produce wartime information films. Its pedagogical goal was 'to provide practical instruction in the production and use of educational and public-service motion picture'.[85] In other words, the Institute's programme was built exclusively around the purpose to train people to make and use

84 On the Institute for Propaganda Analysis, see Sproule, *Propaganda and Democracy*.

85 Irving Jacoby, 'Statement concerning the Film Institute and Unit at the City College', unpublished two-page manuscript, February 1943 (CCNY Archives, Institute of Film Techniques, Vertical File 353).

educational films. Among US film schools, the Institute was unique in specializing in documentary and educational cinema. Richter joined the faculty in late 1941 and was appointed director in 1948, yet was more or less in charge from about 1942, when Irving Jacoby left the Institute to serve as film producer for the Office of War Information.

Transferring and adapting his pedagogical concept of the film essay developed in Europe to his teaching at City College New York, Richter produced with his students a series of films in workshops through 1944, among them *It's Up to You*, a film on the black market sponsored by the Office of Price Administration, and *Education for Democracy*, a film essay that advertised the importance of liberal arts education. Until 1956, about 20 films were made in workshops at the Institute under Richter, most of them produced by notable documentary figures such as Alexander Hammid and Leo Seltzer. In fact, the Institute was a hub in the network of educational film culture in the United States. In 1946, for example, Richter taught 'Fundamentals of Film Production', a lecture course in which the social importance of the documentary film as well as its technique was explained. Renowned photographer and film-maker Willard Van Dyke, who had served as a cameraman on Pare Lorentz's *The River* in 1938, taught a course in documentary film directing. Albert Hemsing, head of the overseas non-theatrical operations of the Office of War Information, taught a course in how to use film, that is, how to select, exhibit, evaluate, and distribute films. Among the guest lecturers were Robert J. Flaherty, John Grierson (whom Richter had met in London in 1929 for the first time), Leo Hurwitz, John Ferno, Joris Ivens, Alice M. Keliher, Stuart Legg, and Irving Lerner.[86]

With Richter, Ivens, and Hammid, three representatives of the European interwar film avant-garde found themselves at the Institute of Film Techniques deeply imbricated in the expansive network of educational film culture in the United States. To give just one example of the wide ramification of this network, Alice M. Keliher, an experienced early childhood educator and professor of education at New York University, chaired the Commission on Human Relations formed in 1935 and with her staff produced, distributed, and assessed the use of feature film excerpts in high schools as a pedagogical tool to discuss human behaviour. As Craig Kridel has shown, Joris Ivens served as the first production director and later technical adviser of what was called 'The Human Relations Series of Films' and included his films in the series. Irving Lerner, who, in the early 1930s, was a member of the Workers

86 Hans Richter, 'The Institute of Film Techniques', *Film News: World Wide News of the Information Film* 7, no. 5 (February–March 1946): 10.

Figure 3.2: Hans Richter with Robert J. Flaherty and Joris Ivens, New York, 1942 (The Hans Richter Estate).

Film and Photo League and became the head of New York University's Educational Film Institute after the war, was another production director in the film series.[87] Their paths all crossed at the Institute of Film Techniques.

At a particular moment in time, the Institute brought together avant-garde, documentary, and educational cinema under the banner of selling democracy in the context of a useful cinema culture that was based upon sponsorship, located on the US East Coast, and that presented itself as an alternative model to the entertainment film industry housed in Hollywood. In this regard, the Institute stands as the emblem of the entangled transnational histories of avant-garde, documentary, and educational film united by the goal to fight authoritarian propaganda and produce democratic citizens in the 1930s and early 1940s. That the Institute of Film Techniques is totally absent from the historiography of film studies[88] is not necessarily a sign of

87 Craig Kridel, 'Educational Film Projects of the 1930s: Secrets of Success and the Human Relations Film Series', in *Learning with the Lights Off*, 226.

88 The two most notable contributions to the field in the US context are Dana Polan, *Scenes of Instructions: The Beginnings of the U.S. Study of Film* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); and Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson, eds., *Inventing Film Studies: A Genealogy of Studying Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008). For Europe, see Malte Hagener, ed., *The Emergence of Film Culture: Knowledge Production, Institution Building, and the Fate of the Avant-Garde in Europe, 1919–1945* (Oxford and New York: Berghahn, 2014).

its insignificance, but rather can be explained by Eric Smoodin's observation that the discipline is among the least historicized of all the humanities and social science fields.[89] As a consequence, the various manifestations of film studies and film education before the 1960s, as well as beyond universities, are still to be discovered in their full extent and inserted in the ramified networks of educational and advertising screen culture that not only helped produce the democratic citizen, but also the consumer citizen.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter is to bring together, within the framework of advertising understood as a broad category for film in the service of persuasion, fields of non-theatrical film culture that in film studies tend to be viewed and analysed separately as distinct categories – such as avant-garde, the documentary, and educational film. My approach set out to blur the boundaries between these categories and to bring to light the larger political and cultural context in which they were inserted. In the 1930s, the documentary movement and most members of the avant-garde were confronted by the same political threat, that of totalitarian regimes; they were faced with the same social question, that of education for democracy; and they were challenged by the same aesthetic problem, the development of new filmic forms that would meet the educational needs of the time. The documentary film can be interpreted as one solution to this problem, Richter's film essay another. Such cinematic experimentation happened in the domain of educational film and in the economic and institutional framework of corporate and government sponsorship. It was thus equally and simultaneously part of educational film culture and useful cinema culture. Whether we address it as educational or useful cinema culture depends on the interpretive framework we adopt. The object of study, however, remains the same.

Formal experimentation in these environments is clearly not primarily artistic self-expression, but a social contribution. In this respect, it is important to recognize that working for corporate and government sponsors was not mere breadwinning, as is often postulated. Instead, it allowed artists such as Richter to 'explore aesthetic problems [...] in relation to the realities posed by life', to quote his own words again.[90] The realities

89 Smoodin, 'What a Power for Education!', 31.

90 Léo Sauvage, 'Hans Richter: Un des maîtres de l'avant-garde allemande voudrait collaborer avec Méliès', *Cinémonde* (Paris), no. 458 (27 July 1937). My translation.

posed by life at that moment in time were perceived as calling for visual education in the service of citizenship training. Under these particular political circumstances, the documentary movement and representatives of the avant-garde such as Hans Richter, Joris Ivens, Alexander Hammid, László Moholy-Nagy, and the Bauhaus artists all followed this call and became 'propagandists' – or advertisers – for democracy, first in Europe and then continuing their mission in the United States in the early 1940s. They were part of a larger transnational network of educational film culture. The involvement of artists in citizenship education and the quest for new, 'democratic' forms of media thus have a longer history than Fred Turner in *The Democratic Surround* posits. If in post-war America, multimedia environments were considered to be the new, democratic media art that would produce the 'democratic personality', it was the documentary and Richter's film essay that held a similar position in the 1930s and early 1940s. They were presented as the democratic answer to totalitarian propaganda, as the educational tool to sell democracy. The origins of both the documentary and the film essay can thus be reinserted within a larger trend in non-fiction educational film culture that was committed to education for democracy.

However, as I intend to demonstrate, instead of a general consensus, there was vivid debate about the theories of propaganda and education not only among intellectuals and politicians but also among film-makers. The respective writings by Paul Rotha, John Grierson, and Hans Richter are cases in point. These debates were sparked by different political ideologies and respective notions of the (anti-)rational citizen and the capacity of the human mind to think. Ultimately, the discussions about propaganda and education can be interpreted as disputes about whether persuasion or emancipation would be the 'democratic' tool to produce democratic citizens. John Grierson, in line with Lippmann, clearly represented the belief in persuasion and public management as the adequate theory for education in democracy, whereas Hans Richter in the legacy of the Enlightenment advocated for the emancipation of the citizen. Both views, divergent as they may be, are anchored in the belief that an elite of experts (that includes artists, of course) is necessary to govern society. And Grierson and Richter shared the belief with their contemporaries that mass media and moving images in particular are a powerful, manipulative tool for shaping the human mind. Thus, the idea of the persuasive power of media – or what I address as advertising in this chapter – was at the origin of these debates.

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