

Introduction: Cinema

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The present issue of *Crisis and Critique* has been produced under some rather unusual circumstances. These circumstances could at times seem as if they originated in a rather mediocre catastrophe movie and were then themselves rather badly translated into reality. The often-devastating effects the most recent conjuncture has created, impacting the editors of the present journal, the members of the editorial board that supports us, and certainly the invited contributors, each to different degrees—some of which for heartbreaking and gut-wrenching reasons or for reasons of unforeseeable fatigue and distress could not but withdraw their contribution. But the situation did not only affect in horrifying ways friends, colleagues, and comrades of the present journal and their families, the “political” effects it generated—at least in part—are sickening and mind-numbing (some effects which are ongoing, and some which haven’t even picked up pace yet).

It is clear to us that, especially in a time like ours, it can appear an almost ridiculous, unworldly, blind, idealist, or idiotic gesture to defend the need to think or to start thinking of other things than the present state of the world. This is why we will happily return to the world with our next issue, after, at least to some extent, leaving it if not aside, at least bracketed or reframed for a moment with our present issue. The reason for this is because we want to address with our present issue a specific way in which, a specific modus, a specific medium through which we see the world, namely through moving images. To mimic one of the famous titles of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, in the following we want to address—rather implicitly than explicitly, as none of our authors was able to foresee what came over us—“cinema in times of COVID”.

From its very conception and material implementation, cinema—moving images—effectively and affectively moved the people; the masses. This is clear. But it is not entirely clear what it is that moves people when they see a film? Is it the images? Is it their movement? Is it their concatenation with a narrative? With music? Throughout the history of cinematographic theory and the history of modern philosophy there have been many answers given in response. In a very general and schematic manner, the different conceptual and theoretical approaches to cinema were once grouped into five larger attempts to understand and explain the power of cinema:¹

Some of its theoretical viewers saw cinema as a mass art that created its appeal because it was able to mobilize the power of the image. Philosophers—since Plato—often argued that images fascinate people—and they (philosophers and images) still do. But cinema brings the power of the image to a whole new level. It allows everyone to perceive miracles of the visual. It offers something like a true spectacle, a truly popular art, excluding no one from the joys and insights of the imaginary artifice.

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¹We orient ourselves herein through Badiou’s elaborations in: Badiou 2013, 202-232.

Others argued that cinema adds and complicates the overall system of the arts (if we start from the assumption that such a system exists and, that is, if we start from assuming that we can make distinctions between the different particular arts). Cinema in this system is an art-form operating with images. Yet it is far more popular than painting. It also uses bodies moving, but it is more popular than dance. It uses words, yet is more popular than poetry. It thereby certainly—and materially—retains some aspect of what makes music, literary narrative, and theatre massively attractive. But it adds something new and different to their appeal by mixing and bringing together different art-forms. Cinema from this point of view is perceived not only as a new form of art but also as being the form of art that has the power to take up aspects from the other particular arts and through combination add something to it. Certainly other art forms were supposedly also able to do this (think of Wagner's idea of a total work of art, of literature using techniques of musically remixing material, of music being narrative, etc.). But cinema's specific capacity, its specificity vis-a-vis the other forms of art, is identified in the ability to bring together the other forms of art, thereby generating productive new potentials.

Again, other thinkers of cinema, like Deleuze for example, argued that cinema is able to make visible something that we otherwise never see, namely time. Cinema is not only an art of the image, it is an art of time. It is an art-form that presents us with a temporal flow that is capable of delighting everyone, because it makes visible what otherwise remains invisible. Cinema's images thereby capture through their very nature what might be a condition of possibility of the visual, but is impossible to see outside of cinema. It makes us see something impossible (to see).

Others again, like Bresson, believed that cinema is the only art that always and constantly borders on and thereby deals with what is not-art. It is the form of art that integrates the everyday—the everyday-imaginary and the boring ordinary images. Where else but in cinema has one seen profoundly insignificant car rides, closing of car doors, meaningless scenes of tables or houses and the like than in cinema? This is also what for others, like Badiou, makes cinema into a great democratic form of art. Not simply because it treats—as Rancière might have it—all its material equally and de-hierarchises what it presents through the way in which it presents it. Rather, because it treats all its viewers in the same manner. It is an immanently impure art as it is never fully art, never fully high art, but cannot avoid containing something boring, mediocre, or bad. Cinema is herein different to a bad musical piece. The latter everyone without any previous knowledge can understand, but it may just a bad piece of composition. Cinema can be understood because it does not necessitate any previous knowledge, yet this does not make a film that is understandable by everyone into a bad film. Non-artistic, bad sequences in even the greatest movies are not just bad sequences, but they are the internally worldly, non-artistic, everyday material that cinema works with. And because of this material, it is intelligible and accessible to everyone (differ-

ent from say painting or poetry). Cinema is an art for the masses, because it operates on a mass-imaginary.

Others, yet again, have argued that cinema is an art form of great character and figures. Not only of idiosyncratic characters, but also great ethical types—from Randle Patrick McMurphy from *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* to Rocky through Sadie in *Vigilante*, from all the great villains to all the great heroes, or even anti-heroes from the history of cinema. These characters are not always heroic in a classical sense, they are not even always “good” in a moral sense of the term, but they dramatize traditional ethical conflicts in ever new ways; in potentially universally moving ways.

Encore, others read current and contemporary depictions as reflective materialization or material reflections of present belief-systems. Cinema thereby is an art that always reflects its specific time by inventing contemporary ways in which dominant representations of the world (that are also our own) work and by depicting their limitations and potencies. It thus presents us with a strange (and thus per-or inverted) insight into the way in which the dominant imaginary works. It shows us and thereby reflects on the ways we think, act, and reflect. Cinema in this sense tackles what we take to be evident or unquestionable and presents us with how ideology, how the logic of our ideas works (and therefore is absolutely crucial to the understanding of the state of the world and specifically “our” subjective position within it). In cinema, we thus even learn and can see how we are supposed to and tend to desire.

This issue of *Crisis and Critique* seeks to investigate the contemporary and general significance and potentials of cinematographic film making in our contemporary world, and it invites answers to what and in what way cinema can teach us today. It seeks to discuss what ways may prove already co-opted or dead-ends. Thereby, it also hopes to point to paths still open or imaginary roads that need construction. In times like ours, seeing what is impossible to see, learning how to desire differently or experiencing what thinking in masses can look like, might actually be the beginning of something genuinely unforeseen.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Badiou Alain 2013, “Cinema as Philosophical Experimentation”, in *Cinema*, Cambridge: Polity