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# Educational Perspectives

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Journal of the College of Education/University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

## C O N T E N T S

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*Students working on the set of "Li Hing Mui, Lilikoi, and Lychee", a film directed by University of Hawai'i student Lauren Cheape. "Li Hing Mui, Lilikoi, and Lychee" is the project of Assistant Professor Anne Misawa's Fall 2008 ACM 410 Advanced Cinematic Production class and a co-production between film students from Shanghai University and the University of Hawai'i's Academy for Creative Media as part of the SMART (Student Media Art) Exchange program.*

## Contributors

**Wimal Dissanayake** is a professor in the Academy for Creative Media at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa and the director of the International Cultural Studies Program at the East-West Center. He is the author and editor of a large number of books on cinema and the founding editor of the *East-West Film Journal*.

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**Graham Parkes** is professor of philosophy at University College Cork in the Republic of Ireland. He taught comparative philosophy for many years at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. He is the author and translator of books on Heidegger and Nietzsche. In recent years, he has been presenting some of the results of his research in the medium of digital video.

**Michael J. Shapiro** is a professor of political science at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Among his publications are *Deforming American Political Thought: Ethnicity, Facticity and Genre* (University Press of Kentucky, 2006), and *Cinematic Geopolitics* (Routledge, 2008). He is currently at work on a manuscript tentatively entitled *The Time of the City: Politics, Philosophy, and Genre*.

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# Cinema, New Media, and Higher Education

Konrad Ng and Hunter McEwan

In the late 1990s, the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa began an ambitious project to install and upgrade the media equipment in over one hundred campus classrooms. Over the following decade, computers, VHS VCRs, DVD players, data projectors, screens, televisions, TV tuners, and internet access became standard tools in University of Hawai‘i classrooms. This expansion of instructional resources for higher education reflects how forms of media like cinema have made new approaches to teaching possible. Indeed, the creative and critical use of film in the classroom demonstrates that the medium can play an important role in university education and is not simply a form of mass entertainment at odds with the pursuit of knowledge. The theme of this issue of *Educational Perspectives* is that film and other forms of media, particularly those made possible by digital technology, open up important areas of pedagogic potential that supplement the traditional lecture format and seminar discussion.

The use of film and new media in the classroom invites students to explore questions, illustrate ideas, and examine events that are not immediately represented in textbooks or through lectures. For example, film enables the teacher to introduce novel, timely, and critical perspectives on topics that challenge students to take a fresh look at familiar things—to question their biases and to re-examine entrenched beliefs. However, using cinema as a critical tool of instruction is not simply a matter of showing films in classrooms. It requires their judicious use by teachers who wish to avail themselves of the potential of these media to open up new ways of thinking and perceiving. Michael Shapiro explains how film provides “a critical perspective on the world that exceeds what mere perception can achieve.” Other authors in this collection of articles describe a similar alteration of perspective—in how, for example, film can be used to teach students about other societies, represent minority perspectives that counter popular misconceptions of indigenous cultures, and expand a student’s response by helping him/her to see how cinematic effects are achieved.

With a majority of university classrooms now equipped for film screenings, it is instructive to explore how film and other visual media are being used in the university curriculum. In this issue of *Educational Perspectives* we have invited a number of faculty from different disciplines to write about how they are using new media technologies in their classrooms. The resulting discussions offer some very imaginative uses of film and computer technology and demonstrate how their use can enrich instruction and lead students to a more profound understanding of representation, education, culture, and difference.

In “Film Form and Pedagogy: Beyond Perception,” Michael Shapiro, in the Department of Political Science, explores the pedagogical value of cinema’s capacity to offer a ‘decentered’ mode of perspective for the audience. Shapiro illustrates a film’s ability to present a different perspective with reference to Sean Penn’s *The Pledge* (2001) and Ivan Sen’s *Beneath Clouds* (2002), which show how cinema allows viewers to recognize the implications of actions and states of affairs that are not captured by our subject-centered perceptions.

In “Asian Cinema and the Social Imaginary,” Wimal Dissanayake, in the Academy for Creative Media, explores how cinema can be a window into the dynamics of contemporary Asian societies and cultures. Through “aesthetic style...concomitant representational strategies, and preferred visual registers,” Dissanayake suggests that films reveal the emotional relationships and political understandings of its characters and how they are affected by the “imperatives of historical events,...[offering] useful point[s] of departure for classroom discussions.”

Glenn Man, of the English department, describes how he instructs students in his introductory film course to show how one can reveal film’s ideological dimensions in teaching. In his article, “Apparatus, Genre, and Spectatorship in the Classroom,” Man traces the progress of his student’s arc of learning, from their relative lack of awareness of film’s influence on the construction of identity to a more sophisticated recognition of film’s ‘cumulative effect’—that

is, how film aesthetics, narrative, and genre essentially constructs a “point of view” and thus, presents a specific way of thinking about what is represented. Man concludes with a valuable list of further readings on film, genre, and classical Hollywood cinema.

In “Made in Hawai‘i: Critical Studies and the Academy for Creative Media,” Konrad Ng, an assistant professor in the Academy for Creative Media (ACM), offers a brief history of the ACM—the University of Hawai‘i’s primary academic program for the production and study of film, animation, and computer game design—and its mission to fulfill the Hawai‘i state government’s agenda to diversify the economy with creative media and high technology. In contrast to this mission, Ng highlights the importance of cultivating a curriculum that encourages critical thinking and the creation of ethical representations rather than sustaining the current imagery of Hawai‘i as tropical paradise and site of historic and national importance.

Cynthia Ning’s “Engaging a ‘Truly Foreign’ Language and Culture: China Through Chinese Film,” shares how she uses Chinese film in her Chinese language and culture classes. Ning, the Associate Director for the Center for Chinese Studies, demonstrates how Chinese films can help students “navigate the uncharted universe of Chinese culture” with reference to several contemporary Chinese films. Ning describes how intensive viewing of films can develop a deeper and more nuanced understanding of what she refers to as small “c” culture—how people express affection, for example, or show displeasure. She recommends some useful assignments and films that students can use in order to become more familiar with Chinese culture, practices, and beliefs.

Graham Parkes, professor of philosophy at University College Cork in Ireland, argues, in “Thinking Images: Doing Philosophy in Film and Video,” that film and video can be used to philosophize as well as to teach philosophy. Parkes’ own creative compositions, or video essays, a number of which are excerpted on the *Educational*

*Perspectives* website (see his article for URLs), exemplify his approach and outline a variety of techniques that he employs in his work. Parkes shows how the creative use of media can be not only a means to enhance instruction, but an extension of traditional literary methods of philosophical composition.

In “Coffy, YouTube, and Uncle Ben: The Use of Film and New Media in the Teaching of African American Studies at the University of Hawai‘i,” Elisa Joy White, a professor in the Department of Ethnic Studies, discusses how she uses film and new media to “teach students to comprehend the complex historical, social, political, and cultural dimensions of the African American experience.” White uses D.W. Griffith’s 1915 *Birth of a Nation*, a number of “Blaxploitation” films, YouTube videos, and cultural tropes common to African America and Hawai‘i—such as plantations and rice—to direct her students’ attention to the African American experience.

James Skouge, of the Department of Special Education, and two of his colleagues, Kavita Rao and Brian Kajiyama, explore the potential of what they call “digital stories” in their work with students with disabilities. In “Finding a Voice,” Skouge and Kajiyama relate a story about the transformative power of technologies for voice. They relate Brian Kajiyama’s personal odyssey—what might be described as a journey from unvoiced to vocal—in learning to use a DynaWrite, a type-and-talk device that Brian uses as a communication tool. In “Digital Storytelling in Teacher Education,” Skouge and Rao provide an account of their work with students across the Pacific region with the various forms of digital storytelling and explain how, in several cases, they have put their ideas into practice. They demonstrate how the composition of digital stories can become an empowering experience for disabled students as well as a valuable learning tool for special education students. In addition, they explain how the digital stories can be used to provide authentic accounts of life in a variety of communities across the Pacific.

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# Film Form and Pedagogy: Beyond Perception<sup>1</sup>

Michael J. Shapiro

Department of Political Science, University of Hawai'i

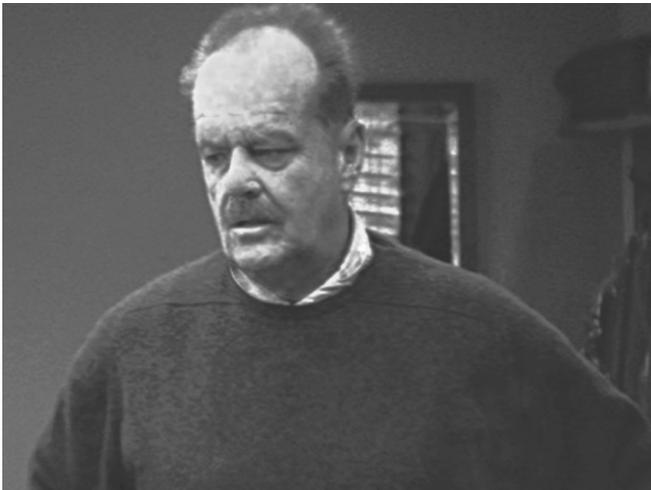
In a gloss on the film-philosophy writings of Gilles Deleuze, one commentator has noted that cinema achieves what vision obscures by undoing the “ordinary work of the human brain.” It “puts perception back in things because its operation is one of restitution” of the reality that the brain has “confiscated,” in part because it disrupts the human tendency to place oneself at “the center of the universe of images.”<sup>2</sup> Deleuze’s approach to cinema has important pedagogical implications because of how it treats cinema’s critical capacity. Among other things, Deleuze focuses on the positioning of the viewing subject. His analysis challenges the assumption that there is a single center of perception from which one can infer the meaning of a filmic text. In more complex terms, Deleuze shows the way cinema deprivileges the directionality of centered commanding perception and thus allows the disorganized multiplicity that is the world to emerge. In his terms, “instead of going from the acentered state of things to centered perception, [we] could go back up towards the acentered state of things and get closer to it.”<sup>3</sup> To pursue the pedagogical significance of recovering the “acentered state of things,” I want to elaborate on Deleuze’s remark by turning to Thomas Mann, who provides a similar insight in his epic tetralogy, *Joseph and His Brothers*, a set of novels whose style is strikingly cinematic. The third book, *Joseph in Egypt*, begins with Joseph’s remark, “Where are you taking me,” to a group of nomadic Ma’onites who have pulled him from the pit where his brothers had left him to die. After deflecting this and subsequent queries with which Joseph expresses the presumption that the Ma’onites are part *his* story, Kedema, whose father is the group’s patriarch, says, “You have a way of putting yourself in the middle of things,” and goes on to disabuse him of his privileged location: “Do you suppose...that we are a journeying simply so that you may arrive somewhere your god wants you to be?”<sup>4</sup> Like Kedema, who contests Joseph’s centered perspective on his spatio-temporal location, cinema is a decentering mode of creation and reception.

Those who have recognized cinema’s decentering effects are in debt to Henri Bergson’s philosophy of embodiment. Bergson saw the body as a center of perception, but crucially, the Bergsonian centered body is a center of indetermination in that its perceptions are always partial. To perceive is to subtract in order to come up with a sense of the world, selected from all possible senses.<sup>5</sup> Inasmuch as each body, as a center of indetermination, selects an aggregate of images from the totality of the world’s images, the question for Bergson becomes,

how is it that the same images can belong at the same time to two different systems [for example Joseph’s and Kedema’s]: one in which each image varies for itself and in a well defined measure that it is patient of the real action of surrounding images; and another in which all images change for a single image [for Bergson each body is a single image] and in varying measure that they reflect the eventual action of this privileged image?<sup>6</sup>

As is well know, Bergson’s answer is that each single image or body subtracts in its own interest-based way, its way of isolating some aspects of the aggregate of images rather than others. Hence the Joseph-Kedema interchange is quintessentially Bergsonian.

The brain, for Bergson, is thus a particularizing and evacuating mechanism. Edified by Bergson’s insights on perception, Deleuze offers a *cinematic* body as a center of indetermination by noting how a film’s cuts and juxtapositions generate perspectives that depart from the control exercised by individual embodiment. Subjective perception is not cinema’s primary model for Deleuze, who insists that “cinema does *not* have natural subjective perception as its model...because the mobility of its centers and the variability of its framings always lead it to restore vast acentered and deframed zones.”<sup>7</sup> For Deleuze, as for Bergson, perception is a moment of arrest; it is an interval that sits suspended between a sensation and an action. That the interval is a matter of “indetermination” reflects the



multiple possibilities for response as the subject oscillates, “going backwards between the plane of action and that of pure memory.”<sup>8</sup> And cinema, inasmuch as it lacks a stable center (contrary to mind-based models of meaning production such as phenomenology, which privileges “natural perception”) has an “advantage” according to Deleuze; “just because it lacks a center of anchorage and of horizon, the sections which it makes would not prevent it from going back up the path that natural perception comes down.”<sup>9</sup> It is a superior screen to the brain-as-screen because it allows for a recovery of what perception evacuates. In the rest of the piece I use examples from two feature films to explicate the implications for pedagogy of the preceding discussion of cinema’s superiority to perception.

In order to appreciate the way cinema provides a critical perspective on the world that exceeds what mere perception can achieve, it’s necessary to see a film’s characters as aesthetic rather than merely psychological subjects. What is an aesthetic as opposed to a psychological subject? To approach this question one has to appreciate that subjects are best understood not as static entities—as for example tinkers, tailors, soldiers, and spies (to borrow from a Le Carré title)—but as beings with multiple possibilities for becoming. Such an assumption deflects attention from the motivational forces of individuals—away from “psychic subject-hood”—and toward the “aesthetic” subject.<sup>10</sup> For example, in Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit’s treatment of Jean Luc Godard’s *Contempt* (1963), a film in which a couple becomes estranged when the wife, Camille (Bridget Bardot), has her feelings for her husband, Paul (Michel Piccoli), turn

from love to contempt, they note that Godard’s focus is not on “the psychic origins of contempt” but on “its effects on the world,” which in the context of cinema is conveyed by “what contempt does to cinematic space...how it affect[s] the visual field within which Godard works and especially the range and kinds of movement allowed for in that space.”<sup>11</sup> As Bergson insisted, the interval, constituted as perception, brings into proximity multiple points in space that connect with the subjects’ motor responses. Accordingly, in Godard’s *Contempt*, the dynamics of changing interpersonal perception are reflected in the ways that the spatial trajectories are constructed through linked cinematic frames, which, as a whole, convey implications beyond those that the estranged couple explicitly perceive and acknowledge.

Another telling illustration of the epistemic and political value of the aesthetic as opposed to psychological subject is apparent in Sean Penn’s *The Pledge* (2001). Much of the film involves close-up shots of the face of Jerry Black (Jack Nicholson), a retired police detective who becomes obsessed with solving a series of murders (all of young school girls) in the Reno-Lake Tahoe vicinity. While many of the film’s shots, especially close-ups of faces, convey the film’s psychological drama (it is never clear whether the evidence of a serial killer reflects actual occurrences or is a result of Jerry’s obsessions and struggle to manage a post-retirement malaise), there are also depth of focus, and wide angle and framing shots throughout, which supplement the personal drama with imagery that conveys both the timeless aspects of the landscape and aspects of its regional past. Ultimately, the film’s *mise-en-scène* is more telling than its storyline.



The landscape shots usher in historical time as they locate the viewers in “spatial and temporal positions” that are “distinct from those of the characters.”<sup>12</sup> As a result, to follow Jerry’s investigation—his encounters and movement through space—is to map an area that was once inhabited by Native American peoples.

Thus although much of the film focuses on the character, Jerry Black, who is situated in time, first as an aging retiree, then as one partially stymied by the temporal rhythms of police investigations (once a suspect is selected, there is enormous pressure to close the case), and finally as one whose investigative opportunities are affected by seasonal changes (there are several seasonal tableaux that are interspersed in the imagistic mechanisms of the storyline), Jerry can also be viewed aesthetically rather than psychologically, because his movements in the institutionalized spaces of Reno-Tahoe reveal the existence of different dimensions of ethnic and geopolitical time. The area of the drama, now a white-dominated region of the West, is shown to be firmly linked to the U.S. nation in, for example, an Independence Day parade scene. However, there are also signs of the region’s ethnohistorical past.

Signs of the process of whitening are shown continually—in scenes that include Native Americans, in some of the landscape scenes (which include both panoramas and depth-of-focus shots), and in scenes that focus on a white icon. A plump pink and white adolescent appears at key moments, once as a witness of a Native American running through a snow field toward his truck, and once at the Independence Day parade. While all these scenes implicate

Jerry Black’s personal drama, they also function outside of the psychological story. Jerry’s perceptual responses to images are dictated by his deeply motivated interest in finding clues to a series of crimes. As a result, he does not isolate the historical dimensions of the landscape within which he is acting.

But the film reveals that to which Jerry is inattentive. When the land- and ethnoscape shots are shown, often in contrast to Jerry’s perceptions, Jerry becomes effectively a transparent figure whose movements point to a historical, politically fraught trajectory. As I have put it elsewhere,

Ultimately, despite the intensity of its foregrounded, psychological drama and the suspense it generates around its crime story, the haunted land- and ethnoscape that *The Pledge* presents, primarily with images that are often disjunctive with the psychological and crime narratives, reflects a historical crime, the violence attending the Euro American continental ethnogenesis.<sup>13</sup>

A focus on the aesthetic rather than the psychological subject, places an emphasis on images rather than the film narrative, and turns the analysis of a film away from personal drama and toward the changing historico-political frame within which the drama takes place. Cinema is an exemplary aesthetic whose implications derive from the way it produces and mobilizes images. In Jacques Ranciere’s terms, its effect is to “wrench the psychic and social powers of mimesis from the grip of the mimetic regime of art,” the regime within which the narrative flow was organized to provoke “the audience’s identification with the characters.”<sup>14</sup> The post



mimetic aesthetic that cinema animates inter-articulates and mobilizes images to provoke thinking outside of any narrative determination, i.e., outside of the dramatic plot. In a gloss on Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'Avventura*, the film director, Martin Scorsese expresses well how a critical film articulates a world rather than merely a specific drama within it:

The more I saw *L'Avventura*—and I went back many times—the more I realized that Antonioni's visual language was keeping us focused on the rhythm of the world: the visual rhythms of light and dark, of architectural forms, of people positioned as figures in a landscape that always seemed terrifying and vast...<sup>15</sup>

Scorsese's observations call to mind the enactment of a more recent cinematic visual language, constituted as the *mise-en-scène* in writer/director Ivan Sen's dramatic rendering of ethnic alienation in his *Beneath Clouds* (2002). The plot is easily summarized:

*Beneath Clouds* is the story of Lena, the light-skinned daughter of an Aboriginal mother and Irish father and Vaughn, a Murri boy doing time in a minimum security prison in North West NSW. Dramatic events throw them together on a journey with no money and no transport. To Lena, Vaughn represents the life she is running away from. To Vaughn, Lena embodies the society that has rejected him. And for a very short amount of time, they experience a rare true happiness together.<sup>16</sup>

However, Sen's dynamic imagery transcends the plot. His camera delivers up the emotionally charged and complex ethnic mix of Australia by focusing alternatively

on eyes and landscape. Close-ups of eyes, some blue (e.g. belonging to a mixed, Irish-Aboriginal teenage girl) and some dark brown (e.g. belonging to a Murri teenage boy), serve to map the complexity of Australia's ethnoscape. Cuts from eyes to landscape shots, some of which show vast expanses devoid of enterprises, some of which show industrial interventions into the landscape, and one of which shows a looming mountain, filtered in a way that spiritualizes it, demonstrate the multiplicity of ways in which the land is occupied and symbolically experienced. And shots taken from the viewpoints of the different characters, mixed, by dint of cuts and juxtapositions, with images that often contradict the expressed viewpoints, show that subjective perception is not what commands meaning. While delivering up the multiplicity that is Australia, Sen's film is at the same time realistic in a way that enables the kind of rendering of film-space relationships that are at the center of my investigations. With his depth of focus shots of the landscape and his panning shots that locate his characters and interactions in spatial contexts, Sen lends "spatial expression" to his drama to develop political implications that exceed the particular moments experienced by the bodies moving across the landscapes.<sup>17</sup>

From the outset, Sen's film, "establishes a geography."<sup>18</sup> And throughout, by cutting away from the drama of the two young people on the road, Sen makes it evident that the landscape is not merely a domain of sensations to which the characters are meant to react. The landscape scenes reflect, in Deleuze's terms, "environments with which there are now only chance relations" and "the viewer's problem becomes

‘What is there to see in the image?’ and not now ‘What are we going to see in the next image?’<sup>19</sup> Although there is a drama involving motion and choices, Sen’s *Beneath Clouds* is best thought of as a cinema of seeing rather than of action, for, in Deleuze’s terms, “The seer [*voyant*] has replaced the agent [*actant*].”<sup>20</sup> The difference is articulated in a critical experience for the viewers. Unlike films that trade in what Siegfried Kracauer famously calls “corroborative images,” “intended to make you believe, not see,” Sen’s film offers visuals in a way that reveals the contemporary “flow of material life” among other things.<sup>21</sup> In short cinema provides edifying glimpses of the world by organizing a world that exceeds the perspectives of its characters and uses its characters “aesthetically,” i.e., showing how their movement discloses what can be seen when commanding centers of perception lose their privilege.

#### ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> This discussion is drawn, with some modifications, from the Introduction to my forthcoming book, *Cinematic Geopolitics* (Routledge, 2008), forthcoming.
- <sup>2</sup> See Jacques Ranciere, *Film Fables* trans. Emiliano Battista (New York: Berg, 2006), p 111.
- <sup>3</sup> See Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), pp 58 and 86).
- <sup>4</sup> Thomas Mann, *Joseph and his Brothers* trans. John E. Woods (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), p. 541.
- <sup>5</sup> See Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution* trans. Keith Ansell Pearson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).
- <sup>6</sup> Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* trans. N.M. Paul and W. S. Palmer (New York: Zone Books, 1988), p. 25
- <sup>7</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, p 64.
- <sup>8</sup> Bergson, *Matter and Memory* p. 161
- <sup>9</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, p. 58.
- <sup>10</sup> The quotations are from L. Bersani and U. Dutoit’s introduction to their *Forms of Being: Cinema, Aesthetics, Subjectivity*, London: BFI, 2004, p. 6.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.
- <sup>12</sup> The quotations are from D. Pye’s reading of the film, *Lusty Men* (1952) in ‘Movies and Point of View,’ *Movie 36*, 2000, p. 27.
- <sup>13</sup> See M. J. Shapiro, *Deforming American Political Thought: Ethnicity, Facticity, and Genre*, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006, pp. 74-75.
- <sup>14</sup> Ranciere, *Film Fables*, p. 24.
- <sup>15</sup> M. Scorsese, ‘The Man Who Set Film Free,’ The New York Times on the web at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/12/movies/12scor.html> obtained 1/13/07.
- <sup>16</sup> The plot summary is on the web at: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0295876/plotsummary> obtained 11/30/06.
- <sup>17</sup> I have “spatial expression” in quotes because I have been edified by its use in Daniel Morgan’s interpretation of Andre Bazin on Jean Renoir’s film *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange* (1936): D. Morgan, ‘Rethinking Bazin: Ontology and Realist Aesthetic,’ *Critical Inquiry* 32, 2006, p. 460.
- <sup>18</sup> The quotation is from T. Conley’s *Cartographic Cinema*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007, p. 2. In Conley’s approach to film, the emphasis is on the ways in which the geography of a film confronts the viewer’s own articulations of space.
- <sup>19</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 272.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>21</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960), p. 306.

# Asian Cinema and the Social Imaginary

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There is growing interest by schools and universities in understanding Asian societies and cultures. One way of deepening this interest productively is through the imaginative use of cinema. Films can open a wonderful window onto Asian societies and cultures on the move. In this short essay, I wish to focus on one area that merits close consideration, namely, the relationship between Asian cinema and the social imaginary. The term “social imaginary” has been put into wide circulation in recent times by the eminent social philosopher Charles Taylor (2004). It is a concept that can be invoked profitably in studying cinema. However, to the best of my knowledge, so far, this concept has not been usefully pressed into service by scholars and educators of cinema.

As Taylor has remarked, the concept of the social imaginary encompasses something much wider and deeper than analytical schemes and intellectual categories that scholars make use of in discussing and dissecting social reality. He calls attention to the “ways in which they (people) imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations which are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images which underlie these expectations” (p. 23). Here Taylor is focusing very insistently on the existential and experiential dimensions of social living.

What is interesting to observe is that Taylor is not talking about social theory. This is because he is keen to direct attention to the complex ways in which ordinary people in society imagine the social context they inhabit. This is not articulated in terms of concepts and theories, it is expressed through narratives, images, myths and legends, and so on. Moreover, as Taylor reminds us, “theory is often the possession of a small minority whereas what is interesting in the social imaginary is that it is shared by large groups of people, if not the whole society” (p. 23). On the basis of these expectations, it is possible to describe the social imaginary as that mutual understanding that makes

possible common practices, and the sense of legitimacy that is broadly endorsed by the community.

As Taylor observes, “[o]ur social imaginary at any given time is complex. It incorporates a sense of normal expectations that we have of each other; the kind of common understanding that enables us to carry out collective practices which make up our social life. This incorporates some sense of how we fit together in carrying out the common practice” (p. 24). There is both a factual and a normative dimension associated with this understanding. Our sense of how things commonly function is connected with our notions of how they ought to function. Hence, notions of collective living, group identity, normative prescriptions for the good life—all shared social narratives—are vitally interconnected within the ambit of the social imaginary. In other words, the social imaginary focuses on the public imagination associated with a culture.

The concept of the social imaginary intersects in interesting and complex ways with ideas of modernity and nationhood. Similarly, Asian cinemas are shaped in terms of nationhood, and they continue to be understood in terms of nationhood. The idea of national cinema is at the heart of numerous discussions of Asian popular culture. The concept seeks to privilege and valorize notions of unity, stability, coherence, and continuity over time. It is connected with national myth-making and ideological production and the suppression and marginalization of alternative narratives of the nation. Therefore, a critical understanding of the concept of nationhood as it finds articulation in cinema can prove to be a fruitful way of understanding Asian societies. A deep engagement with the social imaginary referred to earlier can help us in this task.

If we follow this line of inquiry further, we shall see that a different and more informative approach to learning about or teaching Asian cinema and identity is to highlight the social imaginary rather than viewing films as examples of national cinemas. The category of national cinemas overlooks important political, cultural, and historical

complexities. Therefore, by focusing on the idea of the social imaginary we can initiate more nuanced discussions of Asian cinema in the classroom.

Let us consider a few outstanding Asian films to pursue this line of inquiry further. Japan is normally regarded as a homogeneous society. This is, of course, not so. Oshima Nagisa is a filmmaker who has pointed this out very powerfully. His film, *Death by Hanging (Koshikei)* made in 1968 portrays the predicament of the Korean minority living in Japan. The film is constructed around a true story about a Korean student who had difficulty in securing a job because of widespread discrimination practiced against Koreans in Japan. While attending high school, the student killed two girls after raping them. He was caught and found guilty by a court of law. His appeals for clemency were rejected, and he was hanged four years after the terrible incident. Oshima was greatly interested in making the story into a film. He changed the plot with the aim of foregrounding some of the themes regarding minorities in Japan and the question of capital punishment that had preoccupied him for some time. Oshima began to speculate on the course of events that would have occurred had the young man not died by hanging.

*Death by Hanging*, in many ways, presents a mixture of realism and fantasy to focus on the predicament of Koreans in Japan. The Japanese flag is the pervasive motif, and the film deploys it to achieve satirical ends. R is the name of the Korean protagonist, and at one point, in response to the protestations of the protagonist, the prosecutor lets it be known that it is the nation of Japan that seeks to execute him. R violently repudiates the concept of nationhood. By introducing this scene to the story, Oshima directs attention to the plight of Koreans in Japan and barbarity of capital punishment. R's death by hanging, opens a discursive space that reconfigures the politics of erasure that operate in Japanese society to create a greater awareness of the complex strands of relationships that go to form the Japanese social imaginary. In other words, *Death by Hanging* has the effect of widening the social imaginary of the Japanese, as the wide-ranging discussions that followed the film show. Thus, Oshima's film can be used productively in class to stimulate discussion on the Japanese social imaginary.

Let us consider another film, this time from mainland China, *Sacrificed Youth (Qingchun Ji)*, made in 1985 by the Chinese film director Zhang Nuanxin. *Sacrificed Youth*

focuses on the question of ethnic minorities in an interesting way. The film tells the story of Li Chun, a young woman who grew up in the city, and during the Cultural Revolution, is dispatched to live in a rural area—the home area of the Dai ethnic minority. Like several of her friends, she was forced to go to the rural areas so that she could learn from the villagers. Initially Chun is shocked and repulsed by what she sees around her. Yet, gradually, she begins to develop a liking for the way of life of this minority group. As she comes to understand and appreciate the ways of the Dai, Chun begins to empathize with their zest for life and their love of nature. The Dai's emphasis on instinctual life is contrasted in her mind with the falsities and hypocrisies associated with city life.

Li Chun's experience of rural life opens new doors of perception, and she begins to acquire a deeper and more profound sense of her own personhood. Her pathway to self-discovery opens up against the backdrop of the Dai way of life and the values they place on community life. This film too, in its own way, succeeds in foregrounding the relationships among space, place, identity, and the problems of nationhood; the film reveals how China's vast geography and ethnic diversity challenges or complicates the nationalist narrative of a singular nation-state. In effect, *Sacrificed Youth* focuses on the hegemony of the Han majority in the construction of Chinese nationhood. As with Oshima Nagisa's *Death by Hanging*, Zhang Nuanxin's *Sacrificed Youth* serves to enlarge the respective social imaginaries of the two societies concerned.

The next film that I wish to consider is from India. India, unlike Japan, is clearly a multi-racial, multi-religious society. So, in spite of the hegemony exercised by the Hindu majority, the nationhood of India needs to be understood in relation to the dynamics existing between these diverse racial, religious, linguistic, and caste groups. Saeed Akhtar Mirza's *Don't Cry for Salim the Lame (Salim Langde Pe Mat Ro)* tells the story of a young Muslim, Salim, who is in search of his identity in a confused and confusing world. He lacks money and leads a life of crime. His heroes are the racketeers and smugglers who have succeeded in amassing great wealth. The world that he inhabits shows scant respect for moral values. It is a world marked by gangsterism, violence, and brutality.

Salim makes no effort to travel the path of moral rectitude, especially since the conditions surrounding his life

are hardly conducive to such a course of action. Mirza's film calls attention to the plight of the Muslim minority who live in urban areas in India. *Don't Cry for Salim the Lamé* places issues of belonging, cultural citizenship, and identity in modern India in relation to the overpowering hegemonic discourse of a monolithic India and point out how a privileged meta-narrative of nationhood overwrites local narratives thereby marginalizing the cultural life of its minority groups.

The notion of space is pivotal to the meaning of *Don't Cry for Salim the Lamé*. While the driving power of nationhood aims to construct a monolithic narrative of cultural space, the director of this film has tried to unsettle that activity by reconfiguring the manifold ways in which power relations are written on it. The way smugglers and racketeers relate to the generality of the public is interesting in this regard. Both 'inside' and 'outside' are the dominant tropes that organize the experience and fuel the argument of the film, and they have the effect of re-focusing attention on the interplay between identity and difference. Mirza has sought to demonstrate the fact that the tragedy of Salim is inseparable from his being a member of a religious minority. The film also serves to extend the range of the modern Indian social imaginary by highlighting the fissures and fault lines evident in a supposedly unified national narrative.

Ann Hui's *Song of the Exile* (1990) is a powerful film that broadens, in interesting ways, the outlook of the social imaginary typical of Hong Kong Chinese. This film tells the story of Hueyin, a twenty five year old filmmaker who comes to Hong Kong from England where she has been studying cinema. The immediate reason for her return to Hong Kong is to attend the wedding of her sister. While in Hong Kong, Hueyin and her mother, who is now widowed, decide to visit Japan. Hueyin's mother, Aiko, was born in Japan. The trip has the effect of deepening the relationship between Hueyin and her mother, who, up until the trip, were estranged. As the film ends, Hueyin decides to stay in Hong Kong and work at a television station. She pays a visit to mainland China in order to see her grandparents who are now quite old. The narrative consists of a series of carefully structured flashbacks and voice-overs.

A number of themes are intertwined in the narrative and aesthetic structure of the film and one deals with the idea of Hong Kong's perception of nationhood. We see the way that the film's representation of Hong Kong is reconfigured in relation to other spaces such as China, Macau, Japan,

England, and Manchuria. What the film stresses, then, is that the social imaginary of Hong Kong can only properly be understood in terms of the diverse changing relationships with these other cultural spaces. The entire film text of *Song of Exile* consists of a number of different languages such as Cantonese, Mandarin, Japanese, and English, investing it with a polyglot complexity that is closely connected to the theme of the film. Once again, the social imaginary, in this case of modern Hong Kong, is enlarged through cinematic representation.

The next film that I wish briefly to consider is the Taiwanese film, *A City of Sadness*, by Hou Hsiao-hsien (1989). The film won the prestigious Golden Lion Award for the best film at the Venice Film Festival. It proved to be a domestic box-office success as well. It can best be described as an expansive panorama of a Taiwan family during the turbulent years, from 1945 to 1949, in Taiwan's history. These are years that are vital to understanding of the emergence of the nation-state of Taiwan. Hou seeks to explore these turbulent times through the fortunes of one family consisting of an elderly widower, Ah-lun, and his four sons.

Lin Wen-heung, the eldest son, is a nightclub owner who engages in illegal trading and who dies a violent death. He is, in many ways, the one who is most in touch with the social realities of the emerging nation-state of Taiwan. Lin Wen-ching, the youngest son, is deaf and mute and remains detached from the crisis that has engulfed the family. Lin Wen-sun, the second son, is serving in the Japanese army in the Philippines and has not returned. Lin Wen-leng, the third son, was also recruited by the Japanese army as a translator, but the experience has left him mentally deranged. The interactions among these four characters serve to focus on an episode in Japanese history that official historians normally tend to ignore: the February 28, 1947 massacre of supporters of the Taiwan independence movement by a group aligned with the Guomindang troops. This very sensitive topic, has generated much debate in Taiwan. Hou has stated that he made the film,

[n]ot for the sake of opening up old wounds, but because it's vital that we face up to this incident if we are to understand where we come from and who we are as Taiwanese. The Chinese way has always been to cover over domestic scandals, to pretend they never happened, but I am not at all persuaded that that's a good thing. My own feel-

ing is that problems must be acknowledged and discussed if we are ever to resolve them in our minds. (Viewer Guide: Hawaii International Film Festival, 1989)

*A City of Sadness* is an attempt to call into question the officially sanctioned stories that each nation tells itself. What engages Hou's deepest cinematic interests is not to present historical events as "official" moments in the formation of the nation. Hou's film widens the social imaginary of the Taiwanese by bringing to light facets of occluded history.

So far, I have been discussing films from East Asia and South Asia. I wish to conclude by focusing attention on two films from Southeast Asia. The first is a film from Thailand called *Butterfly and Flower* (*Peesua Lae Dokmai*) and was made by Euthana Mukdasnit in 1985. *Butterfly and Flower* won the top award at the Hawai'i International Film Festival. It tells the story of the desperate struggle of two teenagers to eke out a living in Thailand in the 1980s. Huyan is a bright student, but he gives up his ambition of getting an education because of poverty. He ends up in the dangerous business of smuggling rice across the Malaysian border and falls in love with a young girl named Mimpi. Having observed at close hand the risks of smuggling rice and the tragic fate that befell some of their friends, Huyan and Mimpi resolve to give up rice smuggling and grow flowers for commercial purposes instead. It is a simple and unpretentious story told with sincerity and cinematic competence.

Like the other films that I have discussed, *Butterfly and Flower* serves to expand the Thai social imaginary. Thailand is a preponderantly Buddhist country. However, this film deals with the lives of two young people from a Muslim background. Instead of Buddhist temples and saffron-clad monks, what we see of Thailand is represented by the iconography of mosques and calls to prayer. This in itself serves to highlight the complex social fabric of Thailand. The film does not explore the question of the plight of minorities in any significant way. However, when read against national cinema perspective, the film's text opens up a symbolic space in which we can attend to the question of the place of the Muslim minority in Thailand as well as the diffidence of the film industry in general to deal with this contentious issue.

The second film from Southeast Asia that I wish to discuss is a film from Malaysia called *Sepet* (2004). Yasmin Ahmad is a rare example of a Malaysian female filmmaker.

Her film has won many international awards. "Sepet" is a Malay slang word to describe the shape of Chinese eyes. The film deals with the emotional relationship between a Chinese boy and a Malay girl. Ah Loong (Jason) is a teen-aged boy who enjoys poetry and works in a stall that sells pirated Video Compact Discs (VCDs). One day, a Malay girl by the name of Orked comes to the stall looking for films by the well-known Japanese director, Takeshi Kaneshiro. They fall in love and the film deals with the problems that they experience as a result of coming from different ethnic backgrounds. The film, like *Butterfly and Flower*, is a simple story that is told with emotional honesty and cinematic lyricism. The emotional affair gains depth and definition through the ethnic tensions that exist in Malaysian society between the Malays and the Chinese. Once again, the complex social fabric and the diverse strands that go to form nationhood are highlighted in a way that serves to widen the social imaginary.

Each of these seven films, then, in their diverse ways, deal with the idea of the social imaginary. The social imaginary points to the common horizons of meaning prevalent in specific societies. These common horizons can reinforce and subvert the meanings of national cinemas. In each of the films, the aesthetic style, the concomitant representational strategies, and preferred visual registers enact the respective themes in interesting ways. They all focus on the public imagination as it emerges from and engages specific cultures. This social imaginary constitutes a useful point of entry into the historical meanings of a political culture. Pedagogically speaking, this is where the interest of these films lies. They can be shown in classrooms to initiate discussions of Asian societies and cultures. The emotional relationships represented by the characters in them, and how these characters are changed by the imperatives of historical events, become useful points of departure for classroom discussions.

As Clifford Geertz (1983) has reminded us, "culture" describes the webs of meanings that human beings weave around them. Thus, the Asian films that I have been discussing enable us to enter into those webs of meaning in a fruitful manner. The teacher, of course, has an important role to play in promoting interesting discussions of these films. All seven films help us to see the problems and complexities associated with understanding nationhood. The concept of the social imaginary that I invoked at the beginning of this

essay facilitates in the task of revealing the complex layers of meaning associated with the idea of the nation-state and the ways that they are represented in Asian films and by Asian filmmakers. The social imaginary calls attention to the diverse ways in which people make sense of their social life within the confines of a nation.

What is important to bear in mind in this regard is that the social imaginary not only represents national identity but that it also shows how creative filmmakers can use film to challenge those perceptions of national identity. As the social imaginary often conflicts with officially sanctioned views, it can be very helpful in classroom pedagogy. When screening Asian films in the classroom, one can make use of the idea of the social imaginary to go beyond the standard national cinema approach.

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# Apparatus, Genre, and Spectatorship in the Classroom

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When I observe my five-year-old grandson, Henry, navigate the levels of difficulty of a video game in which he chooses a hero who has to overcome obstacles and zap anyone who gets in his way, I wonder at his dexterity as he rapidly manipulates the control panel with ten fingers going all at once, his eyes glued to the images on the TV monitor, taking in the action he seems to be controlling. And I also wonder, almost aloud, what this all means in the formation of his inner world, of his attitude and perception of the outer world. Is the enthralment he expresses a sign of a complete giving over to the game through his identification with the “hero” character and what he/she represents, or is it a sign of an active imagination and desire to affect the game’s outcome, to be himself, its hero? Or is it both—is he captivated and unruly all at once?

The instructions I give in my film studies courses do not include new media, of which video games are a big part. But a cursory glance at some of the critical literature on video games indicates a healthy, lively commentary on their effects on players as both spectators and participants, (see Bibliography). The source of my fascination with spectatorship and the effects of media derive from the long history of numerous and diverse critical commentaries on film (old media?) as a site for the formation of representations that affect the way we think of ourselves and others. In other words, film’s relationship to its audience is a conduit to explore the ways in which media exerts a powerful influence on the construction of ideology within the self and the larger culture.

A part of my film syllabus focuses on the relationship between media, identity, and ideology. In my introductory film course (ENG 363), I approach the issue developmentally, assuming that many of the students are unaware of the ways in which film exercises its power over the viewer. We first look at the basic elements of cinema and their functions—elements associated with cinema’s eclectic combination of forces: cinematography, editing, mise-en-scene, and sound—the technical elements of film and what

we term collectively, the “cinematic apparatus.” The next part of the syllabus looks at the systems that utilize these elements in their construction—the narrative systems of classic Hollywood and the art film, and generic systems like the western, the gangster film, the musical, film noir, and the woman’s film. One overarching schematic that links aesthetics with narrative and genre is the cumulative effect on the spectator.

## Aesthetics and Spectatorship One: Andre Bazin and the Shot in Depth

One of the ways to illustrate the relationship between the aesthetics of the apparatus and the audience is to focus on two elements of cinematography, the long take and deep focus, and to contrast their function with that of another aesthetic—editing and its various practices. The long take and deep focus are often used together, the camera presenting a scene without cuts and instead, utilizing camera movement like panning, tracking, or zooming, while also shooting in deep focus so that the spatial planes of the scene—its foreground, middle ground, and background—are all in focus. This presentation of the scene preserves the integrity of its space and time. On the other hand, presenting the scene through editing or montage violates its unity of space and also condenses or expands time, whether it be in the classical Hollywood style of establishment shot, medium shots, close-ups, and shot reverse shots; or in the Soviet style of collision and associational editing. Filmmakers, of course, combine the techniques of the long take and editing, but some emphasize one over the other. For example, Paul Thomas Anderson’s *There Will Be Blood* (2007) has many long take sequences (the long take is also called a “sequence shot,” because a whole sequence is presented by it), while Paul Greengrass’s *The Bourne Ultimatum* (2007) is constructed largely through editing and, in the action scenes, intense rapid-fire editing. Very early on in the history of film criticism, the great French critic André Bazin wrote on the aesthetics of the long take/deep focus vs. that of editing,

and he championed the former over the latter on the basis of their effects on the spectator. For Bazin, besides preserving the unity of space and time, the long take/deep focus shot enables the audience to be active in its viewing—it gives the spectator a choice to direct his/her attention to anywhere within the space of the scene; and given its openness and inclusiveness, it also makes possible the quality of ambiguity within the scene. On the other hand, editing or cutting up a scene directs the viewer's attention, thereby closing off the possibility of ambiguity. Bazin is very eloquent on these differences and on what, for him, are moral grounds for preferring the deep focus cinematography and the long take:

Well used, shooting in depth is not just a more economical, a simpler, and at the same time a more subtle way of getting the most out of a scene. In addition to affecting the structure of film language, it also affects the relationships of the minds of the spectators to the image, and in consequence it influences the interpretation of the spectacle...it implies, consequently, both a more active mental attitude on the part of the spectator and a more positive contribution on his part to the action in progress. While analytical montage only calls for him to follow his guide, to let his attention follow along smoothly with that of the director who will choose what he should see, here he is called upon to exercise at least a minimum of personal choice. It is from his attention and his will that the meaning of the image in part derives...montage by its very nature rules out ambiguity of expression... On the other hand, depth of focus reintroduced ambiguity into the structure of the image if not of necessity... at least as a possibility. (Bazin 2004: 49-50)

Bazin used Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941) as his primary example of the continuous use of deep focus to sustain spectator choice and its vision of the ambiguity of Kane's character and the diverse points of view offered in the narration. An early famous sequence in the film illustrates this technique. The boy Kane is centered in a deep focus shot in the background outside the window of his parents' cabin, playing on his sled in the snow. In the foreground of the shot are his mother and the banker, Thatcher, who are in the process of completing a transaction to hand over Kane as a ward to Thatcher. In the mid-ground is Kane's father who objects to this transaction but is silenced after Thatcher reads the terms of the agreement that provide a generous financial compensation. This shot allows the

viewer an opportunity to assign his/her attention to any part of the scene—foreground, middle ground, or background, but the three planes together reveal the ambiguity of conflicting agendas, including that of the innocent Kane, who is in the background and remains unaware that his future is being bartered by the adults. One of the many motifs of Welles's masterpiece is the centering of Kane in the background of several deep focus shots, his figure and stature playing off against the foreground action in context. For example, after Kane has solidified his publishing empire by luring the top journalists of his rival newspaper to work for him, he throws a party to celebrate the accomplishment. In a deep focus shot, he is seen dancing with chorus girls in the background flush in the excitement of his conquest, but in the foreground, his two best friends and associates, Leland and Bernstein discuss whether this newly gained power will distort his perspective and lead him to forget about his original publishing principles to speak out against corruption and help the common man. The inclusiveness of the shot, with the celebratory Kane in the background and Leland and Bernstein raising questions about Kane's character in the foreground, expresses ambiguity about Kane's success and suggests his future downfall.

A more recent example of a long take/deep focus sequence appears in Olivier Dahan's *La Vie en Rose* (2007), the biopic about Edith Piaf, and it illustrates the degree of sophistication and effectiveness of this technique, inviting spectators to take an active interest in a scene's conflicting and ambiguous elements. The sequence is set up by an earlier scene in which Edith Piaf is waiting in New York for her lover Marcel Cerdan, the middleweight boxer, to cross the Atlantic by plane from France to join her. He shows up in her bedroom, and Edith greets him with great love and serves him dinner in bed. The scene then cuts to the morning as Edith awakens to find Marcel gone from the bed. In a long take/deep focus sequence that uses the tracking and panning camera, Edith circles her huge apartment from room to room, frantically looking for Marcel. In the deep focus background are her agent, servants, and friends looking bewildered and helpless as she desperately cries out for Marcel. Finally, her agent gives her the fatal news that the plane carrying Marcel has crashed, killing him and everyone else on board, and she collapses onto the floor. In this pivotal scene, the tracking camera captures Edith's desperate and deluded desire for Marcel as she vainly searches her apartment, while

the deep focus registers the other characters as they watch her move from room to room. The apparatus privileges the viewer, who observes all of the action and its conflicting elements simultaneously, bestowing a contradictory resonance to the moment—the moment of Edith’s intensely expressed delusional desire for Marcel coupled with the concerned, devastated countenances of those around her who know that he is dead.

## Aesthetics and Spectatorship Two: Soviet Montage & Hollywood’s Continuity Editing

Bazin frames his discussion of deep focus cinematography in contrast to the Soviet school of montage and the classical Hollywood system of continuity editing. This contrast between the long take/deep focus and the two systems of editing practice demonstrates for students-as-spectators how the apparatus can limit agency on the part of the viewer since both systems of editing direct or manipulate viewer attention. Soviet montage affects a materialist ideology, while the classical Hollywood system aims to involve the spectator through patterns of identification with the protagonists. In the famous Odessa Steps sequence from Soviet filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein’s *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925), in which czarist soldiers slaughter civilians sympathetic to mutinous sailors in pre-Revolutionary Russia, Eisenstein utilizes several editing techniques—parallel editing, shot reverse shot, overlapping editing, dialectical editing, and associational editing to manipulate viewer sympathy for those being killed. An effective example of associational editing is the series that contrasts the soldiers to the people. The soldiers are presented as mechanically marching down the steps in a straight line, their heads cut out of the picture by the top frame; they are faceless and impersonalized as they shoot and kill. In contrast, the civilians are seen flowing down the steps in long shot, in full figure in medium shots, and as horror-stricken in close-ups of their faces. Eisenstein’s editing personalizes them. The audience views them as human beings slaughtered by the machine-like precision of the merciless czarist soldiers

The classical Hollywood system of continuity editing has institutionalized several techniques to draw viewers into the story world of the narrative. Some of these editing techniques involve constructing spatial and temporal continuity within and between scenes to provide a clear sense of the story world and its actions for the viewer, while other tech-

niques enable identification with the characters, thus drawing the viewer into the world of the narrative. When editing for spatial and temporal continuity, an establishment shot orients the audience to the whole scene before its space is cut up into medium and close-up shots; characters are more or less centered in the frame at eye level, and the camera films all the shots of the scene from one side of a 180-degree axis (the so-called “180-degree rule”). To convey continuity, in cuts within scenes, movement will be consistent from right to left or left to right; and in scenes, for example, that condense the action of a car trip from one location to another, movement of that car will be consistent from right to left or left to right within the frame. When editing to affect audience identification with the characters, the shot reverse shot and eyeline matches attach the spectator’s point of view to that of the characters, while parallel editing solidifies or intensifies that attachment

The shot reverse shot is often cited as the most used editing technique in mainstream cinema and is normally associated with the point of view of one or two characters—a shot of a character looking at something is followed by a shot of what he is looking at, or a shot of a character talking to someone is followed by a shot of the other character listening or responding. The effect of the shot reverse shot is to make the viewer identify with the character who is looking or talking. Meanwhile, eyeline matches are constructed through the shot reverse shot, over the shoulder shots, or through the camera panning from a character’s face to what he/she is looking at. Eyeline matches create a seam of significance within the frame to suture viewers into the moment of the narrative through their identification with the point of view of the characters.

Parallel editing or crosscutting, perfected by D. W. Griffith early in the history of cinema in such films as *Birth of a Nation* (1915) and *Intolerance* (1916), is an editing technique that cuts from one set of characters and action to another set of characters and action that are happening simultaneously. This technique is a staple in the construction of film narrative – it can crosscut among multiple narrative lines or alternate between one character and another in a single story line. Griffith used it famously in chase or “deadline” sequences to intensify spectator identification with the main characters. Crosscutting between two characters in such a sequence, the one rushing to save the other who faces imminent harm, builds suspense and heightens spectator involvement.

Because the intent of the Hollywood system of continuity editing is to draw the viewer into the story world with little confusion or distraction, it is often referred to as “invisible editing.” In other words, you don’t notice it. David Bordwell is more discreet in his analysis of this style of editing, calling it “moderately self-conscious” in contrast to the overtly self-conscious, reflexive styles of the art film and the experimental film (Bordwell 1985: 160). But the term “invisible editing” does make the point that this technique is not supposed to call attention to itself, but to the story that it is telling. The continuity style fits perfectly with the kind of goal-driven narrative that we associate with mainstream Hollywood cinema and its imitators. This kind of narrative presents psychologically defined individuals, who act as causal agents to solve clear-cut problems or to attain specific aims. It usually ends with a resolution of the problem or achievement or nonachievement of the objectives. Because of the “invisibility” of its style—its clarity, and its strong resolutions of conflicts—the classical Hollywood narrative is a highly satisfactory one for its spectators. And that is where the danger lies for spectators who are unaware of its influence on them, for in being “satisfied,” they implicitly buy into the representations within the narrative without explicitly questioning them.

After I have shown students how to become more informed and aware of the ways that film can influence an audience, I go on to discuss the representation of gender in popular culture and the role that film plays in influencing such representations. With insight from Laura Mulvey’s 1975 seminal essay in feminist film criticism, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” coupled with an analysis of the depiction of women in one particular Hollywood genre (film noir) students are able to develop a more critical awareness of cinema and its representations.

### Mulvey and Film Noir

Though Mulvey’s essay was published more than thirty years ago, her exploration of the female’s objectification and specularization for the male gaze still has great relevance and resonance in our present society. The main points of her classic essay have now become established fare for students of gender ideology and its construction by the cinematic apparatus. Building on psychoanalytic theory and the work of Freud and Lacan, Mulvey observes that the traditional role of men in classical Hollywood cinema is that of active

agent, while women remain passive objects of the viewer’s gaze. Moreover, the classical apparatus (the “camera” or the Hollywood system of editing) privileges the point of view of the male subject in mainstream cinema and induces the spectator to identify with his point of view. The apparatus is itself the bearer of a male gaze that mediates between the masculine desires within the spectator and the male protagonist in the film (Mulvey 2004: 841-842). And so, the man is the “bearer of the look,” while the woman is “coded for strong visual and erotic impact...to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*” (Mulvey 2004: 841). Mulvey identifies this particular visual pleasure that derives from the conventional cinematic situation as “scopophilia” or “the pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight” (Mulvey 2004: 840).

Mulvey also identifies a second visual pleasure that derives from narrative cinema, that of “narcissism.” She explains that this pleasure arises from the need for viewers to identify with the hero protagonist in a film and that this identification is an act of transference from the Lacanian mirror stage in childhood. During this stage, the child sees and recognizes itself in the mirror. But this recognition is “misrecognition,” for the child perceives this image as a body of full maturity. It is an image of self as plenitude, more complete than that of the child’s own body. The superior mirror image gives rise to the “ideal ego, the alienated subject, which, reintrojected as an ego ideal, gives rise to the future generation of identification with others” (Mulvey 2004: 840). The transference of this process of identification in the movie-going viewer is his identification with the ideal ego figure on the screen:

As the spectator identifies with the main male protagonist, he projects his look onto his like, his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence. . . . The character in the story can make things happen and control events better than the subject/spectator, just as the image in the mirror was more in control of motor coordination. (Mulvey 2004: 842)

For Mulvey, both visual pleasures, the one scopophilic and the other narcissistic, are male-centered and privileged by conventional Hollywood cinema. There are two questions that naturally arise given Mulvey’s claims that in the

Hollywood narrative female characters lack agency and that the apparatus spectatorially constructs a male gaze: 1) what about those films that have a strong female character as their protagonist, and 2) do women viewers identify with the male gaze and point of view that the apparatus constructs? Mulvey acknowledges that her essay doesn't take into account films that have women as their protagonists. Rather, she cites other critics like Pam Cook and Claire Johnston who argue that the female protagonist's agency is more apparent than real in a film such as *The Revolt of Mamie Stover* (Mulvey 2004: 842). She looks forward to future theorists tackling the problem, like Mary Ann Doane who argues, in *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s*, that the agencies of female protagonists in the 1940s Hollywood genre of the woman's film are ultimately constricted by the male satellites and by the traditional gendered roles of female protagonists—the wife, mother, mistress, daughter, girl in love, secretary, nurse, etc. (Doane 1987: 3-9).

Meanwhile, Mulvey addresses the sticky problem of the female spectator in another essay, "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema': Inspired by King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun* (1946)." If narrative cinema privileges the male point of view and induces the viewer to identify with that point of view, does the "viewer" include female viewers? Mulvey contends that the position of the woman spectator as she watches mainstream narrative cinema only solidifies her secondary status in the culture. Mulvey sees two options for women viewers: they may either identify with the male camera and the male agent within the film (cross dressing) or they may identify with the female object within the film in a masochistic way. In either case, they are complicit in the construction of the dominant system of representation (Mulvey 1989: 35-36).

Mulvey's theories on visual pleasure in narrative cinema have remained at the forefront of discussions of gender politics in the media. They have spawned numerous commentaries that qualify, enhance, correct, reject, or complement her ideas. In modifying Mulvey's claims, these commentaries clarify the complicated agencies and subjectivities of female protagonists in the Hollywood film, and they illustrate the variety and complexity of responses that female viewers may have toward the depiction of male and female characters on the screen (See Bibliography).

A discussion of Mulvey's concepts in my film class, following as it does a discussion of the Hollywood system of

(invisible) editing and narrative, furthers students' awareness of how the cinematic apparatus constructs narrative by suturing the viewer into the point of view of the characters on the screen and naturalizing what those characters and their actions may represent. In the case of gender ideology, the cinematic apparatus privileges a male point of view and reinforces a male-empowered cultural system. To illustrate this lesson on gender ideology and cinema, we turn to a specific genre of film: film noir. Any Hollywood genre will do, but film noir is especially relevant since Mulvey herself uses it as an illustration of how the on-screen character of the femme fatale, a strong and independent woman, is ultimately punished for her challenge to male dominance and control. Again, we are speaking here of two kinds of control: the power of the look constructed by the apparatus and the power of the narrative and its resolutions. In the classic examples of film noir—John Huston's *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity* (1946), and Jacques Tourneur's *Out of the Past* (1949)—the protagonist, normally a male figure (a detective, insurance investigator, lawyer, etc), holds the power of point of view or subjectivity. But there is a twist in film noir. Though he is apparently the agent of the narrative and the bearer of the look, the protagonist is, in fact, being manipulated by the *femme fatale*. Implicitly, she is controlling the narrative, either as an accomplice who betrays him or as a slippery suspect who raises doubts about her guilt. However, the mechanism at work in both the apparatus and the narrative is to overturn her control by establishing the shift in the male character's agency and look from *faux* to real. He discovers her guilt and/or web of deceit and exposes her, and by resolving the narrative in the traditional way, he punishes the femme fatale. She is killed or sent to prison.

Wilder's *Double Indemnity* is a good example of this narrative pattern. Walter Neff, insurance agent, tells the story in retrospect through voice-over narration. He is the subject and agent of the narrative. His story begins when he meets Barbara Stanwyck's Phyllis Dietrichson in her home to renew her husband's automobile insurance. When he first sees her, his gaze takes in her seductive physical beauty. Phyllis asks him to prepare an accident insurance policy on her husband without her husband's knowledge. He refuses at first, but he falls in love with her and agrees to be her accomplice in crime. Neff tricks Phyllis's husband Dietrichson into signing the accident insurance policy. And when Neff

and Phyllis kill Dietrichson, they set it up to look like a train accident, which activates the double indemnity clause on the policy. Up to this point in the narrative, Neff has supposedly been the one in charge, planning and executing the signing of the policy and the “accidental” death that follows. However, he discovers from Phyllis’s step-daughter Lola that Phyllis may have killed Dietrichson’s wife in the past in order to marry Dietrichson for his money, and that Phyllis is now seeing and arranging meetings with Lola’s own boyfriend Nino Zacchetti. Neff realizes that Phyllis, in true femme fatale fashion, has been playing him for a fool, and now may be seducing and manipulating Zacchetti to murder him so she can have all of the money. With his newfound suspicions, Neff confronts Phyllis. He rejects her efforts to seduce him one last time, “Sorry, baby, I’m not buying.” At this moment, Neff regains full control as he hovers over Phyllis, the camera in a high angle shot over his shoulder peering down on a vulnerable Phyllis as she looks pleadingly into his eyes. His own gaze, looking down into her eyes cancels her look as he shoots her. Though Neff’s voiceover amounts to a confession that he is dictating to the insurance company’s investigator, the confession is an act of his own choosing, just as he is responsible for saving Zacchetti from Phyllis’s deadly web and returning the young man to the innocent and wholesome Lola.

A more extended discussion of film noir takes students beyond the Mulveyan example of the strong independent woman and the threat of being undercut by the male gaze in classic films of the genre. A glance at more recent film noir, called “neo-noir,” gives students an awareness of the genre’s transformation over time as cultural attitudes have changed. Students see how the femme fatale has gained the upper hand in the period after the feminist movements of the 1970s and 1980s. Lawrence Kasdan’s *Body Heat* (1982) is a conscious revision of *Double Indemnity*. As we saw in the original, Barbara Stanwyck’s femme fatale seduces the male protagonist, lures him into killing her husband, and tries to frame him or have him killed in turn; but when he discovers her scheme, he kills *her*. In *Body Heat*, however, by the time the male protagonist Ned discovers his betrayal by the femme fatale (played by Katherine Turner), he is already in prison serving time for the murder of her husband. Meanwhile, she has escaped to the sanctuary of a tropical island. Through a dissolve, the cinematic apparatus transfers Ned’s look in prison when he discovers her deceit to *her* look

in a close-up as she lies on a beach sipping a daiquiri. The transference fixes her as the narrative’s true agency and the film’s ultimate bearer of the look—and the movie ends that way. Other neo-noir films with similar patterns of gender transformation include Paul Verhoeven’s *Basic Instinct* (1992) with Sharon Stone, John Dahl’s *The Last Seduction* (1994) with Linda Fiorentino, and Brian De Palma’s *Femme Fatale* (2002) with Rebecca Romijn.

After exploring film noir and neo-noir, I return to Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” to remind students of the role that cinematic apparatus plays in constructing point of view, subjectivity, and a form of representation that is ideologically gendered. Mulvey’s goal is to expose classical Hollywood cinema’s emphasis on invisible editing and push for a more reflexive, self-conscious aesthetic that makes the viewer aware of film as a construct and attain a kind of Brechtian distance. Only then will the narcissism and scopophilia, the twin male-centered visual pleasures of classical cinema (according to Mulvey), be broken and challenged:

Playing on the tension between film as controlling the dimension of time (editing, narrative) and film as controlling the dimension of space (changes in distance, editing), cinematic codes create a gaze, a world, and an object, thereby producing an illusion cut to the measure of desire. It is these cinematic codes and their relationship to formative external structures that must be broken down before mainstream film and the pleasure it provides can be challenged. (Mulvey 2004: 847)

One kind of film narrative that tends to expose the “cinematic codes” of the classical Hollywood style is the art film, which my students and I explore at the end of the syllabus to reinforce the experience of film as a construction and how it affects the spectator.

### The Art Film and *Run Lola Run*

The art film emerged as a response and alternative to the Hollywood cinema. It includes the styles and narrative conventions that we associate with Soviet Montage and German Expressionism of the 1920s and 30s, Italian Neorealism of the 1940s, and the French New Wave of the 1950s and 60s, among others. Historically in America, the art film flourished from 1950 to the mid-1960s when foreign films, predominantly from Europe and Japan, played in US

“art houses” and appealed to college crowds and culture enthusiasts across campuses and in metropolitan areas. As a genre, the art film refers to any film that includes several of these characteristics or a wholesale focus on one or two of them: a self-conscious aesthetic such that the viewer is aware of the film as a film; the focus on a social problem or issue that remains morally ambiguous; the development of complex characters and a central interest in human relationships; a non-traditional narrative structure that may be developed by a non-linear chronology or by a disconnect between time and space; multiple protagonists and narratives rather than the single-protagonist of the classical narrative; and an ending that is open-ended with little or no resolution, unlike the satisfaction of closure characteristic of the classical Hollywood paradigm. Many foreign films and independent films embrace these characteristics, and even Hollywood films have since appropriated them into the classical narrative.

In my class, I treat students to a traditional art film from the 1950s/60s like Ingmar Bergman’s *The Seventh Seal* (1957) or Jean-Luc Godard’s *Breathless* (1959). The former is known for its self-conscious *mise-en-scène*, its stunning black and white cinematography, and its complex theme of a struggle for faith in a seemingly godless universe. The latter is recognized for its disjunctive editing, highly reflexive style, and characters who talk endlessly about doing something but who never do anything. For more recent examples, I like to engage students with the multiple narratives, fractured chronology, and problematic endings of Alejandro González Iñárritu’s *Amores Perros* (2000) or with the forking path narrative and in-your-face cinematics of Tom Tykwer’s *Run Lola Run* (1999). The latter is especially effective in summarizing for the student the overarching issue of spectatorship and its relation to apparatus, genre, and ideology.

*Run Lola Run* employs many of the characteristics of the art film. The film opens with a quotation from T. S. Eliot’s “Little Gidding”: “the end of our exploring will be to arrive where we started and to know the place for the first time.” Through a voiceover, the film purports to deal with a philosophical issue concerning existence: “Who are we? Where do we come from?” From the outset, the film poses questions and issues for the viewer to consider during the film, demanding a form of critical detachment. Over the course of the film, the question of existence remains

open-ended. Another consideration is introduced by the voiceover—that the film we are about to watch will be like a game—“The ball is round. The game lasts 90 minutes. That’s a fact. Everything else is pure theory. Here we go.”

*Run Lola Run*’s narrative is composed of three versions of the same basic plot and presented in spectacular cinematic style. The spectator is aware that the film is continuously being constructed and that the “same” story can be presented in three different ways with three different endings. Basic to all three versions is the fact that Lola must come up with 100,000 deutsche marks in twenty minutes to save her boyfriend Manni from the mob he works for because he accidentally lost that money in a drug deal. All three versions share other common elements, but they are tweaked to provide three different endings. The film utilizes a dizzying array of cinematic techniques to express the film as a game: animation, shaky hand held camera, whirling circling motions, parallel editing, split screen, fast and slow speeds, freeze frame, quick zooms in and out, black and white cinematography (for flashback sequences), a variety of angles and distances, a pliable soundtrack, etc.

Although these characteristics position *Run Lola Run* as an art film, it nevertheless is an interesting hybrid of an art film that has strong classical Hollywood narrative elements. Students recognize, for example, that it employs a work goal within a deadline; a romance goal (Lola must save her boyfriend); strongly motivated characters; a progressive, linear development; and in the final, third version of the story, a clear and happy resolution in which Lola wins the money through legalized gambling and Manni recovers the lost money anyway, at the same time. The film also uses identificatory editing techniques in the classical style so that the viewer identifies and races with Lola to obtain the money and save Manni. And so my students and I shift constantly between analyses of *Run Lola Run*’s reflexivity, which distances, and its classicism, which simultaneously engages the viewer. In the end, however, the film leaves us with many questions that serve the ultimate intentions of the art film: are the characters’ lives dependent on chance, accidental circumstances, or fate, or are they determined by their own motivations and desires? Or are their lives dependent on all of these factors at once? What do Lola and Manni learn in the first two versions that help them achieve the ending of the third version? Is the film just an exercise in the manipulation of its characters and their stories in order

to foreground the discourse or the *telling* of the story and not the story itself? Or are both the integrity of the story and that of the discourse preserved by the totality of the text? And what about the “philosophical” issues raised at the beginning of the film? And last, but not least, how does the film overturn traditional gender expectations? Who is the agent, subject, and hero of the film?

## Conclusion

Though we have come far from Bazin’s championing of the contemplative deep focus cinematography with its attendant long take to the narrative systems conjoined in *Run Lola Run*, a postmodern hybrid that assumes a spectator already savvy to the ways of the apparatus and its representations, we have also come full circle to the beginning of this excursion where I expressed wonderment over my grandson’s rapid fire engagement with his video game. For *Run Lola Run* is like a video game in its forking paths and narrative options. The multiple effects on the spectator engendered by *Run Lola Run*’s narrative—enthralment, distancing, expectation, retardation, optional tracks, multiple endings, mixed media, pastiche, reflexivity—demand an active spectator, one who can choose to be immersed or detached, entertained or critically skeptical, or all of these at the same time. After exploring the work of the cinematic apparatus, genre and ideology, many of my students tell me at the end of the semester that they cannot watch a film in the same way, that they are now constantly aware of the apparatus as it constructs narrative and point of view. I reassure them and reply that the next step is to move beyond this divide between themselves and the film to where they can *choose* to be under the film’s spell and critical of it *at the same time*, to experience a double perspective in front of the screen imaginary and its representations. Though they are complicit, they *know* that they are and can break the spell at any time. My hope is that they can learn to do this both in the theatre and out of it as well.

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# Made in Hawai'i: Critical Studies and the Academy for Creative Media

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## Hawaii's Creative Media Education Agenda

Since U.S. annexation of the isles in 1898, the former kingdom has changed from being a primarily plantation-based economy to one that is being driven by tourism and the U.S. military. However, over the past decade, several legislative and educational events in Hawai'i have signaled the state's expectation that there will be an increasing role for cinema and digital media in the development and diversification of its economy. In 2000, the Hawai'i State Legislature established the Hawaii Television & Film Development Board to help grow the film and television industry by providing support to Hawaii's local filmmakers. From 2001 to 2006, the legislature passed Acts 221, 215 and 88, a series of government incentives and tax credits designed to encourage investment and entrepreneurialism in Hawaii's film, television, video, and digital media industries. In 2006, the state of Hawai'i completed multi-million dollar renovations to the Hawaii Film Studio so that the state now has a modern film and television production facility that is comparable to studio spaces in Hollywood. In 2008, Hawai'i's governor, Linda Lingle, proposed the establishment of "Creative Academies" that "would focus on animation, digital media, game development, and writing and publishing in elementary through high school" (Lingle, 2008, p. 7). The governor's emphasis on teaching new media skills and literacy to students reflected the objectives of the Innovation Initiative—her program to cultivate a highly skilled, knowledge-based workforce to help promote the high technology industry in Hawai'i (State of Hawai'i, 2007).

In conjunction with government plans to use creative media as a way to diversify the state economy, the University of Hawai'i's Board of Regents approved the Academy for Creative Media (ACM) in January 2004. The ACM became the university's primary academic program for the production and study of film, animation, and computer game design from technical, indigenous, and critical perspectives.

In the program's founding documents, then-ACM chairman and Hollywood film producer, Chris Lee, stated that the ACM would "create something unique to Hawai'i that's marketable on a global scale and is dedicated to diversifying our local economy" (Lee, 2004a, p. 5). Lee envisioned an educational initiative that would not follow a traditional "Hollywood-centric" model of film school that relied on expensive film equipment and focused on preparing students to work in the Hollywood studio system, admitting that there were "already standards of excellence such as USC, UCLA, and NYU against which we cannot compete" (p. 5). Rather, Lee believed, the curriculum of the ACM should promote indigenous stories and storytelling and meet the demands of the global information/entertainment economy. Such an economy is

driven by a rising tide of affluence and the ever-widening availability of distribution systems, [consequently,] there is an exponential need for intellectual property and programming to fill those [media] pipelines. Hawai'i students have a logical and rightful place in the creation of this content, not just in Hollywood, but here in Hawai'i (pp. 5–6).

Lee believed that it was possible to establish a creative media program in Hawai'i if it offered a curriculum that taught skills across digital media platforms and emphasized the cultural specificity of the islands. Moreover, the widening of distribution systems meant that ACM graduates could remain in Hawai'i and their work would help diversify the state's economy. In subsequent interviews, Lee stated that the ACM is "...about branching out our economy here in Hawai'i" (Lee, 2004c) and that the program could be "a big part of Hawai'i's future, but it's nothing if we don't convince people to build their own companies or for companies to come here. The (financial) return (for the state) will be whether we've incubated new companies here" (Lee, 2004b).

The collaborative effort by the state and university to use cinema and digital media as the vehicle for economic transformation displays faith in the premise that Hawai'i can be re-defined by these investments. I share this faith. In my roles as the former curator of film and video at the Honolulu Academy of Arts and as a former film festival programmer with the Hawai'i International Film Festival, I advocated the development of a Hawai'i film industry. Now, I am an assistant professor of critical studies in the ACM where I favor making full use of local resources to develop the creative media industry. Given my current and previous investments in promoting the state's and university's creative media agenda, I want to share my thoughts on the rise of cinema and digital media education in Hawai'i and the importance of thinking ethically about culture and representation. Media theorist, Henry Jenkins, claims that most conversations about new media refer to either an inventory of new tools, emerging technologies, or improved technical proficiency of machines or by humans, rather than discuss new media's cultural effects. Jenkins contends that "[u]nderstanding the nature of our relationship with media is central to any attempt to develop a curriculum that might foster the skills and competencies needed to engage within [this] participatory culture" (Jenkins, 2006). As such, I believe the critical question to ask of Hawaii's creative media agenda is this: will this innovative collaboration between industry, governance, and education in Hawai'i transform the existing forces of cultural, rather than just economic, power that governs the state? The state can help develop the local film, television, and digital media industry and the university can supply students with equipment and offer technical instruction, but what should also be discussed is how future creative media graduates become part of Hawaii's cultural economy and producers of its representations in film, television, animations, and computer games. While my thinking on this topic is exploratory, I intend to expand the picture of creative media education in Hawai'i and suggest new considerations relating to its cultural dimensions as this agenda advances.

## Representing Hawai'i

The cultural dimension of a state economy that is dominated by tourism and the U.S. military is reflected in the mass of literature, television programming, and films that project the image of Hawai'i as the very ideal of a

welcoming tropical paradise—beaches, waves, surfers, and grass-skirted hula dancers. Hawai'i is also the site of Pearl Harbor, a symbol of U.S. military power in the Pacific and the country's entry into World War II. The popular representation of Hawai'i as home to tourism and the U.S. military naturalizes the presence of these industries in the islands and reflects a reductive cycle of cultural politics. The economic health of tourism and the military relies, in part, on the continued representation of Hawai'i as a tourist destination and strategic and historic site. That is, the imagery of tourism and the military is used to justify the allocation of economic resources and sustain the industries' continued operation. In turn, the power of these representations of Hawai'i is sustained by the continuing economic influence of tourism and the military. Because tourism and the military drive the state economy, they are able to represent life in Hawai'i in a way that crowds out alternative representations, especially local perspectives that run counter to tourism's picture of an idyllic place of sun and leisure or those that project Hawai'i's historic and strategic importance. As such, the kinds of creative media works that are popular, such as Hollywood films, do not reflect the range of representations and stories that exist in the islands. For example, the narrative premise of popular films that choose to film in Hawai'i, such as *Pearl Harbor* (Dir: Michael Bay, 2001), *50 First Dates* (Dir: Peter Segal, 2004), or more recently, *Forgetting Sarah Marshall* (Dir: Nicholas Stoller, 2008), reflects and assists the cultural economy of tourism and the military such that island realities such as homelessness, Native Hawaiian sovereignty, plantation history or the stories of everyday lives that exist alongside, but are not rooted in, tourism and the military, are excluded.

In response, some scholars have argued for a more ethical representation of Hawai'i. Haunani-Kay Trask (1991), for example, makes a forceful argument to show that the tourism industry has dispossessed *kanaka maoli* (Native Hawaiian) identity, culture, and land. In another work, Jane Desmond (2001) traces the exploitative dynamics of tourism's representation of "native" bodies in Hawai'i. Kathy Ferguson and Phyllis Turnbull (1999) have studied the signs and symbols of the U.S. military in Hawai'i and show how these images dominate the historical meaning and everyday use of the archipelago's landscape. Houston Wood (1999) explores "how journalism, novels, diaries, advertisements, visual arts, museums, films, television shows, and various

other types of cultural productions assist the more naked coercion associated with armies, revolutions, and the criminal justice system” in the usurpation of Hawaiian lands and the displacement of indigenous Hawaiian culture (p. 9). These studies suggest the importance of adopting a critical perspective on the cultural economy of Hawai‘i. I also see their perspectives as a testament to the value of teaching creative media students to embrace an ethics of representation that encourages more fully developed depictions of Hawai‘i that may challenge the cultural status quo. In other words, an argument can be made for the inclusion of critical studies in creative media education and the significance of diversifying Hawai‘i’s cultural economy.

### What is Critical Studies?

Broadly, the critical study of creative media refers to the historical, aesthetic, and theoretical examination of media production and the power of its representations. Critical studies adds important reflection to an educational field that, as Henry Jenkins’ comment pointed out, tends to focus on technical instruction. Many universities include critical studies in their curriculum, indeed, many of the essays in this issue of *Educational Perspectives* are examples of critical studies perspectives on creative media. However, critical studies at the ACM is guided by a unique imperative that I would like to describe in more detail.

At the ACM, critical studies is shaped by the cultural specificity of Hawai‘i. The critical dynamic of culture and geography is illustrated by comparing the description of critical studies at the University of Southern California’s School of Cinematic Arts (SCA), one of the nation’s premier programs for critical studies, and the curricular description of the ACM. At the SCA,

[t]he Division of Critical Studies is committed to the understanding of film, television and new media in relation to the world. By studying and analyzing these forms and the processes behind their creation, Critical Studies scholars gain insight into the power and aesthetics of moving image media.<sup>1</sup>

At the ACM, the program

emphasizes narrative, or story telling, theories, skills and application across multiple platforms of digital media and within a context of cultural and aesthetic values. More than just a “film school,”

ACM seeks to empower students to tell their own stories of Hawaii, the Pacific and Asia rather than have those stories told for them through a different cultural lens that is distant and often distorted.<sup>2</sup>

The distinction between the two programs is small, but fundamental; critical studies at the ACM is shaped by the recognition of the archipelago’s uneven cultural economy. Given the predominance of tourism and the military, the educational imperative is ACM is to respond to existing representations of Hawai‘i and promote different kinds of stories and imagery. In the proposal for the ACM, Chris Lee emphasized the role of the ACM in diversifying the economy of Hawai‘i, but he also described the program’s curricular focus:

The focus is on narrative and storytelling, but the scope will navigate the entire Pacific Rim and beyond[;]...it’s an educational initiative that embraces the unique opportunities of this special place we call home by providing a platform for indigenous filmmakers to tell their stories to the broadest possible audience (Lee, 2004a, p. 6).

Lee’s reference to “indigenous filmmakers” is noteworthy because of its embrace of a wider range of lived experience in Hawai‘i, rather than focusing solely on those cultural productions promoted by tourism and the U.S. military. An indigenous perspective reflects stories and storytellers rooted in the archipelago’s everyday dynamics and complicated history; it includes Native and Non-Native Hawaiian experiences as well as the tensions that may exist between them. Such textured narratives include stories of divisions that linger from Hawaii’s plantation era or the displacement of Native Hawaiians and their search for empowerment. In effect, the focus of the ACM on encouraging “indigenous filmmakers” recognizes the broad range of experiences that are available and specific to Hawai‘i, but have been excluded from dominant representations of Hawai‘i.

In *Reimagining the American Pacific: From South Pacific to Bamboo Ridge and Beyond*, Rob Wilson highlights a similar imperative at work in the Hawai‘i-based journal, *Bamboo Ridge: Journal of Hawai‘i Literature and Art*. Wilson contends that the journal’s selection of literature that reflects “an island sensibility,”<sup>3</sup> as opposed to works that reflect the portrait of Hawai‘i composed by tourism and the military, presents a “cultural politics of place-bound

identity expressing...symbols/acts/tactics of local resistance to metropolitan centers of culture” (Wilson, 2000, p. 134). As Michael Shapiro notes in his work on aesthetics as political critique, *Deforming American Political Thought: Ethnicity, Facticity, and Genre*, art forms such as film, music and literature, can express identities that are excluded or marginalized by the dominant culture. For Shapiro, the resulting expressions are ways that people resist and redefine representations not of their own making. Aesthetic expressions can be

modes of self-fashioning by those who flee imposed identities in order to achieve a state of non-closural becoming...[and a way for] those who tend to be excluded, given the way that recognizable “politics” is policed, assemble to contest imposed identities, deform conventional modes of intelligibility, struggle to survive economically, socially, and politically, or articulate, through writing, sounds, built structures, or images, aspects of a life and thought-world that are officially unheeded. (Shapiro, 2006, p. xv)

Wilson and Shapiro offer useful perspectives that describe the role of critical studies in Hawai‘i. Critical studies encourages cultural production in Hawai‘i to be part of an larger commitment to an ethics of indigeneity. The underlying idea is to assist in the diversification of Hawai‘i’s cultural economy by addressing its distortions and recognizing that a broader range of expressions is both possible and necessary. What I am arguing for, therefore, is that creative media education in Hawai‘i should ask students to consider and critique their role as producers of creative media in the cultural economy of the islands.

## The Promise of ACM Student Work

To summarize my argument so far, Hawai‘i’s economic, educational, and legislative agenda may emphasize the diversification of the state economy, but we should not overlook the importance of challenging the existing forces of cultural power in Hawai‘i. We need to develop a curriculum that promotes indigenous storytelling and its ethical commitments so that cinema and digital media education contributes to Hawai‘i’s cultural imaginaries in new and empowering ways. To an extent, a number of recent ACM student films variously reflect this dynamic between dominant and indigenous representations.

While the production value of ACM student films is not yet at the level of professional media works, their work offers indigenous points of embarkation that challenge popular representations of Hawai‘i. In 2004, ACM student filmmaker Kaliko Palmiera won an audience award at the Hawai‘i International Film Festival 2004 for *Steve Ma‘i‘i*—a short documentary about his father, musician Steve Ma‘i‘i. This engaging film traces his father’s role as a Hawaiian music artist and activist during the 1970s. *Steve Ma‘i‘i* uses the genre of biography to present in an original way the rise of Hawaiian music entertainment as a movement for Native Hawaiian identity. By doing so, Palmiera offers an alternative to the popular representation of Hawaiian music as a tourist entertainment and commodity. In another example, *Plastic Leis*, an award-winning short film by ACM student filmmaker Tyrone Sanga, depicts the removal of an elderly lei seller from Waikīkī. Drawing on the plight of this woman, the film offers a meditation on Hawaiian culture and its collision with tourist commercialism. Her expulsion from Waikīkī represents the symbolic displacement of Native Hawaiians in Hawai‘i. *Plastic Leis* garnered the Best Hawaiian Short Film award at the 2006 Big Island Film Festival. In 2006, Sanga completed, *Follow the Leader*, a short film that gestures to racial-ethnic tensions in Hawai‘i through the narrative of children collecting baseball cards. In *Follow the Leader*, a child of Asian descent feels intimidated by an older and larger boy of Pacific/Hawaiian descent when he is asked by the older boy to purchase a baseball card from an Asian storeowner who is suspicious of the older boy. The film reveals the kind of divisions that linger from the Hawai‘i plantation era when racial and ethnic tensions were used to help manage plantations workers. Sanga’s films depict Hawai‘i in a way that departs from the narratives presented by tourism or the military. *Plastic Leis* is critical of tourism, tying its rise to the decline of Native Hawaiians while *Follow the Leader* gestures to racial-ethnic tensions that underlie tourism’s rosier picture. ACM student filmmaker Roger Nakamine’s *Sore Shoulders and Aching Joints* uses comedic motifs rooted in the “island sensibility” identified by *Bamboo Ridge* to relate a story about contemporary dating in the islands. The romantic atmosphere of Waikīkī is exchanged for the locality of Wai‘anae and University of Hawai‘i students are featured as the protagonists rather than tourists. The main characters discuss issues such as dating and friendship and the story unfolds in karaoke bars

instead of on the beach. In 2007, ACM student filmmakers Dana Ledoux Miller's *Matalasi* and Joelle-Lyn Sarte's *Home Again* show the diasporic conflicts experienced by two women who return to Hawai'i to reconnect with their Pacific and Asian culture and family. What also connects these student films is that each film does not end with full narrative closure. The filmmakers avoid arriving at some profound revelation or resolution, and as such, the meaning of the story is not fixed; the depiction of how life is led in Hawai'i remains an open question.

These works, made by students in an education program guided by the ethical commitments of critical studies, illustrate how films can re-deploy indigenous tropes and circulate alternative representations of island life in the state's cultural economy. By encouraging students to envision a representation of Hawai'i that does not conform to the image of Hawai'i as a tourist destination or the historic and strategic military site, students can compose a more nuanced cultural imaginary that allows for new and more progressive depictions of Hawai'i—depictions that more accurately reflect the lives of people who live in Hawai'i rather than the representation of Hawai'i produced by tourism and the military.

If the goal of the creative media education agenda in Hawai'i is to equip students with the technical skills necessary to produce media and become active workers in the new media landscape, then indigenous ethics should be an important component of the curriculum. Indeed, we need to do more than merely service tourism or feed existing national narratives. As educators of creative media, our aim should be to diversify Hawai'i's cultural economy and encourage our students to go beyond cultural reproduction and encourage conscientious artistic production.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> <http://cinema.usc.edu/programs/critical-studies/application-procedures-cs.htm>
- <sup>2</sup> <http://www.hawaii.edu/acm/acadprog/acmmajor.shtml>
- <sup>3</sup> <http://www.bambooridge.com/aboutus.aspx>

# Engaging a “Truly Foreign” Language and Culture: China through Chinese film

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In foreign language educational circles, languages such as French, German, and Spanish have been called “cognate” languages to English because of commonalities in their grammar, vocabulary, and writing systems. Conversely, languages such as Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Arabic have been called “truly foreign” for the American learner.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the Foreign Service Institute calls Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Arabic “Level IV” languages, with “Level I” (French, Italian, Spanish, etc.) being the easiest to learn and “Level IV” the hardest.<sup>2</sup>

One level of challenge is that of the linguistic code itself. The English “I love you” is “*Ich liebe dich*” in German, “*Je t’aime*” in French, and “*Te amo*” in Spanish, all of which are relatively easy for the American student to learn to say and use, given the familiarity of the Latin alphabet. The Chinese version, “我愛你”, is rather more impenetrable for the American learner. The difficulty is only partially mitigated by the provision of *pinyin*—a romanization system that indicates the pronunciation of characters. Thus, “我愛你” rendered in *pinyin* as “Wǒ ài nǐ” becomes a little less “foreign.” However, the real challenge lies not at the level of the linguistic code, but at the level of deeper cultural meaning. Whereas “I love you” generally elicits a positive reaction in the West—ideally a response in kind from the love object and perhaps a sympathetic “awww” from bystanders—it would not be improbable for “我愛你” to draw a response of nausea from a Chinese audience, both from the intended recipient of the message and from third parties, something along the lines of “Ugh, that makes my skin crawl, my flesh creep” (“真肉麻”). In the Chinese context, the more circumspect “I LIKE you” (“我喜歡你”) has all of the emotive power of “I love you.” It indicates not an absence of passion or depth of feeling, but the presence of restraint through erudition and self-cultivation.

A scene from US-educated Taiwanese director Ang Lee’s 1994 film *Eat Drink Man Woman* is illustrative. The elderly male lead, Chef Chu, bids goodbye to his much younger wife (both are Chinese; she is his daughter’s best friend), as he leaves for the day. In romantic, modern (Western-inspired) fashion, she whispers to him, “我愛你。” He says *nothing to her* in response, but merely smiles at her tolerantly and lovingly, and the scene ends. Arguably, the audience—at least the Asian audience, and with luck the Western audience as well—is to understand that, in this brief scene, each has expressed deep and abiding affection and acceptance of the other, in spite of their significant differences in age and therefore personal culture. The storyline has already established that cooking for and eating together with loved ones is the primary way Chef Chu expresses his devotion to his family. In fact, the film celebrates the primacy of food in Chinese culture. What need is there for words? Her action, on the other hand, foregrounds changes in Chinese society, and the influence of foreign (primarily Western) practices and ideas, including the outright expression, in words, of inner thoughts. Ultimately, the film can be read as an optimistic prediction that Chinese values can co-exist with changing cultures, and a blended society can indeed thrive.

The yawning gap between American and Chinese linguistic codes can potentially be bridged to a degree through the medium of film, because there is widespread familiarity with filmic language. Furthermore, film provides an opening to engage with Chinese culture, at the same time that bits of information about the linguistic code are being conveyed.

The United States College Board has published the following description about culture in its World Languages Framework, an outline of learning objectives focusing on foreign languages and culture:

Cultural perspectives underlie the ways in which people use languages for communication, and the patterns of behavior and products of a society; therefore, the (c)ulture standards demonstrate the interaction of perspectives, practices, and products. A language curriculum oriented to the standards integrates these aspects of culture throughout, as they are pertinent to communicating effectively within the culture and understanding cultural phenomena “from the inside.”<sup>3</sup>

The word “culture” is commonly understood by educators and language specialists as “big-C” (or “civilizations”) culture. It includes, for example, historical facts, philosophic concepts, and achievements in literature, music, theater, and the healing arts. Language specialists also pay attention to “small-c” culture, such as preparing ethnic foods like *jiaozi* (meat and vegetable dumplings), celebrating Chinese New Year, and learning Chinese crafts and martial arts. “Small-c” culture also focuses more particularly on the *attitudes* and *perspectives* that underlie social traditions. Attitudes and perspectives determine what, when, how, and to whom one speaks, how one holds oneself, what one does when and to whom, what one wears, how one lives, what decisions one makes for one’s life course, etc. Becoming educated in a foreign language and about a foreign culture requires a level of control and understanding of the attitudes and perspectives of that culture, both to interpret the motivations of the interlocutor and to determine how best one should behave in that cultural environment.

We might proceed from the premise that something can be learned from every film produced by the target culture. This depends in part on one’s approach to the viewing of the film. The distinction between extensive and intensive viewing is useful here. When we learn to read a written text in a foreign language, we can read it either *extensively* (reading quickly, for breadth) or *intensively* (reading closely, for depth). The same approaches can be applied to the viewing of films.

Extensive viewing is no challenge to the *YouTube* generation, who consume media as whales take in seawater—with familiarity, ease, and naturalness, in large volume, retaining only what they like and expelling the rest. Extensive viewing can involve the screening and viewing of entire films in class. Alternatively, students can be assigned to find and view specific films on their own time, or they can be encour-

aged to make their own selections within certain parameters. Follow-up might involve writing critiques, engaging in organized discussions, or producing a creative work as a response.

Take, for example, a “big-C” culture theme from Chinese history, such as the life of China’s First Emperor, Ying Zheng, king of the state of Qin, the largest of the seven states of the region at the time. In 221 BCE, he finally vanquished the last of his adversaries, unified the region, and proclaimed the start of imperial China under his autocratic regime. The empire he founded lasted over two thousand years, although his own rule barely survived fourteen years. Students can obtain a glimpse of this turbulent, pivotal period in Chinese history from Chinese film. A class might prepare for such viewings by reading two excerpts from *The Records of the Grand Historian*, penned in the first century BCE by the court historian Sima Qian of the Han dynasty<sup>4</sup>. The first excerpt is the biography of Qin Shihuang in the Basic Annals section; the second, from the Memoirs section, is the famous tale of Jing Ke, who lost his life in a heroic but futile attempt to assassinate Ying Zheng. These accounts present the transmitted historical narrative in broad strokes. With this basic story as their point of departure, the students might be assigned to view one or all of the following three outstanding films, each of which interprets the Qin Shihuang legend, employing different approaches and highlighting different aspects of the story. *The Emperor’s Shadow* (1996) by director Zhou Xiaowen focuses on the emotional life of the future emperor. He is portrayed as a man whose actions and impulses fill the screen with carnage during his ascension to absolute power, but who also harbors deep and hopeless human longings for the love and happiness of a daughter and a childhood friend. *The Emperor and the Assassin* (1993) by director Chen Kaige takes up the theme of courtly intrigue and the ruthlessness of the king of Qin. *Hero* (2002) by the director Zhang Yimou is an elegiac film that focuses on the motivation behind repeated assassination attempts against Ying Zheng. *Hero* explores the philosophic question of whether a noble end (unification of the empire and an end to constant warfare) justifies the sacrifice of individual lives.

A useful assignment is to divide the class into three groups and have each group view and present a critique of the film to the other students. Such a discussion offers new insights into how Chinese perceive their own past. Members of the two-thirds of the class that had not viewed two of the

films under discussion may well find their interest piqued enough to watch what they had missed on their own time, thus enhancing the effects of an extensive viewing. Each film's recreation of ancient China, and the presentation of the extant myths and legends about the larger than life figure of the First Emperor in filmic narrative, offers the students a rich storehouse of information that is difficult to obtain in such relatively painless fashion from other sources. Film provides access to authentic material (produced by native speakers for native speakers) in a form that non-native speakers can access, with the assistance of the relatively minor encumbrance of subtitles.

Another theme that is explored in several films, in spite of continuing censorship by the Peoples Republic of China Film Bureau, concerns more recent events—the turmoil suffered during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76). Two major works: *To Live* (1994) by Zhang Yimou and *Farewell My Concubine* (1993) by Chen Kaige, are sprawling epics that include damning depictions of the events of the Cultural Revolution—its suppression of traditional theatre and the rise of revolutionary opera, the harrowing forced, public “self-criticism” sessions that led to multiple suicides, and the general anarchy that is represented in a Red Guard-operated hospital where the doctors have all been imprisoned for “crimes against the people.” *The Blue Kite* (1993) by Tian Zhuangzhuang is more low-key and less sensationalist—an exploration of the effects of the times on a woman, her three husbands (who all fall victim to political persecution), and her young son. *Xiuxiu, the Sent-down Girl*, (1998) directed by Joan Chen, explores the fate of a teenager from an intellectual family exiled to a life of herding in the wilderness of southwestern China. Jiang Wen's *In the Heat of the Sun* (1994) takes a different tack. It portrays the lives of adolescents left behind in the city by parents deported to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution. The children roam the streets because the schools have been closed. These films of the 1990s depict the experiences of members of the Chinese intellectual elite—the group that arguably suffered the most during that turbulent decade.

For a very different view of the Cultural Revolution, *Breaking with Old Ideas* (1975) by Li Wenhua is an official “propaganda” film that extols the ideals of the Chinese socialist revolution—*ad nauseam*. A twenty- to forty-minute excerpt is sufficient to convey the film's main lessons: socialist education must be practical, and must serve the

laboring masses; elitist tendencies must be struggled against relentlessly. Not that the film is without its rewards in terms of both insight and entertainment: there is a sardonically comic scene in which a professor drones on about “the function of a horse's tail.” However, his students in the rural community that he serves have made it very clear they are not interested in horses—their livelihood comes from raising cows. One might draw a parallel to the US university classroom, in which spaced-out students text-message each other while the professor “covers” irrelevant topics that only he finds important and meaningful.

Chinese film offers endless opportunities for the extensive exploration of contemporary social issues. The challenge of educating China's rural majority is depicted in Zhang Yimou's *Not One Less* (1999). The beginnings of the “rule of law,” and the philosophic challenges that this growth poses to traditional community-based mores, is considered in *The Story of Qiu Ju* (1992), also by the prolific director Zhang Yimou. The inherent absurdity of budding consumerism in a farming village is the focus in *Ermo* (1994) by Zhou Xiaowen. The hardships experienced by marginalized individuals in China's new, ruthlessly capitalistic urban centers are explored in Sun Zhou's *Breaking the Silence* (2000) and Zhang Yimou's *Happy Times* (2000). *Blind Shaft* (2003), by Li Yang, exposes the harshness of life and resultant amorality in life-choices among workers in the myriad illegal coal mines that feed China's voracious appetite for energy. Wang Xiaoshuai's *The Drifters* (2003) explores the mindset that motivates young, coastal Chinese to entrust their lives to racketeers, who promise them a new life, albeit illegal, in affluent cities in the U.S. and Canada.

Of course, students can tire of the relentless downbeat storylines of this socially responsible, “serious” cinema. Outside China, Chinese films are most popularly identified with the martial arts, such as kungfu and “bullet ballet” thrillers from Hong Kong. These films are primarily forms of commercial entertainment (like Hollywood, the Hong Kong movie industry has a primary focus on box office receipts), but they too can be instructive about traditional Chinese culture. The good generally win, or at least they die nobly and admirably; although the foregrounding of fraternal bonds of loyalty to comrades and community stands in marked contrast to the lone hero of such Western genre equivalents as action thrillers and westerns. Chinese movies

emphasize fraternal bonding and highlight harmonious relations within a group (family, school, work-unit)—a principal goal in the socialization of individuals from childhood onwards. These films offer a useful contrast to the theme of “To thy own self be true” that is more commonly encountered in the West.

Perspectives and attitudes—small “c” culture—can also be fruitfully examined through an intensive, rather than extensive, consideration of Chinese film. Zhang Yimou’s *To Live* (1994) illustrates a fundamental principle of the Chinese perspective on life—that the individual exists within a web of interconnections, to membership of the family, the community, and the nation, just as they belong to the ebb and flow of fortune, of past, present, and future. *To Live* focuses primarily on two individuals, a husband (Fugui) and wife (Jiazhen) whose lives began in the early Republican period, when they were members of a large, wealthy, land-owning family. As the story develops, the nation falls into the civil war between the Republicans and Communists, which leads to the eventual victory of communism. Fugui and Jiazhen survive the process that forces them to reject a “bourgeois” past and embrace a proletarian future. However, in losing their family fortune they come to realize that, in this new world, the loss of material possessions is their good fortune. They live through the rigors of the Great Leap Forward and the tragedy of the Cultural Revolution and its aftermath. In this story-driven plot, the external context—personages, events, institutions are writ large, and the individuals, writ small. Their characters are not explored in any particular depth, and this has the effect of representing them as the “everyman” and “everywoman” of that period in Chinese history. Life brings them some modest highs, and some very deep lows, and through it all they personify the Chinese ideal of acceptance—that they can always make the best of life’s vicissitudes. After all, if individuals are nodes in a massive, interconnected mesh, it serves the whole better if the parts do not agitate for specific needs and wants. To the degree that the whole is stable and harmonious, each of the parts attains peace and happiness as well.

An intensive consideration of film can also focus on a few selected scenes. Take, for example, how several brief scenes from *To Live* can be used to make a fundamental point about how the Chinese view the relationship between a husband and wife.

What constitutes happiness within the basic unit of family life? An early scene in *To Live* is telling. It is morning, and Fugui has returned home after yet another night of gambling. His dissolution is wasting away the family wealth. In the couple’s spare but well-appointed bedroom, an elegantly attired Jiazhen wipes away a tear, gently urging her husband to give up gambling: “I want nothing more than a quiet life with you,” she says. The lighting is flat and even, the camera is placed at a right angle to the couple, at eye level, in a medium shot. Besides sparse conversation, there is only silence. Fugui grunts, tries half-heartedly to pacify his wife, and falls asleep. The scene presents an overlay of normalcy—of low voices, placid faces, gentle movements, and a *mise-en-scene* that is markedly understated. On the other hand, we know that deep emotions of anxiety and resentment lie beneath the surface. Chiaroscuro lighting, an oblique angle of approach, either high or low camera angles, and emotive background music might have introduced perceptibly heightened level of emotion to this scene, but heightened emotions are unwanted. Happiness, in this Chinese context, is the absence of extreme emotion. Thus, it is more reliably represented in the use of flat lighting, through more conventional camera placement, and through Jiazhen’s calm appeal for “a quiet life” with Fugui.

But Fugui’s world falls apart as a result of his actions. He loses his family’s wealth, his father dies in a fit of rage, and Jiazhen leaves with the couple’s daughter. Fugui has to learn to survive as a pauper, caring for an aged and ailing mother. He endures a wretched winter. With the coming of spring, Jiazhen returns, bringing their daughter and a son who was born to the couple during their period of separation. In the scene in which they meet again, their smiles and the light in their eyes are the sole indications of joy at their reunion. They don’t touch, and there are no verbal expressions of love. In a later scene, this time in impoverished surroundings, the lighting is low, and the camera is again at a right angle to Jiazhen and Fugui. They talk together in bed, in low voices, under their quilt. It is a medium-long shot; there is again silence except for a few quietly spoken words. Jiazhen, now poor but presumably happier (and reconciled to her new situation), repeats her earlier assertion: “I want nothing more than a quiet life with you.”

The final scene in the film, after many dramatic and distressing upheavals, is a return to this quiet life: in another medium-long shot under flat, even lighting, the aging

Jiazhen and Fugui prepare to eat a simple meal of noodles for their lunch. There is no conversation at all; the theme music of the film plays over the end credits. This is what serves for a happy ending in this deeply philosophic, self-reflective film.

By contrast, a scene from Zhou Xiaowen's *Ermo* illustrates how incongruous a Western desire for passion and excitement is, given the Chinese worldview. *Ermo* is an uneducated, presumably illiterate woman from a remote village in China's vast hinterland. She makes noodles to sell in town, hawking her goods with a vendor call that is incorporated into the film's signature tune. With the penetration of the modern world into China's rural hinterland, she decides she must buy a television set larger than that of her neighbor. Her quest takes her to a department store in the nearest city, to gawk at the sets displayed there. In two telling scenes, an American production has been dubbed into Chinese. One features a Caucasian couple. The man is lying on the woman. They are kissing passionately. The next scene shows the same couple in the shower, from the shoulders up. In between kisses, the woman says, "I want to be happy, really happy," to which her paramour replies, "Really? Then let's start now," and he kisses her with even greater passion. The department store audience giggles in embarrassment, while *Ermo* asks: "Why are the foreigners speaking Chinese?" Her response points at the gulf between the cultures involved: not only are the linguistic codes conspicuously different, even the action depicted is incomprehensible in this Chinese context. What does kissing have to do with happiness, anyway?

*Ermo* is a comedy, and urban Chinese audiences laugh uproariously at the protagonist's lack of understanding. But the underlying message of the film and its ending are not comic. *Ermo* experiments with Western-style consumerism and romantic passion (in an illicit affair), but ultimately she is physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually depleted. By the time the film ends, she stares lifelessly at a television screen that offers nothing but snow. The station has signed off. Happiness, the film suggests, lies in more old-fashioned ideals: communal harmony and simple daily tasks such as making noodles to sell in town. The haunting notes of *Ermo*'s old vendor call, playing over the end credits, are a summons, like a muezzin's call to prayer.

Digging for the bedrock message in a film provides the greatest pay-off, but smaller bits of information are worth seeking out as well. How does conflict play itself out in

Chinese society, for example? One sequence in *To Live* is informative.

I play a clip for my advanced Chinese language class, beginning with the point at which Fengxia—the mute, teen-age daughter of Fugui and Jiazhen—steps outside her home into the alleyway, and bends over a wheelbarrow. A small group of neighborhood toughs, maybe eight years old, have fun at her expense by shooting small stones at her rump with a handmade slingshot. She grimaces in pain, but otherwise cannot protest. In the distance and out of sight, Fengxia's younger brother, Youqing, hears the boys laughing and the pellets pinging, and divines the situation. He rushes to his sister's defense, but is quickly overwhelmed. The following scene is set in the outdoor communal canteen, typical of the Great Leap Forward (a time when cooking utensils were collected to smelt into iron ore). Scores of neighbors are gathered over bowls of noodles for supper. Youqing orders a big bowl brimming over with noodles, spoons a large amount of hot chili pepper sauce over it, threads his way past his own family to where the chief tormentor of Fengxia sits, puts the bowl on a nearby table, moves a chair behind the bully, steps up on the chair, picks up the bowl of hot noodles and carefully tips it over the bully's close-shaven head. The boy starts bawling. His father leaps up and glares at Youqing, who stands silently in place with his arms by his sides. At this point I pause the film, and ask the students to write down their predictions of what the boy's father will say, and how the scene might proceed.

Typically, my students imagine something like the following scenario unfold:

**Bully's father:** What the hell??? How could you do something like this? You bastard, I'll break your bones!

**Youqing:** He started it! He shot stones at my sister; he was trying to hurt her. Go punish him!

**Bully's father:** I don't believe you, you little jerk! My son didn't do anything. It's your fault, and you're not going to get away with it. I'll show you what happens when you tangle with my boy.

**Youqing:** Dad!

**Fugui:** Don't you dare lay a hand on my son... everyone knows your kid is the neighborhood troublemaker. He must have done something to provoke this...

(The two men face off and come to blows. Neighbors pull them apart, but a feud between the two families has begun.)

This prediction derives from an American sense of justice, with appropriate reward or punishment meted out for individual action. When I resume the film, my students are surprised at how the scene actually plays itself out, which is roughly as follows:

**Bully's father:** Youqing! How could you! Look at this mess, and all this hot sauce. If it gets in his eyes... it could cost his life! Who came up with this nonsense? Jiazhen! Fugui! Can't you control this kid of yours?

**Fugui (placatingly):** Fights between children, let's not bring adults into it. Neither Jiazhen nor I knew...

**Bully's father:** Who knows whether you knew or not? I don't believe a kid could come up with a prank like this. Who taught him what to do! He disturbed the peace of a communal dining hall. When you disturb the peace of a communal dining hall, you're striking a blow against the Great Leap Forward!

(Youqing has made his way back to his family, and sits silently next to his mother. Fugui is standing. Jiazhen and Fengxia sit silently, downcast, stricken.)

**Fugui:** Youqing! What did you do! Go apologize, and say you were wrong!

**Youqing:** I won't!

**Fugui:** Go apologize!

**Youqing:** I won't!

**Fugui:** I'll tell you one more time, go apologize! Now, will you go?

**Youqing:** I won't!

(Fugui takes off a shoe [made of cloth, with a hard sole], grabs up Youqing and starts beating him. He gets in several hard blows before Jiazhen and neighbors pull him away.)

**Fugui:** Don't hold me back! I'm going to beat him to death!  
(Scene ends.)

(Next scene: in the front room of the family's modest home. Jiazhen and Fugui are arguing.)

**Jiazhen:** How could you have beat Youqing like that!

**Fugui:** That guy said he was making a disturbance in the communal dining hall. I beat him for disobeying me, for causing trouble.

**Jiazhen:** Who was that guy? Was he the government? You can't just hit Youqing. Look at yourself. I couldn't even hold you back!

**Fugui:** You spoil him. You'll bring ruin on this family. If he does it again, I'll beat him again!

(Jiazhen goes out and drags Youqing into the room. He stands him in front of Fugui.)

**Jiazhen:** Go ahead, beat him here, in front of me.

(Fugui sits in sullen silence. Youqing stands silently.)

**Jiazhen:** Is Youqing your own flesh and blood, or some bastard child? Would I let this family go to ruin? The boys were bullying Fengxia. Youqing was only trying to defend her.

(Fugui looks downcast. He goes over to Youqing and tries to caress him.)

**Fugui:** Let Father make it better...

(Youqing flings his father's arm off. Fengxia enters the room with a tray and four bowls of noodles: two big ones that she sets up for her parents, and two small ones that she sets up for herself and her brother. She silently leads Youqing to sit with her.)

**Jiazhen:** Poor Fengxia; she gets bullied and can't even speak up for herself. Youqing adores her, and you beat him?

**Fugui:** Youqing, eat up. Afterwards, come hear my shadow-puppet performance, okay?

**Jiazhen:** (*teasingly*) No, Youqing doesn't want to go to any miserable shadow-puppet show.

(Fugui laughs.)

Next scene: At the puppet show, Jiazhen conspires with Youqing to offer Fugui a bowl of tea laced with vinegar and chili sauce. Fugui falls for the prank, chokes, and spits up the tea, then pretends to chase after the giggling Youqing while the whole community laughs uproariously.

This scene chronicles a dispute from inception to reconciliation. It depicts consideration of greater issues than personal joy and anger. The family's need to co-exist in the community takes precedence in Fugui's mind, over his imperative to do justice by his son. When he beat Youqing publicly, the community's sense of right and wrong is

satisfied. The family retreats to lick its wounds in private. Youqing is young, and has not yet learned to accept injustice in life. His mother caters to his needs. In conspiring with him against his father, she obtains a measure of justice for him for the beating he endured. His older sister on the other hand, symbolically mute, expresses no resentment against those who bully her. Having learned to accept her fate, she is characteristically sunny, both in this scene and throughout the film. She is representative of the millions who have suffered and have no voice to complain. It is left to her long-suffering mother to shed a tear on her behalf. The scene, and the movie as a whole, is a sympathetic narrative depicting the necessity and ability of the Chinese individual—and by extension the nation—to endure suffering, sometimes seemingly unbearable suffering, and to survive graciously in spite of it.

There are many scenes (see *Ermo* and Zhang Yimou's *Red Sorghum* [1987], for example), in which disputes between two individuals do not remain private affairs, but quickly involve others as intermediaries. The point is that individuals are not just individuals; more importantly, they are members of units larger than themselves—they are sons, mothers, brothers, and neighbors. It is the maintenance of harmonious relationships among them that takes precedence over an individual's sense of what is just or unjust.

Intensive viewing of selected clips can allow a focus on many of the details of small “c” culture: how people greet each other and take leave; how they thank others and offer apologies; how much physical space is maintained between individuals who are conversing; and how they express affection, pleasure, and displeasure. A catalogue documenting these interactions is too large an endeavor to accomplish in this essay.

In summary, filmic language is universal, and can be used in the classroom to teach students about other cultures and to facilitate communication between audiences who otherwise do not share the same linguistic code. More importantly, film is an important and effective tool for students who are attempting to navigate the uncharted universe of a “truly foreign” culture.

## FILMOGRAPHY

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*Blue Kite* (*Lan fengzheng*, 1993). Tian Zhuangzhuang.  
*Breaking the Silence* (*Piaoliang mama*, 2000). Sun Zhou.  
*Breaking with Old Ideas* (*Juelie*, 1975). Li Wenhua.  
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*Story of Qiu Ju*, 1992 also by the prolific director Zhang Yimou.  
*To Live* (*Huozhe*, 1994). Zhang Yimou.  
*Xiuxiu, the Sent-down Girl* (*Tian yu*, 1998). Joan Chen.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See Eleanor H. Jordan and A. Ronald Walton, “Truly Foreign Languages: Instructional Challenges,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* Vol. 490 No. 1 (1987): pp. 110-124.
- <sup>2</sup> See table “Expected Levels of Speaking Proficiency in Languages Taught at the Foreign Service Institute” in Judith E. Liskin-Gasparro, *ETS Oral Proficiency Testing Manual* (Princeton, N.J.: Educational Testing Service, 1982).
- <sup>3</sup> World Languages Framework (2007). <http://www.collegeboard.com>
- <sup>4</sup> See Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian: Qin*, Translated by Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

# Thinking Images: Doing Philosophy in Film and Video

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If Descartes were alive today, he would shut himself up in his bedroom with a 16mm camera and some film, and would be writing his philosophy on film: for his Discourse on Method would today be such that only the cinema could express it satisfactorily.

Alexandre Astruc  
*Film director and critic*<sup>1</sup>

Over the past several decades film and video have been steadily infiltrating the philosophy curriculum at colleges and universities. Traditionally, teachers of philosophy haven't made much use of "audiovisual aids" in the classroom beyond the chalk board or overhead projector, with only the more adventurous playing audiotapes, for example, or showing slides to provide historical context for a thinker's work. But with the advent of videotapes it became financially feasible to show films in classes in order to stimulate or amplify discussions of philosophical issues. And now there are numerous textbooks and anthologies of writings on the topic of philosophy and film, not to mention several journals (some of them online).

Among the recent proliferation of videos specifically designed and produced for use in humanities courses, the offerings in philosophy have been relatively meager. After all, what exactly does one *show* in order to enhance instruction in philosophy? While some of Plato's dialogues, the *Symposium* especially, lend themselves to being adapted for film, and the Myth of the Cave in the *Republic* cries out for visual presentation, these haven't been treated satisfactorily. After all, by the time one gets to Kant there are grounds for despair: the Sage of Königsberg seated at his desk pondering the transcendental deduction of categories is hardly the stuff of which great cinema is made. While talking used to be in the days of Socrates central to the philosophical enterprise, thinking and writing tend to predominate in modern times, and these do not easily allow spectacular visual portrayal.<sup>2</sup>

Given that philosophy is a discipline practiced in language, whether spoken or written, how can one "do philosophy" in the visual media of film or video? The

pages of any philosophical text could of course be filmed in sequence, but even the visual interest of seeing hands other than one's own turning the pages couldn't make the experience a match for simply reading the book.<sup>3</sup> Filming an actor reading a philosophical text aloud—however brilliantly—would hardly be more captivating. Perhaps a contemporary thinker doing on camera what professional philosophers in part get paid to do: delivering a lecture? This has been done, and many such videos are available for classroom use; but since few philosophers nowadays are great lecturers the results are disappointing. Somewhat more interesting might be the video of the philosopher being interviewed, or several philosophers in discussion. This has also been done, but one can't help feeling that a transcript of what is said would serve as well, if not better.<sup>4</sup> All that would be missed would be the opportunity to say, "So *that's* what So-and-So looks like."

In their introduction to a recent issue of *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* specially devoted to "Philosophy and Film," Murray Smith and Thomas Wartenberg pose the question: "To what extent can film act as a vehicle of or forum for philosophy itself?"—the question of "film *as* philosophy."<sup>5</sup> A major obstacle to the acceptance of the idea of film as philosophy has been the breathtakingly narrow view of the discipline held by so many practitioners in the mainstream "analytical" tradition, for whom it has to have *arguments* or it's not philosophy. This emphasis on the discursive nature of the discipline, on proceeding to conclusions by way of reasoned argument rather than intuition, catches an important feature of philosophy but fails to give a full picture. There are many occasions in the dialogues of Plato, that master of reasoned

argument, when the dialectic reaches an aporia and Socrates then resorts to vivid imagery or the recounting of a myth to fire his interlocutors' desire for enlightenment.

It is true that “if philosophy is regarded as the attempt to think systematically about fundamental issues of human existence, it seems plausible to regard film as capable of embodying such acts of reflection,” but this reflection need not be systematic.<sup>6</sup> In his own contribution to the special issue, Thomas Wartenberg questions the identification of philosophy with systematic thinking as being too narrow, invoking the obvious exceptions of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Wittgenstein.<sup>7</sup> Indeed many other philosophers from Heraclitus to Deleuze have generated profound ideas about existence in ways that are far from systematic: Epicurus, Marcus Aurelius, Montaigne, Schopenhauer, Emerson, and Heidegger are just a few names that come to mind. (Not to mention that other philosophical traditions, such as the Chinese, have produced a profusion of philosophy in which discursive thinking is absent or plays a minimal role.) While reasoned argument may be a preferred strategy for dogmatists convinced they are in possession of the truth, more agnostic thinkers prompt reflection on existence by other means, such as irony, poetic allusion, correlation of ideas or types, hyperbolic assertion, enigmatic aphorism, and so forth.

Incidentally, one might expect that films made by directors who have practiced the discipline of philosophy would contain philosophical themes. Two exemplars confirm this expectation: Terrence Malick, who studied philosophy at Harvard and Oxford, and taught briefly at MIT, and Errol Morris, who was a graduate student in philosophy at UC Berkeley for a few years in the early 1970s. Malick's *Badlands* (1973), *Days of Heaven* (1978), and *The Thin Red Line* (1998), together with Morris's *Gates of Heaven* (1978), *Vernon, Florida* (1981), *The Thin Blue Line* (1988), and *The Fog of War* (2003), turn out to be unusually rich philosophically. (Strange that *Days of Heaven* and *Gates of Heaven* should have come out in the same year—and what is it about philosopher film-makers that they have colored lines in their titles?) The opening lines of *Vernon, Florida*, to give just one example, are: “Reality. You mean, this is the real world? I never thought of that.”

From an educational perspective, then, philosophers might enhance their teaching by showing documentaries or dramatizations that deal with the topic of philosophers and

philosophy, or feature films that can illustrate philosophical themes and issues, or—perhaps optimally—films that in some sense “do philosophy” or are explicitly philosophical. But if, as suggested earlier, the videos that are made expressly for the classroom are generally uninspiring, what would it take to improve this situation? What styles and techniques would be most effective? Or, to pose a far more radical question: what about using film and video not just to enhance the teaching of philosophy and expand the audience of learners, but rather to do philosophy by using visual media to *generate philosophical understanding*? In other words, innovate by extending the use of film and video beyond the dissemination of knowledge and understanding to new modes of knowledge production.

An autobiographical turn is, at this point unavoidable: having worked in digital video for several years now with the aim of “doing philosophy” in visual media, I would like to reflect on just what it is that I've been doing. Lack of funds to pay for such luxuries as camera crews, actors, or lights to illuminate interviewees has necessitated a rather simple mode of production (do the videography “on location,” in public places or natural surroundings) and a somewhat spare style (visuals of environments, whether natural or built, accompanied by ambient sound, and voice-over recorded after the fact). Lacking interviews or talking heads, these “video essays” (where the connotation of “essay” as a trying out, or testing, in experience outweighs that of a written work) do not fit the standard documentary mold, and instead share some features with the experimental or art video. Working at such a basic level allows one to distinguish several ways in which video might be used to practice philosophy, and a variety of techniques that lend themselves to elaborating philosophical ideas in digital media. Here are the most significant:

1. Set up an *interplay* between *visual images and music*.
2. Provide *visual context* for a philosopher's thought.
3. Present philosophical ideas and *exemplify, amplify, illustrate* them.
4. Practice *irony*, especially through tension between past and present.
5. Exemplify visually and orally *modes of awareness*.
6. Provide *aesthetic pleasure* while doing some of the above.

We begin with the most difficult case, that of something central to what is added by digital media but which is apparently farthest from philosophy because it works without language—namely, music.

1. *Interplay between images and music.* About the relationship between images and music Schopenhauer wrote that “when scenes or activities are accompanied by appropriate music, the sound seems to open up their most secret sense and meaning, and to constitute the clearest commentary on them.” Indeed, according to Schopenhauer “music lets any painting, or scene from real life and the world, stand forth in heightened significance.”<sup>8</sup> This passage appealed greatly, and unsurprisingly, to both Richard Wagner and to Nietzsche, who quotes it with approval in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Wagner put the idea into practice to brilliant effect in his operas—and indeed he was writing magnificent film music long before the medium was invented and the genre developed.

The soundtrack to a film adds not only ambient “real world” sounds, whether recorded on location or in the studio, but also voices speaking language. But when music is added, the viewer’s *body* is called upon to deal with additional kinds of meaning other than linguistic. This already happens to an extent when philosophy is written in poetry or poetic prose, where some of the meaning is coming through tempo, rhythm, assonance, cadence, etc. A paradigm case of this is Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, which he characterizes not only as music but even as “a symphony.”<sup>9</sup>

One of the greatest composers to write film music was Arnold Schoenberg, who in 1930, while he was living in Berlin, wrote a ten-minute composition with the title, *Music to Accompany a Film Scene (Begleitmusik zu einer Lichtspielszene)*. This was to be a collaboration with the Hungarian photographer and film-maker, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, but for various reasons the project foundered and no film has ever been made (as far as I know) to accompany the music. It occurred to me that, with a composer as philosophically interesting as Schoenberg, it would be worth while to attempt the counterpart of what Schopenhauer discusses and put images to the music rather than the other way round—in the hope that the images would “open up the most secret sense and meaning” of the music and let it “stand forth in heightened significance.”

Since I was in Berlin at the time, doing the videography for a project inspired by Walter Benjamin about the ways a city commemorates its past, I looked for and found photographs from 1930 in an illustrated magazine in the State Library. To set up a tension between these images and images from the postmodern metropolis that Berlin is now in the process of becoming, and especially images of places of remembrance and destruction, could enhance the meanings of the music. Schoenberg wrote almost nothing about his *Music to Accompany a Film Scene*, but he did name each of its three parts: “Threatening Danger,” “Angst,” and “Catastrophe.” In this piece he clearly anticipates the Holocaust to come, and in view of the many philosophical discussions of that event which emphasize the failure of language to convey the horror, I thought it best to follow the composer’s example by saying very little, in order to let the viewer and listener participate in the attempt to make sense and construct meaning.

[Video excerpts illustrating these techniques can be viewed online. See Arnold Schoenberg’s *Begleitmusik: Images for the Music*, part 2 <http://www.hawaii.edu/edper/movies/Ex1.mov> ]

[Arnold Schoenberg’s *Begleitmusik: Images for the Music*, part 3 <http://www.hawaii.edu/edper/movies/Ex2.mov> ]

2. *Visual context* for a philosopher’s thought. In spite of a tendency in the western traditions to regard philosophical thinking as an activity that transcends the particular circumstances of the thinker in an ascent toward some kind of *theoria*, or contemplation of universals that are beyond space and time, the philosophies of some thinkers are explicitly dependent on *place*: names such as Rousseau, Nietzsche, Thoreau, and Heidegger spring to mind. Nietzsche in particular emphasizes the importance of the particular places where certain thoughts came to him, and so to be shown the Swiss Alpine landscape where the thought of eternal recurrence struck him may enhance our appreciation of that difficult idea.

A BBC production from 1999, in which “various biographers, translators, and members of Nietzsche organizations speak about the philosopher, his philosophical ideas, and influence” (program summary),

also goes beyond the standard television documentary format now and then. It shows, for example, a well mustached actor hiking in the landscape of Switzerland's Upper Engadin, where the thought of eternal recurrence came to him. The program also goes too far in showing spectacular scenes, shot from a helicopter, of the lone philosopher climbing a mountain ridge several thousand feet above the highest point to which Nietzsche himself, with his poor eyesight, ever dared to venture. Because of the robust perspectivism in Nietzsche's philosophy (the view that our experience of the world is a function of multiple perspectives that are dependent on our life situation and projections from past experiences, prejudices, fears, hopes, and so forth), the multiplicity of talking heads in this program is especially appropriate, but the programme is greatly enhanced by the portrayal of the places that were important for Nietzsche.<sup>10</sup>

When an idea is related to a particular place, perhaps by having occurred to the thinker while he was there, video offers the opportunity to show the place directly rather than having to describe it using language. This wouldn't matter in the case of abstract ideas or with a theoretical philosophy that presumes in its universality to transcend time and space, but is helpful in the case of a thinker like Nietzsche who often thinks it important that a particular idea should have come to him in a particular place. When a scene in a video shows a place, it shows it as it looked when the video was recorded—presumably, in the case of digital video, at some time in the recent past. But in a place where the built environment is lacking, or is old, it can look as it could have looked in the past—in, say, the late nineteenth century. Embedding the scene in a historical narrative setting it in the past will enhance this effect.

3. Present a philosophical idea, and *exemplify*, *amplify* or *illustrate* it visually.<sup>11</sup> An important figure in this context is the Russian director Sergei Eisenstein, who explored the possibilities of “intellectual cinema” in essays he wrote in the late 1920s. In an afterword to a book on Japanese cinema, Eisenstein argues that montage—the technique of juxtaposing different shots in (usually rapid) succession—is an important element of Japanese representational culture, even though he believes that Japanese cinema is innocent of the technique. He points

out that Chinese ideographs (which he mistakenly calls “Japanese hieroglyphs”) can express abstract concepts by juxtaposing representations of concrete elements: “the representation of an ear next to a drawing of a door means ‘to listen’ ... a knife and a heart mean ‘sorrow’, and so on.”<sup>12</sup>

The point is that the ... combination of two hieroglyphs of the simplest series is regarded not as their sum total but as their product, i.e. as a value of another dimension, another degree: each taken separately corresponds to an object but their combination corresponds to a concept. ... But—this is montage!!

On the analogy of this feature of the East-Asian ideograph, where “two independent ideographic characters (‘shots’) are juxtaposed and *explode* into a concept,” Eisenstein characterizes filmic montage as “a *collision* [in which] two factors give rise to an idea.”<sup>13</sup>

An example from Eisenstein's 1927 film *October (Ten Days that Shook the World)* suggests the power of this technique to work toward “intellectual cinema.”

A montage sequence that moves from a shot of a magnificent Baroque statue of Christ, through shots of Chinese bodhisattvas, Indian Buddhas, Hindu deities, and icons of various other religions, to a shot of an Eskimo idol problematizes the idea of the divine. As Eisenstein describes the intended effect, “We retain the description ‘God’ and show idols that in no way correspond with our image of this concept. From this we are to draw anti-religious conclusions as to what the divine as such really is.”<sup>14</sup> A later example from a different film is a sequence in Andrzej Wajda's *Samson* (1961) in which the protagonist, a Jew in Warsaw, approaches a fence behind which a large column of Jews is being led to the ghetto: as he approaches, the camera shows Nazi soldiers nailing up what appears to be a wooden cross—but which turns out to be the framework for an imprisoning fence. This sequence of images raises the question of the responsibility of the Catholic church for the persecution of the Jews in Poland.<sup>15</sup>

In the early 1930s Rudolf Arnheim pointed out the mysterious way in which slow motion in film doesn't look like ordinary motion slowed down, but results in movements “which do not appear as the retarding of

natural movements, but have a curious gliding, floating character of their own.”<sup>16</sup> Walter Benjamin drew wider implications about cinema from this phenomenon, suggesting that the film camera is capable of disclosing what psychoanalysis and depth psychology refer to as “the unconscious.”

With the close-up, space expands; with slow motion, movement is extended. And just as enlargement not merely clarifies what we see indistinctly “in any case,” but brings to light entirely new structures of matter, slow motion not only reveals familiar aspects of movements, but discloses quite unknown aspects within them ... Clearly it is another nature which speaks to the camera as compared to the eye. “Other” above all in the sense that a space informed by human consciousness gives way to a space informed by the unconscious. ... This is where the camera comes into play, with all its resources for swooping and rising, disrupting and isolating, stretching or compressing a sequence, enlarging or reducing an object. It is through the camera that we first discover the optical unconscious, just as we discover the instinctual unconscious through psychoanalysis.<sup>17</sup>

All the film-maker needs to do, then, is to employ slow motion appropriately—and there it is: a philosophical idea exemplified. The freeze-frame is similarly capable of revealing hitherto unknown aspects of the world by stopping motion abruptly, a technique that also shows rather than tells the genesis of the still photograph or snapshot.

More recently, Thomas Wartenberg has shown how well Charles Chaplin’s *Modern Times* (1936) illustrates Marx’s idea (Karl’s, not Groucho’s) of the “mechanization” of human activity brought about by industrial capitalism.<sup>18</sup> One can also exemplify an idea while deliberately *not* illustrating it, thereby drawing attention to the tension between film’s ability to exemplify and to illustrate. We might hear, for example, Walter Benjamin’s reflections on the mysterious juxtapositions one finds in the display windows of certain shops in the Paris arcades: “The items on display are a rebus: how ought one to read here the birdseed in the fixative pan, the flower seeds beside the binoculars, the broken screw on the musical score, and the revolver atop the goldfish bowl?”<sup>19</sup> More

interesting than showing these juxtapositions illustrated would be to show different examples: say, the tuba behind the potted palm, the stuffed bird next to the ice skates, and the travel clock obscuring the lithograph of the palace interior.

[Walter Benjamin’s *Paris*, chapter 9 <http://www.hawaii.edu/edper/movies/Ex3.mov> ]

Another possibility is to present a philosophical idea in language, whether spoken in voice-over or written on an intertitle, and then to amplify it by means of visual images. This process is more complex, and potentially more interesting, than simply illustrating the idea. Amplification employs images that reinforce the thought, allude to possible extensions or parallels, explicate features implicit in it, and so forth. Benjamin for example suggests that new building technologies touch an archetypal nerve that fires up images from childhood and activates my themes from the childhood of the race.<sup>20</sup> Here is a scene that exemplifies ideas about the relations between myth and technology by finding and showing mythic or archetypal images in scenes of (in this case) structures heading toward dilapidation.

[Walter Benjamin’s *Paris*, chapter 5 <http://www.hawaii.edu/edper/movies/Ex4.mov> ]

Two other techniques can be used that allude to, or exemplify, features of philosophical thinking: the telephoto zoom and the soft focus (both of which were operative in the last example). A telephoto lens with a long focal length “compresses the space” in such a way that objects that are actually far apart appear unusually close together, while observed texture gradients and optic flows produce a distortion of perspective. In this way the scene, because it looks more two-dimensional, takes on a schematic or abstract appearance. One can zoom in with a long telephoto lens to such a tight close-up of the object of the ultimate focus that one is left with an abstract pattern that isn’t easily recognizable as the object. In the case of the Paris arcades, for example, an extreme telephoto shot of a small portion of an iron-and-glass roof may, in its abstractness, suggest the abstract dynamics of iron-and-glass construction better than a wider-angle shot in which the roof is easily recognizable.

The reverse process brings in a new element, insofar as it helps make the philosophical point that our understanding of a thing or event is always dependent on the *context*. This can be effected by beginning with an extreme telephoto shot which presents a simple abstract pattern that will not be recognizable as any particular object. As the camera pulls back, it is the gradual introduction of more and more context that makes the object recognizable. Soft focus can work in a similar way: an extremely soft focus produces such a vague image, like clouds of various colors, that the object is again unrecognizable. A gradual move to sharp focus can then give an impression analogous to a vague idea's becoming clearer and finally distinct.

4. One can employ visual media in service of the venerable philosophical practice of *irony*. The first great ironist in the western philosophical tradition is Socrates, who often says one thing while meaning another (usually opposite) thing, something stated elsewhere in his discourse or implied by the larger context of his utterance. Rather than generating an either/or dichotomy in which we take the utterance and its counterpart as excluding one another, irony in the Socratic dialogues often sets up a both/and situation whereby both the utterance and its counterpart are held in tension as equally valid.

Sometimes it may be the unsaid idea alone that Plato wants to promote, and in these cases one is prompted to read and listen between the lines for the intended meaning, thereby participating in the very process of philosophical inquiry. Philosophical irony doesn't require the dialogue form, as evidenced by the ironical strategies practiced by more recent thinkers like Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Their philosophies thus have to be engaged existentially, experimenting with the dual and multiple perspectives they offer, which are never made fully explicit but always require the reader's thinking participation.

Film and video lend themselves to irony because they combine two distinct media, visual images and soundtrack—both of which can present language. Filmic images naturally give the impression of showing some kind of reality, determined by what they are images of. We are accustomed to having the soundtrack of a film

accompany the visual narrative in a harmonious and enhancing way: usually what we are hearing is what we are seeing, though it may be enhanced by (non-diegetic) music on the soundtrack. If we hear voice-over, it usually works in a similar way, narrating, amplifying, or commenting on what we are seeing. But if the soundtrack goes against or contradicts the visual narrative, the ironic tension prompts us to ask which one is real. After all, real things come and go, and visual montage of scenes in ironic tension can convey, for example, the interplay of presence and absence that conditions reality.

In particular one can set up a tension between past and present by giving a spoken narrative that is historically situated in, and refers to, the past of a place, while showing scenes of that place in its present condition. The voice-over here is from a radio broadcast for children that Benjamin made in the late 1920s about the famous Borsig locomotive works outside Berlin.

[Walter Benjamin's *Berlin*, "Borsig Works" <http://www.hawaii.edu/edper/movies/Ex5.mov> ]

When effected through voice-over combined with fairly "subjective" camera work, the presentation of a philosopher's ideas to some extent implies approval, or agreement with them. The combination of images and sound tends to buttress the ideas. But one can also negate visually an idea that is being heard voice-over. We might hear Walter Benjamin recounting with approval what his friend Bertold Brecht said about photographs, that they can "record practically nothing of the essence of something like a modern factory."<sup>21</sup> But at the same time we are seeing the famous "Turbine Hall" that Peter Behrens built for AEG in Berlin in 1909, one of the first buildings to lend architectural dignity to the industrial workplace (an achievement that both Brecht and Benjamin must have appreciated), in a series of still scenes that renders Brecht's claim questionable.

[Walter Benjamin's *Berlin*, "Behrens AEG" <http://www.hawaii.edu/edper/movies/Ex6.mov> ]

Benjamin invokes a formulation by the symbolist painter Odilon Redon which pursues irony to the point of mystery and anticipates philosophically effective techniques available to the film-maker: "The sense

of mystery, the secret of which we have learned from Leonardo da Vinci, comes from always remaining in the equivocal, in double and triple perspectives, in suspicions of perspectives (images within images)—forms that come into being in accordance with the mental state of the viewer.”<sup>22</sup> One can exemplify this rather Nietzschean idea by doubling the image back on itself through combining a scene with its mirror image, which effects a transformation that suggests a prism- or mosaic-like order underlying and informing our visual experience.

[Walter Benjamin’s *Paris*, chapter 3 <http://www.hawaii.edu/edper/movies/Ex7.mov> ]

Film can also draw attention to itself and its strategies in an ironical mode, by means of Brechtian distancing effects, such as allowing the camera and its operator to be glimpsed on various reflective surfaces. Self-referential techniques that allow film to refer to itself as film go back a long way in the history of the medium, Dziga Vertov’s *Man with the Movie Camera* (1929) being one of the most seminal exemplars.

5. One can use audiovisual techniques to *exemplify certain modes of awareness*. There is in any case a tendency to imagine our experience of the world on the model of visual technologies. Plato famously compared our everyday awareness to the experience of sitting in a darkened space and watching a play of images projected onto a two-dimensional vertical surface in front of us (*Republic*, Book 7). Had he been writing some twenty-four hundred years later, he would simply have used the analogy of people sitting in a movie theater believing that what they are seeing on the screen is real. Not long after the invention of the *camera obscura* in the sixteenth century, analogies began to be drawn from that contraption to the eye—and even to consciousness. In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) John Locke writes, “The understanding is not much unlike a closet wholly shut from light, with only some little openings left, to let in external visible resemblances, or ideas of things without” (2.11.17). The French philosopher Henri Bergson wrote: “When I first saw the cinematograph I realised it could offer something new to philosophy. The cinema provides us with an understanding of our own memory. Indeed we could

almost say that cinema is a model of consciousness itself. Going to the cinema turns out to be a philosophical experience.” And such a powerful experience that since the advent of film many people apparently construe their visual experience on that model.<sup>23</sup> This, however, perpetuates a prior tendency to oversimplify the phenomenon by imagining consciousness operating on the principle of “one scene at a time.”

Suppose you are sitting in a lecture room where someone is giving a talk, perhaps on the topic of doing philosophy in film and video. A mention of *My Dinner with André* reminds you of the date you have for this evening with a special friend. You hope that your request for a table at the window will be granted, since the view will form the appropriate backdrop for the special topic you intend to broach over dessert. You rehearse a few minor topics of conversation that would be suitable to raise during the hors d’oeuvre, and some more substantial themes for the main course. —Suddenly you remember that you promised someone who couldn’t attend the talk that you would tell her what it was about—and so you return your attention to the speaker and his talk (who now seems, strangely enough, to be discussing the topic of dinner conversation).

So, how exactly was your experience between the drifting away and the return? While you were visualizing the animated facial expressions of your friend and imagining the table at the window, the view of the city lights, the pleasingly attentive waiters, the exquisitely presented nouvelle cuisine, and so forth, the things that were actually present in your visual field—the speaker at the lectern, the wall behind him, the backs of the heads of the people sitting in front of you—didn’t simply disappear, but rather receded into the background. Or else the images you were imagining appeared as if transparently superimposed upon your experience of the scene that was actually present. And while you were anticipating the conversation over dinner, hearing in imagination your own voice raising the very special topic and your friend’s replying in a tone of pleasant surprise, this imagined sound didn’t completely drown out the speaker’s voice as it droned on. If suddenly asked to repeat what he had just said, you could probably manage, though recalling what he had said a few minutes before would probably be

impossible. The auditory experience is somewhat parallel to the visual: you hear in imagination your friend's voice in the foreground, as it were, and the voice of the lecturer in the background.

To take another example, this time involving the memory of a past event rather than the anticipation of a future one: suppose you are sitting at home reading a journal article, perhaps something on doing philosophy in film and video. Fascinating though the treatment of the topic is, mention of a Swiss alpine landscape reminds you of a hike you took in the mountains of the Upper Engadin early last summer. You remember walking up a steep path that winds through meadows dotted with wildflowers; you hear the sound of the cowbells down in the valley against a background of the wind blowing through the branches of the nearby pines; you see the huge boulders on either side of the path with their exquisite patterns of colorful minerals overlaid by patches of lichen; you feel the gentle breeze on your cheek and smell the air that struck you then as the sweetest you had ever tasted; and you recall the view from the highest point of the hike, looking down on the lake far below whose surface the setting sun was turning to burnished bronze. You turn the page—and realize that you have no idea what the last few paragraphs were about (except that there was something on the topic of dinner conversation).

In this case the remembered scene might be best described as being situated *behind* the pages of the journal you are holding in your hands. Again, what is in the actual visual field doesn't disappear—after all your eyes have been dutifully moving along the lines of print and gradually down the page—but there's a transparency between the pages and the remembered scenes from the alpine hike. And any sounds you heard in memory, such as the cowbells or the wind sighing through the pines, probably drowned out the muted sound of the traffic on the street outside, and whatever other noise may accompany the silent reader's reading. Although if asked whether an ambulance with its siren wailing had gone by during the previous few minutes, you would probably be able to tell.

Our conceptions of our experience tend to simplify the phenomenon drastically. Perhaps an element of wishful

thinking conditions our “one scene at a time” view of consciousness, a naïve assumption that we are simply “here now.” The reality is surely that, while we may well be here now, we are also often “there then” as well (in some other real or imagined place, and at some other time). Our visual experience is often permeated by transparent superimpositions of past memories, imagined possibilities, or future anticipations, while our auditory experience frequently consists in soundtracks of “internal monologue” or “dialogue,” together with ambient sounds from memory, which underlie or overlay the sounds we are actually hearing in the so-called real world. Most of the time, then, we are spread out—spread thin, some might say—over more than one temporal dimension, remembering the past while anticipating possible futures.<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps because of an allegiance to the “one scene at a time” conception of our awareness, film-makers have tended to show such blendings of temporal horizons as switches from one to another, as in the “flash-back” or “flash-forward.” But more true to our experience would be transparent superimposition to suggest this feature of it.

Walter Benjamin discusses a more exotic version of this phenomenon, in which images from a more distant past are occasioned by one's being in a place with a history. He invokes the type of the *flâneur*, or saunterer (discussed by Baudelaire and Proust), for whom “far-off times and places interpenetrate the landscape and the present moment.”<sup>25</sup> Benjamin is concerned with the ways the past can manifest itself in the present through structures that have survived over time, and also with the ways the past thereby seeps, as it were, into the present. So, when Benjamin says the arcades are “the residues of a dream world,” the use of certain digital techniques can show how this dream world might be experienced as it conditions what we call the real world.

[Walter Benjamin's *Paris*, chapter 1 <http://www.hawaii.edu/edper/movies/Ex8.mov> ]

By contrast with the busy inhabitant of the modern city who is so intent on her proximate goal that she is for the most part oblivious to the surroundings, the *flâneur* is someone who wanders around with no particular

purpose, and is thus unusually open to the multitude of events and things going on in the cityscape. In this mode of experience one becomes especially aware of the ways that, in a city like Paris where most of the built environment is centuries old, the past emanates, as it were, from the city's streets and structures: "The street conducts the *flâneur* into a vanished time. For him, every street is precipitous. It leads downward—if not to the mythical Mothers, then into a past that can be all the more spellbinding because it is not his own, not private."<sup>26</sup>

Also Baudelaire, who characterizes the multiperspectival possibilities of awareness in terms of a couple of simple but spectacular optical devices: "The perfect *flâneur* ... is like a mirror as vast as the crowd itself, or a kaleidoscope endowed with consciousness, which, with each one of its movements, represents the multiplicity of life and the dynamic grace of all life's elements."<sup>27</sup> The bustling commotion of the modern city prompts a proliferation of perspectives, and with each turn on the streets, a different set of perspectives combines to produce a new and complex visual experience.

[Walter Benjamin's *Paris*, chapter 2 <http://www.hawaii.edu/edper/movies/Ex9.mov> ]

Film and video are eminently suited for presenting the multi-temporal nature of awareness, insofar as one can use the technique of superimposition to suggest, for example, the way a scene remembered from the past is transparently superimposed over what is being seen in the present.

Benjamin emphasizes the temporality of overlap in his discussion of the (puzzlingly named) "*colportage* phenomenon of space":

The fundamental experience of the *flâneur* is of the "colportage phenomenon of space," in which everything that potentially happened in a particular place is experienced all at once. (Such experiences of superimposition, or overlap, are especially common in the world of hashish.) The place winks at the *flâneur*: "Now what do you think may have gone on here?"<sup>28</sup>

[Walter Benjamin's *Paris*, chapter 8 <http://www.hawaii.edu/edper/movies/Ex10.mov> ]

One can play a visual variation on an idea expressed verbally. With the *colportage* phenomenon of space: instead of showing events from different times in the same place, one can show different parts of the same place at the same time. This can be extended to a play on the phenomenological insight that our perception of the constancy of moving things, or things in relation to which we are moving, results from a synthesis of a potentially infinite series of "profiles" of, or perspectives on, the object of perception.

The film-maker can induce an experience of temporal overlap in the viewer within the compass of the film or video, simply by setting up an interplay between the visual narrative and the soundtrack. One presents some language visually: a piece of text, say, for the viewer to read. If it is re-presented later in the same way, the viewer will notice the repetition, but will perhaps also reflect on how it appears differently insofar as it's recognized as a repetition, and also because it's appearing in a different context. But if one re-presents the words in a different medium, in voice-over rather than writing, the viewer will experience a fusion of temporal horizons analogous to (and perhaps prompting reflection on) the way memories work in everyday experience. If through experiences of superimposition and overlap, as Benjamin says, "truth becomes something living ... in the rhythm by which statement and counterstatement displace each other in order to think each other," then film and video are ideally suited to the pursuit of that elusive goal.<sup>29</sup>

6. Lastly, *aesthetic pleasure* as a concomitant to doing philosophy. While the more puritanical writers have been suspicious of beautiful style in philosophy, some thinkers have thought that it performs an important pedagogical function. Socrates for example regarded *eros*, desire stimulated by beauty, as crucial for philosophical thinking, teaching, and learning, while Nietzsche was equally emphatic on this point—to the point of calling his writings both *Versuche* (essays, attempts) and *Versuchungen* (temptations, seductions). Beautiful style, then, serves the function of inducing the reader to participate in the play (and work) of thinking. Similarly, philosophical film and video will work best when they not only instruct but also captivate by way of the aesthetic pleasure they provide.

Enlightenment according to later Buddhist philosophy is not a matter of going across to the other world in order to attain nirvana, but is rather a waking up to the fact that nirvana is already here and now. (The Buddha's name means "awakened one.") At one level film and video can prefigure such an awakening if the camera operator simply goes about in the everyday world recording appropriate scenes in such a way as to show the beauty that is already there in the midst of our mundane existence, but which we usually fail to notice. As Thoreau once wrote, "It is only necessary to behold thus the least fact or phenomenon, however familiar, from a point a hair's breadth aside from our habitual path or routine, to be overcome, enhanced by its beauty and significance."<sup>30</sup>

There are several ways, then, in which film and video can be used not only to enhance instruction in philosophy but also to actually engage in the practice of the discipline. While the reactionaries in the profession tend to see the use of visual media as "mere entertainment," I regard my work in video simply as an extension of my academic research into additional, complementary media. Rather than thinking and writing, and then publishing the resulting text in a book or journal, one in this case thinks and writes a script in which some language will be heard spoken as voice over and some shown as text on-screen, and where the language then functions synergistically with visual images, ambient sounds, and music. Rather than abandoning the practice of writing, one extends it beyond writing words to writing in visual images (videography and cinematography).

In the face of declining literacy on the part of contemporary undergraduates, who read progressively less than previous generations, one can take advantage of their increasing "image literacy" by complementing language with visual images in media that are more likely to engage their attention. And there is also the potential, in the case of graduate students and one's colleagues who teach, of furthering research and deepening understanding by combining the might of the pen (or typewriter or word-processor) with the powers of sound and the visual image.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Alexandre Astruc, "The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Caméra-Stylo," in *The New Wave*, ed. Peter Graham (New York: Doubleday, 1968), p. 19. (Since Descartes' *Discourse* is a kind of intellectual autobiography, with a narrative that ranges from his education at the Jesuit College of La Flèche in Anjou, through his military service in Germany, to his years of seclusion in Holland, it's hard to imagine how he could make a film of it while confined to his bedroom.)
- <sup>2</sup> In the 1970s Roberto Rossellini made several long films for television: *Socrates* (1971), *Augustine of Hippo* (1972), *Blaise Pascal* (1972), *Descartes* (1974). Derek Jarman's *Wittgenstein* (1993) is a brilliant piece of filmmaking, but one doesn't learn from it a great deal about either the man or his ideas.
- <sup>3</sup> There are two films based closely on philosophical texts: Péter Forgács, *Wittgenstein Tractatus* (1992), and David Barison and Daniel Ross, *The Ister* (2004), which presents numerous excerpts from Heidegger's lectures on the poet Hölderlin. This work is brilliant in parts, but lasts for a grueling three hours. My own video from 2006, *Walter Benjamin's Paris: Projecting the Arcades*, is a celebration of Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project*.
- <sup>4</sup> The rotoscope animation of the videographed interviews in Richard Linklater's *Waking Life* (2002) make the talking heads more interesting to watch, but even this technique begins to pall after a while with some of the less interesting speakers.
- <sup>5</sup> Murray Smith and Thomas E. Wartenberg, "Introduction," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 64/1 (2006): 1.
- <sup>6</sup> Smith and Wartenberg, 2.
- <sup>7</sup> Thomas E. Wartenberg, "Beyond Mere Illustration: How Films Can Be Philosophy," *JAAC*:24.
- <sup>8</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, §§ 65, 52.
- <sup>9</sup> See my essay "The Symphonic Structure of Thus Spoke Zarathustra," in James Luchte, ed., *Nietzsche's 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra': Before Sunrise* (London and New York, 2008), 9–28.
- <sup>10</sup> *Friedrich Nietzsche: Beyond Good and Evil*, in the series, *Human, All Too Human: Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Sartre* (Princeton, N.J.: Films for the Humanities & Sciences, 1999.) My video from 2003, *Nietzsche's Thinking Places: From the Alps to the Mediterranean*, focuses almost exclusively on showing the relevant places.
- <sup>11</sup> An idea can be *presented*, whether as a text to be read or as voice-over to be heard, and then *amplified* by means of visual images. Some ideas may come across better when presented as a visual text, as if an excerpt from a book, while others may work better when heard, as in a lecture. The audience's interest can usually be held more effectively by a mix of auditory and visual presentations.

- <sup>12</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, “Beyond the Shot” (1929), in Richard Taylor (ed.) *The Eisenstein Reader* (London, 1998), 82–83.
- <sup>13</sup> Eisenstein, “The Dramaturgy of Film Form” (1929), and “Beyond the Shot,” in *The Eisenstein Reader*, 95, 87.
- <sup>14</sup> Eisenstein, “The Dramaturgy of Film Form,” 109–10.
- <sup>15</sup> See Roy Huss and Norman Silverstein, *The Film Experience* (New York, 1968), 32–33.
- <sup>16</sup> Rudolf Arnheim, *Film as Art* (Berkeley, 1957), 116–17. (Original German edition: Berlin, 1932.)
- <sup>17</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility” (third version, 1939), in *Selected Writings* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 2003), volume 4: 265–66.
- <sup>18</sup> Wartenberg, *JAAC*: 28–30.
- <sup>19</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1999), 540 [R2,3].
- <sup>20</sup> Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 461 [N2a,1].
- <sup>21</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Berlin Chronicle,” in *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, part 2, p. 599.
- <sup>22</sup> Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 429 [M6a,1], quoting a French author invoking a passage from Redon’s notebooks.
- <sup>23</sup> Dreams are often understood on the analogy of seeing a film while asleep—so that some people even imagine they dream “in black and white” rather than in color.
- <sup>24</sup> Practices such as zazen, sitting meditation in Zen Buddhism, cultivate patience in the face of the ranging mind, and consist in an alert waiting for the babble of internal sound and flicker of images to subside.
- <sup>25</sup> Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 419 [M2,4].
- <sup>26</sup> Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 416 [M1,2].
- <sup>27</sup> Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 443 [M14a,1], quoting a passage from Baudelaire’s essay “The Painter of Modern Life.”
- <sup>28</sup> Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 418–19 [M1a,3].
- <sup>29</sup> Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 418 [M1a,1].
- <sup>30</sup> Henry David Thoreau, *Journal*, 8:44
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# Coffy, YouTube, and Uncle Ben: The Use of Film and New Media in the Teaching of African American Studies at the University of Hawai'i

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When students enter my African American Experience courses at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa many are taking part in their first academic engagement with the study of individuals racialized as Black. The great percentage of students are from Hawai'i and, despite the "majority minority" status of the state, they have grown up in a society that, according to the 2000 United States Census, is only 2.8 percent "African American or Black," including individuals who selected both categories of one single race and "in combination with one or more other races" (US Census 2000). The small population of African Americans in Hawai'i is a very diverse group that includes members of the military, university students, travel industry employees, attorneys, medical doctors, journalists, and scholars. Some are transplants and others are local-born. They represent a broad cross-section of socio-economic classes (see Jackson 2004). However, in spite of the diversity of the group, a majority of my students enter the classroom with predominant assumptions of a monolithic African American cultural identity; assumptions often gleaned from available media products such as film, television, music, and news.

Discourse on race and ethnicity in Hawai'i is often constructed around the notion of the islands as a multiracial paradise. And even though these perceptions have been challenged by scholars, journalists, and essayists (see Haas 1998; Okamura 1998; Edles 2004; Halagao 2006), the mythology of multiracial harmony remains embedded in popular discussions. Indeed, the fact of a "majority minority" society with a significant multiethnic population in which individuals racialized as White are in the minority does not necessarily eradicate problematic understandings of individuals racialized as Black (see Takara 2004). I frequently observe that the fantasy of ethnic and racial harmony limits discourse that would help students further

understand the complexity of the African American experience. For although it is the case that students on the U.S. continent could become better educated in various areas of the African American experience (see Pinar 1993; Shujaa 1995; Ladson-Billings 2000), opportunities for the engagement of students in Hawai'i in lessons that promote a better understanding of the African American experience are even more limited. This educational gap often results in the expression of race-based assumptions and epithets that—even though they may be considered innocuous by those who utter them—can provoke acts of violence (see Viotti 2005).

I am keenly aware that my students are frequently confronted with issues and events that are related to the African American experience, and that these events inevitably require them to make sense of the meaning of race in contemporary society. Take, for example, the comments by radio talk show host, Don Imus, who described the mostly African American Rutgers University women's basketball team as "nappy headed hos", or the use of the "n" word in a private, yet well-broadcast, phone conversation by Hawai'i resident Duane the Dog Chapman. Consider the significance of the noose in Louisiana's Jena Six case, or the on-going debates about the contemporary social significance of "hip hop," or the political resonance of conversations about the Black authenticity of Hawai'i born presidential candidate Barack Obama. The various cases *inter alia* need to be put in the context of the history of the African American experience if they are to be properly understood—for example, an understanding of the history of lynching in the United States, the use of racial epithets during the slavery and Jim Crow eras, and the presumption of Black female promiscuity that accompanied racist understandings of Black womanhood. Alarming, as students reflected on

these highly publicized events it was apparent that many of them were at the whim of the sound bite—mere consumers of media without the benefit of a broader and deeper understanding of the social and historical background necessary to adopt a more critical and informed opinion.

Teaching about the African American experience in Hawai'i—as is the case elsewhere — involves teaching about contemporary debates in ways that bring out more fully the context in which the students are raised and that allow for a critical consideration of the ways that African Americans are represented in the media. I believe that this process is most effectively achieved when film and new media are incorporated into the curriculum. Therefore, the very media productions that have to this point distorted student awareness of the African American experience can be used to create a more accurate understanding. In addition, the process of applying students' understanding of key social and political circumstances to a reading of media products also makes them more able to apply this knowledge to readings of media outside the classroom.

In the remainder of this article I aim to demonstrate how I use the content and contextual analyses of a range of film and new media products in the teaching of African American Studies. In addition, I will include examples of ways in which I take into consideration the unique social and cultural circumstances of Hawai'i.

### **Old School Media – Early Cinema, Resistance, and Propaganda**

D. W. Griffith's 1915 *Birth of a Nation* played a role in perpetuating the racist and discriminatory conditions experienced by African Americans by constructing a violent tale of the rise of the Ku Klux Klan in what is conceived as a heroic effort to curtail Black presence in post-Civil War social and political arenas. The film, notably described by President Woodrow Wilson as "history written with lightning," presents students with an opportunity to see the way in which the power of a new medium bolstered an oppressive social and political system that disadvantaged African Americans. However, in spite of its racist message, I believe that a screening of *Birth of a Nation* can also be used to challenge modern students to consider alternative readings of media texts.

One of the main reasons that I have for showing excerpts from the film is to make students aware of the impact of the medium at the time, because its effect upon

early twentieth century audiences is almost as important as the content itself (see Rocchio 2000). *Birth of a Nation*, based on Thomas Dixon's book and play *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan*, takes the popularly successful text into a new arena in which the nascent medium of film is used to construct a feature-length, live-action representation of the story. For the first time, a mass audience experienced a medium that conveys a sense of reality in a way that books or photographs cannot. I show the film at the point when students have learned about the Reconstruction era, the implementation of the Jim Crow system, the beginning of the terrorist activities of the Ku Klux Klan, and the anti-lynching movement. As a result, they are clearly able to understand that the Dixon story and Griffith's cinematic production are historically inaccurate. Armed with an awareness of historical facts, they are in a better position to analyze the socio-political purpose and impact of a false story told through a medium that had enormous influence in shaping the social and racial landscape of the time. The students' awareness of the problematic fact that information is presented by the film as "history," and their understanding of the excitement that the new medium of film would have had for early audiences, helps them to understand how information can be used to create a distorted picture of the past. I encourage them to consider that the Internet can also be considered in the same way—as a contemporary source of potential misinformation that can produce invidious effects.

After I show Griffith's classic "cliff scene" in which a White woman leaps to her death rather than face contact with a Black soldier—a scene that is best understood in the context of the legal, social, and political discourse around the topic of miscegenation that was prevalent at the time—I bring students into the world of African American resistance to the film's message via an excerpt from African American filmmaker Oscar Micheaux's 1920 film, *Within Our Gates*. Micheaux's film features a scene that counters Griffith's "cliff scene" by showing a White man attempting to rape a Black woman. The woman stands on a chair and holds her arms up in an attempt to protect herself from the man's advances. The act is conspicuously a cinematic match to Griffith's White woman raising her arms to fend off the approaching Black soldier. However, in Micheaux's scene a birthmark is revealed on the woman's shoulder, which makes her would-be rapist aware that he is about to attack

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his own daughter from what is described as a “legitimate” relationship with a Black woman. The scene presents a richly meaningful example of the methods which Micheaux is using simultaneously to correct a wrong via the same medium as Griffith and to readjust the impact by presenting the well-documented reality that the circumstances of rape were more than likely the reverse of Griffith’s popularly based assumption that Black men were raping White women (see Courtney 2005; Siomopoulos and Zimmerman 2006). In addition, Micheaux’s film, by depicting the legitimacy of the young woman, serves the early twentieth century African American racial uplift project that promoted puritanically bourgeois notions of Black sexuality, Black womanhood, and things moral by presenting a representation that countered the images of Black women as hypersexual, licentious, and immoral.

In a further effort to give students a sense of the early twentieth century African American experience, I show sections of the 1927 silent film *Scar of Shame*, directed by Frank Perugini, one of numerous white directors of “race films.” The film, which tells the story of a relationship between an African American classical musician and an African American woman from a less than honorable background, provides an illustration of the discussions we have in class about the color-hierarchy within the African American community by highlighting the significance of social class distinctions within the community, and the overall focus on racial uplift—a theme that is also dealt with in *Within Our Gates*. The scenes from *Scar of Shame* further support my students’ understanding of DuBois’ “talented tenth” and related projects meant to redefine the meaning of African American cultural identities in the United States. The film is melodramatic yet, significantly, it offers students the opportunity to witness the lives of individuals involved in an important social project meant to demonstrate that African Americans were upright members of society who were indeed worthy of full citizenship.

When using media to make historical circumstances resonate with greater significance for my students, it is useful to show how content and context interact. During lectures and discussions about the African American experience during World War II, my students screen sections of the 1944 U.S. War Department film, *The Negro Soldier*. Considering the resistance to Blacks serving in the war and the ubiquity of anti-Black discrimination at the time,

my students are often surprised that the film includes a cinematic history of Black participation in American conflicts dating back to the Revolutionary War. However, students are also aware that there was a significant challenge launched against the ban on Black participation in the war effort, including A. Philip Randolph’s threatened march on Washington D.C. if defense industry jobs were not opened up to African Americans. So, even as the *Negro Soldier* brings forth a history that arguably is still not widely known and represents a media prelude to the Civil Rights movement, students are able to read it as a propaganda document. Interestingly, I’ve seen my students become savvy enough to read the film as part of a project designed to raise the morale of Black troops and secure the support of African Americans at home; further communicating the contradictions inherent in the project of fighting fascism abroad while simultaneously experiencing discrimination in the military and the United States.

### Education through Blaxploitation – Difficult Texts in Difficult Times

The MGM Lion roars and the deep pluck of an electronic bass rolls underneath. As the film opens, Richard Roundtree strolls down a New York City Street in a dark leather jacket. The students know from the music, the swagger, and the city backdrop that Richard Roundtree embodies 1970s coolness. However, my students must also consider this “coolness” in light of the historical and social context of the African American experience. Through lectures and readings, they learn that Gordon Parks’ 1971 film, *Shaft*, is part of a larger cinematic movement known as Blaxploitation. But, the important issue for them to consider emerges out of the question: What does Blaxploitation say about American society?

I use the opening scene of *Shaft* to demonstrate that the film emerges out of a socio-political context that facilitated a shift in the production of African American cinematic representations. In other words, Roundtree’s strut can be interpreted as an historical and social document. Hollywood producers and independent filmmakers saw it as economically viable to bring forth a series of movies in this vein in the 1970s, and by looking at the film in this way students gain a better insight into how the Black Power movement emerged from the Civil Rights era. The contentious social and political debates of the late 1960s and

early 1970s created the economic conditions for marketing a strong Black superhero *à la* John Shaft—a representation of an African American man far removed from the black soldier in Griffith’s classic whose physical proximity could cause a white woman to leap from a cliff.

*Shaft* offers students a very lively and useful presentation of the prevalent discourse of the time. While the idea of John Shaft could still appear threatening to mainstream America, my students realize that the portrayal of an African American helping to remove heroin from the streets without compromising his dignity or appearing neutered represented a significant social change in people’s perceptions of African Americans. Also, students learn that the film’s commodification of radical African American identities is an aspect of the movement towards more neo-conservative ideologies and post-Civil Rights era discourse that suggested that racism and discrimination were no longer prevalent aspects of the African American experience.

I also show students the opening scene of the 1973 film, *Coffy*, starring Pam Grier and directed by Jack Hill, one of numerous white directors of Blaxploitation era films. The story features a revenge tale, in which the lead character avenges the drug-related death of her sister. The students are lured into the “groovy” movie by Roy Ayers’ music running through the opening credits and before they know it they are catapulted into a classic “Blaxploitation” scene of sexuality and violence. Students watch *Coffy* lure a drug dealer into bed under the guise of trading sexual favors for the proverbial “fix,” only to shoot him and his partner. The *Coffy* screening begs the question: Why show the students such unseemly scenes and characters as representations of the African American experience? I believe that there are four reasons for this. First, the film offers a window into the harsh social and political circumstances that could motivate an African American woman to take control of her life, albeit through violent means. Second, it reflects the period’s prevalent representation and criminalization of militant African American women identified with such high profile legal cases as Angela Davis’ prosecution as an accomplice to a plot to free the “Soledad Brothers.” Third, the film counters predominant assumptions that African Americans were supportive of extra-legal activities, particularly in the distribution and sale of illegal drugs. Fourth, as an example of exploitative cinema, it invites students to explore the contradictions in *Coffy*’s violent acts of revenge for the

social evil of drug dealing. As a result the film perpetuates the myth of the hyper-sexualized African American woman that early twentieth century racial uplift proponents worked so hard to dispel.

Overall, an examination of the contradictions inherent in the Blaxploitation period help students to acquire the skills and knowledge to further interrogate the complexities of the African American experience and the flawed outcomes of what are presumed to be advances. Students, therefore, come to see the contemporary discourse around African American pop-cultural products (e.g., film, television, hip hop music) as derived from earlier pop-cultural moments with similarly nuanced debates.

### On-Line Life and Making the Past New

The Internet is a rich medium that offers educators many opportunities to access visual and audio documents, though they often have to remind students that all data are not created equal. For example, when we discuss slavery and, later in the course, when we discuss the Works Progress Administration (WPA), students are encouraged to visit the Library of Congress on the World Wide Web and access the WPA interviews in which the audio-taped recordings of former slaves have been converted to digital format (<http://memory.loc.gov/>). Students marvel at hearing the voices of former slaves tell their stories. Listening to the voice of an actual former slave lessens the distance between past injustices and present circumstances, and it helps students to understand that they too are the inheritors of the legacy of American slavery.

The culture of contemporary Hawai’i has been shaped in part by networks of social and cultural alliances created by the descendants of the predominantly Chinese, Japanese, Portuguese, and Filipino laborers who came to the islands beginning in the late nineteenth century to work the sugar and pineapple plantations. So, in contrast to the continental United States, a consideration of plantation life in Hawai’i is not framed by the experience of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Most notably, the impact of the enslavement of Blacks in the Americas takes a peripheral position in the Hawaiian Islands, as the unique circumstances of Hawai’i’s plantation-era history of labor exploitation and ethnicity-based stratification are more prevalent in social and political discourse, as well as in the curriculum (see Takaki 1983; Rosa 2004). But when the 1941 voice of former slave Mrs. Laura Smalley

of Hempstead, Texas resonates through my University of Hawai'i classroom, it makes the experience of slavery more real for my students. Mrs. Smalley speaks across the decades to explain a life experience that is rarely given much thought by students here because of its distance in time and place from the history of ethnic divisions with which they are most familiar.

The website YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com>) also offers numerous opportunities to bring media into the classroom for student discussion and analysis. In covering the Civil Rights movement, I've found it useful to show a clip of what is described as "rare live footage" of a late 1950s Billie Holiday performance of the song "Strange Fruit." The students know that lynchings such as the 1955 killing of fourteen-year-old Emmett Till in Money, Mississippi, as well as other racist acts of violence, are not remote phenomena, and Billie Holiday's performance of the 1939 Abel Meeropol song opens a window into the efforts of the anti-lynching movement. The song was frequently banned from broadcast—evidence that the demands of the marketplace and various socio-political interests aimed to limit resistance and restrict freedom of speech on the topic. And so a viewing of the haunting black and white footage of Billie Holiday drawling Meeropol's lyrics, "Southern trees bear a strange fruit, blood on the leaves and blood at the root," introduces students to an important American performer, highlights the many dimensions of racism in U.S. society, and offers a penetrating social commentary on the violence and terrorism prevalent in the southern United States at the time.

Another example from YouTube that I find useful to show my students is a video of Gil Scott Heron's 1974 song, "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised." The video, featuring colorful post-psychedelic 1970s-style animation, presents Heron's lament for contemporary politics, and expresses the sentiment that the medium of television has fostered complacency and the co-opting of events that might otherwise have helped bring about social change. After viewing the Heron video, I ask students to listen to the 1995 Brooklyn Funk Essentials song, "The Revolution Was Postponed Because of Rain" which, as the title implies, is critical of the lack of passionate interest in politics and deplores the new cultural and political priorities that impede African American revolution in the post-Black Power era.

In order to show students the ways that social and political changes are articulated in various sectors of

our society, I take them on a journey to the Ferris State University website, "The Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia" <http://www.ferris.edu/jimcrow>. Here they can view a range of products and advertisements that reveal the historical acceptance of racist representations of African Americans. And even though items such as the golf product, "Niggerhead Tees," no longer exist, the African American cook on the Cream of Wheat box can still be found at the local Safeway. Aunt Jemima received a makeover in the 1980s to shed her plantation-era mammy look, yet her brand-name origins are still rooted in a particular moment—a moment when the African American status was that of a lowly servitor such as a cook or maid.

The Jim Crow Museum visit also raises the topic of rice—a product that is an integral part of local cuisine throughout the Hawaiian Islands. It is also a highly significant factor in a consideration of the part played by food production on plantations in the southern United States. Students deconstruct the social significance of the product labeled "Uncle Ben's" rice, and consider its role as a product icon. I explain that "Uncle" was used as the familiar title for older Black men to whom the larger White society could never offer the more respectful "Mister." It was widely used as a generic reference to older Black men. We also discuss the use of the product title, "Uncle Ben," to sell rice—the long history of similar representations of Black men, and the assumption implicit in the name that a Black man would have expertise in the area of harvesting and cooking rice (see Pieterse 1992).

The Uncle Ben's corporate website, launched in 2007, provides the visitor with an interactive exploration of the headquarters of *Chairman* Uncle Ben (<http://www.unclebens.com>). But armed with the history of Uncle-Ben-like representations of black men in mind, students see things differently—they now find themselves in a corporate world that is painstakingly striving to erase this history and reinvent the icon that is such a vital part of their corporate image (Elliot 2007). This more nuanced understanding of the historical circumstances and social conditions enables students to see the Uncle Ben representation as out of step with contemporary understandings of African American identity, and they come to understand more fully the manner in which social movements and discourses of justice have had an impact on corporate presentations. As the students explore Uncle Ben's office, they see how his image has

been completely reconstructed. For example, his bow tie, once conceived as a common sartorial adornment of the subservient house slave, is now considered a part of a collection that has been “a fixture of [his] wardrobe” and is worthy of a trophy that reads “Golden Bow Tie Award” (<http://www.unclebens.com>). Students can run their cursor over his large corporate desk to read his journal, which recounts an active schedule of lectures, product approvals, and world travels. The text is filled with Uncle Ben’s proverbs and witticisms that reflect an educated life of the mind, as well as a business-oriented obsession with rice. In short, he is transformed into a genteel, high-powered corporate executive with worldly interests. The website, rich with opportunities for students to explore various dimensions of Chairman Uncle Ben’s life, reinforces his new role as the knowledgeable and wealthy uncle that everyone wishes they had, rather than the servant “uncle” reminiscent of a nineteenth century house slave.

In the context of the Hawai’i plantation experience, the revision of Uncle Ben’s “image” underlines the differences in the meaning of “uncle” in Hawai’i and in the continental United States. In Hawai’i “uncle”—and “auntie” for that matter—does not carry the same legacy of oppression. It is an honorific that is comfortably extended to family friends. In the African American context the usage of “uncle” takes on a very different meaning. And students who do not initially grasp the offensive connotation that “uncle” has for African Americans learn to see that a major corporate revision signifies that the prior representation of Uncle Ben is now deemed inappropriate. Furthermore, students gain insight into how a modern corporation employs new media to preserve an icon that supports its brand while simultaneously distancing itself from the horrid circumstances that facilitated the creation of that icon.

## Conclusion

I have argued and demonstrated here that film and new media can be used to teach students to comprehend the complex historical, social, political, and cultural dimensions of the African American experience. Whether they are located in Hawai’i or anywhere else in the U.S., when students hear the voice of a former slave in a WPA interview, experience Billie Holiday’s voice, see the grimace of Pam Grier in the face of a drug dealer, or visit the corporate headquarters of the stylish Uncle Ben, they are engaging with the African

American experience in a way that transcends textbook instruction. It leads them to view the world from a new vantage point—one that inspires a more informed perspective on a painful past.

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# Digital Storytelling in Teacher Education: Creating Transformations through Narrative

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Stories are important resources in the repertoire of the teacher. Storytelling is a powerful way in which to communicate experiences and to explore ideas. Using stories, the teacher takes her students on journeys of discovery that introduce them to new vistas of lived experience. In this article, we describe how we have used *digital storytelling* to teach the core values in our field of special education—an approach that honors cultural diversity and empowers students to reflect on and share their experiences.

Digital storytelling makes use of a wide variety of techniques including standard storytelling, audio- and video-recording, multimedia publication, and shared “mediated” events. In our university-level courses, students watch digital stories as well as create them. We employ a student-directed, inquiry-based approach to digital storytelling that makes the process of storytelling as important as the resulting digital story. Our approach to digital storytelling continues to evolve as new media and technologies emerge that enable new forms of sharing, dissemination, communication, and publication. In this article, we will describe how we have used digital storytelling for inquiry-based learning in university level courses, K–12 schools, and community settings.

## Self-determination through digital storytelling

We, the authors, have had the privilege of living and working on the Pacific islands of Hawai'i, American Samoa, and Micronesia. These unique islands offer many opportunities for the celebration of island life through digital storytelling. Digital storytelling is a compelling way for people to document their lives and communicate their stories to others. For islanders, technology provides a valuable means of showcasing the beauty and rhythms of island life through visual representations that celebrate the physical and cultural geography of their island homes. Furthermore, technology allows Pacific islanders to document, in narrative form, the accomplishments as well as the challenges that individuals

and families face. For educators, digital storytelling provides an engaging way to bring lessons about community, culture, local values, and traditions into the classroom. Digital media helps them craft stories about daily life. But just as importantly, it helps in the dissemination of what is distinctive in the lives of people and their communities. Thus, digital storytelling can bring lessons from the world into the classroom and, in turn, be used to share the distinctive issues of island life with others.

Digital stories are multimedia projects employing the use of photographs, video, audio, and music. We have developed and documented several educational genres in our work with teachers (Skouge, Boisvert & Rao, 2007; Skouge, Guinan, Nobrega, Rao & Segal, 2004.). These genres include photo “walkabouts,” video “how tos,” video or audio interviews, video role plays, narrated slide shows, and music videos.

The development of projects does not require any specialized software. We use programs such as iPhoto, iMovie, PowerPoint, and Keynote that are readily available on computers. Projects can be made on both Mac and Windows platforms using software that is either bundled into their respective operating systems, included in productivity suites such as Microsoft Office or Apple iWork, or available for free download. Completed projects can be shared by means of CDs, DVDs, and websites.

An essential aspect of digital storytelling resides in the power of example—the power, that is, to project images of exemplary individuals who can influence other people and make a difference in their lives. We believe that human beings can be profoundly influenced by presenting themselves and others, within familiar contexts, as models of inclusion and self-determination. Media are uniquely equipped to project these influences through self-guided tours of persons' homes and communities; demonstrations of various skills and accomplishments; recordings of songs, dances, and other

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forms of artistic expression; interviews with a role models; role plays of dreams unfulfilled; and portrayals of people making valuable social contributions, such as teaching or helping others. Videos are useful tools in documenting personal acts of civic responsibility.

Our work with digital storytelling is about changing lives and minds. It is grounded in Paolo Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy; Albert Bandura's (1997) social learning theory, which develops the ideas of modeling and self-modeling; and Peter Dowrick's (1999) research on video "feedforward," which posits that video is an effective way to create images of positive futures and to depict the future potential of an individual.

### **Digital Storytelling in Island Schools: The Pacific Voices Project**

We have developed many of our digital storytelling techniques and genres in K–12 classrooms as a part of the Pacific Voices project. This partnership between the University of Hawai'i Center on Disability Studies (UH-CDS) and Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL) was funded by a US Department of Education Regional Technology in Education grant. This multi-year initiative gave us the opportunity to work with teachers at sixteen school sites in Hawai'i, American Samoa, the Federated States of Micronesia, Palau, the Marshall Islands, Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands. We worked with teachers to find out what their key concerns were and taught them to use multimedia tools in their classrooms and communities to support their learning objectives. During this project, we developed several culturally- and locally-responsive ways to create and use digital storytelling in Pacific island schools and classrooms.

The project began in 2000, when software that facilitated desktop video editing and multimedia production came bundled on computers. Using built-in multimedia tools, such as Apple's iMovie and iPhoto, we developed a variety of culturally responsive instructional strategies that integrated multimedia technologies and island-based themes and stories. We paid particular attention to the oral and visual elements of island cultures, celebrating in narrative form the distinctive beauty of the people and their environment.

Teachers and students at our Pacific Voices school sites were excited to use the "technology toolkit" that was

provided for each school through project funding. The two essential tools for creating digital storytelling projects were a Macintosh desktop computer and a video camera, which we included in each toolkit. We taught teachers how to use iMovie and a variety of strategies that they could employ in creating multimedia materials that combined digital photos, video, and audio. Teachers and students (in grades 4–12) learned interviewing techniques and video-editing skills that allowed them to record interviews with elders and community members. They also learned how to edit photos and record their own voices to make short visual stories about important issues in their communities. Students created plays, composed public services announcements, and made digital books in their first language and in English, using the built-in multimedia software on the computer.

We compiled projects made by students at the Pacific Voices schools on CDs, creating what we called "video letters," and mailed them to the other schools in our Pacific Voices network. In this way, teachers and students shared their multimedia work and told their stories to people who lived on other islands. We also held videoconferences in which students from different islands met and interacted. At least one school on each island possessed videoconferencing capacity, allowing students to gather together and "meet" virtually via telecommunication technology. After watching each other's digital stories on CD, students used the time during videoconferences to interact and learn more about each other's islands, cultures, and traditions. Students particularly enjoyed the digital stories that showed the day-to-day lives of their peers on other islands. For example, one group of high school students from Hawai'i shared a digital story about learning to surf and, in turn, students in American Samoa shared a video about cultural traditions in their villages. The students were fascinated by the everyday lives of their peers, and they asked many questions to each other about how they lived and what their school days and home lives were like. By sharing their digital stories and through real-time interactions via videoconferencing, teachers and students in the Pacific Voices schools gained an authentic experience about life in different communities in the Pacific.

### **Using Digital Storytelling in University-Level Courses**

Our experiences with digital storytelling in Pacific Voices classrooms provided many ideas that we continue to include in our university-level courses. Using the same built-

in multimedia software that our Pacific Voices teachers and students used, we have, for many years, taught students in our assistive technology courses how to create digital stories and use these stories to affect change.

The assistive technology course, offered by the Special Education department in the College of Education at the University of Hawai'i, focuses on teaching undergraduate and graduate students the ways that technology can be used to support school and community inclusion for persons with disabilities. By incorporating digital storytelling in the course, we have explored how technologies can be used to "give voice" to individuals with disabilities and empower them to tell their stories. For our university-level students, the process of creating the stories as well as the sharing of the final product become key ways in which to learn and teach lessons about inclusion, advocacy, and accommodations for individuals with disabilities. The stories are transformative to the students who worked on the projects, the audiences, and the individual highlighted in the stories.

In the following section, we describe how the creation and development of a digital story can teach lessons and values, while empowering people to be agents of positive change.

### **Creating change: When stories become real**

In the Fall 2006 assistive technology course, one of our students was an undergraduate student named Mellany<sup>1</sup>, who had recently arrived from the island nation of the Republic of Palau. We had heard that she was the first wheelchair user from Palau to attend the University of Hawai'i. We were excited to meet her, believing that she would become a role model for others and that we could provide some support in her grand adventure of going to college far from home.

As a service-learning project in the class, we asked for volunteers to join Mellany in producing a digital story of her college experience. Five students volunteered. Mellany enthusiastically agreed to the proposal as she realized that a digital story would be a useful way to show her family back home what her surroundings were like at college and what life was like for her in Honolulu. The videos that her team created would be burned on CD and sent to her family in Palau, a strategy similar to the "video letters" that students had shared during the Pacific Voices project. Over a period of several weeks, the students and Mellany worked together to produce a series of videos. The first video project, using

a video camera and iMovie, showcased Mellany hosting a campus tour in her wheelchair. The video of Mellany's campus tour included many of the experiences that she had to endure as a disabled person, such an instance when a campus shuttle driver refused, in violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act, to pick her up. The students, who had become close to Mellany, while working on the project, were both dismayed and indignant that this had occurred. It opened their eyes to the types of discrimination and personal challenges that an individual with a disability may face in day-to-day life.

In a second video, Mellany hosted a video tour of what was advertised as an "accessible" apartment located in one of the university dorms on the lower campus. While shooting the video, the student team was stunned to find out how many basic and essential elements within the apartment Mellany could not operate alone. They learned that Mellany was unable to manipulate the strings that would open and close the heavy curtains in her bedroom. The small space made it impossible for her to access her desk in her wheelchair. The shower was also unusable, with a faucet too high for her to reach and a showerhead that she could not adjust or access. The shower chair had no cushion. The microwave in the kitchen was placed out of reach. Their most disconcerting discovery was that in the event of fire, she would be unable to exit the apartment, as the door was too heavy and unwieldy for Mellany to manage from her electric wheelchair. While the apartment was technically "accessible" according to the Americans with Disabilities Act codes, the video helped them to see the apartment through Mellany's eyes and with her particular disabilities. It was immediately apparent to our students that these codes do not take into account that disabled people have varying and unique strength levels, physical limitations, and mobility issues and that one set of specifications does not necessarily fit all.

The student team worked with Mellany to create a digital story that showed how this "accessible" apartment failed to meet Mellany's living needs. The team then shared their footage with other students in the assistive technology course. Rather than simply focusing on what didn't work, the students brainstormed strategies that would make things more accessible for Mellany. Working in small groups, the students reviewed the media, discussed successes and challenges, and suggested strategies to improve Mellany's safety and quality of life. It didn't stop there. Using a small

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budget of seventy-five dollars that we paid for through course lab fees, the student team turned their ideas into action. They renovated Mellany's shower and constructed an accessible desk in her bedroom and countertop in the kitchen. They added a rice cooker and George Forman grill to her kitchen and, for the first time, Mellany was able to share in the preparation of a dinner of grilled chicken and hamburgers. Then they all sat down to eat a dinner of celebration.

The team's achievements were not just Mellany's. This experience of creating and documenting a story about the life of a fellow student taught them a good deal about working together. A Samoan student wrote of the project that it represented the single most meaningful experience of her college career. Students had come together as a team, in partnership with a person with a disability and, with the help of technology and digital storytelling, had supported Mellany in giving expression to the challenges she faced in her new life at university. They had learned an important lesson about creating and telling digital stories—that they can be a means of inquiry, of working through problems, and of support for others.

### **Inquiry-based Learning: Family Stories in the Classroom**

Another example of digital stories for inquiry-based and transformative learning occurred in an interdisciplinary graduate certificate program that was sponsored by the University of Hawai'i Center on Disability Studies through its MCH LEND program (Maternal and Child Health Leadership Education in Neuro-developmental and Related Disabilities). This program sponsors interdisciplinary courses that use a mentorship model in which a "learning community" of students across disciplines (including public health, social work, physical therapy, speech pathology, nursing, special education, nutrition, medicine, political science, and law) were mentored by their respective faculty to study issues of culture and disability.

We developed an innovative model using digital storytelling as a means to introduce students to key issues facing people with disabilities and their families, and to foster communication and dialogue with them (Skouge, Ratliffe, Guinan & Iding, 2007). We collaborated with persons with disabilities and their families to produce video stories organized into thematic scenes, each addressing a central concern that deals with matters of inclusion and

self-determination. We had two interrelated aims. The first aim was to give "first voice" to the individual and family in describing the reality of their lives and situations. The second was to create an authentic and useful dialogue among the individuals, their families, and the students enrolled in our program.

The students watched and listened to these stories of people with disabilities and their families, and learned about the issues in their lives from these personalized and first-hand narratives. The videos were accompanied by a viewing guide, which posed talking points for further learning. Working in small teams, students identified key "learning issues." These were usually matters of particular interest to individual members of the student team, and provided motivation to do further research. As working professionals, each team member brought a particular perspective and strength to the process of problem identification and problem solving. The teams wrote letters to the family, addressing what they had learned by watching the digital stories, and explaining what they had discovered from the research about their chosen learning issues. We asked students to present their ideas in the first-person and not in impersonal, academic language, so that their conclusions would be accessible and useful to the families who read their papers.

The individuals with disabilities and their families came to the classroom to meet in person with student teams and respond to the letters that the students had written. Again, the individuals and their families were given first voice, beginning the conversation with their response to the students' letters. This began a dialogue between student teams and the families, allowing students to collaborate with families on solutions rather than prescribing solutions for them. This interaction between the storytellers (the individuals and families depicted in the videos) and the students was a key event in the inquiry-based project. These interactions allowed the students and families to clarify issues, propose solutions, and identify the steps that needed to be taken. The digital storytelling media provided a form of critical engagement as opposed to mere entertainment and became a means of developing critical awareness of issues and of promoting dialogue and conversation as a means to solve problems. Digital stories encouraged dialogue and communication between two groups of stakeholders, the individual with a disability (and his family), and their future service providers. For the students in our program, the importance of solving

problems *with* rather than *for* the people they serve in their professional lives was clearly modeled in this process.

### Returning to our Island Homes: Project Based Learning for University Students

As part of our work at the College of Education, we have created an informal network of undergraduate and graduate students from Pacific islands. This network includes students from American Samoa, Tonga, Kosrae, Pohnpei, the Marshall Islands, Palau, Chuuk, Yap, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), and Hawai'i. Over the years, the students, who participate in the network on a voluntary basis, have been part of many Pacific Voices projects and have learned digital storytelling techniques as a result. They have also used these skills to create projects for other courses that they take at the university. They have integrated course content from a variety of fields and addressed their own personal interests in honoring their home cultures and communities. In some cases, we have been able to accompany students to their home islands over summer break and support them to create digital storytelling projects in their home villages and communities.

When we go to a Pacific island to start a digital storytelling project, we organize youth leaders and others into media teams, and we encourage them to photograph their villages so that they convey, in a systematic way, the look and feel of their home. We want them to depict both the ordinary events of daily life and the natural beauty that surrounds them. We equip teams with digital cameras (still and video); and work with them to construct "shoot lists" and "story boards" which, in turn, guide the documentary process. Shoot lists may include particular landscapes and seascapes, flowers and other details of nature, street life, shops, and portraits of elders and friends. Storyboards sequence the routines of cooking, fishing, gardening, animal husbandry, worshiping, swimming, and playing sports and games. We construct opportunities for these activities to occur, so that children become engaged in the very activities they are documenting.

Perhaps because Pacific life remains relatively "unmediated" (especially as produced through the eyes of indigenous people themselves), village elders have enthusiastically embraced our efforts to teach children and youth to share stories of village life, including feeding pigs; cross-net fishing; harvesting coconuts, yams, taro and tapioca; preparing

breadfruit; cleaning reef fish; preparing sashimi; making leis; and baking in earthen ovens. We produce our stories in the indigenous language of the village, with the understanding that it is to be "gifted" to the participating families and schools and shared with our students at the University of Hawai'i.

In summer 2007, we had the opportunity to accompany an undergraduate student and a doctoral student to Kosrae (which is part of the Federated States of Micronesia). One student was from Kosrae and the other was Native Hawaiian. Both students were committed to empowering and educating children in their respective communities and were interested in how media can be used as a way of to tell stories of the beauty of their traditions and values. Both students had taken our assistive technology classes and had been part of our Pacific Voices network for many years. They were very familiar with a variety digital storytelling techniques and genres and were eager to put these methods to use with children in Kosrae.

We worked with twelve children and their elders to produce photo and video media about Kosraean village life, including the preparation of a "healthy meal" using local foods and traditional recipes. The resulting media showcased the children learning from their elders. It is now being distributed on DVD's throughout the island, as part of an effort to raise awareness about inclusion, diabetes prevention, and post-secondary education.

### Modeling Digital Storytelling Techniques in University Courses

In this article, we have described several ways in which digital storytelling can support inquiry-based and project-based learning. As we have mentioned earlier, the technologies used for making digital stories are now readily available to all of us on our desktop and laptop computers. With instruction in using digital media and video-editing software, instructors who are interested in using digital stories in their classes can acquire the skills it takes to make short videos such as the ones have described in this article. It does take practice to gain expertise and refine these skills, but it is well within the reach of any educator who is interested.

In our university classes, we require our undergraduate and graduate level students to learn these skills by engaging in authentic field projects. We hope they will continue to use these strategies in their own teaching practice. We teach

these skills by modeling. Our assistive technology course meets once a week and our routine includes showcasing a few digital stories related to course content. Through these stories, we explore themes such as self-determination, cultural expression, and inclusion. As we watch and discuss digital stories, students begin to identify underlying tools and the techniques used to make these videos. We then guide our students through hands-on exercises in which they learn the skills necessary to produce their stories. Through a series of class assignments in which they practice these skills on small projects, we challenge students to plan and implement their own storytelling projects.

It can be challenging to teach multimedia skills to novice learners, especially when we are simultaneously engaging them in a creative enterprise. Humans work to acquire skills; they play to express creativity. The typical learning sequence, however, requires us often to work first, in order to play later. This becomes problematic when we want students to experience joy and creativity throughout the semester, even in the face of numerous mini projects and a daunting laundry list of skill sets to acquire, which is always the case in project-based learning.

We have met this challenge in our work by deemphasizing product outcomes in favor of experiential outcomes. We expect students to engage in projects as exploratory exercises, and not so much as projects to be mastered. Our technique may be summed up in three words: explore, reflect, and envision. Students *explore* with hands-on learning, *reflect* on their learning process, and *envision* how they might apply the technology in their classrooms.

We budget one hour per week for such *hands on explorations*, usually with students working in pairs. Volunteers and teaching assistants lend a helping hand as students work on the computers. We emphasize that students do not need to master skill sets; we want them to experience the skills firsthand, and then apply them creatively and joyfully within the time available.

Following each class session, students write about their learning experiences in the threaded discussion of our online courseware. This helps them to reflect on their learning and visualize how to apply the lesson that they have learned in their own classroom teaching. We view this “explore/reflect/envision” model as a useful way to expose our students to a broad array of technology applications within a single semester.

Students take pride in the finished products they create during the course. They use and share them in many ways. Some create CDs of their work and present them to their families. Some use them as curriculum materials for their student teaching or presentation materials in other university classes. This hands-on component to our teaching receives the highest student evaluations, with students reporting that they “get it,” even if they don’t “master it.”

### **Visualizing a classroom of bricks and mortar, light and sound**

In this article, we have described a few ways in which digital storytelling can be used as a powerful and transformative medium both for the producers and the audiences of the stories. As educators of future teachers, we will continue to use emerging technologies to model for our university students how they can better teach the children they will work with in their teaching careers and in their roles as community members. We will continue to develop our own practice of the methods of digital storytelling as new media emerge and, as our technologies evolve, to explore new ways of using media to present the lives of people with disabilities.

We envision our classroom as a theater, a portal, a studio, and a showcase in which new media are explored as tools of communication and empowerment. We use our classroom as a space in which a “community of learners” engages in creative activity—celebrating the beauty of the Pacific while constructing sustainable, inclusive visions of island life. We are passionate about storytelling. It is through stories that we share our common humanity. We envision our classroom as a performance center in which we celebrate picture and voice, light and sound. We move furniture, open creative spaces, invite storytellers (digitally and in person), encourage audience participation, and mix media. We imagine a reader’s theater, bathed in imagery, projected floor to ceiling, just as stories once were told under the moon and by the light of the fire.

We envision our classroom as a gateway to Pacific islanders and their communities beyond—engaging in dialogue, solving problems together, and exploring cultural and artistic forms of expression. We see plasma screens on the classroom walls as in the CNN newsroom. We envision our university students tutoring other students—videoconferencing with children and youth, counseling them, and acting as role models to them. Our task is to create classroom partner-

ships and foster human connections through text, voice, and video. We seek to collaborate in shared efforts to celebrate difference and build a better world.

We envision our classroom as a curriculum workshop that is open in the evenings and during weekends. It is a place that supports the production of digital curricula for students in Hawai'i and other Pacific islands. Our student teams will create digital media that are broadcast on Pacific radio and television stations. We imagine regularly scheduled children's television workshops, produced by UH students and disseminated on satellite television and DVD to Pacific island nations. Our programs include songs, stories, cultural lessons, and community walkabouts. Please join us if you wish.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Not her real name

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# Finding a Voice

James R. Skouge and Brian Kajiyama

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In Fall 2002, I was working in partnership with the Hawai'i Department of Education producing a series of video profiles of exemplary persons with disabilities in Hawai'i (Skouge & Ratliffe, 2004). Brian Kajiyama was nominated as a candidate. He was twenty-six years old; an honor student in his senior year at the University of Hawai'i, majoring in *disability studies*; and intending to pursue graduate education in counseling. Brian has cerebral palsy. He uses a powered wheelchair for mobility and communicated, at the time of our first meeting, through writing—word processing, e-mail, text messaging, and text telephone (TDD). Brian has the functional use of his right hand, permitting him to type with relative speed and ease. He chose not to use an augmentative communication device, as he did not like the robotic sounds of the electronic “talkers,” depending instead on the written word and, on occasion, having his words read out in class by his “note taker.”

Brian and I communicated via e-mail. He agreed to the making of the film, and he also agreed to write a twelve-minute script describing the milestone events of his life (Skouge, 2005). The plan was to keep the format very simple: I would film Brian rolling into a meeting room at the university, and he would acknowledge the camera with a smile and then turn to a keyboard to type his story. I would focus on his hand and face and the computer monitor as he communicated. Later, in post-production, I added my own voice, narrating Brian's words. We met three times. On the final visit, I brought an augmentative communication device that I borrowed from a friend, asking Brian if he might end the video by speaking a few words using the talker's voice. He agreed. This is what he said:

Now as I grow and have to think of communicating outside of this ivory tower known as school, I realize I will need some device, for people won't be as patient to read my thoughts and will want to hear them. So I try to keep up with what's out there in terms of augmentative devices. Ideally, it would be something very compact, without a robotic sound.

This device definitely has potential. It's compact and seemingly easy to transport. The only minor drawback, and, again, maybe this is something I'll need to learn to accept, is the robotic voice. I'm still hopeful, though with the extreme progression in technology today, synthesized voices will be available that will compare with human quality speech. My critical view of the speech quality on such devices is something that I need to accept. And quickly. I must learn to not be so picky. As they say, beggars can't be too choosy.

This was our final “shoot.” Brian and I parted company. Several months later, when I attended his December graduation, I learned that he had not yet been accepted into graduate school and that he was still uncertain about his future studies. Later that spring, I received an e-mail from Brian asking if he might volunteer in my office some days each week, helping me with clerical work such as filing, word processing, and keeping inventory. I immediately said, “yes” although neither Brian nor I had any idea where this arrangement might lead. He had never been in my office before, and we did not know one another beyond the brief experience of the video project. But I did know that Brian was intelligent, goal directed, mobile, and pleasant to be with. We set up a schedule. Brian would work three mornings each week, beginning immediately.

## An open space: Building around perimeters

I teach educational technologies in the Department of Special Education at the University of Hawai'i. The year prior to Brian's offer to work with me, the department had invited me to relocate my office in what had been the departmental conference room. It was a large space (perhaps twice the size of a typical office), windowless, inordinately cold (due to the air conditioning system), and lit by a few fluorescent lights. And in spite of the room's size, a large portion of its space was taken up by an over-sized, two-pedestal conference table. But I saw the room's potential, and I enthusiastically

cally accepted the offer, with the understanding that I could remodel it as a *studio*. I envisioned a digital environment with workstations around the perimeter and, in the center, a space that would be open and inviting to all comers, including wheelchair users.

The first order of business was to dismantle the immense conference table. Counters were constructed along three walls to accommodate computers, television monitors, printers, and scanners. Peg boards and shelves were hung on walls to maximize floor space. Light-weight furniture was acquired, including stools and tray tables. The fluorescent lights were replaced with spot lamps. Arts and crafts of the Pacific were displayed on the walls. Photographs and videos of marine life and island scenes were played on the monitors to the accompanying strains of Island music.

The open central space allowed Brian access to all essential equipment: computers, VCR's, cameras, a printer, and a scanner. We acquired a Telecommunication Device for the Deaf (TDD) for telephone communications; we disconnected the hydraulic "door closer" and tied a sash to the handle so Brian could pull the door closed while driving through. The lamps were plugged into power strips so they could be turned on and off with a single switch. And we constructed Brian's workstation in a corner of the studio, angled in such a way that he could back in to gain full view of the space.

Digital access proved to be easy to accomplish. Brian was capable of manipulating every key and button in our studio, bringing home the fact that the digital world essentially requires just one finger for near full control. We acquired trackballs for the computers, though Brian preferred the standard mouse. We purchased camera tripods that allowed full control from the handles (zoom, tilt, pan, and pause). Within days, Brian joined our video production team as they worked together on filming and editing interviews.

Brian's presence added to the welcoming atmosphere. He was young and "tech savvy." He loved sports and was a diligent student. We agreed that Brian should come and go as he liked and carry his own key to the office. Soon Brian had his picture and office hours posted on the door, with the caption, "Brian Kajiyama, Digital Media Associate." But I also had other plans to help Brian in his work as a digital media associate: I felt strongly that Brian's work would be more easily accomplished if he had an audible voice, and that meant a "talker," which was something I suspected Brian would resist.

## The DynaWrite and the "blog"

Not many weeks after Brian's start, we met Bruce Flemming, the Hawai'i "rep" for the Dynavox Company, which is a major manufacturer of augmentative communication devices. Bruce had recently been assigned to the Pacific region and was eager to build his reputation and client base. We heard that he was on island and invited him to our studio for a video interview. The "set" was simple: two chairs and a folding table. I acted as the host. Bruce demonstrated his equipment. Brian handled the camera. During the interview I proposed to Bruce that he lend Brian a DynaWrite for a two or three week "try out," suggesting that he might gain no better product endorsement, should Brian choose to embrace their product. Bruce agreed to leave his demonstration model with us that very day. It was perhaps a bit of an ambush to ask this of Bruce while the office cameras were running; but we did it nevertheless, and Bruce took it all in good spirit.

Brian fell in love with the DynaWrite. It was small in design and fit easily into his backpack—an important consideration for Brian. It also produced a deep, commanding voice—robotic, yes; but at least not the childlike robotic speech of earlier versions. Before long, Brian was answering the telephone, shopping at the bookstore, delivering messages, and taking over many of the management duties in our office. It was not long after that that he was admitted into the master's degree program in educational counseling; after which he began counseling "clients" in our office using his new device.

Little did we imagine that the loan of the talker would stretch from weeks into months, and finally into more than a year before the Hawai'i State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) saw fit to buy Brian a DynaWrite of his own.

The story of Brian's eighteen-month quest with DVR for the purchase of the DynaWrite was one of persistence mixed with a certain amount of exasperation. There were face-to-face meetings between Brian and his counselor(s); letters of documentation and justification; formal "assessments" and the exchanges of many e-mails. Attempts were made to steer Brian to local providers even though they did not sell the device he requested. Patiently and repeatedly, Brian expressed that he had made his choice. He knew what he wanted. Time and again, Brian's initiatives were postponed or thwarted.

Midway through this protracted affair, Brian discovered blogging—a form of Internet journaling. Brian is an avid

writer. So I was not surprised that he immediately took up blogging with the same passion that he invested in all his endeavors. Soon Brian was posting a weekly Internet entry entitled “Brian’s Ramblings.” The journal was marvelously written, and provided interesting and detailed accounts of the daily events of Brian’s life—including his struggles to obtain a DynaWrite.

**On January 24, 2005, Brian posted the following report:**

A very rare time that I’ll compose an entry on consecutive days. But it’ll be an interesting read, I assure you.

I like to think of myself as a nice person, I always try to do good, do the right thing, treat people with respect. I certainly don’t try to be mean or do bad to anyone. You’d think I should have good karma, or whatever you believe in....

Last night I received an e-mail regarding my augmentative communication device. It wasn’t a bad note, in fact it was a positive one. Someone had received a DynaWrite through the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR). “Great!” one should think.

It’s great except for one minor detail...I’ve been patiently waiting for over a year to receive my device, all the while trying my best to convince VR that they should support this. Finally VR is convinced, but yet there’s a bunch of hoops that I was asked to jump through. I DO all that they ask of me....now it has become a waiting game, “pass the buck” if you will. Come to find out, a VR counselor was able to order a device for someone in less than a week’s time! How can there be such a huge disparity in this idea of “delivery of services”?

What exactly am I missing here?! Something is definitely askew in this picture. It’s like someone has punched me in my gut or played a very sick joke on me.

I’ll openly admit to literally feeling sick after processing all of this. I write this entry as I cope with a migraine headache, definitely brought on by self-induced stress. What do I take away from this? I MUST learn to deal with stress better, don’t let situations affect me so much.

I am very grateful that DynaVox has been extremely supportive of me. They have and continue to believe that I benefit greatly by using

a DynaWrite. Thus, I AM happy that I could help them in serving another individual who will benefit from their product. I look forward to the day that I can proclaim, “I have my OWN DynaWrite!”

Does this mean that I’ll start being not nice, more “mean” in my attempts to advocate for myself? Probably not. However, I will question my competence in advocacy until I receive the support I am entitled to. A year plus, in my eyes, is NOT considered “timely” in terms of delivery of service.

At this time, Brian was serving an internship as a teaching assistant in one of my technology in education classes. In this capacity, Brian gave occasional lectures and provided hands-on assistance to student teachers in a computer lab. Midway through the semester we determined that the students should learn something about Brian’s ongoing struggle to obtain the augmentative communication device. During one class session, we projected Brian’s blog site onto a screen and read it aloud together as a class. The students were incredulous. Proposals were made to initiate a petition. Both Brian and I cautioned the students to exercise restraint.

**One of the students, summarized the collective thinking of the students in our class as follows:**

While growing up in a small Alaskan fishing village, I never had the opportunity to meet people who were not able to utilize their natural voice. Brian was the first person I ever met that communicated with the aid of a tool which put his thoughts into speech, therefore one of the first things I learned about those in his situation was that not having a natural speaking voice does not at all mean that a person does not possess a very powerful mind. As soon as Brian started speaking through his external device, I knew that the guy was incredibly smart and was going to be a great teacher. Since then he has proven to me that I was not mistaken that day.

On top of being very intelligent and knowledgeable, Brian has a compassionate heart and utilizes it to relate to and help others. Although having an augmentative communicator is not necessary to put his intelligence and kind heart to work, I have seen how it allows Brian to work closer to his full potential and help turn his hopes and dreams of helping and inspiring others into a reality. By having an audible voice, Brian is able to change

the minds of those who may doubt him and show others who are in his same situation that they have the power to do the same...

After Brian explained his situation to us in class, I immediately started brainstorming ways I might be supportive and help him out. As anger and fear were some of the first emotions that I felt after Brian gave his explanation, my first thoughts were to somehow rebel and protest against the situation. After sitting and talking with Brian however, I realized that getting angry and oppositional was not the best way of handling a situation like this. What would be effective, however, is showing and telling those with the authority to provide devices like the DynaWrite what a difference such tools make in all of our lives. If certain groups cannot be considerate and empathetic on their own, perhaps they needed other people to do the job for them.

As professionals we have the capabilities and connections required to perform such tasks and we're long past the deadline to start doing them. We need to start using our imaginations and creativity to create our own assistive technologies and inspire others to do the same. Most importantly, we need to stay committed to doing what educators do: helping others realize their full potential no matter what.

In Brian's case, I believe that his augmentative communicator only played the role of a tool, yet that tool serves as a bridge linking a mind with limitless potential with society at large. (Wright, 2005)

This story of the DynaWrite came to a rather abrupt conclusion. Sterling Kryslar [a man with quadriplegia who is a role model for assistive technologies (Skouge, 2004) who served on the advisory board for the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation] took it upon himself to contact the DVR Director to ask him to read Brian's blog. The Director instantly realized that Brian Kajiyama had gained a powerful, public voice. Soon, Brian received a communication from his counselor that she had authorized an immediate purchase of the device.

### Digital storytelling: Brian gets a job

Brian started out in our studio as a volunteer. His mother dropped him off by seven o'clock a.m. on her way to work, returning in the afternoons at five. The family had

a wheelchair accessible van. Brian had "proven himself," having learned the technical skills required for video, multimedia, and telecommunications. He combined all this with marvelous interpersonal skills and a strong desire to help and serve. I felt strongly, however, that his volunteer status should end and that we should find a way to include him as a paid employee.

In fall semester 2004, Dr. David Leake, with the U.H. Center on Disability Studies, inquired whether we might be interested in producing "digital stories" of *culturally diverse* college students with disabilities, highlighting cultural variables that contribute to success in college. Dr. Leake left it up to us to define *digital storytelling*, which was wonderful, because it inspired us to develop an expansive definition: "digital storytelling" would include *technologies for voice* in which people are empowered to find their voices and to speak for themselves.

Digital story telling stood for any creative application of technology used to celebrate life experiences and to enhance communication. It included a wide array of "visual" applications such as photo essays, audio interviews, narrated slide presentations, video documentaries. It also made use of telecommunications technology such as audio and video teleconferencing and internet publishing (Skouge, 2005). Dr. Leake embraced our definitions and offered Brian a graduate assistantship to share his stories and assist in the production of other people's stories. It was a perfect job for Brian, and one that challenged us to explore the potential of technologies for voice using the DynaWrite.

Brian began by producing video poetry (music videos), inspired by the work of Norman Kunc in Canada. We published his work on Video CDs (Kajiyama, 2004a, 2004b). By this time, a growing demand was taking place for Brian as a public speaker, first to student groups at the University of Hawai'i and then at state and international disability conferences. Brian's presentations evolved into multimedia "events" in which he spoke through his DynaWrite while projecting his slides and captioned videos on large screens. The effects were electrifying. Brian Kajiyama's voice was one that people were eager to listen to. He was soon invited to serve on the Hawai'i State Disability Access Board.

### Working with Others to Create Digital Stories

In Fall 2005, Brian was admitted as a master's student into the rehabilitation counseling program in the U.H.

College of Education. Dr. Brenda Cartwright became his advisor. She encouraged Brian to integrate our digital storytelling initiatives into his counseling internships. It was as a result of this work that we came to know Sharon and Eulalia—two deaf women enrolled in their first year in the Gallaudet Regional Center at Kapi’olani Community College. They were from Pohnpei in the Federated States of Micronesia. Far from home, they were experiencing the loneliness and anxiety of being far away from their families. But they were also thrilled at the novelty of living and studying in Hawai’i. This was their first experience of being immersed in a deaf community and, at the same time, adapting to a western lifestyle. They were busily acquiring American Sign Language, and struggling with the demands of developing their English literacy. Brian was assigned as their counselor in training, and I was assigned to be his internship supervisor.

We wanted Sharon and Eulalia to join us in a project that included working with role models, technologies for voice, self-advocacy, and community service. First, we constructed opportunities for them to interact with role models and, in turn, to become role models in their own rights. Brian invited an associate named Steven Wichilfil to join him on the project. Steven was a college student from Yap, a sister state of Pohnpei in the Federated States of Micronesia. Like Brian, Steven loved technology and embraced diversity, including disability culture. He was also keen to learn American Sign Language from the young women. A productive working relationship quickly developed among the four. Brian communicated with Sharon, Eulalia, and Steven by means of messages displayed on his DynaWrite. They responded in ASL or in writing. They all took great pleasure in these interactions so that it became unnecessary to hire a professional sign language interpreter.

Our first project was a photo essay. Sharon and Eulalia were given a digital still camera, with the expectation that each week they would take pictures on a variety of themes—drawing on aspects of their life in Hawai’i such as friends, shopping, going to school, the scenery of Hawai’i, apartment life, and transportation. They brought their camera to each of the weekly sessions where they transferred their pictures to a computer and made thumbnail prints on contact paper. During the following week, Sharon and Eulalia took the contact sheets to school at Gallaudet where their teachers and friends helped them to compose sentences to go with the pic-

tures. At the next meeting with Brian and Steven, they typed their sentences into photo essay software on our computer. The photo essays were then printed in color on photographic paper that they could insert in a memory book.

The project served several important functions. First, it provided Sharon and Eulalia with a “visual” voice that they could use to communicate aspects of their world to others. Secondly, it taught them such skills as digital photography, photo cropping, and lay-out, which they were able to use in developing and communicating ideas. Finally, it provided them with multimedia support in presenting their ideas to an audience through public speaking and self-advocacy.

In Spring 2005 Sharon and Eulalia were invited to present their story to delegates at an international conference on disabilities in Honolulu. Their circle of support, which included faculty from the Gallaudet Regional Center and the U.H. Center on Disability Studies, joined them at the presentation. Their photographs, projected from a laptop computer, were the centerpiece of their presentation. Representatives of their government were in attendance, and afterwards expressed enthusiastic support for their project and applauded the educational contribution that they had made. When students like Sharon and Eulalia become empowered to share their work in public forums, an important new lesson is added to the value of the media project. They become agents of self-advocacy as informed contributors who are able to improve community awareness on an important educational and social issue.

In the final step of the project, Sharon and Eulalia were able to return something for the support they had been given by their community by producing a DVD that interpreted their essays in American Sign Language (Skouge & Boisvert, 2004). This DVD and the photo essays were then distributed to deaf educators in Micronesia to share with deaf children and their families.

## Looking to the future

The story of Sharon and Eulalia illustrates our belief that digital storytelling must be interventionist and empowering. Like Brian’s experience with the DynaWrite, it tells a story about finding a voice. Our strategy is to employ role models and technologies for voice to empower young people to gain confidence that they can participate more fully in their communities (Skouge, 2005; Skouge et al., 2003; Skouge et al., 2004).

Perhaps the story that Brian related on his blog points to a new future for persons with disabilities who have found their voices through media. Brian regularly posts his photographs and writings to his blog site; and soon, we hope to add video and audio projects by utilizing video streaming and podcasting. We are also exploring live teleconferencing in which virtual communities can see and talk to one another and share their multimedia expressions.

These technologies present new opportunities to create peer support and consumer advocacy networks and, as in Brian's blog story, they permit a "public voice" with all of the opportunities and responsibilities that go with publication.

### Brian's Epilogue

As I worked on editing a video in Dr. Skouge's office, a complete stranger came in and introduced himself.

"Hey I'm Robert. What is your name?"

"Hi Robert, I'm Brian," I communicated through my DynaWrite.

"It's nice to meet you Brian; this is some office you have!"

"It's not my office, I share it with a professor but I agree it's pretty cool."

All of a sudden, I realized what was transpiring. I was having a conversation with a complete stranger. This was a foreign concept to me until I had my augmentative communication device that enabled me to verbalize my thoughts.

"It was nice chatting with you, Brian. I'll see you again!"

"Okay, Robert. It was great meeting you. Have a great day!" I replied. The ability to wish someone a nice day provided me with a sense of joy, for I know how good I feel when someone wishes me well. This was just the start of many opportunities to come because I was now empowered with a voice that could be heard.

After the University of Hawai'i's women's volleyball team was denied the opportunity to host a regional playoff in 2005, the team's sports psychologist, who was my friend and teacher, called me with an urgent request.

"Brian, I'd like you to address our women's volleyball team and deliver a message of hope and inspiration to them because they're at a very low point," Dr. Michael D'Andrea explained to me in a phone call.

I agreed to speak to the team as they prepared for regional tournament play, realizing that their hopes of contending for a national championship hinged on their ability to persevere over this perceived slight from the NCAA selection committee. They were to leave for the continent in the morning.

The locker room for the volleyball team was very quiet and somber as I entered. I shared a little background of my growing up as a person with a disability. I explained how I learned to turn the question of "why me?" into one of "why not me?" and proceeded to explain how I used this positive outlook on life to get through any struggles in life. I challenged them to take on this attitude as they entered tournament play, explaining that "champions win regardless of where they're asked to play."

The reaction from the young women seated in front of me was powerful. Some were crying, some smiled, and some came up to me as I ended and thanked me for taking the time to inspire them. I parted ways by saying, "I look forward to seeing you back here as national champions!"

After their season concluded, the head coach for the team, Dave Shoji, found me at the athletic complex and expressed his gratitude for my taking the time to speak to his girls. None of this would have been possible without my DynaWrite.

In 2006, I connected with one of the assistant coaches for the University of Hawai'i's Warrior football team. Coach Jeff Reinebold quickly learned of my love for the university's team. I was attending practices regularly since Coach June Jones began his reign and knew many of the players. However, this was a new time, a new opportunity for me to express myself in a way that could be heard. Coach Reinebold heard me loud and clear, recognizing that I had abilities that could help the team in tangible ways. Verbalizing my thoughts and ideas allowed me to be seen as more than the "inspirational" figure who loved to support the team. I soon found myself working with other coaches, communicating information that could help in preparation for games. These

experiences led to my earning a graduate assistant coaching position in 2007.

During that season, the Hawai'i Warrior football team went undefeated and earned their first Bowl Championship Series (BCS) bowl berth. My family and I were able to accompany the team to the Sugar Bowl in New Orleans, Louisiana. I received a Western Athletic Conference (WAC) championship ring. This ring is a constant reminder of all of the hard work, sacrifices, and great experiences we had throughout the season. More importantly, the ring epitomizes the value of having a "voice" in contributing to a winning team.

All of these experiences have allowed me to discover that I am a social being. I enjoy conversation, fellowship, and helping others; I enjoy people! My ability to be heard has such an important role in being able to relate to people. Society is so fast-paced; many people do not have the time or patience to wait for someone to write thoughts on paper and then read them, which was how I communicated prior to obtaining my DynaWrite.

My career goals have changed because of my "voice." No longer do I envision myself doing work requiring little or no interaction with other beings. Had I continued on this path in life, I would have felt empty. Sitting at a desk, typing away on a computer all day would not have been fulfilling. The lack of interaction with people would have left a void.

I now aspire to become a college professor, as my passion lies in helping and teaching others. In order to accomplish this, one needs to be able to communicate with a voice—a voice that can be heard.

In the fall of 2007, I was accepted into the exceptionalities program of the College of Education's Department of Special Education. This acceptance was the next step in my journey to follow in the footsteps of my mentor and friend, Dr. James Skouge. A professor needs to be able to communicate with his or her students, as well as with colleagues, in an effective manner. The most effective and efficient means of communication occurs when it is audible.

As I look ahead, I cannot help but reflect upon my silent past. The silence was deafening, but because I was able to find a "voice," my horizons

are endless. People can finally hear me...loud and clear. I hope to enable others to find their "voice" as well. It will be at that point that I can truly say, "I have been heard."

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# Philosophy of Education Society of Australasia

38<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting—December 3 to 6, 2009

Imin International Conference Center

East-West Center, Honolulu, Hawai'i

Papers are invited for the 38th Annual Meeting of the Philosophy of Education Society of Australasia (PESA), to be held from Thursday, December 3 to Sunday, December 6, 2009, at the East-West Center in Honolulu, Hawai'i.

The Program Committee invites submissions that address a wide range of educational issues from a variety of theoretical/philosophical perspectives and traditions.

## Keynote Speakers

- ❖ Roger T. Ames, “Confucian Role Ethics: A Vision of the Moral Life,” professor of philosophy at the University of Hawai'i and editor of *Philosophy East and West*
- ❖ Austin Dacey, “The Secular Conscience.” Representative to the United Nations for the Center for Inquiry
- ❖ Laiana Wong, “All Knowledge Is Not Contained In One Hālau,” professor of Hawaiian and Indo-Pacific Languages and Literatures at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, Kawaihuelani Center for Hawaiian Language

## Theme of the Conference

### *Dialogue and Difference*

*How might different philosophical traditions generate critical debate on contemporary educational issues? What can these different philosophical orientations offer to educational thought and practice? What is of value for philosophers of education in inter-cultural dialogue?*

*Modern educational thought is marked by a considerable and apparently irreducible diversity of ideas and practices. Global society is increasingly an arena of marked divergence in educational values and philosophical orientations arising from a wide variety of traditions and perspectives. This is particularly true in the context of education in the Pacific Region in which differences can be defined not only in terms of competing European philosophies of education and their respective visions of value and practice, nor only in terms of the vastly different traditions of educational thought of East and West, but also in terms of different indigenous perspectives, such as those represented by various aboriginal and minority groups.*

Papers that focus on the conference theme may be selected from among those presented at the conference, after further review, for a special issue of *Educational Philosophy and Theory* <http://www.wiley.com/bw/journal.asp?ref=0013-1857>.

Papers that deal philosophically with other educational issues are also welcome. The tradition of the society is to provide a supportive environment for those who present papers and to encourage a more profound understanding of practical and theoretical issues in education.

Those new to PESA are welcome to submit papers.

Call for Papers— <http://www2.hawaii.edu/~pesaconf/call.html>  
Conference inquiries should be addressed to [pesainfo@hawaii.edu](mailto:pesainfo@hawaii.edu)