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ISBN 978-608-4849-03-2



Conference Proceedings

PHILOSOPHY AND FILM



ФИЛОЗОФСКО ДРУШТВО НА МАКЕДОНИЈА
PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY OF MACEDONIA

PHILOSOPHY AND FILM

Conference
Proceedings



Едиција • Edition

ФИЛМОСОФИЈА • PHIL(M)OSOPHY

ФИЛОЗОФИЈА И ФИЛМ

Зборник на текстови од Меѓународната конференција
одржана на 25 мај 2021 год. на ZOOM онлајн платформата
во рамките на 11. Филозофски филмски фестивал

Publisher:

PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY OF MACEDONIA

Edition's Editor-in-chief:

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Editors:

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Language Editor: Mira Bekjar, PhD

Technical Editor: Ljupcho Mitkovski

Cover design: Mirjana Obednikovska

Print: Grafostal, Skopje

Print run: 300



This publication is issued in cooperation with the
Philosophical Film Festival



Република Северна Македонија
Министерство за култура

This publication is supported by the Ministry of Culture
of the Republic of North Macedonia

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**25 May 2021 ZOOM platform
11. Philosophical Film Festival**

**Organized by Philosophical Society of Macedonia,
in cooperation with Faculty of Philosophy – Skopje and
Faculty of Dramatic Arts – Skopje, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University – Skopje**

**Philosophical Society of Macedonia
2022, Skopje**

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Serdar Öztürk

Faculty of Communication, Ankara HBV University

CINEPHILOSOPHY: A NEW WAY OF DOING PHILOSOPHY**Abstract**

One of the most intricate challenges within the discipline of philosophy and film is how to construct a relationship between the two. A great number of philosophers believe movies can be a vehicle to illustrate philosophical concepts. Some philosophers claim that philosophy reflects on problems and creates concepts, whereas films make us see them. The film director, according to this view, knows how to create a concept as an experience. However, the most neglected element in discussions about the relationship between film and philosophy is the medium. Philosophy was born as an oral medium in the Agora in Ancient Greece, and over time the written text became dominant medium for doing philosophy. With the invention of cinema, a new possibility emerged for doing philosophy through what I call "cinephilosophy." Cine-operations like shots, frames, camera angles, camera movement, montage and lighting take the concepts to audiences through heart and senses, rather than through rational mind. Rather than talking about film and philosophy, I believe, we can suggest cinephilosophy, written philosophy and oral philosophy. Film and philosophy are not separate fields. We can approach written philosophy via the medium of writing, oral philosophy via oral speech or we can engage in cinephilosophy via cinematic images. It is demonstrated in this study that cinephilosophy as a new way of doing philosophy offers a great opportunity to engage with philosophy through senses and create new concepts and thoughts.

Keywords

cinephilosophy, cine-images, medium, oral philosophy, written philosophy, cine-operations

I would like to start with simple but very significant questions: How can we construct the relationship between cinema and philosophy? What is the best way of making a distinction between philosophy and cinema? Or do we think that, in fact, there is philosophy but there are different ways of doing philosophy? If so, can we think that film as a medium can do philosophy in its own way, with its own technique?

I would like to discuss these questions in my paper. First, I want to start with the meaning of cinema and philosophy. What is cinema? It is a huge question but, to put it simply, cinema can be thought of as a composition. What kind of composition? Movement images and time images produced by camera movement, camera angles, shots, frames, montage, colour, sound, lighting, music, screenplay and acting. Gilles Deleuze classified images in cinema as basically two main images: movement images and time images. We can use a short description to classify these images: cine-images. Cinema is made of cine-images.

What is philosophy? Of course there are many definitions of philosophy. Kant characterized philosophy as the attempt to answer these basic questions: What can I know? What should I do? What can I hope for? Deleuze and Guattari claim philosophy means creating concepts. Philosophy does not question everything, wherever it finds a problem philosophy reflects on it. Alain Badiou thinks that philosophy considers paradoxes. According to him, if there is not a relationship between some things, philosophy reflects on this. And finally, Henry Bergson claimed doing philosophy means an intervention in common or usual thinking. In daily life, we think that we think, but in fact it is a common sense. We should get away from ordinary thinking in order to engage in philosophical thinking.

As you see, these philosophers put an emphasis on problem. In philosophical thinking there always must be a problem. Therefore, here is a problem: on the one hand, cinema is made with cine-images; on the other hand, philosophy is done by concepts. What kind of relation can we see between them? Is it possible to think of cine-images and concepts, cinema and philosophy together?

Plato claimed that images mislead us. Images are outside of the real world. For him concepts or Ideas belong to true world, fundamental world, the world of Ideas. Plato himself believed that since art imitates physical

things, which in turn imitate the Forms, art is always a copy of a copy, and leads us even further from truth and toward illusion. According to him, works of art are at best, entertainment, and at worst, a dangerous delusion. Philosophy, for him, enlightens us and tries to help us get away from the delusion of images.

A number of philosophers agree with Plato. According to them, images and concepts or truth are against each other. As Badiou claims, if there is a relationship between philosophy and cinema, this might be a relationship of hate. Philosophy throughout its history has hated images and to some extent still keeps this position.

From these explanations we can easily understand the reason why many philosophers generally reject cinema in favour of thinking and concepts. They believe that cinematic images can distract attention from the full intellectual and logical universe; cinematic images belong to entertainment or to the art world; they may objectify some philosophical concepts at best.

The second problem I would like to put forward is the opposition between art and the mass appeals of cinema. Assessing this paradox Badiou calls cinema a "Mass Art." What is mass art? Films are loved by millions of people all around the world at the moment they are made. At this point, I would like to draw attention to the key expression "at the moment". Of course millions of people can go to ancient historical places, but when films appeared at the time, many people go to movie theatres, or watch them at their homes. Charlie Chaplin's movies were watched by people all around the world at the time his films were made. Today Christopher Nolan's *Interstellar* can be watched all around the world, in every corner, even on cell phones by millions. In this movie we witness genetic elements, which are profound and essential for all human beings. All people actually depend on the fate of the world, our home. Our home, the world, is much more important than our daily issues or political, or economic clashes with each other. This film presents this fundamental element for us. The "mass" dimension of movies can reflect and construct a generic humanity.

Cinema is also an art. This double regime of cinema, meaning mass and art, conveys a paradoxical relationship. Mass is both an industrial and political category. The cultural industry produces products for making mon-

ey and distributes them to people living all around the world. But mass at the same time implies political activism. Today, people can get together both in physical and virtual spaces in order to resist political pressures. On the contrary, art basically belongs to aristocratic category. Why? Because art includes creating aesthetic and artful products that not everyone can tackle. Besides, understanding the meaning of art requires education to a certain extent. In brief, cinema belongs to the political and industrial category, on the one hand, and the aristocratic category, on the other. This is a paradoxical relationship.

What is the meaning of this paradoxical relationship? Paradoxical relationship refers to a philosophical situation. Philosophy focuses on paradoxes. Wherever philosophy finds a paradox, there emerges thinking. It means, now that there is a paradoxical relationship between cinema and philosophy, or mass and art; philosophy thinks about it. Plato dealt with images because in his view, images had no relations with Ideas. Wherever we find a "no-relationship" situation, we may encounter philosophical situation. We may ask why images and rational thinking, or cinema and philosophy, or mass and artistic concepts convey the philosophical situation. Philosophy considers relationships among things or situations that share no relationship with one another. Images and concepts are foreign to each other, mass and art are foreign to each other. Therefore, philosophy reflects on cinema. Between them, it has a distance, an interval.

This is one of the general views on the relationship between cinema and philosophy. You can put cinema on the one side, and place philosophy on the other side, divide them; claim that there is no relationship between them. But is this really so? I want to discuss this. In my paper I want to focus on the idea based on the features of media, but before I do, I want to clarify different approaches to the relationship between cinema and philosophy and why philosophers are interested in cinema.

A philosopher may be interested in cinema for a few reasons. The first one is for latter's entertainment aspect. As Béla Balázs claimed, cinema, first of all, has the fundamental capacity for entertaining people. It is a natural feeling for any person to want to be entertained. Even Wittgenstein spent time watching movies. Philosophers need to get rid of the pressures of rational thinking and logic.

The second reason why a philosopher might deal with cinema comes from cine-images. What is their ontological status? Are they psychological entities or beyond our subjective viewpoint? We know that Bergson and Deleuze discussed the concept of images. Some questions emerge here: What is movement? What is time? Are images real movement or artificial movements? Certain philosophers discuss these issues. In *The Republic*, Plato, with the famous cave allegory, took up the issue of images. **We may call this approach *the philosophy of film*.** An approach about the ontic status of cine-images.

A third reason why a philosopher might care about cinema is because she or he wonders about the film experience. Watching a movie is a different experience than reading a book or listening to a musical performance. With movies we live the experience both visually and aurally. We are inside the cine-images while watching. But reading a book requires us to imagine the written medium rather than living the experiences as they are. **We may call this approach *Philosophy and the Cinematic Experience*.**

Another reason for a philosopher to engage with cinema is the illustrative aspect of movies. What does it mean? In the philosopher's mind there are some concepts like ethics, freedom, being, life, death, happiness, existence, and so on, and films illustrate these kinds of concepts. Today philosophy teachers can benefit from movies or movie scenes in order to teach philosophical themes to students. A common example is the movie *The Matrix*. What is reality, what is appearance? Reality has attracted many philosophers in the history of philosophy. In *The Matrix*, humans of digital world live like the slaves of Plato's Cave, while machines set up the phenomenal world for humans. Machines live in the foundational or Ideas' World. **This approach can be called *film about philosophy*,** a term for movies that illustrate philosophical ideas.

In fact, some movies bring up serious philosophical issues to the central. If a director focuses on a philosopher's life or his basic concepts, a film can be about philosophy. Films about philosophers' lives or their views can attract many philosophers. These are philosophical movies, such as *The Matrix* trilogy by the Wachowski Brothers, *A Clockwork Orange* by Stanley Kubrick, and *Wittgenstein* by Derek Jarman.

Although there are some differences between these approaches, they share a similar idea. There is a reference point called philosophy.

This means that ratio, logic and concepts come first. And cinema is just an instrument for philosophy. Cinema is used to illustrate philosophical themes. Cinema, according to these views, is like a shadow and a phenomenal world of philosophy.

Now I would like to turn my attention to a different approach to cinema: *film as philosophy*, or *movie-made philosophy* or as I put it, *cinephilosophy*. What is it?

Films can do philosophy with their optic and sonic images, or *cine-images*, with their own style. What I mean is that the basic medium of film is not a written or verbal medium; it is a visual medium or cine-image. Films can do philosophy with cine-images rather than through a written or verbal medium. I call it *cinephilosophy*. Daniel Frampton defines this approach as *Filmosophy* and Thomas Wartenberg and Tal S. Shamir calls it *cinematic philosophy*. Whatever we name it the important thing is that films can do a different philosophy, this is another kind of philosophy, it is a kind of movie-made philosophy. This philosophy does not reject written and oral philosophy; it is just a different philosophy. Now, I would like to discuss its basic features.

In philosophical discussions many philosophers and social scientists generally neglect "the medium". A medium is a kind of a layer on which you can load and transfer your ideas. For example, in order to make my speech and convey my ideas, I use an oral medium and a digital medium. Before I made my speech, my ideas were on a paper. The written medium in this example is another medium. Cinema is a different medium, a cinematic medium or layer done with images. We should delineate the details of the features of mediums and the relationship between medium and philosophy.

Philosophy began with Socratic dialogues in the Ancient Agora in Ancient Greece. These dialogues were made verbally and Socrates particularly was against the written medium. He believed the written word could not answer all questions. It is a rigid form of media. For him the written text freezes the poetic and dialogical speech. The written medium, Socrates argued, repeats itself when it is read. It is impossible to change the written text. Besides, the text cannot defend itself. Socrates comes to the conclusion that writing has a lower status than dialogue. Dialogue is the best medium for achieving truth.

During the Socratic Era philosophy was done by oral dialogues and no one claimed whether or not it was a philosophical discussion. As you see during the Socratic Era, the new medium, the written word, was an invention that was used to do philosophy. It was new, and Ancient philosophers had been living under an oral tradition. They organically connected philosophy with oral speech, not the written word. Over time, when they internalized the written medium, forms of doing philosophy changed. The practice of writing and reading came first.

Socrates had been wrong by not perceiving the potential of the new technology, meaning writing, during his time. Today, in our contemporary world, I think some philosophers are making the same kind of mistake by not seeing the new medium, cine-images. Cine-images have the potential of the cinematic medium to engage with philosophy.

What I want to clarify is that there is no pure medium for creating philosophy. Philosophy was not born with writing. It means philosophy is not objectively and purely connected to writing. Doing philosophy with cine-images is a new possibility for engaging with philosophical thinking. There can be different ways of doing philosophy: through an oral medium, written medium, and with cine-images. There is no hierarchy among them. We can just say that every medium has its own style, and is different from the other.

If so, I would like to move to another issue, the relationship between film and philosophy. In this paper, I mentioned the paradoxical relationship between philosophy and cinema. And also, I emphasized that it is wrong to make a distinction between philosophy and cinema. I want to express that cinema is just another way of doing philosophy. Medium is a key term to understand this point.

In fact, the new paradox emerges from my discussion about the medium. Accepting that cinema is another way of doing philosophy, does it mean that using the conjunction "and" between "philosophy" and "cinema" is a mistake? If we use the expression "cinema and philosophy", it means that there is a gap, a distance between cinema and philosophy. In fact, according to my argument, there are different ways of doing philosophy, and cinema can not be separated from philosophy. At this point the use of "and" in "film and philosophy", or "cinema and philosophy" is unnecessary.

Consciously or unconsciously, we suppose that cinema is not a natural medium for doing philosophy. Many philosophers think that directors produce movies and philosophers reflect on films. Philosophers believe that films just illustrate written philosophical ideas.

But if we adopt the *cinephilosophy* approach, we should understand that it is a mistake to make a separation between cinema and philosophy. We can use *cinephilosophy* rather than using the film and philosophy dichotomy. After that we can divide philosophy into three categories: oral philosophy, written philosophy and cinephilosophy.

If we make a comparison with Spinoza's thinking, we can reach a better understanding of my argument. Spinoza made a distinction between "substance" and "attributes". There is one substance and attributes are just manifestations of the substance. Attributes are expressions of the substance. In my discussion, the substance is philosophy, and attributes are different media like oral, written and cine-image. Different mediums are extensions of the substance, meaning philosophy. Each medium provides a different and authentic access to philosophy. Doing philosophy with the written word, meaning written philosophy, is not superior to philosophy done with cine-images, meaning cinephilosophy. If we accept this idea, naturally there could be room for the possibility that films can create a philosophy by themselves.

Interestingly, many philosophers think films just illustrate philosophical ideas and do not want to discuss the relationship between oral philosophy and written philosophy. In Ancient Greece, Socrates was doing oral philosophy, and Plato wrote these dialogues after Socrates. No philosopher has claimed this argument up to this time: "written philosophy is an illustration of oral philosophy. The main philosophy is oral philosophy done by Socrates, and Plato just illustrated Socrates's ideas. Plato is a typewriter, representing Socrates's dialogues via the written text." It is a ridiculous idea to claim that Plato was a typewriter for Socrates's arguments. Every philosopher accepts that Plato stands on his own as a philosophical creator.

The relationship between philosophy and cinema can be raised on these basis. It has a variety of mediums, each of them offers different perspectives, and philosophy and cinema are connected with each other. One medium like cinema cannot replace another medium like writing. Each me-

dium has a crucial linkage with one another. Rather than talking about film and philosophy, I believe, we can suggest cinephilosophy, written philosophy and oral philosophy. Film and philosophy are not separate fields. We can do written philosophy via written medium, we can do oral philosophy via oral speech or we can do cinephilosophy via cine-images.

Each medium has limitations and possibilities. Each medium has the potential for engaging with philosophy. Each medium leads to the creation of different types of philosophical works. It is a contribution to philosophy, different types of medium presents a variety of possibilities. For example, we can create a rational discussion and use concepts with a written philosophy more easily than cinephilosophy. Why? Because cine-images are basically affective, they touch our bodies, we can be affected emotionally and sensually. Emotion and affection are not totally outside the rational dimension. David Hume, Spinoza, Nietzsche, Deleuze, and many current neuroscientists emphasize this point. Cine-operations like shots, frames, camera angles, camera movement, montage and lighting reach the audience through heart and the senses, rather than through the rational mind. Film, through its moving images, makes us see the world and experience it as it is. Philosopher directors as Orson Welles, Ingmar Bergman, Akira Kurosawa, Andrey Tarkovsky, Stanley Kubrick, Alfred Hitchcock, Joseph Losey, Robert Bresson, Jean Luc Godard, and Luis Buñuel know how to create an idea as an experience. In the written text ideas are abstractions of the mind but in cine-images ideas are sensations as perceptions of the body. It means cinema can merge an idea with a sensual experience.

If we put together our brain and physical body via different types of philosophical platforms, I believe, philosophy can come down from the ivory tower to the Bazaar, to the Agora. I call cinema as the Philosophy of the Bazaar, as well as Art of the Bazaar. Everyone who has the ability to see and hear can reach the philosophy of movies. Therefore, cinema is a democratic medium for doing philosophy.

One of the biggest differences between written philosophy and cinephilosophy is based upon the separation between reflection or imagination and experience. To put it simply, written philosophy reflects or imagines the problems or paradoxes whereas cinephilosophy makes us live the experience as it is. A film has the potential to make us see or experience the thinking in

action. But the written text requires us to imagine or reflect upon the ideas. A film creates this experience with its instruments like camera movement, camera angles, montage. However, the written text is static and stands on the paper by itself. By reading, we imagine the meaning rather than experiencing it. Films show the idea as an event in motion and text makes us imagine the idea.

Experience is a key term here. As Kracauer claimed, in modern life things are lost; they become invisible. Our pragmatic view, ideological apparatus, science and technology frames the reality. Heidegger made a distinction between calculative thinking and meditative thinking. Calculative thinking is in connection with the dominance of science and technology in our life. How can human faces, animals, plants and inorganic world be visible? As Béla Balázs stated, films let people see human faces which had been lost since the invention of printing press. With letters, we just read about the human faces in the books and imagined them. We could not experience the intensity of faces with all the lines on them. But films made human face visible again. Kracauer argued films not only showed human faces but also other things including inorganic life. Today streets, faces, homes, railway stations lie before eyes but in fact they are invisible to us. Our pragmatic life, customs, habits, scientific and technological gaze make them invisible. So films revealed the abstract life surrounding us. Written philosophy generally works with abstractions and generalizations. This abstract thinking is outside of the Agora, where philosophy was born. Films can concretize abstract thinking. Whitehead said: "When you understand all about the sun and all about the atmosphere and all about the rotation of the earth, you may still miss the radiance of the sunset." How can we experience the sunset as it is without abstraction? Whitehead claimed art and aesthetic education can give this experience. Kracauer argues cinema can help us "touch the reality, not only fingerprints, but to seize it and shake hands with it." For the first time cine-images made us possible to experience the material life from bottom to top. Other arts and written philosophy proceed from top to bottom. But cinema starts with raw material and helps us to appreciate our given material environment. As Kracauer said films "virtually make the world our home." To make the world our home, to experience our home as it is. This is one of the basic characteristics of cinephilosophy.

To end my paper, I would like to sum up my arguments. The first argument posed that philosophy started mainly as an oral tradition in the Greek Marketplace, the Agora. Then, with the written word, philosophy abandoned its origins and transferred itself to the academic ivory tower. Philosophy became synonymous with writing and later printing and then they influenced philosophy. Philosophical written and printed texts were thought to be philosophy. What is the price of this? We have paid a very heavy price, meaning that philosophy was alienated from common language, common people, everyday life. In the beginning philosophy was with young people, everyday people at the Bazaar. But now, philosophy is alienated from its origins. It became aristocratic thinking. I believe cinephilosophy is a great opportunity to make philosophy accessible once again. Cinephilosophy can make a great contribution to creating new concepts and thoughts in philosophical thinking. Cinephilosophy is a new way of doing philosophy.

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