



Cinema, Philosophy and Education

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Abstract

This special issue responds to the current discourse on cinema and education from a philosophical point of view. Considering the fact that young people worldwide are watching films and series via their smartphones or personal computers, we here explore the educative aspects of this popular activity. Does this wide-ranging habit mis-educate the next generation? Or does cinema carry a potential for ethical-political education, parallel to the ancient Greek tragedies and the modernist *Bildungsroman*? The authors of this special issue deliberate this question by exploring the intersection between cinema and philosophy and the potential powers of cinematic education.

Introduction

Young people worldwide stream and watch films and series as never before, be it via their smartphones, computers or television sets. In 2018, 19% of the adult U.S. population claim to stream and watch a film daily (Statista 2021). In 2021, Netflix—the world’s largest streaming company—had 207.64 million paying customers worldwide. However, as 41% of the users do not subscribe, we may assume the youngest viewers have access via their household or they may use a password sent to them via family or friends (Techjury 2021). What we know, however, is that in the U.S. in 2020, 65% of the millennials and 54% of Generation X subscribed to Netflix (Statista 2020). So, to what degree and in what ways may this wide-ranging habit of watching films and series educate the next generation? Is the popular habit of streaming and watching films generated by the youths’ desire to escape the realities of everyday life? Is this habit a mis-education of the next generation? Or, does

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cinema carry a potential for ethical-political education, parallel to the educative possibilities of the ancient Greek tragedies and the modernist *Bildungsroman*?

What is Cinema From a Philosophical Point of View?

In general, the term “cinema” (from Greek *kinema*—motion or movement) denotes a movie theater, a film, the film industry, or cinematography, which is the art or science of motion-picture photography. From a philosophical point of view, we often refer to “cinema” as the seventh art (Canudo 1923) while categorizing “philosophy of cinema” as a subfield within the philosophy of arts. Moreover, philosophy recognizes cinema as a phenomenon that cannot be reduced to an exact definition. First, because knowledge of cinema is gained through experience. Jacques Rancière, for example, speaks of his relationship to cinema as governed by passion rather than theory, “I have never taught film, film theory or aesthetics. I have encountered cinema at different moments in my life; during the cinephile enthusiasm of the 1960s; the examination of relations between cinema and history in the 1970s; or the 1990s effort to map the aesthetic paradigm underlying thought on the seventh art” (Rancière 2014, p. 7). Consequently, philosophical explorations of cinema do not privilege the textual analysis of a film or the logic of the film work, but rather the cinematic sensation. Second, cinema cannot be reduced to an exact definition because cinema is a complex composition continuously in the making. Cinema has many dimensions. Such as moving images; sequences; sound; music; narratives; dramatization; acting; shots; scripts; and editing. The history of cinema adds to this complexity. First, because new technologies have continuously re-shaped and expanded the media culture: We still remember how the VCR opened up new possibilities for film distribution, how satellite television delivered media directly to homes, and how the World Wide Web helped to stream films and series to our personal computers, tablets and smartphones. Next, because the art of cinema is always in the making: Today, we see a cross-over of genres, non-linear storytelling and even interactive sequences of films and series. High budget films, that earlier were to be watched in a movie-theater, are now produced for streaming only. And streaming companies like HBO and Netflix offers very well written and produced drama series—like “The Wire” and “The Crown”—for a worldwide audience to be watched at home. Consequently, Gilles Deleuze considers cinema as analogue to the inventive act taking place in philosophy. “The great directors of cinema [...] think with movement-images and time-images instead of concepts” (Deleuze 1986, xix). So, how should we read the relationship between philosophy and cinema?

Cinema and Philosophy

In the early decades of the 20th century, philosophers were among the first scholars to engage with cinema, which today is one of the most significant art forms of our culture. Philosophy of film is now a well-established and recognized discipline (Wartenberg 2015), generating influential philosophical works. Just to mention a few, we have Georgio Agamben’s writings on ethics and cinema (Agamben 2014), Walter Benjamin’s essays on the politics of cinema (Benjamin 1936), Stanley Cavell’s tribute to Hollywood (Cavell 1979) and Gilles Deleuze’s seminal books on “Cinema” (Deleuze 1986, 1989). The many faces of the

discipline contain diverse approaches to the philosophical study of cinema. A conventional approach is to reveal how cinema may illuminate philosophical ideas, such as Torill Strand's reading of Wim Wenders' *Wings of Desire* (Strand 2014). Another approach is when a film refers to philosophical ideas, such as how Lilly and Lana Wachowski's *The Matrix* refers to Plato's allegory of the cave. A third approach is to explore how cinema philosophizes. This new way of thinking the link between cinema and philosophy was instituted by Deleuze (1986, 1989), who read films as creative expressions that should not be interpreted through a philosophical lens or system. Contrary, Deleuze claimed that philosophy should confront cinema because cinema is an art that produces new ways of thinking that may be generative for philosophy. "The cinema can, with impunity, bring us close to things or take us away from them and revolve around them, it suppresses both the anchoring of the subject and the horizon of the world [...] With the cinema, it is the world which becomes its own image, and not an image which becomes world" (Deleuze 1986, p. 64).

Consequently, this third approach does not see a contradiction between cinema and philosophy. The moving images at the cinema are not images of a false reality. Cinema is not a cave of illusions. Contrary, cinema is "a metaphor for contemporary thought" and a "philosophical experiment" (Badiou 2013, p. 17). In short, the cinematic platform can create valid philosophy (Herzogenrath 2017; Shamir 2016).

Cinema has a unique relationship with philosophy: we could say that it is a philosophical experiment. This raises two questions. First, "How does philosophy regard cinema?" Second, "How does cinema transform philosophy?" The relationship between them is not a relationship of knowledge. Philosophy does not enable us to know cinema. It is a living, concrete relationship, a relationship of transformation. Cinema transforms philosophy. In other words, cinema transforms the very notion of idea. Cinema basically consist in creating new ideas about what an idea is. To put it another way, cinema is a philosophical situation. (Badiou 2013, p. 202)

Cinema is not the production of images, but rather a struggle to affirm true images. Thus, it is again pertinent to ask to what degree cinema may carry a potential for ethical-political education.

An Impure Art

Ricciotto Canudo—an early Italian film theoretician—regarded cinema as a new art form, "a plastic art in motion" (Canudo 1923). He labelled cinema "the seventh art", as he conceived cinema as an addition to and a synthesis of the six ancient arts; architecture, sculpture, painting, music, dance and poetry. Cinema is an autonomous art form. However, cinema also draws on the other arts. Therefore, a cinematic experience can never be separated from the experience of other arts. An obvious example is how the sensation of Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* cannot be separated from the experience of the music. Or, how our response to Woody Allan's *Manhattan* cannot be separated from the sensation of the city's architecture. In this way, cinema is exceptional. As it contains all other art forms, cinema is the place of all imaginary creations. It is the place of any imaginary fictions. In this way, cinema is the total cave. However, cinema is concurrently a commentary on and judgement of these imaginary creations. Obvious examples are Celine Sciammas *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*,

which draws on the art of painting, and Charles Beeson's *Four Minutes*, which is a critical comment to a conservative approach to classical music. However, such commentaries are also evident in popular films for children, such as in Victor Fleming's *The Wizard of Oz*, Lee Unkrich's *Coco* and Elissa Down's *Feel the Beat*. Cinema therefore creates some contradictions in relation to all other forms of art by first, judging the filmic resistance of these works of art and next, creating conflicts between these pieces of arts' pure existence and something else. Consequently, we may say that cinema stages a conflict between art and non-art.

Cinema is always located on the edge of non-art; it is an art affected by non-art, an art that is always below or beside art with respect to certain of its features. In every era cinema explores the border between art and what is not art. That is where it is located. It incorporates the new forms of existence, whether they are art or not, and it makes a certain selection, albeit one that is never complete. (Badiou 2013, p. 210)

The fact that cinema contains all other arts, makes cinema exceptional. Cinema is simultaneously the place of all imaginary creations and a comment to and judgement of these creations. "Cinema is the art of the fight between art and non-art" (Badiou 2015). So, the fight against Plato's cave is inscribed in cinema. In this way, cinema stages a fight between what really is of value and not value. Cinema is not the production of false images, but rather a struggle to affirm *true images*. True images contain visible fights within the images themselves. A true image contains a contradiction, or two incompatible elements. It is not a representation, but rather an image that *by itself* is a comment to and a new way of thinking the real. Consequently, a cinematic experience is experiencing a fight between art and non-art, a sensing of the conflict between what is of value and not, or of being involved with an ongoing contest to affirm true images. In this way, a cinematic experience carry potential for ethical-political education, parallel to the educative sensation of a Greek tragedy or *Bildungsroman*.

Cinema as Education

Based on his axiom that "the only education is an education by truths" (Badiou 2005, p. 14), Alain Badiou strongly argues that cinema is a form of contemporary education. First, because cinema contains the struggle to affirm true images. Next, because everybody has access.

Cinema is a form of art so impure that it is possible to inscribe within cinema all possible fictions of the fundamental conflicts of our existence. Today, cinema is probably the most important symptom of our history as it is the place where all the contradictions of the contemporary world are assumed, for the best and for the worst.

So the definition of cinema is paradoxical, and that is why cinema is a situation for philosophy. Cinema is a unique relationship between total artifice and total reality. Cinema is really both the possibility of a copy of reality and the complete artificial dimension of that copy. This amounts to saying that cinema is a paradox that revolves around the question of the relationship between "being" and "appearing". It is an ontological art. (Badiou 2013, p. 207)

Cinema is therefore a recollection of all contradictions. In this way, cinema is *dialectical*. Moreover, cinema is *democratic*. Cinema is for everybody and everybody has access. It is a mass art. In addition, there are no distinctions between elitist and vulgar forms, since the vulgar is always already inscribed in cinema. Cinema is therefore a question of democracy. As the task of philosophy is to examine the contradictions of the contemporary world and propose an orientation, we hold that philosophers of education should go to the cinema, take part in its democratic dialectics, and participate in current education.

This Special Issue

In the present issue five philosophers of education suggest different outlooks on these democratic dialectics from diverse philosophical and theoretical perspectives and drawing on examples ranging from film and TV-series to performance art. The issue is meant as an invitation to philosophize with and through these different artistic expressions and in this way to broaden our understanding of the educative possibilities of today's forms of "cinema".

In the article opening the special issue, Torill Strand explores Alain Badiou's writings on cinema through an engagement with the popular Norwegian youth series *Skam*. Strand focuses in her analysis on season 4 of the series, which centrally revolves around the creative ways in which the Muslim girl Sana navigates in the inner city of Oslo between the norms of home and school life. Exploring cinema with Badiou as a new allegory of the cave, Strand reads the story of Sana on three different levels, in terms of cinema as a form of doubling the real, as a paradoxical situation and as a democratic emblem. In Strand's text we come to understand the TV-series as a form of cinema and as an alternative allegory of the cave, precisely through its creation of a "paradoxical relationship between art and non-art, creation and ordinary life, the work of thought and ordinary opinion" (Strand 2021). According to Badiou, the pedagogy of cinema is an education through the manifestation of truths-in-worlds, and in Strand's nuanced portrayal we come to see how a popular youth television series can manifest and educate through such truths-in-worlds. Introducing us to the fictional world of Sana, the series educates by truths of the contemporary world through a confrontation with its complexity, its paradoxes and its vital ethical conflicts.

In their analysis of the South Korean film *The Parasite*, David Cole, Joff Bradley and Alex Taek-Gwang Lee also draw on Alain Badiou's thought on cinema as the image of semblance and as a thinking in the dark of the cave. However, questioning Badiou's perspective through a close engagement with Gilles Deleuze's texts on cinema, they emphasize the reality-creating potential of film and develop a pedagogy of the parasite based on their analysis of the film. Furthermore, they explore the ethics and the time of the parasite and, with the help of the film, argue for a revaluing of parasitic processes of assimilation in the face of contemporary global capitalist expansion. Cole, Bradley and Taek-Gwang Lee develop new perspectives on understanding education via the complex relationship of parasites and hosts on a geopolitical level, on the level of our conception of time as well as on the level of the ethics of such relationships.

Turning from the more exceptional cases of "cinema-thinking", as presented by the South Korean production of *The Parasite*, to more profane, "non-art" instances of cinema, Marie Hållander in her article explores the political, the revolutionary and the pedagogical possibilities of moments and hours of escapism which the watching of TV-series provides. Tak-

ing her experience of sitcoms entering the university classroom on students' smartphones as a starting point in the analysis, Hållander employs Ernst Bloch's and Walter Benjamin's writings to develop a hopeful perspective on the potential of seeming moments of mindless distraction and argues that "escapism can be a form of utopian thinking that could be the seed of changing things" (Hållander 2021). Hållander examines these particular forms of daydreaming and escapism as forms of a "not-yet", of things which have not yet passed into actuality, but which nevertheless present the possibility of enacting new beginnings.

In Ole Andreas Kvamme's article, the exploration of the pedagogical potential of TV series is continued. Kvamme engages with the same Nordic youth series which also centrally figures in Strand's text and highlights the ethical dimension of the TV series in his analysis. Relying on Hegel's notion of *Sittlichkeit* and Seyla Benhabib's philosophy, Kvamme presents *Skam* as a moral education with a particular focus on the mediation between individual and societal dimensions of moral education. He reads the series as a portrayal of the establishment of the social order as well as a reworking of it through actualizations and recontextualizations of lived norms, especially regarding the hegemonic position of Christianity and heterosexuality and their repositioning through the series. In this way, *Skam* "emerges as an instance of public moral education" (Kvamme 2021) and contributes through a demonstration and probing of dilemmas between potentially conflicting norms to pluralist and democratic self-understanding of Norwegian society.

The article "Fragile Visions of the Social" by Claudia Schumann concludes the special issue relating the analysis of the youth series *Skam* to a performance piece by young German artist Anne Imhof, who won the 2017 Venice Biennale. Schumann focuses on how the series as well as the performance work create and reflect experiences of contemporary social relations, especially as regards the longing for and the challenges of forming relations of solidarity among today's youth. The characters in *Skam* as well as in the performance piece *Faust* are shown as dependent on and craving for empathetic social relationships and a form of social solidarity, in a way that both works themselves become "philosopher-teachers" which create an experience which parallels Axel Honneth's critique of the framework of liberal political theory. Furthermore, they show the limits even of Honneth's model. A feminist rereading with the help of Sara Ahmed's notion of "snap" and Clare Hemming's notion of "affective solidarity" allows for a more positive understanding of the possibilities, which ruptures and dissolutions of traditional bonds can imply. In Schumann's reading the performance piece and the TV-series experiment with how new bonds of solidarity might be propelled out of such dissolutions in a way which Stanley Cavell described as "film as philosophy", creating meaningful experiences because they "let a world happen" (Cavell 1979, p. 25).

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