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Contents

CINEMA AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY AS RESOURCES OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

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Abstract

The educational potential regarding the analysis of motion picture language using the digital technologies remains little understood and little explored, while Italian educators/teachers at all levels of schooling enjoy limited access to digital tools. Likewise, the value and educational benefits of using film as an educational resource at school are largely unappreciated.

This contribution presents the research project titled *Cinema at School* regarding the proposal to introduce the cinema at school oriented to promote the media education and enhance the teaching of digital tools dedicated to the film editing and the film language analysis.

Film is the first multimedia object that, from its origin, served to overcome the limits of the human eye. The use of cinema in educational context can reinforce the learning of single topics, and at the same time, it produces a contribution to interdisciplinary learning approach when the use is specially oriented to explore other topics. Film at school can act as an analytical-documentary resource and as a creative teaching resource, by virtue of its versatile and multidimensional nature. We should not forget the magic lantern, a device precursor of the cinema, it has been not only used for entertainment purposes but also to deliver lectures on several topics from science to arts and literature. Film is a teaching resource characterized by the power to "transport" the class into any possible spatial-temporal or interdisciplinary dimension.

By the representation of visible and invisible reality and imaginary worlds, the fiction dimension of film supports the aim of multiplying the perspectives available to the students and guides their attention to countless forms of narrative from near or distant place in the space and time of human culture in the past and future. With similar modality, the digital technologies for animation picture and others experimentation visual techniques transport the observer/student in other spaces of learning.

Keywords: Cinema Education, Interdisciplinary Approach, Innovative Teaching Methodology, Learning Space.

1 CINEMA IS AN ART.

At the dawn of the history of cinema, in the period spanning the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the show of *Cinématographe Lumière* was mainly shown at fairs or amusement parks and was

viewed as a freak in a sideshow, a touring show, a form of entertainment that was expected to principally elicit amazement, curiosity and amusement. [1]

The early film theoretician Riciotto Canudo was officially the Italian scholar who first studied cinema as a form of art: he compared it with the other arts and concluding that cinema, in that it recapitulates all the other arts, may be defined as "plastic art in motion". [2]

The definition of term "cinema as the fifth art" was conied by Louis Delluc [3], while the "Sixth Art" label was defined by Riciotto Canudo on his manifesto titled *La naissance d'une Sixième Art* in 1911. Subsequently he opted for the better known "Seventh Art" and he founded, in 1921, the first cineclub. [4]

In a famous letter written in 1948 for the magazine *Bianco e Nero,* the writer Benedetto Croce recognized and accepted that cinema might be considered a work of art, insofar as a work of art is free and a manifestation of the human spirit. [5]

The work of art is an output of human inventiveness that issues from the attempt to aesthetically create an artistic product of great and recognized value.

Anyone can create, but not all creators are artists: the artist is he or she who receives a superior quality intuition and is endowed with a refined sensibility with which to express their feelings. Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray were both convinced that art is first and foremost a mental phenomenon whose physical realisation can take place in any medium.

In the period spanning the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, advances in technology and new techniques of representation facilitated the invention of instruments, the daguerreotype and cinematograph, with the capability to record real-life images. The reproduction of reality via moving images and the creation of animated images encouraged both the growth of and interest in new forms of art.

Gilles Deleuze wrote that "the great directors of the cinema may be compared not only to painters, architects, musicians, but also to thinkers. They think with movement-images and time-images instead of concepts", and precisely for this reason Deleuze himself argued that film belonged to part of the history of art and thought. This claim elevated cinema to the status of the place where images are transformed into visual concepts and directors into thinkers**.** [6]

According to the French critic Jean-Louis Baudry, film is an instrument of representation similar to the representation of perspective in painting. [7] In fact when studying the origins of cinema, it is natural to examine the kind of pictorial art that had already been present in the pre-cinema era. The period between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries saw the birth of the realistic or visionary landscape painting, the painting of views, and panoramic painting. Artists such Viviano Codazzi and Michelangelo Cerquozzi with their paintings of "realistic" views of the city and later Gaspard Van Wittel, JeanBaptiste-Camille Corot, Bernardo Bellotto and Francesco Guardi with their grand and true to life views of the city, created new visual spaces. [8] [9]

These pictorial spaces were radically different to those that had gone before and greatly expanded the production of documentary pictures.

Eric Rohmer studied the relationship between painting and cinema. He theorized on the artistic value of cinema, this value doesn't stem from others arts, but artistic is the way in which the cinema produces the film. The cinema is a new art for its ability to faithfully reproduce reality and also create fantastic worlds. This singular character of cinema, Rohmer observed, has undermined the traditional constitutive elements of a workart. [10]

Arthur Edwin Krows wrote "…the work of art is not made with marble, with the pen, the paper and ink, or with the coordinated intervention of the playwright, the actor and the theater building, but from the reactions of the public to which it is presented and for which, presumably, it is produced."[11]

With the passing of time, film has become a narrative language with its own conventions of grammar and style. It is a language that is related to literature, given that its characters can speak and that its aim is to tell stories.

However, from its birth, cinema has been described as an art, the art of motion or more appropriately the art of time, because it induces spectators to experience feelings and emotional reactions by totally immersing them in the dimension of filmic time. [6].

The moving images of film facilitate experiences that are not direct experiences of reality but are equally rich, sensory, and exciting, and can therefore compete with objective and intelligible reality. Albert Michotte wrote that filmic experience generates the union of the real and the artificial, in that spectators live out the emotions elicited by the filmic narrative, while remaining aware that the story they are watching is not real. [12] Lucilla Albano has also described film as an experience that is both real and not real, true and at the same time false, likening it to the dream. [13]

In the opinion of George Sadoul, "the cinema, first, is pastime, but it is also, although we don't have awareness, a media for education. Thanks to it, without to move from little town or the village where the audience lives, he/she can learn, know something of the farthest places, about their traditions, landscapes, buildings, civilization. The cinema, since shows the things, it teaches with more efficacy compared to books and papers; while a writer describes the waves of see, the film shows them in their real life. But the cinema is also art.[…] therefore the cinema is, at the same time, pastime, instrument of culture, art, industry, commerce, technique". [14]

Antonio Costa provided an effective synthesis, stating that film is as a set of many things, but for him it is above all simultaneous narration and representation. [15] At the same time Antonio Costa explored, in depth, the relationship between cinema and the visual arts, particularly between painting and architecture. [16]

Gian Piero Brunetta, on the other hand, wrote with accurate foresight that in the third millennium, with the advent of digital and interactive telecommunications media and virtual reality, the cinema would remain a valuable resource: as a medium of expression, a mode of communication, and a

"privileged place in which the unconscious beams out its rays of light to make the invisible visible". [17]

2 CAN CINEMA ACT AS A RESOURCE FOR SCHOOLS?

Brunetta's definition, cited at the end of the last paragraph, prompts a few remarks on the use of film as a space of learning, given that it can offer a valuable resource to schools.

Most teachers have been making use of film in the classroom for many years now, but often without knowing how to exploit the key methodological approaches that ensure its effectiveness in fostering learning and teaching processes.

When we think about the use of film in the school setting, it is almost always in relation to some kind of "cineforum" or film club formula, involving the showing of a series of films on a common theme, followed by classroom debates among teachers and students, sometimes with the input of outside experts.

However, in the digital and Internet era, the filmic and media education provided by schools needs to go somewhat further: describing media contents is no longer sufficient. The objective is to promote and develop among the new generations a critical approach to the language of images and an informed use of the media. [18]

Learning the language of film can help students become more critical and mindful consumers of filmic products. At the same time, students may be trained in new skills, especially digital citizenship competences. [19] According to Le Boterf, competence lies in the mobilization of individual resources (knowledge, skills, attitudes, and much more), rather than in the resources themselves: it may be defined as knowing how to act (or react) in a given situation in a given setting, to attain a given level of performance, which will be rated by other subjects. [20]

The growing importance of developing new cognitive skills implies the need to help teachers design and deliver innovative educational paths and to provide them with alternative tools and applications exploiting the benefits of digital technologies, in line with pilot projects introducing interdisciplinary educational paths that have already been implemented in a number of schools.

What is the function of film in the classroom? How may we exploit its educational potential? What film education trajectory is achievable with children and what trajectory with adolescents? These are only some of the currently open questions that must be answered before introducing any film education project in a school.

The world of film constantly offers new material for reflection on both current and futuristic "socially acute" themes, and if interdisciplinary film education projects are being considered, increasingly rich and stimulating ideas are continuously flowing from the field of art amongst others. The key thing is to develop an understanding of cinema not just as a pastime or form of entertainment, but as an art that can become a resource for educational and training processes. Film education means teaching about the educational value of the film language, aesthetic taste, and how cinema works from a technical point of view.

Scholars in the field of film education have theorized that film may be introduced at all levels of schooling via two main routes: an analytical-creative route that is critical and descriptive and a productive-creative one that is critical but also operative. These paths may be viewed as either independent or combinable. Both can generate further interdisciplinary teaching or learning paths.
[21]

Which of these two options is it better to choose: Film as a supplementary teaching-learning resource (analytical route) or the cinema workshop as a means of developing creativity (productive path)? Alain Bergala suggests that "the experience of creation is essential", specifically direct experience of making film. [22]

2.1   Cinema in schools: an experimental approach between digital technology and languages for teaching and learning.

The research project on film education entitled *At School with the Cinema* was initiated in 2014 at the "Riccardo Massa" Department of Human Sciences and Education of the University of Milan Bicocca, is still in progress, and is aimed at promoting the use of film in schools as an educational and training resource.

To date, introducing film culture and language in selected Italian classrooms has led to the construction of meaningful teaching-learning paths/experiences. Each path has been designed on the basis of specific objectives defined by the participating schools such as:

. Reinforcing the teaching of some disciplines;

. Facilitating interdisciplinary educational activities;

. Fostering intercultural communication;

. Fostering inclusion and integration;

. Enhancing students' awareness of their right to be children;

. Reinforcing the critical use and awareness of the language of images as part of students' broader digital media education.

The research project is underpinned by an alternative approach to using film in school setting. First, it is characterised by an interdisciplinary approach [21] and informed by F.M.R. theory *(Fragments mis en rapport)* which advocates relating fragments of film to one another by organizing them around a theme. [22]

Part of the project has involved guiding student teachers on teaching practice to make innovative use of film education methods in order to transcend the rigid disciplinary boundaries that constrain conventional methods of teaching.

The idea for the project was generated by experimental action research previously conducted in collaboration with Prof. Fulvio Benussi at the Liceo Carlo Tenca High School in Milan with the aim of developing and refining active and interdisciplinary teaching methods via the use of film and digital technologies. [23]

The experimental programme's key educational aim is to test new and alternative methods of using film in education and training so that the full educational/training potential of filmic language may be recognized and harnessed with a view to enhancing teaching and learning.

To implement this project, it was first necessary to identify together with the teachers of the participating schools, suitable shared themes, to design and present to the teachers the proposed teaching-learning paths - which reflected the previously established goals - as well as the selected films. The occasions on which film would be used to generate a novel space of learning and interdisciplinary resource were also defined in advance. The researcher and teachers worked together and agreed on how certain transversal themes, or connections with other disciplines, could be drawn out more effectively to enhance learning.

The proposed educational paths were intended to offer the participating students a comprehensive yet open-ended introduction to the main themes in the art of film.

Multiple approaches were used, all of which drew on the theme of cinema's roots in art, science and technology to enrich subject-specific learning.

The main learning objectives included introducing students to film culture, fostering their appreciation of world film heritage, and offering them a basic knowledge of filmic language and of how films are made from a technical point of view. The digital technology provided was used both as an analytical tool for developing students' ability to watch and critically analyse and interpret a film and filmic images, and as a creative (operational) tool during the production and post-production stages. The outcomes of the first year of the project include the key observation that film has many features in common with the humanities, the sciences and the arts. Specifically, numerous connections were identified with literature, philosophy, history and geography, economy and law, the natural sciences and mathematics, foreign languages and above all the other arts. [24]

Film is an interdisciplinary and multicultural resource by nature and unites people thanks to its power to reveal concepts and perceptions that otherwise would not be visible to the naked eye. [25]

3 CONCLUSIONS

The reflections shared by the students who have participated in the project to date suggest that it has helped them to acquire the capacity to analyse a cinematographic work and an understanding of the multiple elements contained therein. The majority of the students that took part in the programme acquired the ability to view a film critically. Specifically, the participants were found to be more

mindfully aware of drawing connections between ideas and knowledge from different areas, Cinema, Arts, History, Literature,, Technology and Sciences.

Feedback collected via the administration of entry and exit questionnaires documented the students' observations concerning the positive and critical aspects of the interdisciplinary teaching-learning paths offered.

In sum, knowledge and mastery of the language of film may be instrumental to acquiring other abilities and supportive of interdisciplinary learning.

Learning observational skills through the use of film allows the student to explore the history of cinema and the nature of film, the relationship between film language and other expressive languages, and the social and cultural roles of cinema.

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