Toward a Cinematic Pedagogy:
Gilles Deleuze and Manoel de Oliveira

SUSANA VIEGAS

On the one hand, there’s the internal development of cinema as it seeks new audio-visual combinations and major pedagogical lines (not just Rossellini, Resnais, Godard, and the Straubs, but Syberberg, Duras, Oliveira . . . ) and finds in television a wonderful field to explore.1

Introduction

My aim in this essay will be to approach cinema, philosophy, and cinematic pedagogy through an exploration of the interest and impact that the Portuguese filmmaker Manoel de Oliveira (1908–2015) has had on the philosophical thought regarding cinema and the moving images of Gilles Deleuze (1925–95). According to Deleuze, there is a principle of affinity between the two forms of thought expression, explored as a peculiar transversal project alongside pure philosophical inquiry. What different kinds of interferences may occur between philosophy and cinema? I defend that there should be difference and disagreement between philosophy and art in general, rather than one common sense and agreement. If philosophy is the discipline that has to create concepts, should art “extract a bloc of sensations, a pure being of sensations” as Deleuze states in What Is Philosophy?, written with Félix Guattari.2 Between art and philosophy, we also encounter unplaceable intrusions that transform each other in a mutually reciprocal way. If cinema has forced philosophers to rethink their ideas regarding movement, time, and image, philosophical concepts such as the time-image or the crystal-image could also make filmmakers rethink their own praxis. Cinema seems to have the ability to give philosophers the nonphilosophical elements that make us think via concepts, thereby suggesting an affinity between the cinematic image and the philosophical text as a philosophical expression in thinking in cinema through cinema.

Susana Viegas is a FCT postdoctoral research fellow at the IFILNOVA/FCSH Universidade NOVA de Lisboa and the University of Dundee. She was awarded a FCT PhD fellowship (2007–11) and is coeditor of Cinema: Journal of Philosophy and the Moving Image.

© 2016 Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois
In this sense, Manoel de Oliveira’s curiosity in the lecture that Gilles Deleuze gave in 1987 at La Fémis (titled “What Is the Creative Act?”) was somehow an achievement of that philosophical principle. Challenged by the philosopher’s words, Oliveira wrote Deleuze in 1991. In addition, Deleuze mentioned the Portuguese filmmaker’s films as one of the greatest pedagogies, along with Roberto Rossellini, Alain Resnais, or Jean-Luc Godard, for example. Cinema was then seen, for the first time, as a new (possible) cartography to the philosophical plane contributing to a reciprocal movement between cinema and philosophy. The present essay aims to elucidate and to trace Deleuze’s philosophical considerations of Oliveira’s films with the final objective of demonstrating this reciprocity. In this sense, this research will also be of interest to both Deleuzian studies and cinema studies.

As will be shown, difference and disagreement between philosophy and art are a fundamental background that increases their educational relevance. In the concluding remarks of The Time-Image, Deleuze recovers his analysis on Godard, video, television, and the spiritual automaton and launches new questions pertaining to televisual and digital images stating that “cinema is dying, then, from its quantitative mediocrity.” Toward the postcinema new type of images, Deleuze shows us the same mixed feelings of metaphysical pessimism and optimism that he feels toward cinematic images: cinema has been used for propagandistic political purposes where “image constantly sinks to the state of cliché,” but, at the same time, “the image constantly attempts to break through the cliché.” Following Serge Daney’s ideas, Deleuze understands cinema as having the capacity to provoke a “whole pedagogy” because the screen itself is now understood to be an “empty blackboard.” Thus, between pessimism and optimism, Deleuze’s concerns were toward the limits and impact of contamination of other audio-visual media in cinema and of arts in philosophy. This concern is shared with Rossellini, Godard, and Oliveira’s hopes and disappointments regarding televisual images: “there’s television’s own development, as competing with cinema, as actually ‘perfecting’ and ‘generalizing’ it.” Thus, the social function of televisual images from a third period of cinema (“How we can find a way into it?”) neutralizes both the aesthetic function of the first period (“What is there to see behind the image?”) and the noetic function of the postwar cinema of seeing (“How we can see the image itself?”).

Deleuze and Oliveira: An Encounter

On March 17, 1987, only a few years after the publication of his Cinema books, The Movement-Image (1983) and The Time-Image (1985), Deleuze gave a conference talk at La Fémis, the national French film school in Paris, titled “What Is the Creative Act?” There, he questioned what it means to have an idea, in cinema, in philosophy, or in any discipline. He began by saying
that to have an idea is a rare event and that we do not have ideas in general, but always in a specific field. In this sense, ideas are always something of material. However, in this context, we should bear in mind the difference between and “idea” and a “concept,” an essential distinction to a definition of a philosophy of film. To summarize, an idea is an image that forces us to think: it is a pensative image that is, by nature, thought in the making. It is in this sense that we can understand cinema as something “full of ideas.” A concept, while a necessary condition for the establishment of philosophical thinking, is an exclusive creation of philosophy; it is the work of the philosopher to obtain concepts in the making.

As is well known, Deleuze studied several filmmakers and films for different reasons. In that vast group, I would like to highlight the presence of the Portuguese filmmaker Manoel de Oliveira. Four fundamental references show the immediate relation between Deleuze and Oliveira: 1) The Movement-Image, 2) the preface for Serge Daney’s Ciné-Journal, 3) a letter written by Oliveira to Deleuze, and 3) an interview published in Revue Chimères. I address each in turn below.

1) In October 2015, it was thirty-two years since the publication of The Movement-Image. In the first volume of his Cinema books, Gilles Deleuze refers in particular to one of the best known of Oliveira’s film, Francisca (1981), an adaptation of Agustina Bessa-Luis’s book Fanny Owen. Francisca as “an Oliveira close-up” was one of Deleuze’s examples, along with Ivan the Terrible as “an Eisenstein close-up,” to think about the affect-image, face, and close-up.8

One of the most intriguing aspects of this reference regards how Deleuze could have had access to Oliveira’s film. To start with, Deleuze’s interest in Oliveira took place only thanks to a precise historical context that was related to the exhibition of Portuguese films in France. The French curiosity with Portuguese film production was a sudden phenomenon in what, for Deleuze, would be an unknown country, resulting from a Portuguese population that, after the 1974 Carnation Revolution, was awaking from a forty-eight-year dictatorship. There were several retrospective on Portuguese films and filmmakers appearing in France. As their films were discovered, they greatly impressed both the public and film critics, particularly those who worked at Cahiers du cinéma, like Serge Daney, who was a decisive influence on Deleuze’s cinephilia.9 This success was also achieved thanks to the pledge of producer and exhibitor Paulo Branco. “Out of Scene,” the retrospective on Portuguese filmmakers that Paulo Branco organized, was, according to Jacques Lemière, a “remarkable event” in what concerns the reception of Oliveira’s work in France.10 Films like Douro, Faina Fluvial/Working on the Douro River (1931), Aniki-Bóbó (1942), O Pintor e a Cidade/The Painter and the City (1956), Acto da Primavera/Rite of Spring and A Caça/The
Hunt (1963), O Passado e o Presente/Past and Present (1971), Benilde ou a Virgem-Mãe/Benilde or the Virgin Mother (1975), Amor de Perdição/Doomed Love (1979), and Francisca (1981) were admired by the audiences.

According to Lemière, Oliveira was seen as a filmmaker who is “faithful to his artistic vision, and proceeds, with a calm artistry, with his goal to educate the viewer, through an ethical program” and “inventive formal choices.” In the case of Francisca, this is illustrated by the use of long takes, the frontal and theatrical position of the actors, the repetition of the same scene from a different angle, the reflection of the mirrors, and the use of medium shots without close-ups. However, Deleuze refers to a particular scene, which is one of the most remarkable and analyzed. In this scene, José Augusto (Diogo Dória) insists on bringing the horse into the house of Camilo Castelo Branco (Mário Barroso), when he admits his love for Fanny (Teresa Menezes): “An Oliveira close-up: the two faces of the man, whilst, in depth this time, the horse which has mounted the stairs prefigures the affects of the seduction and the musical ride.”

Apart from the unusual events portrayed in the scene and the use of the artifice and stage-like acting, commented on by many, Deleuze underlines the affective nature of that medium shot. The eye of the viewer is attracted to the center of the stage, to the horse’s gaze; in this case, the affect-image is the horse. Camilo and José Augusto are looking straight into the camera. The horse’s gaze turns into our gaze, “beyond the soul,” and the horse is itself the face of the “soulless creature,” to quote Eduardo Prado Coelho—this is a film about those who love soullessly, irrationally, an idea that comes from a scene when Fanny, at the ball, asks Camilo Castelo Branco, “What is the soul? The soul is a vice.” That is to say that an affect-image of this nature is not an image that represents or expresses affects. On the contrary, it represents and expresses the inexpressible, the void, and the irrational connected to the soulless. It is in the viewer that one finds the affect: the viewer cannot but look to the horse.

2) A second reference to Manoel de Oliveira appears in the preface that Deleuze wrote for Serge Daney’s Ciné-Journal, published in 1986 and reprinted in Negotiations. In that short essay, as seen in the epigraph above, Deleuze argues for “new audio-visual combinations and major pedagogical lines . . . and finds in television a wonderful field to explore, with wonderful resources.” Many filmmakers started working in television during the 1970s, some of them after declaring that cinema, in its classic model, was dead. This was the case of Roberto Rossellini’s biographical films on the life of philosophers such as Socrate (1970), Blaise Pascal (1971), Augustine of Hippo (1972), and Cartesius (1973). Godard and Oliveira have also made films for television: Godard’s Six fois deux/Sur et sous la communication (1976), with Anne-Marie Miéville, and Oliveira’s lesser known and studied Doomed Love
They all share the pedagogical idea that, through moving images (on small or in big screens), they could educate and inspire viewers while also entertaining.

What interests me in this particular approach is to understand this philosophical interest that puts Oliveira, Godard, Duras, and Rossellini side by side. Oliveira was the only Portuguese filmmaker to belong rightfully to this group. One understands why this happened looking at the aesthetical and formal changes that took place in Portuguese cinema in the 1960s, ’70s and early ’80s. According to Prado Coelho, from the 1960s on, the will to “restore the Portuguese cinema” will translate into an artistic expression marked by the distance to the viewers.15

However, what seems to remain from this fragmentation reveals itself as philosophically appealing. According to Randal Johnson, “Oliveira’s work . . . is characterised by a rather iconoclastic reflective and self-reflexive cinematic discourse,”16 characteristics that remind us of a common idea on the Portuguese cinema, seen as “a cinema that, for many, became too literary, cerebral, experimentalist, intellectual or politic.”17 Those were qualities of Portuguese cinema and reflect what was going on in European cinema, especially in France, with whom Portuguese filmmakers shared a sense of metacinematographical cinephilia.

3) In third place, we have the letter written by Oliveira in 1991 after seeing Deleuze’s lecture.18 Deleuze had sent a copy of the lecture to Oliveira while he was in Paris working on A Divina Comédia/The Divine Comedy (1991). However, despite all Oliveira’s efforts to meet him in person, Deleuze was sick at the time (he was retired since 1987) and unable to meet. Further, in the same sense that Deleuze had once felt compelled and stimulated by the connection between philosophy and art, Oliveira also felt “provoked” by the philosopher’s words. Writing that letter from Oporto was a way for the eighty-three-year-old filmmaker, an “intellectual full of doubts” as he says, to expose to Deleuze some of his own doubts.

There were four major “concerns” underlined by the filmmaker on Deleuze’s presentation: the “supreme urgency,” the “breakup between the profane and the religious,” Paul Klee’s sentence “The people are missing,” and the “act of resistance.”19 Through the concept of “people,” Oliveira links these four ideas connecting the individual conflict to the social one. Deleuze had finished his lecture by saying that every work of art appeals to a people who do not exist, and, just as he had said in the second volume of his Cinema books, if before World War II the people were present, after the war, we lack their presence: “if there were a modern political cinema, it would be on this basis: the people no longer exists, or not yet . . . the people are missing.”20 The absence of people is, therefore, the first thing that marks the difference between classic and modern cinema, from a political point of view. How can
we understand this absence in modern cinema when we refer to an art form that is, since the beginning, not only appealing to the masses but has also been put into the service of political propaganda? According to Oliveira’s approach to Deleuze’s statement, the people who are missing are the people of God, emphasizing the distance between the life of Jesus Christ and modern-day living. The closing scene of Rite of Spring strongly exemplifies Oliveira’s critical position toward this distance. Is it possible that the lack of belief in this world, the intolerable nature and the manipulative use of film (criticized so many times by the Portuguese filmmaker), has led modern cinema to an apolitical stance, the impossibility of a political or ideological engagement? These are some of the possible questions, to which I return.

4) Last, we have the interview published in the magazine Chimères, “Le ciel est historique” (The Sky Is Historical), an interview conducted by Serge Daney and Raymond Bellour. According to Oliveira’s ethical program and formal creativity—as Lemière has highlighted—we understand the commitment to authenticity, realism, and objectivity in his work, even in his historical films relying on the power to imagine movement, colors, and sets. As Jorge Cruz puts it (in “Manoel de Oliveira, the Sculptor of Words”), “[I]t is impossible to fully bring back an historical time: what gesture? What clothing? What expression? What . . .” Faithful to his deontology—the concept used by Randal Johnson, in a Kantian reading of Oliveira’s work—Oliveira refuses to shoot these representations of the soul. However, his films portray the soul and its doubts. Every time that he enacts or stages a historical time, he uses stylistic elements that stress that search for objectivity, for example, the sky shots that appear in his films. Those shots, sky and clouds, are elements that bring the viewer closer to a lost, unseen, historical time: the sky is always there. It is, in this sense, completely historical.

Thus, this objectivity and realism, however paradoxical they may seem, are achieved through the theatrical staging of each scene, in a bold deconstruction of the rules and canon of film, following Deleuze’s classification of the five elements of the new, postwar cinematographic image: “These are the five apparent characteristics of the new image: the dispersive situation, the deliberately weak links, the voyage form, the consciousness of clichés, the condemnation of the plot.” For example, in the beginning of Non, ou a Vã Glória de Mandar/No, or the Vain Glory of Command (1990), there is a false shot/reverse shot in the scene when Portuguese soldiers travel in the jeep; or the choice of medium shots, without the use of close-ups: the viewer must find the most important element of the scene. These formal and aesthetical innovations have the purpose of making the viewer think about the metaphysics of time. Oliveira had admitted a strong sympathy and affinity with Deleuze’s texts, stating that, until he read The Movement-Image and The Time-Image, he had never been aware that Deleuze’s thoughts about cinematographical
temporality were so close to his own: when a film is projected, it transforms itself; it becomes alive, it is a *durée*; the language of cinema is, precisely, time.\textsuperscript{25} It will be precisely to synthesize the relationship between Deleuze’s cinematic approach to movement and time that, in his Doctor Honoris Causa speech in 2002, Oliveira will mention cinematic images as “movement-time” as he is not able to dissociate four independent, although complementary, elements of the cinematic image: editing, word, sound, and music.\textsuperscript{26}

**Cinema: Toward a New *Paideia*?**

The elaboration of a film-philosophy and a cinematic pedagogy, as well as a pedagogical cinephilia, remains a concern in philosophical speech and has a specific approach in Deleuzian studies. One can find two different attitudes toward the relationship between philosophy and cinema in the debate that Deleuze started thirty years ago, and they have transversed the analytical approach, as well as the Continental one: What is the relationship between cinema and philosophy? There is a most problematic approach that states that cinema is important to philosophy in a nonlinguistic way. This approach is close to Deleuze’s stance: there is a direct connection between cinema and philosophy itself.

The close connection between images (in a broader sense) and philosophy has existed since the pre-Socratic era when philosophers used images and metaphors in their arguments; for example, the allegory of the cave in Plato’s *Republic*. I mention this example because the association between the allegory and the movie theater has been a repeated analogy: it mainly resides in the comparison between the prisoner in the cave and the film spectator as passive viewers of the observed images.\textsuperscript{27} Thus, the “exit from the mind in the cave,” in the Platonic sense, may occur, paradoxically, through what Deleuze defines as a pedagogical cinephilia, a cinematic pedagogy not understood in the common sense of transmitting knowledge and/or information, but as new ways of perception and thinking (quotation from the Serge Daney’s preface), mentioned beginning in his earlier texts and maintained throughout his career, such as *Difference and Repetition* (1968). The widespread idea of the viewer’s passivity allied with the mechanical reproduction of cinematic objects gave rise to the initial divorce between art’s theory and cinema, as well as between philosophy and cinema. As Walter Benjamin defended, in cinema, we lost the “here and now,” the aura and the ritual of other artistic expressions as present in theater or painting. At the beginning of the twentieth century, cinema was seen as an emergent art with little-to-no philosophical appeal, as well as a kind of art that did not frame itself in an already established and preconstituted philosophical system, in the aesthetical sense. When invented, the cinematographic forms alluded to the theory and criticism that both philosophers and theorists developed.
regarding other forms of art such as painting, music, and theater. Besides that, cinema was associated with nickelodeons, magic theaters, and vaudevilles, namely, to the lower and ignorant classes, to the masses, as an “artistic” activity of dubious origin with a massive and popular profile.28

It is precisely on this point that Deleuze’s thought differs radically from others: cinema does not appear in his thought as another element explicable and adaptable to a preconstituted conceptual structure (as a philosophy of art or an aesthetics, for example); instead, cinema put in motion the movement of philosophical thought itself, something that is indispensable to the philosophical act, through a temporal cinematographic conception. Not only was cinema no longer seen as an inferior art, of simple illusion and popular diversion, but, rather, it was now seen as the art of time reunited. The actual debate around the passive massification created by television and other screen devices reminds us of the criticism once devoted to cinema.

I will now briefly examine the link between educational choice and the connection between aesthetics, pedagogy, and metaphysic. The Platonic use of images makes me think that, if there is an educational use of images, there must also be this kind of use of cinematographic images, in spite of their deceiving nature. In fact, this allegory appears in the Platonic texts following the Greek ideal of paideia, the ancient Greek educational ideal. The idea of paideia, even more than the allegory itself, is essential to the study of cinema and film-philosophy nowadays—in the sense of an education that should be made public and accessible, to the extent of the idea of a pop-philosophy, as Deleuze understood it.29 In fact, the Deleuzian film-philosophy stands up for, on one hand, the return of the philosophical domain to the public, the agora, that is, it stands for a return to the basics of Greek philosophy itself. Cinema, as an “art for the masses” has that power, of returning thought, in a democratic way, to everybody.

The propagandistic and rhetorical use of cinema is enough proof of this, but the creation of a human being dominated by the fascist image (in the sense of passivity toward image) is, on the other hand, a problem. Therefore, the revision of a theory of thinking and the devaluation of the sensitive world of images (as copy or phantoms) led to an art form that, according to Jacques Rancière, “resolves the question of mimesis at its root—the Platonic denunciation of images, the opposition between sensible copy and intelligible model.”30

I will not defend or criticize, either the “film-as-philosophy”31 or “philosophy-in-cinema” approaches.32 My aim is to defend and sustain a philosophy of film in a Deleuzian sense. I search for unique elements of cinema. In this sense, it is true that cinema is able to expose and convey arguments and ideas that make us think philosophically by concepts. This is done in the first instance, through the dramatization of the life and the work of a philosopher, as in Cartesius directed by Roberto Rossellini (1974), Wittgenstein.
(1993) by Derek Jarman, or Le journal du séducteur (1996) directed by Danièle Dubroux, an adaptation of the 1843 Soren Kierkegaard’s Diary of a Seducer. And it is also done in a second sense through the recording of philosophers’ speeches (lessons and interviews). Deleuze’s aim to make a pop'philosophie meet in a paradoxical way with his eight-hour television project L’Abécédaire with Claire Parnet (1988–89). In this kind of audio-visual device, the problem that limits our question resides in the fact that the exposure and dissemination do not occur in a cinematically exclusive way. In this sense, they are not good and strong arguments to sustain the “philosophy-of-film” approach. If, however, cinema can be without a doubt a useful art in the service of philosophy, it seems to always be secondary and minor to philosophy. Deleuze follows the opposite reasoning: for example, in modern cinema, the importance of purely optical and sound situations that present time directly is crucial to educate the viewer. They are more demanding and make us think out of the cliché. The philosophical conceptual language seems to be a verbal remake of the audio-visual sounds and images’ thought. Precisely because we can think along with sounds and images, they make us think philosophically: an audio-visual thinking. Philosophy itself is no longer a superior knowledge; neither could a philosophy of cinema be a “philosophy of x” where x would be its subject matter. So, in this sense, we may say that “Deleuze’s approach to cinema has important pedagogical implications because of how it treats cinema’s critical capacity,” namely, through its idea of a cinema of seeing in which the viewer is a center of indetermination who must take his time to see the image itself critically.

Conclusion: Philosophie-Cinéma

In conclusion, Deleuze was aiming for new ways of thinking. The viewer’s experience differs from natural experience, from the everyday world experience; the film itself is not a mere copy or reproduction of reality. What does this mean, exactly? It means that the cinematographic images promote new ways of feeling and new ways of thinking: for example, the mental-image in Hitchcock, the crystal-image in Orson Welles, and the affect-image in Manoel de Oliveira. But the relationship is not purely intellectual; cinema is also able to teach us how to feel differently, how to live both individual and collective affects. Cinema is, in this sense, a school of life in its most liberating way, even if we are talking of one minoritarian filmmaker whose moviegoers are still to come.

Manoel de Oliveira’s interest in Gilles Deleuze expresses something that is very common to all the artists who felt compelled by his philosophical ideas on art. But the problem with Deleuze’s attempt to understand television and other possible cinematic media, such as pop videos, as a “wonderful field to explore” is that the democratic accessibility to images may
correspond to vacuity and mindlessness of the art form and so prevent them from creating new circuits in art and in mind.36

Notes
4. Ibid., 20.
5. Jonathan Lahey Dronsfield, “Pedagogy of the Written Image,” Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy [Revue de la philosophie française et de langue française] 18, no. 2 (2010): 90; “Serge Daney, one of Deleuze’s interlocutors on cinema, argues that Godard’s screen is an empty blackboard because the sine qua non of Godardian pedagogy is to take the text at its word, the statement as already given, in order then to oppose another word, another statement.” At the same time, it is a retrieval of an old question toward the impact of cinema on the educational system, as in Richard Abel, French Film Theory and Criticism: 1907–1939, vol. 1 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 10–14.
6. Deleuze, Negotiations, 71.
7. Gilles Deleuze, Deux régimes de fous. Textes et entretiens 1975–1995 (Paris: Les éditions de Minuit, 2003), 197: “Ce que j’appelle Idées, ce sont des images qui donnent à penser.” All translations from the French and Portuguese are my own, unless otherwise noted.
11. Ibid., 117.
15. Coelho, Vinte Anos de Cinema Português, 8.
17. Coelho, Vinte Anos de Cinema Português, 10.
20. Deleuze, Cinema 2, 208.
122  Viegas


24. Deleuze, Cinema 1, 214.


29. Deleuze, Negotiations, 7.


36. Deleuze, Negotiations, 60.