

# Cinema And Collective Consciousness: Toward A Civic Pedagogy Of Visual Culture

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## **Abstract**

*This article explores the role of cinema and cultural institutions—particularly cinémathèques—in fostering collective consciousness and the development of critical and civic awareness. Drawing on a comparative analysis of film education practices in Europe, North America, and Japan, it examines how cinema functions as a pedagogical tool for shaping ethically responsible and socially engaged individuals.*

*Grounded in the philosophical framework of Gilles (Deleuze, 1986; Kowsar et al., 1987) and enriched by the pedagogical contributions of Alain Bergala, Jacques (Rancière, 2008), and Paulo (Freire, 1970), this study conceptualises cinema not as a form of entertainment but as a site of thought, affect, and social transformation. Cinémathèques are approached as institutions that cultivate visual literacy and critical perception, while Japanese manga and anime are analysed as forms of popular pedagogy that promote resilience, solidarity, and ethical reflection.*

*The article proposes a model of civic film pedagogy based on three interrelated dimensions: aesthetic sensitivity, ethical judgement, and civic responsibility. It argues for the integration of visual culture into public education policies to develop a reflective and engaged citizenry in an increasingly image-saturated world.*

**Keywords:** *cinema, collective consciousness, cinémathèque, civic education, visual culture, manga, critical pedagogy*

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## **I. Introduction**

In contemporary societies marked by crises of meaning, declining social trust, and fragmentation of collective identities, the question of how to cultivate collective consciousness has become increasingly urgent. While institutions such as schools and media contribute to this process, few cultural forms possess the transformative potential of cinema.

As a collective art form, cinema operates simultaneously on aesthetic, cognitive, and ethical levels. It shapes perception, stimulates reflection, and engages the spectator in moral and social questioning. In this sense, cinema can be understood as a powerful pedagogical medium capable of contributing to both individual development and the construction of shared social values.

This article examines how cinema, through both institutional frameworks (cinémathèques) and popular visual cultures (manga and anime), contributes to the formation of a critical and civically engaged public.

**Research question:** How can cinema function as a pedagogical tool for the development of collective consciousness and civic responsibility?

### **Why Cinémathèques?**

Cinémathèques are more than repositories; they are visual memories and schools of perception. To preserve, exhibit, and transmit films is to maintain the possibility of contemplating the world across time.

Created by figures such as Henri Langlois, these institutions emerged as acts of cultural resistance—saving images threatened by oblivion, censorship, or destruction. Beyond preservation, they teach how to see. By presenting works across periods and styles, they shape spectators capable of perceiving aesthetic, political, and human continuities and ruptures.

Pedagogically, cinémathèques offer an experiential learning space: one learns cinema through cinema. Collective screenings and exposure to diverse rhythms and forms contribute to the development of aesthetic and ethical awareness.

They embody Alain Bergala's vision of image education as an education of perception, sensitivity, and curiosity. Ultimately, cinémathèques fulfil a civic mission: to form citizens endowed with memory, judgement, and critical awareness.

### Cinema and Collective Consciousness: A Contemporary Educational Issue

In a context of social fragmentation and declining trust, the formation of collective consciousness becomes essential. While schools and media contribute to this process, cinema stands out as a uniquely transformative medium.

Cinema is simultaneously an aesthetic, cognitive, and civic experience. It educates perception, raises awareness, questions morality, and stimulates reflection, thus functioning as an instrument of civic education.

Cinematheques play a central role in this process by educating audiences about history, thought, and cultural diversity through images.

At the same time, Japanese manga and anime convey values of effort, solidarity, and ethical reflection, offering a complementary form of popular pedagogy.

### Relearning How to See: Wiseman and Wang Bing

In an era of immediacy and forgetting, filmmakers such as Frederick Wiseman and Wang Bing restore a slow and attentive gaze.

Wiseman's observational cinema reveals the hidden pedagogy of institutions, transforming viewing into a civic act. Wang Bing, through duration and realism, cultivates compassion and understanding.

Their work teaches that cinema does not explain—it educates perception.

## **II. Cinema As A Space For Awakening Critical Perception**

### Thinking Through Images

Cinema, according to Deleuze, does not merely represent reality but constitutes a form of thought. Images become tools for reflection, capable of provoking questioning and complexity.

Films such as *The Salt of the Earth* and *Baraka* develop a pedagogy of perception, inviting viewers to understand the world through sensation rather than discourse.

Thinking through images means learning to see interdependence, beauty, and suffering as interconnected dimensions of existence.

### Bergala: Educating Through Aesthetic Experience

For Alain Bergala, artistic education must involve a sensitive encounter with the work. Learning occurs through experience, not instruction.

Films such as *The Gleaners and I*, *Faces Places*, and *Isle of Flowers* demonstrate how aesthetic experience fosters ethical awareness and social consciousness.

Cinema becomes a pedagogy of perception, teaching us to think through sensitivity and act through compassion.

### Rancière: The Emancipated Spectator

Jacques Rancière challenges the idea of passive spectatorship. Every viewer actively interprets and constructs meaning.

Cinema thus becomes a space of intellectual emancipation, where perception itself is an act of freedom.

Works such as *The Missing Picture* and *Ghost Hunting* transform spectators into witnesses, engaging them in ethical reflection and collective memory.

## **III. Cinematheques As Spaces Of Collective Learning**

Cinematheques in Europe and North America function as public schools of perception. They combine preservation with education through screenings, debates, and workshops.

In *The Dreamers*, the cinematheque appears as a space of intellectual and emotional experimentation, where cinema becomes a way of thinking the world.

These institutions demonstrate that cinema can serve as a tool for collective learning and critical dialogue.

## **IV. Japanese Manga Culture: A Popular Pedagogy**

Japanese manga and anime play a significant educational role by conveying narratives of resilience, solidarity, and ethical reflection.

Works such as *One Piece* and *Vagabond*, as well as films by Hayao Miyazaki, emphasize personal growth, ecological awareness, and collective responsibility.

This visual culture promotes an ethics of becoming, where education is understood as a continuous process of transformation.

## V. Toward A Civic Pedagogy Of Cinema

From Aesthetic Perception to Ethical Awareness

A pedagogy of cinema integrates three dimensions:

- **Aesthetic:** developing sensitivity
- **Ethical:** forming moral judgment
- **Civic:** strengthening social responsibility

Personal Development Through Images

Cinema acts as a mirror, reflecting emotions and values. Documentary films such as *The Cove* and *Searching for Sugar Man* foster empathy, awareness, and critical thinking.

Learning through images becomes a process of connecting perception to consciousness, allowing individuals to engage with complex social issues and develop a deeper understanding of the world around them.

Proposal: Visual Education Policy

This article advocates integrating cinema into public education policies. Cinemas and cultural institutions should be recognised as spaces for civic education.

The cinema of Ali Essafi and Hakim Belabbès illustrates a pedagogy of visual consciousness, encouraging spectators to engage with history, memory, and identity.

Their work contributes to a shared project: constructing a lucid and sensitive understanding of society, which fosters critical thinking and encourages dialogue among viewers about social issues and cultural narratives.

## VI. Conclusion – Educating Through Images

Documentary cinema transforms perception into knowledge. It teaches critical distance, patience, and complexity.

Filmmakers such as Wiseman, Varda, Panh, and Wang Bing create learning experiences that engage both ethical judgement and aesthetic sensitivity.

In a world saturated with images, seeing becomes a political act, as it requires individuals to critically engage with the content and context of what they observe. Education in visual culture must, therefore, cultivate consciousness—of oneself, others, and the shared world.

Cinema offers a path towards a renewed humanism, where thinking, feeling, and creating converge, allowing individuals to engage critically with visual narratives and understand their impact on society.

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