Transcript of Part Six (by Andy Elliot, 2007)

With this lecture we will start the second part of the course which has been designed - once we have established the ground discussing the general concepts - to see how the cinema is connected to culture, philosophy, and to see how the role of cinematography has increased in recent years. We will now try to focus more closely on the idea of cinematography.

This idea of cinematography is important. Normally people talk about the concept of cinema, and my view is that we have three basic concepts: one is film, the other is cinema, the other is cinematography. 'Films' refer essentially to movies- even if it is not exactly like that, but for the purpose of brevity let's accept that 'film' talks about a movie. Cinema is the physical part as such, it is the cinema itself, where you go to a building to see a movie. So cinema basically includes the film and the building in which the film is delivered. Cinematography is another step forward, and it includes all the theories, all the thinking and all the functionality of cinema in society or in a particular community. Cinematography doesn't just include film, but also includes the intellectual dimension of cinema, if you like. That's why I mention the concept of cinematography, because as a concept it is a more comprehensive one, as it includes these three objects: the film, the building and all the theoretical aspects. Thus the second part of the course will be more closely connected to cinematography.

For a start in lecture 6, I indicate the title because I would like to go a little bit deeper in the description that we made about this switch in culture form a literature-orientated society to an image-orientated society. In the traditional society the idea of

the edge in cinema was mainly focussed on understanding how the edge was working, how we were seeing things and how these physiological studies can explain cinema as a physical phenomenon. On the contrary, one thing that did happen in this switch towards an image-orientated locality, was that the eye became conscious. We no longer have this abstract eye which in a pure environment was looking at something, we have this idea of an eye which is already 'designed'. And in this context, when we start to see things we already have a preconception of what this eye is, we have a cultural background which determines our perspective. So what happens is that we switch from an idea of an 'eye' to one of 'vision', so we have eyes - we still see things - but that these eyes have consciousness, they have a background, they are not innocent. This is what has really changed.

Also, I indicate the Italian expression which indicates the machine - especially in the first part of the development of cinema - which was designed to catch images. Literally translated it has the idea of 'catching'. I think in this evolution, in this change which we classed in the first part of the course, to go back to this notion of the *macchina da pressa* could give us some sense of how - culturally speaking - cinematography works today, because we have this idea of a machine which is catching things. A lot of things we have discussed are connected with this problem of reality: whether cinema creates a unique reality, if it produces reality, and so on. Perhaps you are more familiar with these discussions relating to reality than this one relating to vision. What we have established is that from the cinematographical point of view we create a sort of package, a set of elements which have been caught, and has soon as they have been caught they become a sort of autonomous object, and begin to circulate in society in a certain way. And this is what has changed. Since the beginning of cinema the idea that we can control the meaning of a particular thing was present, and now - and this is why I would like to return to the idea of catching - we cannot control that any more. Cinema is part of a culture in which we produce objects, the objects have some sort of autonomy, they start to circulate and we can no longer control the meaning of that object, the meaning will be dependent on what local context has been placed, what the observer's position is, and so on, as we discussed when we talked about constructivism in the first part of the course.

Regarding the idea of point of view, I would like to say that a change, again, did

happen there. Within the traditional society in which cinema was beginning to develop, the societies were grounded in a particular idea of culture, which was in itself grounded in the idea of literature. For those societies, a good director of cinema was one who managed to use the camera in a sort of way so that it represented the point of view which he or she had, so the closer the relationship between the camera and the point of view, or the closer the montage was to the point of view of the director, the more effective and the better the film was. What happens now is that neither the use of the camera nor the montage are connected to the point of view. There is no longer this belief that we can express the point of view of a person using the camera or montage. What we are talking about now is a set of elements that we can discuss. So we can establish a series of elements, and we can use the camera or montage to discuss these sets of elements. But almost no one, no one critic believes that these elements can represent a point of view because a point of view is so difficult to discuss objectively and individually; cinematography became more and more of a collective work, meaning that this connection between individual and final product has disappeared.

More generally I would like to comment on two things. When cinema at the beginning and towards the middle of the century was trying to establish itself, basically two main subjects concerned the critics and directors. The first was to establish cinema as a kind of art, to give it some sort of status and the second to establish some kind of function of cinema. The closer we get to the end of the 20th century, the more this second concern begins to dominate the first one. What happened is that the cinema has become more than art and this is something that not many people were able to predict, as people like Virilio have discussed, so all the people concerned with cinema, all those working in the cinema were thinking that the maximum they could achieve was to establish this idea of the 'seventh art', but no one was able - except a few people, like Abel Gance - to predict that it would become the *dominant art*. More than that, it would become a dominant element in culture, which is why the first discussion disappeared. As for the second discussion, the social function of cinema, well, cinema assumed a hugely important role in culture. This idea of functionality, of social function became too abstract, it is too general. We need a more specific tool to explain a specific situation. And that is why the second discussion disappeared as well. As I discussed in the first part of the course, we are

facing this new environment, in which the traditional concerns from critics and directors disappeared.

What we are going to see now is the consequence – in this previously described context - of this notion of the observer, as we characterised them in the first part of the course. So we are going to see how this affects the basic conception we have about cinema. We have this idea about the *auteur* - an idea, as you know, which was established in the 40s and 50s and even survived until the 60s - the idea was that the director of a film was the equivalent to what we would traditionally call author in another art like literature. This created quite a big debate over 20 or 30 years (within cinema of course), but another aspect that has only recently been analysed was that the idea of authorship which we have in Europe in the 20th century. Authorship was a concept mainly grounded in literature and there has been quite a debate about the disappearance of this idea of authorship. So cinema picked up a notion of authorship from let's say literature in a moment in which this notion itself was being discussed in other areas, such as philosophy. So the choice was already problematic at the time they made it. There is another consideration about this *auteur theory*, which was that this idea of authorship was being connected mainly with a period when cinema was trying to establish itself as an art. So a lot of directors thought that if they had managed to establish themselves as an author, then what they do would immediately be considered as an art. But at the same time as people were discussing the theory of authorship, the idea of art became empty or disappeared. What happened is that during the 70s and 80s people like Barthes and Foucault began to discuss the idea of the 'death of the author'. There were different approaches and theories, but the fact was that something was there, something happened to the idea of authorship, something that meant that authorship was not an unproblematic concept. So someone who is going to use the idea of authorship needs to be aware that there is a sort of crisis with this idea of concept, and the application of this concept is not as easy as one might initially think.

Another interesting aspect is there in the idea of authorship which, as I mentioned before, came up during the 40s - I remember reading once an article in French I think, by someone called Alexander Astruc, who was making an association saying that the camera was like a pen, 'un stylo', that was the idea. And indeed connected to this

notion was the idea of ideology. So if you are an author and you want to make a point, the belief during these 20 or 30 years was that you would like to express your ideology, all of your points of view towards society, love, human beings, and so on. So for those who believed that the 'theory of authorship' can express cinema, they believed at the same time that the function of cinema was to express ideology. And this is something, too, which was problematic, because the idea of ideology itself was being questioned in the 70s and more so in the 80s and 90s as a problematic area. So again people in the cinema were picking up concepts from philosophy, or political science, and incorporating them into cinema in a moment in which these concepts itself were being questioned. And this also had consequences, in the sense that the effectiveness of these concepts disappeared, which is why critics in the late 70s began to abandon these ideas. The perfect examples of this are the books on cinema of Deleuze, coming up in 1983 and '85; in the considerations that Deleuze made about cinema, even if he mentions these theories, they are not grounded in these ideas, and he did not use these concepts. So we come back to the idea of the director. The director recently has been considered like a sort of *manager,* as cinematography became such a complex area, and such an important cultural area; so many interests, so many values from a cultural, financial, economical point of view are involved in it that the idea of the director has recently been associated with the idea of the manager. Furthermore, Virilio (as you are going to see, or have already seen if you have looked at the suggested reading) suggests that a director is a sort of expert in logistics, and this is why he associates the development of cinema connected with war periods, because during war periods we have the problem of logistics. Everything is a problem, we need to get water, we need to get gas, we need to get everything: everything is about logistics, and Virilio observes that cinema has the same requirements, everything is about logistics in cinema, too. We need extras, cast, we need organisation for everything. So it is the big planning that is the main problem, basically. This is why there is a sort of revisited perspective about the director, and this is what I call the director's situation.

And it is relevant, too, because those critics who have reconciled the idea of cinematography as the art of logistics, director as manager, are at the same time those who are proposing this model of cinematography as a model to understand not only culture, but also to understand society as such. And this is the most extreme version

that we have ever come across about the importance of cinema. We have people discussing cinema now saying that societies, in one way or another, are organised cinematographically speaking. Or they say that if we should follow a model of organisation in our society, this should be grounded in this cinematographical model. Saying it in this way, you will probably be thinking that this is a silly idea, but if you think about it from a semiotic perspective, we are living in a community in which what we share with other people are abstract values, and if you accept that this change of values and this idea of representation is grounded on images, and these images are grounded on cinematography, this perspective about the organisation of society doesn't sound quite so silly any more. It begins to seem very realistic.

Regarding the personal situation, I briefly want to describe how that has changed. From one situation in which the *personages* in cinematography were characters to another more recent one in which the characters have been transformed into a sort of role model, into an original concept. Character became concept in the sense in which Deleuze was discussing. We have the personage who is completely original, original in the sense that they are establishing, making points, determining situations which didn't happen before. So that is why I say they are a role model. In the first part, characters were a representation of a particular social figure, for instance. But what happens now is the reverse situation. The social person is someone who has been absorbing things from films, and this is when people started to talk about the reverse of reality. Reality was there in society, and cinema tried to represent it; now, the reality is there in cinema, and people try to represent it in society. This is to simplify, of course, but only to explain to you what happened with this idea of personage.

Regarding the spectator situation, we have a change as well. We changed or better we alternate changes from two periods that we can define, following Barthes, as a spectator who formed into two different types. (1) a *projective* spectator, who watched the film and transported himself into the plot in to the film, and 2) one who was less reactive and more intellectual, who was not making a projection of himself, but trying to *incorporate* the film to himself. So there are two opposite movements. That was the first idea of the spectators in the 60s and 70s; now we move to another perspective more connected with semiotics, or at least connected to the idea of reader in literature or culture as described in semiotics. So the idea of the role of the reader:

that semiotic aspect applied to literature, affects cinema as well, in the sense that they tried to extend this concept of reader from semiotics to be applicable to cinema in the sense of the spectator. And this is where the idea came up that we have two kinds of spectator nowadays. One which is *imaginary*, that is, defined within the film. So when a film comes out, there is already a preconception of a spectator there. The film already determines the type of audience of that film. Then you have the other spectator: the *real* spectator. So what we have to analyse, to understand the 'spectator', is how the real spectator interacts with the imaginary spectator of a film. There are plenty of studies about this, but this is the main discussion about the situation of the spectator. Well, that's it for today.

I will briefly now discuss the topics you have in the recommended reading. You have a comprehensive article from Virilio which is a sort of resumé of what has been discussed here. In the bibliography, you have several indications such as Esquenazi, who discusses Deleuze and 'point of view' in Deleuze; the preface for *War and Cinema* from Virilio; Chapter 5 from *La machine de vision*; Jacques Aumont, a French author who has been writing about the image, I think that Chapter 1 and 2 are very interesting, especially in the part that we have been discussing about edge and the idea of vision. Then De Cordoba has an interesting article which analyses the evolution of cinema from a historiographical point of view, he explains these changes which we have discussed. Monique Sicard did something very similar; then Lajaoux, too, focusses more in this area of cinema. Then a book we saw before: Crary *Techniques of the Observer*; and the work about Deleuze and the idea of a machine. So my recommendation is always the same: pick up what you think is most interesting. This is a huge area, and you don't need to cover all of the aspects. The important thing is just to have an overall idea, to make the right decision regarding the essay.

Recommended Reading

Paul Virilio, 'The Vision Machine' in James Der Derian (ed.), *The Virilio Reader* (London: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 134-151.

Suggested Reading

Jean Pierre Esquenazi, 'Deleuze et la théorie du point de vue' in O. Fahle and L. Engell (eds.), *Le cinéma selon Deleuze* (Weimar: Universität Weimar/Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 1997), pp. 372-405.

Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception* (London: Verso, 1989), 'Préface'.

Paul Virilio, *La machine de vision* (Paris: Galilée, 1988), Chapter 5.

Jacques Aumont, The Image (London: BFI, 1997), Chapters One and Two.

Edgar Morin, *Le cinéma ou l'homme imaginaire* (Paris: Minuit, 1956), Chapter 1.

Richard Decordoba, 'From Lumière to Pathé. The Break-Up of Perpectival Space' in Thomas Elsaesser (ed.), *Early Cinema. Space, Frame, Narrative* (London: BFI, 1997), pp. 76-85.

Monique Sicard, 'Mille huit cent quatre-vingt-quinze ou les bascules du regard' in Alexis Martinet (coord.), *Le cinéma et la science* (Paris: CNRS, 1994), pp. 18-31.

Jean-Dominique Lajaoux, 'Etienne Jules Marey. Les origines du cinéma' in Alexis Martinet (coord.), *Le cinéma et la science* (Paris: CNRS, 1994), pp. 34-47.

Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), Chapter 5.

D. N. Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), Chapters 2 and 7.