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## Research article

# The act of showing: film as a social learning process

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## Abstract

This article frames the gesture of showing as – at the same time – a pedagogical gesture and a gesture intrinsic to film. It raises the question of what happens when this gesture passes on to pupils who are making their own films in class and projecting them in a cinema space. What are the effects on the pedagogical relation, on the social dynamics and on the possible learning processes? These questions are addressed in analysing and comparing the long-term observations of two workshops: in Paris (France) and in Frankfurt am Main (Germany). The workshops formed part of the international film education programme *Le cinéma, cent ans de jeunesse*, in the cycle 2022–2023 on the subject 'Centred-Decentred'. The article deals with the role of the filmmaker; the social dimension of the process of filmmaking; the social and symbolic function of technical devices; and the projection of films as a collective process of recognition, responsibility and exchange. It discusses these dimensions within three different frames: the school institution, professional filmmaking and the international programme, especially taking into consideration the aspects of inclusion and gender.

**Keywords** *Le cinéma, cent ans de jeunesse*; film education; filmmaking; film projection; social learning; aesthetic education; film techniques; gesture of showing; inclusion; gender

## Introduction

Film is not a technique for exposing images, it is an *art of showing*. And showing is a gesture that obliges us to see, to watch. Without this gesture, there is only illustration. But when something has been shown, there has to be someone who confirms reception.<sup>1</sup> (Daney, 1994, p. 78; translated from French by the authors using deepl)

In an article on his cinephile 'autobiography', French film critic Serge Daney stated that film education is based on the gesture of showing, in a twofold sense (in Henzler, 2013, pp. 301–6). On the one hand, he names the selection and projection of films as a pedagogical and subversive gesture which introduces an illegitimate (popular) medium into the school context and invites pupils to pay attention to films they do not know. On the other hand, he talks of the gesture of showing intrinsic to the medium of film itself, which he attributes to the filmmaker who, by the choice of framing, shows something to an audience. With the notion of showing, Daney hints not only at the (audio)visual form and a phenomenological notion of perception as foundation of thought, but also at the intersubjective dimension of film (and) education. As indicated in the epigraph above, showing something to someone means, at the same time, expressing an attitude towards that which is shown (be it a film or the real or imagined world framed by a film) and, in doing so, addressing someone, inviting him or her to watch and listen.

Even if this focus on the visual seems reductive with regard to the audiovisual quality of the film medium, in a metaphorical sense it corresponds to the central role attributed to the gesture of showing in pedagogy, be it the teacher who gestures towards an object to be noticed or the organisation of the space of the classroom structured around a black (or nowadays white) board. Thus, phenomenological philosopher Bernhard Waldenfels (2016, pp. 40–1), for example, in reflecting on the process of attention, names the gesture of showing as a means to draw attention to something. In the pedagogical situation, he insists that the teacher should not simply pass down knowledge, but has to address the pupils to attract, maintain and direct attention; in doing so, the teachers are themselves deeply involved in an experience they do not control, as it depends on the response of the learners, who may or may not pay attention. Therefore, when film enters school, these two modes of showing – the filmic and the pedagogical gesture – might be aligned; they might complement but also contradict each other, as Winfried Pauleit (2009, p. 5) argues when he talks of the cinematographer as pointer, which embodies a concurrence with the teacher.

Nevertheless, in both cases, the gesture of showing is implicitly linked to a hierarchical relationship between those who show and those who pay attention – between adult and child, filmmaker and audience. But what happens if, in a film education project – like *Le cinéma, cent ans de jeunesse* (CCAJ) (2022–2024) – this hierarchy is shifted, maybe even reversed, as it is the pupils who, in making their own film and projecting this film in a cinema space, 'take over' the gesture of showing? What are the effects on the pedagogical relation, on the social dynamics in the class and on the possible learning processes? We would like to consider these questions in analysing some aspects of the social dynamics and learning processes we observed in two workshops, one in Paris (France) and the other in Frankfurt am Main (Germany) during the project cycle 2022–2023 on the subject 'Centred/Decentred'.<sup>2</sup> The observation was part of an evaluation in the context of the Erasmus+ project 'Exploring cinéma, cent ans de jeunesse'. Another aspect of the evaluation, the analysis of the film's aesthetic concept and its adaption by different teams of teacher-professionals, are discussed in the article by Bettina Henzler and Emmanuel Siety in this issue.

The two workshops we study in this article were chosen to represent the diversity of groups participating in CCAJ. In Paris, the project took place as a voluntary course on Wednesday afternoons at the boarding school Collège Thomas Mann. Eleven pupils from different grades (11–14 years old), boarders as well as day pupils, participated in their free time. In Frankfurt am Main, the workshop was held at the secondary school Integrierte Gesamtschule Herder and was attended by pupils of two different grades (15–17 years old) who chose it as part of an optional subject in arts. While the pupils in Paris were all participating in CCAJ for the first time, some of the older pupils in Frankfurt had done the

workshop the previous year. The researchers visited the classes at least once per month, covering the whole period of the project from September to June, through all stages of work. The documentation included photographs and audio recordings, interviews with the pupils and the adult supervisors, and video material (the exercises and films made by the pupils, including outtakes). The Paris workshop was observed by Perrine Boutin, the Frankfurt workshop by Bettina Henzler. This approach allowed the researchers to investigate how the pupils engaged in the project and to consider their learning process.

The research into the development of critical thinking and academic skills through media education (Goodman, 2003) or that into digital production by young people as a form of self-construction in the world (Potter, 2009) and the research into the cultural practices of young people as a means of expression (Willis, 1990) constitute the frame for the question we are concerned with: the relationship between the symbolic and the social in an aesthetic approach to film education. This approach was developed in Elise Tamisier's thesis (2022) on CCAJ, which asks in what way the characters in the films produced by these workshops reflect the socialisation phenomena that take place there, and thus the function of artistic practice for the children and adolescents we are concerned with. Following on from this research, we want to look at the relationship between adults and pupils in the co-construction of an aesthetic framework that enables this socialisation and, more specifically, this relationship to the symbolic.

While adopting the intersubjective conception of cinema and education, as evoked in Daney's (1994) metaphor of showing, we will – in our analysis of the observations – broaden the perspective to the frames constitutive of the process: those of the cinema apparatus and the educational institution. In his major book *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, Erving Goffman (1974) explains that in a given situation there might be different frames that convey the meaning of what is happening. Indeed, our experiences are consigned to a stratified universe, made up of multiple realities. Each imposes its own perspective or schema, its own framework. Any sequence of our ordinary experience, any decisive test or experiment – just like a movie, a rehearsal, a rite or a game – is naturally and socially framed. Thanks to these frameworks, one can understand what is going on in a situation and how to tell the story of what is happening.

In our analysis, we will concentrate on aspects of three frame levels that interact and create a field of tension in CCAJ. First, the educational institution, a primary frame, contributes a basic sense which is very well known and often rejected by pupils (e.g. including the *mise en scène* of the classroom, the relationship between adult and child, the curriculum and evaluation system). Second, film production as an artistic and professional field is another frame: the workshop involves filmmakers, artists or people from outside the school, who bring in other skills, working practices and value systems as well as other technical devices. Finally, there is the international project as a network of adults working in the fields of film culture and education. It acts as a conceptual frame, given that all the workshops explore the same subject, consult the same selection of film extracts and follow the rules of the game. It also constitutes an event in the cinema space, as adults and pupils gather each year to present and exchange views on the 40 films made during the project cycle.

## The role of the filmmaker and the frame of the international project

To begin with, we would like to briefly mention the different approaches of the pedagogical teams to the subject and how they related to the frame of the international project. These could represent two opposites in the wide range of pedagogical strategies applied within CCAJ, which we call *deductive* and *inductive*.

In Frankfurt, the team worked with the symbolic weight of the international project to introduce and justify the topic and the tasks. The topic of the year, as well as the 'rules of the game', were defined and explained to the pupils, as a frame all participants of the project had to follow. To introduce the subject, the sessions of three hours were mostly divided into three parts: 1) comparing film extracts to discuss different aspects of the topic; 2) carrying out (parts of) a film exercise in smaller groups; and 3) watching

and discussing the exercises made with all pupils. Film practice was, thus, deduced (or developed) from the given theoretical and methodological framework: practical exercises were introduced in reading the written rules of the game together and discussing how to do them. This explicit gesture towards the international project seemed to allow the teacher, despite his experience in film education, to at least partly relinquish the position of authority (of knowledge and rulemaking) and to transfer aspects of the institutional role to the cultural frame – especially the definition of a curriculum through a choice of subject, a selection of material and the written tasks to follow. Accordingly, the filmmaker, when asked about his role in the classroom, defined himself not in relation to his professional competence, but as facilitator of a process in which most of the decisions should be taken by the pupils themselves. He said that he wanted the pupils to make their film and he wanted to support them in the process (Interview, Frankfurt, 23 January 2023).<sup>3</sup> He described his work as that of someone who supervises the production process, someone who accompanies the pupils by keeping an overview. During shooting and editing, he asked pupils to make the decisions; at times he made suggestions or reminded them of the subject 'Centred/Decentred', without intervening too much in their choices.

The team in Paris chose a different approach, adapting the framework of the project to an especially demanding pedagogical situation: an optional workshop of two hours in a boarding school for socially disadvantaged pupils. The international frame, in this context, was introduced by the teacher to motivate the pupils to participate and – for the first time in their lives for some of them – to make a trip abroad. The filmmaker of the Paris team explained, in an informal conversation at the final meeting in Wiesbaden ('À nous le cinéma!', 6 June 2023), that in this context of an optional workshop, especially for pupils with learning difficulties, it would not be possible to first define an abstract framework and then follow the rules. Even watching film extracts might be difficult, as they lack the motivation to engage with something unknown and potentially 'tiresome'. The filmmaker did not even present the subject at the beginning, but developed it *inductively*: he immediately started to practise filming and discussed the takes the pupils made; in doing so, he directed their attention to the aesthetic question of the year's topic.

During one day of the workshop, the teacher had taken the group on an outing, and the filmmaker used this experience, which the pupils had enjoyed, to implement exercise 3, which raises the issue of decentring in the shot to be worked on.<sup>4</sup> The filmmaker had them do the two scenes they had made during the outing again, but combining both in a long take; he asked pupils to work out how to do it themselves. He describes his film educational practice as a kind of mutual resonance, or *maieutic* approach, in which he reacts to the suggestions of the pupils to initiate the next step. Therefore, when the group was about to make the final film, he took this particularly accomplished long take they made for exercise 3 as a point of departure, and asked them what might happen next. During the shooting of the final film, he asked the pupils many questions mentioning concrete options, such as: 'Could this actor stand instead of sitting?' During their last session, he brought the film they had made and discussed it with the group, to raise their awareness of the year's topic and its meaning. He explained that they tried not to crystallise knowledge, but to crystallise what they had done, in other words what the film brought into play (Interview, Paris, 26 June 2024).

These two approaches (in Frankfurt and Paris) hint at a fundamental question all supervising artists and teachers have to deal with: how much do they want to intervene to trigger attention and conscious choices, and how do they want to cooperate with the pupils to make a film they all feel is their own? If this is a question that concerns all sorts of film practice in a pedagogical context (see, for example, Bergala, 2016, pp. 95–118), it seems specific to CCAJ how this practice relates to the international context, and how this context not only provides a methodological framework, but has a symbolic impact on the pedagogical process.

## The social dynamics of the process of filmmaking

At the end of the year, when asked what they had learnt through the process of CCAJ, the majority of pupils named film practice as the most important learning outcome. In addition to the acquisition of

technical skills or insight into the complexity of filmmaking, many of them emphasised teamwork. One boy in the Paris workshop said for example that 'making a film opens up a whole new world, as does working in a group' (Interview with pupils in Paris, 10 June 2023).

Accordingly, while observing the social dynamics in the Frankfurt and Paris group throughout the year, we noticed that the creative process changed relations in the classroom – between adults and pupils as well as among pupils. Although this might be true for any project work, it is also specific to the process of filmmaking, which is based on the division of labour linked to a variety of technical devices. The many different tasks in the filmmaking process – writing, acting, taking pictures, editing, organising the locations and the props, as well as presenting the film at the final meeting – are likely to engage pupils with different skills and different degrees of motivation, all working together on a single project. Thus, filmmaking has the potential to integrate heterogeneous groups. This was the case in the classes in Paris, where pupils from different grades, boarders and day pupils were mixed, and in the Frankfurt film course, where the group included two age levels, pupils from different social and cultural contexts, many pupils with a migration background, pupils with highly contrasting academic records, and two pupils with special educational needs.

If the teamwork initiated new inter-age peer groups, the dynamics of integration also involved pupils marginalised for different reasons. As they actively participated in the filming, these pupils were treated with respect by the others and felt that they were part of a community. This includes pupils who had been bullied in other classes, like a boy in Frankfurt who often kept himself apart in class; after the project, in a written exercise on the question 'What is cinema for you?' on 27 June 2023, he wrote that cinema is something he can share with others. When answering the same question at the beginning of the project cycle (13 September 2022), the same boy wrote that he prefers watching film at home and did not mention any kind of group experience.

This also pertains to pupils who were excluded due to their social or cultural background. For example, a boy from a socially disadvantaged family in Paris did outstanding camerawork and gained the respect of his peers, who listened to him when he explained his ideas of *mise en scène*.

Furthermore, for pupils with outstanding performance at school, the project was an opportunity to bring their skills into the service of a collective work, and to move beyond the ethos of competition and individuation promoted within school. At the end of the project one of the tenth-grade actresses in Frankfurt thus described the teamwork as a beautiful experience in which one might overcome one's own narrow horizon and be inspired by others (Final interview, 13 June 2023).

And, not least, this is also relevant to pupils with special educational needs, who are able to find their place in the project process. An interesting example here is the function of the clapperboard. The clapperboard is a simple task, but it is also essential for the filmmaking process, as it announces the starting point of the shoot and numbers the takes. In Frankfurt, this task was often fulfilled by a pupil with special educational needs who barely spoke; through this task, the pupil participated in the collective work. The clapperboard thus becomes a pedagogical device that, as in this case, might be used for the purpose of inclusion.

The way in which the filmmaking was organised by the adults seemed to be crucial for these processes of social learning. The framework of CCAJ proposes different options for organising the creative process: the exercises include individual as well as small-group exercises, before the final film essay is done collectively. This not only allows *all* the pupils to test different roles and tasks of filmmaking before deciding what they want to do in the final film production; it also addresses the issue of a variable number of participating pupils in the workshops. Big groups are a challenge for the collective process of the final filmmaking. Therefore, in the Frankfurt workshop, which included 17 pupils, the shoot was divided between several groups, depending on the scenes, and different groups were responsible for writing, filming, editing and so on. Interestingly, all of the pupils ultimately affirmed that they felt it was *their* film – even those who, at some stage of the production process, expressed their dissatisfaction with the scenario, or those who did not really engage in the filmmaking process. This shows not only that the adults were able to frame a creative process adopted by the pupils as their own, but also that making a film together brought them together as a group (even if only temporarily).

## The act of framing: the social and symbolic function of the technical devices

The distinctive character of the filmmaking process relies on specific technical devices, such as the clapperboard, the tripod, the camera, the microphone and the editing program. These devices engender specific forms of communication, interaction and attention that differ from those in the classroom. It is not adults who form the centre of attention, but the technical devices. This becomes obvious when one looks at photographs taken during the shoot. The microphone, connecting two pupils via headphones, invites careful listening. The clapperboard and the tripod are means to focus attention by defining the frame and the moment of shooting. And, in contrast to the hierarchical constellation in the classroom – with an architecture and *mise en scène* that draws pupils' attention to the front, where the board and the teacher are placed – here all participants, adults and pupils alike, gather around the camera, which directs their attention to what is being filmed, or to the take on the small screen, watched and discussed afterwards. Here it is the pupils at the microphone, camera or clapperboard who decide what is focused on, how and when. The frame of the classroom is replaced by film production as frame, or device, that produces attention.

In what follows, we would like to focus on camerawork, which plays a central role in the methodological framework of CCAJ, with its focus on questions of framing and decoupage. The camera might, most obviously, be linked to the gesture of showing. As shooting a film is a mode of watching rather than exposing oneself to the gaze of others, it might attract pupils who are shy or do not like to attract attention. Moreover, it might reveal talents that are not addressed in regular school subjects or have remained hidden. In the Paris workshop, as mentioned already, this was the case for a reserved 14-year-old boy from a socially disadvantaged background who did not quite form part of the group of fidgety adolescent pupils. He showed a genuine interest in the workshop, being the only one who, at the beginning, mentioned an interest in cinema – and especially the animated films of Hayao Miyazaki – as his reason for participating. During the process of filmmaking, he revealed a particular gift for camerawork, thus gaining respect and attention from his peers. He seemed to be very comfortable during the shoot, and at the end of the year he said that he had discovered a new passion: 'I love being behind the camera'. And to the question 'What did you dislike?', he answered: 'I would have liked to have shot the whole film for days on end' (Interview, Paris, 10 May 2023).

On the one hand, his talent was recognised by the adults – more specifically by a filmmaker, who represented and introduced a different set of values into the school system. On the other hand, this was a result of the boy's own determination to be behind the camera, as well as the social dynamics in the group. Despite huge differences in their attitudes towards the school institution (this particular boy showed interest and goodwill, while the others opposed the institution's norms and values), the pupils showed great respect for each other throughout the year. For example, in the initial interview with this particular boy, the boy spoke positively about a schoolmate, saying that he thinks she acts beautifully (One-on-one interview, 7 December 2022). When he was behind the camera, the others listened to his suggestions. In appropriating the gestures of showing, the pupils directed their attention to each other; they got to know each other, assessed each other's performances and found a balance in collaborating with each other – a form of 'team complicity', in [Erving Goffman's \(1974, chapter 9\) words](#) – during the filming process, despite behavioural differences. The teamwork was based on forms of adjustment through listening, exchange and discovery.

The camera might not only reveal specific talents or reorganise the social constellations in class; it has also significance as a sign of professionalism. It brings, symbolically, the field of professional filmmaking into the school context, which implies a different 'authority' and power dynamics. This became evident one day when the filmmaker in Frankfurt introduced his professional camera with a body tripod to the pupils. As he installed the technical devices, which took about 15 minutes, and as he let different pupils try to handle it, the whole group watched attentively, even pupils who easily became disinterested while

watching film extracts. Their fascination with the professional equipment was evident: the filmmaker, without striving for authority, was respected as a representative of the profession.

Since camerawork, like all technical devices, is still heavily gendered in our society, this aspect seems especially significant when girls take control of the camera. In Frankfurt, one ninth-grade girl, who never participated in the discussion of film extracts and often demonstrated her disinterest through her body language, participated from the beginning in the camerawork. She was the only girl who patiently tested the camera with body tripod in the above-mentioned situation. On the first day of shooting, when the group was to shoot a scene in a classroom, she suggested that they film the rows of benches in a long take. Shooting the take with a gimbal turned out to be difficult for her physically, as the camera was too heavy. She nevertheless repeated the operation several times, until she had to give up. The shot was shortened slightly and a male student, who was actually assigned as director, took over the camerawork. Nevertheless, the girl insisted on her conception of the take – a searching camera movement along the desks – and convinced the others to choose it for the final film.

This example indicates that camerawork is not just an act of showing, but a body performance by the cameraperson, who relates to the technical device as well as to the place around her, and a process of collective decision making in which an individual might negotiate and assert her choices. In this case, shooting the well-known location of the classroom in a long take might be interpreted as an impulse to analyse the structure of the place. It might be seen as wanting to change the established positions of the teacher in the front and the pupils in the rows of benches, while adopting the perspective of someone wandering along the benches, showing what each desk reveals. On a more basic level, this example speaks of the gendered quality of self-assertion in handling a professional device and negotiating one's own ideas in a group. Later on, when interviewed on her recollection of the project, the girl affirmed her decision. She stated that she knew straight away that she only wanted to do the camera. When asked what the most challenging moment was for her, she responded that it was when she was holding the heavy camera. She emphasised feeling proud that she did that. She expressed her satisfaction with her work, even though she had never worked with a camera before, and noted that she thought she filmed well (Final interview, Frankfurt, 13 June 2023).

Later on, she answered 'No' when asked if she would like to do a film workshop again. She said she would rather do something new. In contrast to the boy in Paris, who felt that working with the camera was his vocation, it was obviously the challenge of using a professional device that triggered her engagement: the process of filmmaking allowed for her self-assertion in a gendered (professional) field.

In both cases, the pupils already showed an interest in camerawork, either in the aesthetics of cinema or in the technical device itself, that led them to engage in the filmmaking process. But with some pupils this process might be reversed: it is the recognition they gain through participating in filmmaking that triggers their motivation. This was the case with a very shy girl in the Paris group; she performed poorly at school (as the teacher affirmed) and did not initially engage in the project. She came with her friend to the Wednesday afternoon sessions without being registered; at first, she did nothing but observe and listen. One day, when the class was asked who would handle the camera, she raised her hand; she then shot – with the help of the professional – a complex long take that later became a core element of the final film (as mentioned earlier in this article). When the filmmaker congratulated her for the precision and mastery of this shot, she just smiled and seemed very happy. After that, she became very involved in the process of filmmaking.

The recognition the girl received seemed to help her overcome her shyness and gain self-confidence. This recognition was based on the different institutional frames of the project: the filmmaker introduced a different value system into the school context, not considering the traditional requirements of 'good' behaviour, and encouraged her to engage with the technical aspects of filmmaking. Beyond the importance of recognition on the part of her classmates or the adults (teacher and filmmaker) during the filmmaking process, this example also hints at the importance of the presentation of their work to an audience, in school as well as in the international context. The shot this girl made as part of one of the

exercises was praised highly during the mid-term meeting in Paris, when the adults of different teams discussed the exercises done by the pupils. This might also have influenced the filmmaker, when he later proposed to the pupils that this take should be chosen as a point of departure for their film essay. The presentation of the film at their school, and then in Wiesbaden in the presence of Wim Wenders, reinforced the experience of recognition for this girl in her social context as well as on an international scale. This might have had an even greater impact on her gaining self-confidence than the making of the take itself.

## **The act of showing as a collective process of recognition, responsibility and exchange**

The example just discussed hints at the act of showing the films (exercises) to others in different contexts as a crucial moment in the social learning process. The presentation of pupils' films to others on a local and international scale is an important challenge and moment of recognition, stimulating their engagement in the filmmaking process and helping some to gain self-confidence. The final meeting is of particular significance as a reward for their work: as a trip (Wiesbaden in 2023, Lisbon in 2024), as a meeting with other pupils taking part in the programme, and as the presentation of their film in a cinema and in front of a large audience who will dedicate their attention to the film.

An important aspect of 'À nous, le cinéma!' that distinguishes it from other festivals for young people is the absence of a prize for the best film. This 'rule' opens the space for a critical but respectful exchange that is not based on an evaluation of the others' films, but on the common ground of a similar experience. All the participants have worked with the same 'rules of the game' and may, thus, be interested in understanding how the others approached it. Each film is followed by a moderated discussion in which the audience of pupils is invited to ask questions. These exchanges generally deal with all kinds of questions regarding casting, filmmaking, aesthetic choices, the encounter with reality as well as the foreign language used in the film. As the pupils know that all participants in the movie theatre had to complete the same exercises, some are able to ask precise questions about specific challenges and the meaning of aesthetic choices, sometimes showing a significant sensibility for film as a means of expression.

More important than the discussions is watching the films of the other pupils. The pupils reflect on their own films and the films made by other pupils as a mode of expression and as a medium to exchange with others. In making the films, the pupils not only tell but show something of their life-world, concerns and imaginations to others. As a tenth-grade girl in Frankfurt put it in a written answer to the question 'What is cinema for you?' at the end of the project cycle on 27 June 2023, in watching the films of others 'you plunge into a different world and get to know different histories and perspectives'. The most elaborate reflection on this aspect was written by a ninth-grade girl of the same group in her response to this question:

This movie experience was different; you could see the people behind the films, see how much it meant to them. They were treated with respect. You could recognise in the films that it's someone else, from whose inner self it comes, but somehow it feels beautiful and very personal.

A movie can be and trigger many things. It can make you laugh or shake you to the core. It can touch you or make you recognise yourself. It's impressive that it can be all of that in one. For me, a good film is when I realise that the people behind the film are trying to say or show something. When you can feel the heart and soul that goes into it. Unfortunately, this is often difficult with expensive films. The films are somehow unapproachable; they touch you differently – unlike some of the films that were shown here, in which you could recognise

the people, get to know the culture and landscape. Movies can stay with you, stay in your mind, or be seen and then forgotten; they can exist for the moment or continue to exist in your heart. Maybe it's not the equipment that matters in a movie, but the feeling of seeing the people who created it. It's about that connection between the creators and the viewers.

Most striking here is how the girl describes film as a personal experience, similar to [Daney's \(1994\)](#) definition of film as an intersubjective act of showing: she distinguishes the films made during CCAJ from commercial movies, in that they are individual works in which she can recognise the filmmakers. She defines these films as a communication between creators and viewer, expressing their inner self. This is anchored in a culture and a landscape. It conveys not only an idea but emotions and sensations. It seems that other pupils' films function like a mirror in which she might find a reflection of herself and, at the same time, find access to someone unknown.

These dynamics of personal involvement may even be related to sociopolitical awareness, considering how the girl quoted above related to the film the Frankfurt group made. Interestingly, she did not play a particular role within the filmmaking process. She admitted during the final interview that she did not dare to handle any of the technical devices (Frankfurt, 13 June 2023). Nevertheless, she was part of the core group of four especially engaged pupils, present at each step of the filmmaking process. She was enthusiastic about the screening in Wiesbaden, and expressed in an informal conversation how important the subject of the film – a girl in love with another girl – was to her. Other pupils, when asked why they chose the subject, suggested that it was rather by accident, as no boy wanted to play the leading role. One might ask whether they were really as unaware of the sociopolitical impact of their film as they claimed. However, it seems remarkable that for this particular girl, it was of utmost importance that in the final encounters in Wiesbaden the whole group represented the film as their own and thus assumed this subject – at least symbolically – in front of an international audience.

It is this assumption of responsibility for a collective work that the film professional of the Paris group says is at stake when pupils present their films to the audience at the final encounters:

'À nous, le cinéma!' meetings crystallise something that is absolutely essential and that you can't create any other way. Because [the pupils] are going to have to answer questions, they're going to have to answer for their actions, they're going to have to answer for their films and they're responsible for it. That's the etymology of being responsible: having to answer. And all of a sudden, in fact, they're responsible for ... not for a kid, not for their little brother, but for this film. And suddenly they're responsible for a speech [...] it's the fact that they're being asked questions and that other people are asking them questions. (Final interview, Paris, 28 June 2023)

This dynamic shows how questions of identity and self-confidence are interwoven, in a complex way, not only with the social dynamics of the filmmaking process, but also with the presentation of the films in the space of a cinema.

## Conclusion

In this article, we have argued that in *Le Cinéma, cent ans de jeunesse*, the frame of the school institution is opened up and shifted by the frame of the professional and artistic field of film production and the frame of film culture. However, at the same time, these are also inflected in becoming the frames for complex social educational processes in which cinema not only functions as a medium of entertainment or as artistic expression but becomes a space of mutual exchange among people of different generations and cultures. The acts of showing, fundamental to camerawork in film practice and film projection, here reveal the intersubjective character of potential learning processes; these might include aesthetic sensibility (how to frame), symbolic self-assertion in a gendered field (to take the camera), the building of motivation and self-confidence while being recognised (to be seen) by others, the assumption of responsibility for a

collective work (shown to others) as well as a form of intimate communication (between those who show and those who watch).

Philosopher [Alain Kerlan \(2021](#), p. 39) insists on the potentially emancipating dynamic of aesthetic experiences; this lies in the compensation for a certain lack of experience in the contemporary world, offering an opportunity for reflection and helping one to reconnect with one's own sensibility through aesthetic experience. The specific quality of aesthetic film education, as realised in *Le Cinéma, cent ans de jeunesse*, then lies in these experiences being embedded in and enabled by intersubjective exchanges, by a connection to other subjectivities and – sometimes – by the creation of an almost utopian space of community.

## Author biographies

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**Bettina Henzler** is professor in film studies at the Internationale Film Schule Köln (IFS). Her research focus is film education, childhood studies, French cinema, New German Cinema production studies, play theory and acting theory. Her PhD thesis dealt with the cultural and theoretical contexts and the media and methods of Alain Bergala's work on film education. The habilitation project (see [www.film-und-kindheit.de](http://www.film-und-kindheit.de)) analysed the film aesthetic figurations of childhood, combining phenomenological approaches to film reception and production. Besides her academic work, she is engaged in film education, cooperating with international institutions of film culture. She is attached to the research centres ZeMKI (Universität Bremen) and IRCAV (Université Sorbonne Nouvelle) and is a member of the advisory board of the *Film Education Journal*.

Selected publications:

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Henzler, B. (2022) *Filmische Kindheitsfiguren: Bewegung – Fremdheit – Spiel*. Vorwerk 8.

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Henzler, B., Pauleit, W., & Ruffert, C. (eds) (2010) *Learning from the cinema: International perspectives on film education*. Bertz + Fischer.

## Notes

1. 'Le cinéma n'est pas une technique d'exposition, c'est un art de montrer. Et montrer est un geste, un geste qui oblige à voir, à regarder. Sans ce geste, il n'y a que de l'imagerie. Mais si quelque chose a été montré, il faut que quelqu'un accuse réception.'

2. For information on the subject and the rules of the game, and the films made by the pupils, see <http://blogcinemacentansdejeunesse.org/centredecentre/le-sujet-de-lannee/>.

3. All translations from French and German are by the authors.

4. The instructions for exercise 3 were as follows: 'In a single sequence shot: accompany a character in a situation (free). At one point, without justification, the camera leaves the character to film an object,

a situation, a detail, a gesture, etc., which at first has no apparent connection with the situation the character is experiencing. The camera catches up with the character and we discover that there was indeed a link (expressive, narrative) between the elements chosen for the decentred shot and the character's moment, centred.'

## Declarations and conflicts of interest

### Research ethics statement

Not applicable to this article.

### Consent for publication statement

Not applicable to this article.

### Conflicts of interest statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest with this work. All efforts to sufficiently anonymise the author during peer review of this article have been made. The authors declare no further conflicts with this article.

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