GLOBAL
CINEMA

THE EDUCATION OF THE FILMMAKER IN EUROPE, AUSTRALIA, AND ASIA

EDITED BY
METTE HJORT

The Education of the Filmmaker in Europe, Australia, and Asia

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The Education of the Filmmaker in Europe, Australia, and Asia

GLOBAL CINEMA

Edited by Katarzyna Marciniak, Anikó Imre, and Áine O'Healy

The **Global Cinema** series publishes innovative scholarship on the transnational themes, industries, economies, and aesthetic elements that increasingly connect cinemas around the world. It promotes theoretically transformative and politically challenging projects that rethink film studies from cross-cultural, comparative perspectives, bringing into focus forms of cinematic production that resist nationalist or hegemonic frameworks. Rather than aiming at comprehensive geographical coverage, it foregrounds transnational interconnections in the production, distribution, exhibition, study, and teaching of film. Dedicated to global aspects of cinema, this pioneering series combines original perspectives and new methodological paths with accessibility and coverage. Both "global" and "cinema" remain open to a range of approaches and interpretations, new and traditional. Books published in the series sustain a specific concern with the medium of cinema but do not defensively protect the boundaries of film studies, recognizing that film exists in a converging media environment. The series emphasizes an historically expanded rather than an exclusively presentist notion of globalization; it is mindful of repositioning "the global" away from a US-centric/Eurocentric grid, and remains critical of celebratory notions of "globalizing film studies."

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For Tammy Cheung and Vincent Chui

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Lingnan University established a Centre for Cinema Studies (CCS) in 2011 and generously offered to bring the scholars involved in the two-book "Education of the Filmmaker" Project to Hong Kong for discussions of their ongoing research. The opportunity to have contributors share their early findings at what became the CCS's inaugural conference helped to bring central issues into clear focus and to create a strong sense of shared purpose, all of which is reflected, I believe, in the chapters. I am deeply grateful to Lingnan President Yuk-Shee Chan and Vice-President Jesús Seade for their generous support for Cinema Studies more generally, and for research on practice-based film education specifically. Wendy Lai from the Human Resources Office dealt effectively with unexpected visa requirements. CCS colleagues Meaghan Morris, Mary Wong, John Erni, and Red Chan helped to make the discussions in Hong Kong fruitful. New media artist Zoie So brought talent to various design issues, while Hong Kong artist Chow Chun-fai kindly allowed images of his paintings based on scenes from well-known Hong Kong films to be featured on the CCS website, as well as on the poster and banner for the "Education of the Filmmaker" conference. Felix Tsang Chun Wing, senior research assistant to the CCS, provided consistently gracious and efficient help at all stages of the project. Student volunteers from across the Faculty of Arts—Kara Chan, Felicity Chau, Emily Choi, Terence Choi, Amis Kwok, Lilian Ngan, Law Kwun Kit, and Sally Lau—deserve thanks for their help and for being utterly dependable, and so genuinely committed to the project.

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Introduction: More Than Film School—Why the Full Spectrum of Practice-Based Film Education Warrants Attention

Mette Hjort

Adapting Simone de Beauvoir's well-known phrase, one is not born a filmmaker, but becomes one.[1] To ask about the nature of practice-based film education as it has emerged around the globe and exists today is to begin to understand how filmmakers become filmmakers. Inquiry along these lines sheds light on the process of becoming not only a filmmaker, but also a particular *kind* of filmmaker, where "kind" encompasses skills, as well as narrative and aesthetic priorities, preferred modes of practice, and understandings of what the ideal roles and *contributions* of film would be.

A few suggestive anecdotes from the field of film practice help to set the stage for a more scholarly account of the questions, commitments, and aspirations that are behind *The Education of the Filmmaker in Europe, Australia, and Asia* (vol. 1) and *The Education of the Filmmaker in Africa, the Middle East, and the Americas* (vol. 2). Evoking both a desire to make meaningful, authentic choices and questions having to do with what counts as a genuine justification for the costs of filmmaking (in terms of money, effort, and time), Danish director Lone Scherfig reflects as follows on the process of selecting her next script from among an array of possible choices: "I'm quite marked by an experience that I've had twice, uncannily. My father died while I was shooting *Italian for Beginners* and my mother died while I was shooting *An Education*. When I watch these films I can't help but ask myself whether they were worth it. When you start to look at the whole filmmaking process with those eyes, there are really a lot of scripts that life is simply too short for."[2]

In an exchange about *The Video Diary of Ricardo Lopez* (2000), documentary filmmaker Sami Saif—who, like Scherfig, is a graduate of the National Film School of Denmark—foregrounds his commitment to taking his responsibilities as a filmmaker seriously. Saif's film is based on Lopez's webcam recordings, which had been sensationalized by the media, inasmuch as they captured his suicide shortly after having mailed a bomb to Icelandic singer Björk, with whom he was obsessed. In response to a question as to why *The Video Diary of Ricardo Lopez* remains difficult to get hold of, and why the filmmaker prefers to be present when audiences watch the film, Saif says: "I have a lot at stake in being able to stand by what I've done with the material. I want to be able to explain why I edited it the way I did, why I saw it as important to make the film, and how I understand Ricardo Lopez. My desire to engage very directly with the audiences who see the film also has to do with the fact that Ricardo Lopez is dead. [. . .] I want to be there when people see the film, because there are all sorts of things about Ricardo Lopez on the internet. I like to be able to talk to people about what it is they've actually seen."[3]

One last anecdote, this one referring to developments in Hong Kong, on the Chinese mainland, and in South Korea, suffices to draw attention to filmmakers as agents of moral deliberation with significant choices to make that extend well beyond the punctual craft-based decisions required by any given filmmaking project. The year 2012 saw the well-known sixth-generation Chinese filmmaker Jia Zhangke "installed as the dean of the Busan International Film Festival's Asian Film Academy (AFA)." Called on to describe the experience of working with 23 young filmmakers in workshops and seminars spanning 18 days, Jia spoke of his commitment to "mak[ing] honest films and films that will make people think." Jia sees his values as reflected not only in his films, but also in his efforts to mentor young filmmakers through his company, Xstream Pictures. His ongoing efforts to establish a funding program called the Renaissance Foundation, in Hong Kong, in collaboration with "fellow filmmaker Pang Ho-cheung, author Han Han, and musician Anthony Wong Yiu-ming," are similarly an expression of an understanding of the film practitioner as an agent of moral choice. As Jia puts it, "It is all about giving young artists the freedom to create. Through that comes honesty—and artists should be honest."[4]

Over time, what emerges through filmmakers' professionally relevant and publicly available actions—by no means limited to the actual making of films—are patterns of choice that are indicative of certain values and thus amenable to assessment in broadly ethical terms. That is, filmmakers have decisions to make not only about whether a given story (if the film is a narrative one) is really worth telling and warrants the time, cost, and effort needed to articulate it in moving images, but also about how to treat the actors and other practitioners with whom they work, about the environmental costs of their filmmaking practices, the possible ideological implications of their work, and the terms in which they choose to discourse about it. Examples of filmmakers having made poor choices are not at all difficult to find. Titles that come to mind include Danny Boyle's *The Beach* (2000), James Cameron's *Titanic* (1997), and fifth-generation Chinese filmmaker Chen Kaige's *The Promise* (2005), all three of them for reasons having to do with a failure to take the environmental duties of filmmakers seriously. Duties, after all, may be moral in nature, rather than strictly legal, requiring considered action even in the absence of (enforcement of) rigorous laws preventing the remodeling of beaches in the Phi Phi Islands National Park in Thailand (*The Beach*), the chlorination of sea water in Baja California (*Titanic*), or the killing of trees in the gardens of Yuanmingyuan, China (*The Promise*).[5]

Filmmaking is usually an intensely collaborative process, making it difficult to draw firm inferences about a specific practitioner's values, and equally so to assign responsibility for decisions made and for the consequences arising from them. Furthermore, every instance of filmmaking takes place within a series of larger, interconnected contexts, in environments, for example, shaped by the ethos of a studio as it interacts with the constraints and opportunities of a larger (economic) system. Thus Richard Maxwell and Toby Miller see "[t]he wider background to the ecologically destructive filmmaking" evoked earlier as being "the message of economic structural adjustment peddled by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organisation, and the sovereign states that dominate them."[6] Yet, acknowledging the interconnected ways of decision making in the world of film, and the constraints, tendencies, and enticements of larger forces, by no means obviates the need to ask questions about the values of filmmakers, as individuals, but also, just as pertinently, as members of communities where common knowledge and shared practices reflect ways of being in the world through filmmaking.

Burkinabé filmmaker Gaston Kaboré, whose alternative film school IMAGINE in Ouagadougou provides film training for aspiring filmmakers from across francophone Africa, is clearly motivated by a conception of what film is all about that is quite different from that of, say, James Cameron. As Burkinabé actor Serge Yanogo puts it in *IMAGINE FESPACO Newsreel 3*, a 15-minute documentary produced through a training initiative involving filmmaker Rod Stoneman, director of the Huston School of Film and Digital Media in Galway, Ireland, and Kaboré's alternative film school, "most films in Africa involve learning."[7] Yanogo, who had a leading role in Kaboré's award-winning *Wend Kuuni* (1983), was responding to a question put to him by a filmmaking student in the context of an outdoor, night-time screening of the film, which the organization Cinémobile had mounted in a village distant from Ouagadougou and its many well-frequented cinemas. Yanogo's point is borne out by a film such as Ousmane Sembène's *Moolaadé* (2004), which takes a moving and critical look at female genital mutilation. In Samba Gadjigo's documentary entitled *The Making of Moolaadé* (2006), Sembène identifies a desire to have *Moolaadé* function as a vehicle of enlightenment and emancipation in remote villages throughout Senegal and elsewhere in Africa.

A conception of both fiction and nonfiction filmmaking as contributing to authentic cultural memory and to the causes of justice and fairness was like a clear red thread running through conference, exhibition, and screening activities taking place at Kaboré's alternative school during the 2011 edition of FESPACO (Panafrican Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou). One evening, for example, the newly whitewashed wall in the school's courtyard became the screen for animated shorts produced by young Burkinabé children (in the context of training workshops conducted by Golda Sellam from Cinélink and Jean-Luc Slock from the Liège-based Caméra-etc). A feature common to all of the films, which were being screened with the children and their families present, was that they drew on indigenous traditions of artistry—the topic of a fascinating poster exhibition at Kaboré's IMAGINE, which was also hosting a related conference focusing on ancestral myths—and highlighted social issues from everyday life. *Leila*, a five-minute film produced by eight Burkinabé children, drew attention to the problem of child labor through the figure of a "cut-out" girl who becomes a donkey when the new family in which she finds herself exploits her. The central and clearly educational question asked by the film is, "What has to happen for the donkey to become a girl again?"

But are the values and commitments of a Kaboré or a Sembène, as these find articulation in cinematic narratives or training initiatives aimed at capacity building on the African continent, as the case may be, really connected, in any nontrivial sense, to the paths through which these filmmakers became film practitioners? Do they reflect a specific kind of practical induction into the world of film? Kaboré was trained at the École supérieure d'études cinématographiques (ESEC) in Paris, and graduated with a degree in film production in 1976. Sembène, who was largely self-taught as a filmmaker, spent one year at the Gyorki Film Studio in Moscow, having failed to get into filmmaking programs in France and elsewhere: "I learned how to make films in the Soviet Union. I didn't have a choice. To get training, I initially turned to people in France, notably Jean Rouch. I had written to America, Canada etc. and was rejected everywhere without being given a chance. Then I got in touch with Georg Sadoul and Louis Daquin. They suggested the Soviet Union. I spent a year there (1961–1962). It must be said, before I went there I had my ideas and my ideology. I'd been a unionist since 1950. I was very happy that it was eventually the Soviet Union that offered me a scholarship."[8]

So at one level the paths were very different, in terms of the geography of the training, its institutional environment, and its wider political contexts and social systems. What these filmmakers do share, however, is the experience, among other things, of having had to leave Africa, whether for western or eastern Europe, in order to achieve the training they saw as necessary. Further common ground is to be found in the experience of making films in sub-Saharan Africa without adequate indigenous personnel to draw on, and in a shared understanding of film as a medium well suited to fostering change in societies where oral traditions, as compared with the written word, are strong.

There can be no one-to-one correspondence between the profile of a given film school, on the one hand, and the priorities and values of its graduates, on the other. After all, film schools are subject to the full range of complexities that characterize institutional life. Among other things, they are in constant evolution, be it as a result of changes in leadership, incorporation into educational parameters such as the Bologna Accord (Anna Stenport, this volume) or the sorts of major historical changes that have affected key institutions in a once-divided Germany (Barton Byg and Evan Torner, this volume). And then, of course, there is the not so small matter of human psychology, which, thankfully enough, can be counted on to generate differences that are anything but trivial. If being a filmmaker is the outcome of a process of becoming, factors shaping that process are not merely to be sought in the institutional landscape of film schools and practice-based training programs. Also, filmmakers may choose, temporarily or over the longer run, to *resist* the training they receive, including the values that are ultimately driving it. It would be wrong to suggest that Eva Novrup's interview with Phie Ambo in *The Danish Directors 3: Dialogues on the New Danish Documentary Cinema* shows that this award-winning documentary filmmaker has rejected the training she received through the National Film School of Denmark's well-known documentary program (discussed by Hjort, with reference to initiatives in the Middle East and North Africa, vol. 2). At the same time, it is fair to note that Ambo understands herself as having asserted her strong desire at a certain point to counter aspects of her training:

> After film school I had a real need to undertake a process of "de-film-schoolification." I wanted to do something that involved shooting from the hip. [. . .] I had a strong desire to put aside all that learning I'd acquired, all those sophisticated ways of articulating things, so that I could just follow my instincts and go for what seemed like fun. When I look at the film now, I can easily identify all the things I'd learnt and that I'd started to do almost automatically, without even being aware of it, the things that had become second nature. But [making] *Gambler* [about filmmaker Nicolas Winding Refn, 2006] was about a desire to get film to flow through me again, instead of having constantly to stop the creative elevator for a bunch of obligatory consultations with consultant A, B, and C.[9]

That the question of *values* is important in the context of a consideration of film schools and, arguably by extension, the fuller field of practice-based film education is clearly suggested by the topic chosen for a recent conference organized by the International Association of Film and TV Schools (CILECT). The organization meets biannually for an Extraordinary General Assembly, and in 2011 the theme for the conference, which was hosted by the Film and TV Academy of the Performing Arts (FAMU) in Prague, was "Exploring the Future of Film and Media Education." Subthemes providing further foci for discussion were "the fundamental *values* [emphasis added] of film education;" "benchmarking and evaluation;" and "the impact of internationalization."[10] CILECT "was founded in Cannes in 1955 with the intention of stimulating a dialogue among film schools in the deeply divided world of those times. Its membership was drawn from eight countries: Czechoslovakia (presently the Czech Republic), France, Great Britain, Italy, Poland, Spain, the USA and the USSR (presently Russia). By the year 2012, CILECT had grown to include 159 institutions from 60 countries on five continents. A significant number of the world's leading film and television makers are graduates of member schools." CILECT sees itself as "deeply committed to raising and maintaining the standards of teaching and learning in its member schools, and to exploring the potentials of new technologies for education, information and entertainment." What is more, the organization envisages "a new level of international cooperation" made possible by "the relaxation of international tensions among the great powers, the diminishing of national frontiers and the emergence of new technologies."[11] Membership in CILECT involves meeting strict criteria, as verified in a vetting process. Unsurprisingly, membership is a coveted badge of honor in a world where education is increasingly globalized, with student recruitment often a matter of intense competition on national, regional, and global levels. What membership potentially means is clearly suggested in a press release featured on the University of Auckland's website, which makes reference to "elite CILECT membership" having been secured by the Department of Film, Television, and Media Studies' Screen Production Program, following an "exhaustive audit" and a vote among the existing members.[12]

There are, of course, many reasons for studying film schools, some of them having little or nothing to do with the *values* that are constitutive of what I have called "practitioner's agency."[13] At this stage in the argument, the issue is not one of determining what the full range of research questions looks like once practice-based film education is seen as warranting careful scrutiny through various lenses, including historical, political, ethical, industrial, and institutional ones. Rather, what must first be settled is the question of institutional scope. What kinds of institutions merit attention? Of the relevant kinds, which specific instantiations of the more general types are particularly worthy of study? What sorts of principles might legitimately be invoked to inform decisions regarding inclusions and exclusions when answering both of these questions? Let it be clear: It is my firm belief that the questions being asked here have many possible legitimate answers. The answers to which I am committed, and which are reflected in the design of *The Education of the Filmmaker in Europe, Australia, and Asia* and *The Education of the Filmmaker in Africa, the Middle East, and the Americas*, are shaped by a range of factors, including, most importantly, a dogged interest in small nations and their film cultures (including minor cinemas and their various politics of recognition),[14] and in the ways in which systemic constraints are transformed, through practitioners' agency, into creative opportunities and the conditions needed for an entire milieu to thrive. Another factor, relevant in terms of the global reach of this two-volume project published in the "Global Cinema" series, is my own personal and institutional history, which has offered affiliations, networks, and solidarities linked to practitioners, researchers, institutions, and sites of training in Africa, Canada, Denmark, and HK China (where I have lived as a nonlocal academic for well over a decade).

We have the possibility as film scholars, or as practitioner-scholars (which many of the contributors to the "Education of the Filmmaker" project are), to affirm certain kinds of initiatives, institutions, and organizations and to bring awareness of valuable and effective practices to a wider audience, including researchers in the first instance, but also filmmakers, policy makers, and practitioners working in sites of training located at a considerable cultural and geographical remove from those under discussion. We have the opportunity to learn from practices that are innovative, hopeful, and in some cases at least partially transferable. Even the discovery of challenges may be promising, for if these turn out to be a matter of shared problems, then they provide a potential basis for new alliances and partnerships.

But what should the focus be, and is it enough to focus on film schools? My response to the second part of this question is emphatically negative, and this, in turn, helps to define the scope of the research efforts contributing to the present project.

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