

The Cinema Hypothesis – London

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I'd first like to offer my thanks to those who brought about the English language edition of *The Cinema Hypothesis*: Alejandro Bachmann, Alexander Horwath and the Austrian Film Museum, Mark Reid and the BFI, Scottish Film Education, Madeline Whittle and Katarina Müller.

This book was written very quickly, over the course of two months in 2002, as I wanted it to appear before the change in government and the end of my time working with Jack Lang at the Ministry of Education.

In 2000 Jack Lang invited me to conceive and deliver an educational project that would operate across the French school system.

At that point in time I had the benefit of 25 years' experience in creating educational tools, initiatives and resources in this field. Thanks to his expression of confidence in my work I was able to systematise this work and then share it with anyone who was interested.

I tend to be quite a slow writer, so the decision to write something quickly allowed me to become more direct, to open my ideas up, and thus create a more personal, immediate relationship with the reader. The product of this period was the book and its legacy.

I'm proud that, since its publication, this book has become useful in many countries, who've taken the initiative to create cinema education projects in schools.

This has started, in each case, by the publication of *The Cinema Hypothesis* in the country's language. In Spain, Italy, Brazil, Finland, Germany and, next month, in Slovenia.

I was then often invited to meet and sometimes train those who were to engage in this experience. The greatest thing that this book has to offer is that it offers a level of confidence to people who have the desire to share their passion for cinema, without having

received a specific cinematic training. Many people have said to me that it is thanks to this book that they've found the strength to embark on cinematic adventures without fear.

What does this book bring that's new to this field?

First of all that it is vital to approach cinema as an art form and not as a medium of communication.

At the time the book was written the French approach to film was to see it as part of the structural and linguistic toolsets, aimed primarily at the construction and interpretation of meaning. The obsession with meaning and a film's ideological content, prevented people from seeing that cinema belongs in the realm of the senses in the same way that a painting or a piece of music does. A student of cinema can still, today, at French universities, write a thesis of 500 pages on a filmmaker or film without a single word on the emotive materials from which the films are made.

Jack Lang and I were both of the opinion that schools were only interested in the logical and analytical half of the brain, and that it was now time to appeal to the other half, the creative, emotional, intuitive half.

It also provided a way to enable certain students, who would normally have been excluded from traditional educational frameworks, to discover their creative, emotional and artistic abilities. Which, in some cases, allowed them to regain their self-confidence, thanks to their discoveries.

The teaching of cinema already existed in other, more pragmatic European countries, such as Germany, but there was always a danger of confusing cinema with that of media.

This method proposes that you approach film as a subcategory of the media and media studies, which is a reductive way of approaching it, ignoring its place as an actual art form.

Certainly, there are aspects of communication in cinema – in the screenplay, the character's dialogue, but first and foremost cinema is an art form. The way in which cinema has the

ability to communicate human and artistic experiences of the world is not the of the same order as television, for example.

I believe that the teaching of television is important to our society, necessary as a means critical analysis of communication and ideology. But this is a teaching which remains radically separate from the teaching of cinema as art.

The greatest change in cinema since the start of the 2000's has been in the opening up of the ways that receive it, following the triumph of the digital revolution. Young audiences today are seeing fewer films in their entirety in cinemas. To watch a film lasting an hour and half without the ability to flick between channels, or to do something else at the same time as viewing the film, has made watching film increasingly difficult. They watch them in snippets on all sorts of screens in all sorts of locations - on computers, tablets and smart phones in their bedroom, in class, on the train or metro or even whilst walking.

The 'clip' has become the most widely used method of viewing films. The swift flicking from one clip to the next has fostered a sense of impatience, such that any teaching approaches must now consider the development and retention of a student's attention and patience. Leaping from one clip to another is terribly exciting, but each clip seems to erase the presence of the clip that went before it. This new way of engaging with films doesn't leave much in the way of memories, is beholden to the act of consumption, and creates a sense of cinematic amnesia, which also transfers to history and art.

The great danger with this increasingly rapid cycling of images is that that each image seen on screen becomes rendered the same as other images and that we will lose the sense of the specific nature of cinema and cinematic images.

The critic Serge Daney contrasted the image with visual flow - "There are screens everywhere but not necessarily images." For Daney the image was partly made up of reality, sharing an experience of the world, an encounter with the other. On the other hand the *visual* was a smooth image, shallow, without depth or background, lacking reality, purely for consumption and to be immediately forgotten.

The aim of teaching cinema as art is to experience cinema as an approach to the world and to the other. This implies a distinction between art (cinema) and that which is pure consumption (the visual). With this it is important to accept that art may not be effortless and immediately accessible. The cinematic method demands patience and time. It demands that you watch films, or clips from films, several times, and create connections between them. I am convinced that there no pedagogical approach can function without the need to slow down. The pedagogue, or teacher, must not let themselves be intimidated by the ever increasing encroachment of technology in to our lives, by running even faster than the new practices of the pupils themselves. On the contrary, they must resist the final state of consumption, which is achieved by passing more and more rapidly from one product to another, forgetting the slow moving past, and end up spinning lightheaded in the moment, a result of travelling at such speed. If education has a meaning, it is surely to resist the amnesia of consumption and to maintain a link between the present and the past.

In the pedagogy of cinema it seems to me that more than ever it is important to create links between films, between excerpts from films, which is the best antidote to flitting unconsciously from one thing to the next.

In the early 2000s I implemented a pedagogy based on extracts, or rather, the linking of fragments of film, which was the founding principal of my curated DVD collection, *L'Eden cinéma*. First I saw it like an aperitif, or a starter, in that, screening an extract often gave the participants a furious desire to see the film in its entirety, which we saw in class and courses day after day. Above all, I expect the possibility of non-vertical pedagogy. In the classical, vertical, pedagogy the teacher imparts their knowledge to the supposed ignorant down below, the students themselves. In the *comparative* pedagogy of cinema, the teacher screens clips to their students which are structure in a specific way, without saying anything to the students.

The first thing that happens is that the students propose their responses and ideas in relation to the excerpts: What have the clips got in common? How do they differ from each other? It is the students who speak first, exchanging their perspectives and ideas on what

they've seen in the excerpts. It is only after this first, horizontal exchange between the students themselves that the teacher takes over, with their own knowledge and perspective on culture, but only after the core ideas have been identified by the students, in response to the experience of seeing these excerpts.

Surfing the net on sites such as *Youtube* allows you to pass from one extract to another, with nothing to link these random clips together, leaving very little or no trace at all on the memory of the *surfer*.

Whereas if you show a class 5 or 6 carefully chosen clips around a specific cinematic situation, for example - *How to stage and shoot a romantic encounter* - without any preamble or framing by the teacher, the students discover for themselves exactly the same questions that a director would have to consider when staging such a scene: How to place the characters in the setting; how to film the space that separates the characters; how to show their distant glances; how to make the distance shorter in the second phase of the encounter; at which point should the characters first speak to each other, etc.

This comparative method has an advantage, which is to create links between different cinematic eras, styles and nations.

It also serves to open up cinema, to allow discoveries, without which the students would only see that, which they already know, or that which is massively signalled to them by advertising, the media and the film industry.

Another virtue of this method is that it allows the educator to establish a real and tangible exchange with the culture of their students. In this example a teacher could ask their students go online and search *Youtube* for examples which look at romantic encounters from films that they know. This way the teacher can discover excerpts that they themselves perhaps don't know, allowing the teacher and the pupils to feedback to each other on their perspectives on the clips.

The other essential proposition of this book is that it is essential to juggle an approach to films, and film excerpts, and the practice, no matter how humble, of filmmaking. The two approaches require and nourish each other.

Ideally, to make the most of this pedagogical approach, the teacher should form a partnership with a filmmaker for the duration of the project. The presence of the filmmaker adds another dimension to the everyday interactions of the students and their teacher. The filmmaker brings with them an artistic approach and set of values that are not necessarily those of the school itself, which can sometimes create different dynamics within the students. With their degree of externality a filmmaker can spot a notionally 'bad' student's skills, which may, perhaps, be more practical or artistic than those skills called upon by the traditional school curriculum. In this environment everyone must fend for themselves, including the teacher, who may find themselves in a situation which may, at first, not be familiar.

I come now to certain, current dangers, prevalent in France in any case, for the teaching of cinema, dangers which were less prevalent in 2002.

One of the most frequent dangers encountered is that of pedagogical *ram raiding* lasting 2 or 3 sessions. These 'fast food' style interventions often only benefit the good intentions of those who happen to organise them.

I have always believed that a true induction to cinema must be delivered over a long course of time, at regular intervals, for at least one term, or, preferably over the course of the school year. If not, the students will not feel the impact of their learning, and all you are left with is the vague impression of a project's message. Length of time and patience are indispensable to make a truly remarkable experience of cinema, which will not just be pure consumption.

Today's other major danger is the illusion that, with the resources we can find on the internet, that young people can build up a relationship with cinema without the direct involvement of someone to start them off. There is an illusion that, thanks to the resources

to be found online, there will be no need for a teacher, nor philosophy of teaching.

The internet offers an incredible amount of resources. We can find an incredible number of films and excerpts on the internet, but this kist of riches has no sense to it if we don't know how to engage with it, and if no one helps us to build our points of reference, and to be aware of what we are looking for.

If we approach cinema as *art* and not as *knowledge* the steersman is essential in the transmission, or passing on of cinema by way of their tastes, their personality and culture.

No *tutorial* can play this role of catalyst. To believe, or to pretend to believe, that a cinematic education can be achieved exclusively by way of the tools and resources on the internet is a form of tyranny, and resigns adults from their role in the transmission of their experience and love of cinema. The love of cinema is not transferable through a tutorial. It can only come from a direct, teaching relationship in the presence of an adult who believes in cinema, and who can instil in others their love for cinema, and from a lively exchange of ideas and perspectives between children themselves, and between the children and this adult.

I'm fairly confident in the fact that the publication of this English language edition of the book, 15 years after it first came out, doesn't just contain an archaeological framework of knowledge for the teaching of cinema. I really hope that its primary aim, to be at once a guide for the meditation on cinema, a practical handbook and an incitement to teach, remains current and timeless.

I thank you for giving it this new life in the world's most widely accessible language.

I'm utterly delighted.