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POLITICAL SCIENCE REVISITED

(FEW) VISUAL CLUES OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY*

VIORELLA MANOLACHE**

Abstract. *The present study approaches (anticipating a forthcoming volume concentrating upon the topic of* Political Philosophy in Motion*) few visual clues acknowledged by political philosophy. The study is interested in the relationship of the* philosophy *and the* politics of film*, formulating a particular way of "looking at things", indicating* a frame *which is able to verify the domain's themes and constructs, in order not only to offer a sample (*a few *illustrating inserts) but also to* name *some* reflections *in order to re-define the relationship between* film + philosophy.

Keywords: *Film + Philosophy; Visual Clues; Political Philosophy; Filmosophy; Philosophy – Politics – Film.*

Political Philosophy: an Essential Chapter of the Relationship between Film and Philosophy A Few Clues…

Within the quantification of (didactically – inflected) chapters decidedly concerned by/with the structural individualization of any connection between film and political philosophy, the *Philosophy through Film*[1] volume offers, as starting page, the definitional framing of political philosophy inside fixed patterns, and its repositioning as a part of ethics. Any answer to questions concerning general principles which regulate and coordinate the behavior of both states and individuals would place within the central node of research domain,s a solution offered to the interrogation *enouncing the attributes of the state*: its fundamental qualities are those of defender of liberty and promoter of institutions guaranteeing and protecting each individual's equality in his strife for achieving/fulfilling his own interests.

* The present article is part of the research project no. 12, "Filosofia științei, a mentalului și a comunicării: cunoaștere, cunoștință, conștiență, mental, ființă dialogică, polifonie, libertate de expresie, semnificație, interpretare" [Philosophy of Science, Mind and Communication: Knowledge, Awareness, Mental, Dialogical Being, Polyphony, Freedom of Expression, Meaning, Interpretation], of The Academy of Romanian Scientists (AOSR), Bucharest.

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[1] Mary Litch, Amy Karofsky, *Philosophy through Film*, third edition, Routledge, New York and London, 2014.

This endeavor is not singular, isolated or desultory; on the contrary, it reviews, annotates and completes the frame already indicated by Christopher Falzon in *Philosophy Goes to the Movies: An Introduction to Philosophy*[2], where he advocates both a focusing upon distinctive inserts dedicated to social and political philosophy, and an analysis of visual and ideate clues contained in, and projected by, the film/cartoon *Antz* (1998). Falzon remains true to the progressive type of research, and he (con)centrates upon a study of modern evaluative tendencies which prioritize the individual to the detriment of the state, bringing into discussion Plato's conception which accepted the state's unity as the supreme prerogative, with each individual being assigned a pre-established role. The working method targets the extraction and underlining of main ideas, commenting upon them, but also upon the currents and directions of political philosophy, while at the same time reloading an interest for critical acceptance and visual empowerment of the domain's essential terms.

The great themes of political philosophy (often superimposed over each other, without any limiting inflexions from the direction of *a science of the political*) are grouped, dismantled and reloaded with an insistence upon prioritizing aspects such as: identity and social conformism, liberalism, state of nature (*Lord of the Flies, Mad Max*), social contract and types of government, individualism, personal freedom, public space, the right to life, health and property (*People vs. Larry Flynt*), negative rights (*1984, Manchurian Candidate, A Clockwork Orange, Bob Roberts, Wag the Dog*), manipulation, mass-media effects (*Truman Show*), positive liberty, self-determination, social beings (*The Wild Child, The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser*), community, social reality, the primacy of economic factors, alienation (*Matewan*), collective unions (*Matewan, Salt of the Earth, Norma Rae*), social change (*Blue Collar, October*), real interest (*A Question of Silence*), power and surveillance (*Ghosts of the Civil Dead, Face-Off, Fortress, The End of Violence, Ladybird Ladybird*), a critique of authoritarianism denouncing totalitarianism (*Invasion of the Body Snatchers, Starship Troopers*).

If, for Christopher Falzon, the visual testing template of the junction between *philosophy – politics – film* acknowledges as a landmark the route taken by an individual's progress from morality towards social order, route which places the *Antz* film in a privileged position, for Mary Litch and Amy Karofsky the idea of an existing theoretical frame overtly contextualized by films seems more logical. From the same privileged position, the *Antz* film can be compared, on equal terms, with *Equilibrium* (2002), both representing an elegant way of visually translating a whole file of themes dear to political philosophy, such as: social identity, autonomous individuals, political duties, social contract, end of history and/or of Western political philosophy, limits of individual liberty, human nature – beginning via Plato, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Mill, Kant, Marx – and finishing with Rawls.

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[2] Christopher Falzon, *Philosophy Goes to the Movies: An Introduction to Philosophy*, second edition, Routledge, New York and London, 2007.

In places, establishing an ideologically-imprinted direction for films with central importance (accepting liberalism but connected also to communitarian reflexes!) demands a clear circumstantiation of volumes such as *Philosophy through Film* when they opt for discussing movies like *Antz* and *Equilibrium*. Here, indeterminacy manifests itself as an endorsement of chapters dedicated to political philosophy, targeting the way in which fictional registries are superimposed upon the coordinates of an authoritarian state, marked by social roles attributed from/by birth. In fact, one insists upon the mixture between/of two research formulas, studying individual autonomy, human nature, rebellion, the ideal state or the degree of social justice (*Antz*); as well as ways of unblocking repressed emotions, rethinking the role of the state and the individual, investigating political elites and the active role of revolutions/ revolutionary acts (*Equilibrium*).

One can note, in both of these landmark films, a common predisposition and an identical registry allowing for interpretation, comment, illustration and filmic-visual valuing of political philosophy. Nevertheless, at a first viewing/ preview all of these seem to opt for the articulation of a variation already dedicated to the way in which a registry of counter-deductions can be sartorially[3] organized: between text and image there exists no contradictory ideology – on the contrary, affirmations are made in a combinatory, cooperative way, accepting the roles of plus- explanation and synthesis, in the sense in which knowledge can exist through imagery only if the latter's intelligibility resides in reverting to much-needed *explanations*.

Fragments from an Archive of Cinema[4] *– Related Political and Philosophical Conversations*

We consider that one can easily include a group portrait of philosophers with noticeable contributions to the frame-space of political philosophy research inside a synthesis of cinema- related comments and observations, with a special mention for the *Conversations on Cinema*[5] volume, which harmonizes fiducially opinions of a domain already belonging to Georges Didi-Huberman, Roberto Esposito, Jacques Rancière or Jean-Luc Nancy.

Thus, Georges Didi-Huberman places the "esthetics of immanence" within the generally-troubled tide which guarantees a *critical effect of representation*, thus conforming to the routine practice of cinema which uses hard materials (*primary*, we underline) in order to ensure the availability of any narrative and its predilection towards focusing upon objects taken from the area of a singular or tridimensional existence, transferred and reintegrated in the *nodes* of a hybrid and combinatorial discourse.

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[3] Giovanni Sartori, *Homo videns. Imbecilizarea prin televiziune și post-gândirea* [Homo videns. Televisione e post-pensiero], Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 2005.

[4] See, for more details, Viorella Manolache, "Verdictul imaginii: politica 3D" [Image dixit: 3D politics], in *Saeculum*, year XIV (XVI), no.1-2 (39-40), 2015, pp. 39-50.

[5] Roberto Gaetano (editor), *Conversations on Cinema*, Pellegrini Editore, Cosenza, 2013.

A clear interest for applied formulations is confirmed by Jacques Rancière, who considers it as one of cinema's specific properties, a particular form of *political power* subject to the *specific powers of the machine*, with an irregular and lacunar functioning. Any sliding from the status of *passive spectator* to that of *emancipated profiler* reveals less of a hierarchical relationship and more of a positioning upon a scale of valuation common to both *artist (protagonist*) and *spectator*.

From the point of view of a Godardian endeavor ready to prove the subjectification of narrative industry, conditioned by *placing the spectator in the center of political problems*, cinema's new strategy revalues the contradictory *forces* of stoppings, disparities, syncopations and disconnections. We can also note that, inside the *politics – philosophy alloy*, the art of cinematography interferes in an intellectualizing manner with the *visibility (form) of narrating bodies, as well as with fundamental properties of things inside the narration itself*, thus producing a double effect reloaded either in an enhanced visual effect or in an absence of discourse. Rancière's conviction accepts the fact that, when transposed on a screen, the political always asserts the premises of a radical democracy which belongs to all existential things, installing certain intervals as art models of determining social relations while also accepting an economic climate – an egalitarian property: *cinephilia* interrogates all the categories of artistically modernism.

In Jean Luc Nancy's analytical interpretation, image extends the prerogatives of power, seen in the hard sense of an iconicity which vivifies representations, by considering it a *non-figurative (and fully affirmative) function of power and competence*. Although preoccupied by the relationship between *sacred power – sacredness of power – sacred potency* which constitutes a tri-phased formulation able to institute a general, autonomous and excluding order, Jean Luc Nancy does not deny the reversible capacities of theological – political visions which would necessarily impact any decree of lay properties defining a medium already free from any religious cinematic accents.

Suggesting a superposition of registries such as *medium* and *opportunity*, with inflexions conditioned by certain *non-specific category specifications*, Roberto Esposito's vision states that cinema would represent an opportunity of collecting both *centripetal powers/forces of the real* and the *centrifugal discourse* transgressing it. In fact, the offered approach rescues cinema from imprisonment inside the perimeter of a sartorially autonomous specificity, in order to reposition it inside the economy of a Morinian project of created doubles/duplicates with a role in immobilizing and imprisoning reality or even metamorphosing it.

By involving the *cinematic apparatus* (in its double role of preserver and destroyer) in an uneasy, recessive cohabitation with the *bios*, the first term would be seen by Esposito as an equivalent of that *machinery of power and knowledge*, or an area of contact between *communitas* (exposition, externalization and an interest in alterity) and *immunitas* (a continuous, dividing and transcending movement). From within the confluence of *power* and *artistic imagery*, film offers an *estheticizing of politics* and a *politicization of art,* with a lethal effect –

that of positive reversibility, acknowledged in elaborate esthetic and political practices, inside spaces already guided by biopolitical landmarks. Any attributes particular to the economic productive domain that cinema reloads are attached by Esposito to a Foucaultian conception of *power*. This produces subjects, but also decrees the death of subjectivity, inside the logics of a panoptikon with diachronic variable constants: "I look at you, you look back at me", constituting a balanced structure which confirms, by identification, the metastable character (both *on* and *off-screen*) of cinema. A sympathizer of *pro-communitas practices*, Esposito reasserts the coordinates of a Godardian politics, interested in the non-personal, the original connection between life and politics, and distanced from major involvements or over/superposition.

An Illustrating Insert: Axel Honneth – Film as an Indicator of Social Interaction

Film or literature represents "the most faithful indicator of social constructs and interaction reactions", decrees Axel Honneth[6] in his study, while considering the two domains as "recent moves" used to expose the individual's incapacity to form and preserve any form of interhuman attachment.

Concentrating both upon legal liberty and moral liberty, Axel Honneth is interested (in the case of both conceptualizations) by the abovementioned categories' reason of being, limits, manifestations and pathologies. Such an endeavor is undertaken with the avowed purpose of explaining and understanding the ethical sense of judicial liberty, and thus to operate upon its positioning inside the *frame* of concepts about social justice, by clarifying the functioning mechanisms of judicial elements regarding private autonomy[7].

Judicial liberty can have pathological consequences, influencing and perverting social behavior when, by becoming autonomous (*sich verselbstständigen*), it offers to each individual that critical element of radical emancipation from any social obligations. The judicial position obstructs the socializing and cooperative process, prevents access to intersubjective attachments and responsibilities, but also amplifies the drama of alienation, accenting the crisis of a marginalized ego: "as long as subjects question monological obligations and alternatives, they will be self-imprisoned inside a decision-taking void, in a state of near-total indeterminacy"[8].

In the context of social theories, "social pathology" is indicative of a type of social development which significantly affects the capacity of rational partaking of any form of social cooperation. In contrast with social injustice, which consists in beneficial exclusion or restriction of any opportunities to partake in social cooperative processes, social pathologies can be found on a socially superior reproduction scale, which conditions the reflexive accessibility of

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6 Axel Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2014, p. 151.

7 *Ibidem*, p. 72.

8 *Ibidem*, p. 84.

subjects to sequences of actions and norm systems. Whenever social evolutions prevent any members of society from (adequately) beneficial access to the significances and consequences of practices and norms, "social pathologies" develop – arrested developments, manifested by deviations from the norm and behavioral disturbances, grouped by Christopher Zurn in a well-individualized category, identified by the syntagm "second-degree disorders". These represent "rational deficiencies in which any first- order beliefs and practices cannot be implemented inside the secondary order"; such pathologies, Honneth believes, cannot be perceived as pathologically-individual accretions, but become generalized deviations from social norm, manifested by a loss of "that ability to adequately practice normative grammar, or to intuitively perceive familiar action systems"[9].

The symptomatology of social pathologies is discerned in a certain rigidity (*Verhaltenserstarrung*), and in reflexive consternation (*reflexive Betroffenheit),* which can be diagnosed either by a recourse to Hegel's work or to Lukács' early studies. Thus freedom is reduced to a sum of individual rights, any means of action becoming *caputs*; equal liberty is founded upon a difficult pattern of recapturing one's own identity; any temporary relief from intersubjective duties through the action of individual rights becomes a general reference symbol for the relationship between the individual and the self; the epitome of individual liberty is no longer defined in terms of subjective rights, suspending any personal obligations and constraints, but converts liberty into an ideal; one is faced with the impossibility of understanding and adequately perceiving "the sense of a law-protected open space"[10].

The dynamics of social pathology – typical for legal acting systems – is convincingly illustrated, according to Honneth, by and through the film *Kramer vs. Kramer* (1979). Used to the "correct" and "capable" way of "watching a movie", he notes the fact that the abovementioned movie has its faults, due to its narrative construction (it does not explain why the wife divorces; it sustains, tolerates and perpetuates prejudices about women's liberation). Nevertheless, acknowledges the film's worth in creating and maintaining "a good impression" by portraying the way its heroes constantly assess/weigh any legal consequences their actions might have, taking also into account any repercussions this might have upon their personalities. We have to note the fact that (Honneth does not insist upon this aspect) the movie ostensibly flaunts a double investigation the director is interested in; social roles and any implications stemming from them – Ted *assumes* the father-role for eighteen months – but also the rationally interested calculation the father chooses; thus, he is judged depending on his "employment file".

In Honneth's acceptation, the film banks more upon a valuation of the screenplay and a primacy of action to the detriment of expressive images and esthetical achievement. In this sense, the camera's positioning angle is not

[9] *Ibidem*, p. 86.
[10] *Ibidem*, p. 88.

valued, nor is the specific sequencing of images: on the contrary, it reaffirms an interest in "the decisive use of a medium for investigating social pathologies". Any visual clues/allusions unravel the protagonist's' isolation, the accepted separations, the pressing passage of time, the impossibility of adapting "his attitude" to "her fears", and the wife's inability to control and accept any fear and/or unhappiness. A psychoanalytical streak of individual pathology (on the verge of role or gender pathology) runs through the film too; nevertheless, Honneth does not insist upon it, although the end (the trial) seems to decree that it is actually the film construct's main argument: guided by rationality, oriented by a mind which already showed her the impossibility of a correct decision, feeling that something is amiss, the wife/mother reanalyzes her decision to leave only after enrolling in therapy, convincing herself that the whole situation stems not from dysfunctions or the bad nature of her structure, but from an impossibility of seeing and accepting an "emotional or creative way" of escaping the present situation, at that moment in time.

Only in the epic department, Honneth thinks, does the film manage to illustrate the process by which individuals are transformed into instruments, "masks" of law, a metamorphosing mechanism which becomes striking in the culminating point/moment when Ted Kramer finds out his wife has changed her mind and decided to fight for the legal custody of their child. The husband, "as if guided by an invisible hand", starts to plan and administer his daily actions, becoming also interested in the way these might affect the judges' decision. When fired, he finds a job which pays less just to prove his capacity of integration into the system of salaried work; during the divorce, he perceives his son's accident just as an act with negative repercussions upon the custodial procedures. The whole interaction registry between father and son is limited to "a public demonstration of parental care, love and affection", challenging not only the protagonist but also the active spectator to question the applicability of already initiated actions: are these the expression of real sentiments/affects or just surface illustrations, constructs of an adequate behavior? Honneth's interpretational perspective allows for a characterization focused upon two coordinates of the protagonist (one of a social nature, the other – purely subjective) with the result that the father's endeavor is limited not only to "a conformity with legal demands" but also to a demonstration of his own verticality[11].

The Honnethian sample of recourse to visual clues resonates with any directions already decreed by "philosophical and political conversations about cinema", underscored by the engraftment of (the *fading form* of*) narrative bodies* and *the hard fundament of things as objects of the narration itself*, in an economic – ethical – legal climate, placed within the contact zone between *communitas* and *post-familial relationships*, as an exposition, interest and externalization of alterity. But even more than that, Honneth now observes that whenever one insists upon visual performance provoking the spectator to

[11] *Ibidem*, p. 151.

become involved the process of anticipating transformation in itself, film remains concerned with judgments superimposed over its own actions by an exclusive recourse to the law. Beyond any overdose of emotivism/affectation attached to the process of obtaining custody, the film reveals a pathology able to impregnate the legal endeavor: during the divorce procedures, both parents rationally and deliberately anticipate the effect of their own actions upon any future decision of the judicial system, omitting the fact that, beyond any apparent strategically intentions, the needs for communication and dependence are still maintained. Honneth's conviction is based on the idea that, upon the blocking frame of life-as-it-is, any tendency to consider *strategic intentions* (acknowledged by the law as a form of legitimate communicational interruption) is the only possible form of *strategic interaction* comes to the fore. Actions based upon commonly-established reasons are replaced, in the case of these two partners, by calculations and private purposes, which transform positive law into negative liberty, seen as a way of life.

Phase Conclusions: Film + Political Philosophy

Daniel Frampton[12] states that cinematographic art does not represent a simple/simplified form/formulation of reproducing reality, but accepts the *soft* possibility of manipulating the world by referring to a second-order alternative. In this sense there exists sociology of cinematography which allows images-in-movement to be attached to philosophies, by reuniting all the affected structures and effects, through information and reflection. In fact, the Kantian perspective of aesthetic judgments is reiterated here, with the observation that these are not simple conceptual *clues*, but intellectualizing landmarks marked by rational need and destined to force and forge a phenomenological de-realization.

Filmosophy can be considered a domain exclusively concerned with the study of film, possessing an adequate conceptual and thinking system, referencing film's status of being, its form and its fundament. Frampton theorizes here the philosophically-semantic significant concepts of *filmmind, filmgoer, film-thinking, film-being* – and subsumes creativity to its own possibilities of filtering; dramatic decision is attributed to the capacity of extension and domain integration of para-narrative theories, and esthetic exposure is conferred upon an organic theory of both film and language. Filmosophy promotes a particular type of rhetoric, impressive by its analytical promptitude reflected inside thinking systems, and with a decisive role in considering cinematography as a formula of classifying philosophical possibilities. A whole array of interrogations regarding the specific conceptual frame of the cinematographically domain is thus opened, starting with ways of inserting philosophy into film and extending towards the forcing, illustration, motivation, possession, patronage or multiplied relationships of the domain (*film + philosophy*). *Working philosophically upon a film* is the recommended

[12] Daniel Frampton, *Filmosophy*, Wallflower Press, 2006.

method, even if it devalues an application of film philosophy to the process which recharges films with more philosophy than it would be called for in the present context, using the philosophical method itself.

Accepting Mulhall's opinion, film is seen as a philosophizing act, but also as a philosophical exercise or as philosophy in action[13]. The absolute novatory element, deployed by the present endeavor consolidates its position from within adequate argumentations offered as answers to the interrogation – *if film philosophizes, who is it that philosophizes?* Hypothetically, if one acknowledges *the presence of the philosopher who philosophizes*; and if one identifies, through a *dedoxification* process, the act of offering political philosophy the alternative of visual clues, one can certainly sustain the logical creation of a *filmopoliticosophy*.

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