

## Sensations and cinema: Reframing the real in democracy and education

Andrew Gibbons & Andrew Denton

**To cite this article:** Andrew Gibbons & Andrew Denton (30 Aug 2024): Sensations and cinema: Reframing the real in democracy and education, Educational Philosophy and Theory, DOI: [10.1080/00131857.2024.2395343](https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2024.2395343)

**To link to this article:** <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2024.2395343>



© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 30 Aug 2024.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)





View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

# Sensations and cinema: Reframing the real in democracy and education

Andrew Gibbons<sup>a</sup>  and Andrew Denton<sup>b</sup> 

<sup>a</sup>Education, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand; <sup>b</sup>University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Canada

## ABSTRACT

In the film *Sans Soliel*, Chris Marker challenges received wisdoms with regard cinematic production of real worlds and real people. In Marker's techniques, Jacques Rancière observes an intensely political, highly accessible, art form that leads to a theorisation of cinema for its democratic and educational functions. In this paper we take up Rancière's interest in the democratic and educational functions of cinema through a reading of three films: *Sans Soliel*, *Minority Report*, and *After Yang*. Marker's essayist cinema produces an uncanny experience of anthropological irony, and a mode of rethinking imperialism, revealing stories of communities that typically do not get told. Spielberg's film adaptation of Philip K. Dick's story is a cautionary contemplation on the ethics of the future of a police force that has access to visions of the future. Kogonada's poetic lens muses on what it is to be human, what it is to be a family, and what it is to be a child and a parent negotiating complexity, loss, and identity. Each film is of interest here for the openness with which they engage thinking about democracy and education. They are democratic and educational precisely because they do not tell us what to think about democracy and education. Each film at the same time provides insight into Rancière's thinking about the functions of cinema in producing senses of politics.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 27 October 2023  
Accepted 12 August 2024

## KEYWORDS

Cinema; democracy; education; Rancière

## Introduction

Pictures that are less deceptive, he says, with the conviction of a fanatic, than those you see on television. At least they proclaim themselves to be what they are, images, not the portable and compact form of an already inaccessible reality. (Marker, 1983)

Cinematic works have educational functions and democratic functions. Cinema can be discursive, instrumental, and didactic—cinema as schooling and propaganda. Cinema can be affective, questioning, and sense-making—cinema as theoretical and philosophical. In this paper we work with three films that offer theorisations of the latter.

The three works, *Sans Soliel* (Chris Marker, 1983), *Minority Report* (Steven Spielberg, 2002), and *After Yang* (Kogonada, 2021) offer a collection of science fictions. The films explore the everyday through the uncanny and strange experience of skewing reality through the residing

**CONTACT** Andrew Gibbons  [agibbons@aut.ac.nz](mailto:agibbons@aut.ac.nz)  Education, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand

© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

material affects of the film media and through the handling of the subjects by the filmmakers. *Sans Soleil* unspools as an alien observation of colonialism collected through derive, letter writing and visual journaling. *After Yang* asks how AI will challenge the realities of family, love and humanity. In *Minority Report* we are faced with ethical dilemmas regarding the policing of the future in a democratic society. Each of the baselines of these worlds are familiar. Rendering them strangely elicits visibility in the quotidian as a rupture that allows it to be seen and heard differently. This cinematic exploration provides a dynamic visual, aural, social, and cultural milieu to think and be in education and democracy—askew in difference.

In establishing a spectrum of cinematic provocations, this article makes a case for the exploration of democracy and education through the lens of the lens. In the study of democracy, education and cinema we turn to the work of Jacques Rancière. In *Dissensus*, Rancière (2010a) theorises democracy and politics through the event of a disruption to the ordering of things—‘an intervention in the visible and the sayable’ (2010a, p. 37). We first outline ideas on politics, democracy and education in Rancière’s writings, before taking up an analysis of his thinking on cinema, and then exploring democracy and education through the three cinematic pieces. Each of the explorations then fleshes out our engagement with Rancière’s contributions to the study of education and democracy.

Like Rancière, we are fanatic cinephiles, obsessed with artistic and popular cinema and its reach. For this work here, Rancière is an ally to engage in sometimes heated, charmed, surprised, revelatory, but always passionate conversations about cinema. His writing on moving images represents a significant portion of his lifetime of contemplations, declaring a love of cinema that acknowledges the complications of his relationship akin to his tangling sensorial liaisons with democracy and education, always in flux, never as a ‘whole’.

## Democracy, education, cinema

Rancière asks ‘what is meant by the name of democracy?’ (2010a, p. 45). This appears as a radical question concerning social and political order and the machinery of consensus that is of particular importance for educational systems engaged in both being and producing democratic life.

Democratic life appears as a configuration of promises of self-determination that, Rancière (2010a) argues, produce necessary checks and balances. Self-government and self-fulfilment are vital appearances in a democracy—however their realities can lead to perceived chaos. This potential for chaos then demands a configuration of democracy such that the self is kept in check. This democratic paradox has been a closely guarded secret in a colonial ‘campaign to spread democracy to new territories’ (Rancière, 2010a, p. 47).

The configuring of democracy resolves into who can and cannot be recognised, be included, be seen, and be heard (Bassett, 2014; Rancière, 2006a, 2010a). This hierarchy is enforced through the distribution of the knowers and the ignorant, and by the function of schooling in dealing out just the right amount of knowing to the ignorant in order to maintain a democratic order (Rancière, 2010b). The univocal mainstream is an edifice, which ‘draw[s] a clear-cut line between what belongs to the self-evidence of the real and what belongs to the field of appearances, representations, opinions and utopias’ (p. 141). This is *consensus*, or the sensory configured as a single voice—the drone of orthodoxy.

Politics reveals the fiction and function orthodoxy as a self-evident reality that is produced through a police order (Rancière, 2010a). The police order disrupts or diverts attention from deviations from the orthodoxy in order to maintain order—policing here involves the magic of making something new and different to appear to disappear. Policing operates within a Ministry of Truth (Orwell (1949/1986) to remove from visibility, to make unreal, any disruption to a consensus. The visibility of such disruptions is understood as politics. Politics is ‘the collective action through which one *becomes* a subject’ (Bassett, 2014, p. 887). This ‘process of subjectification’ (Bingham & Biesta, 2010, p. 35) calls upon an enduring openness, and can be seen to ask a democratic politics to recognise every body

as subject. In this configuration, democracy ‘cannot ... be part of the police order’, democracy is the recognition of a group ‘as a group with a particular identity that didn’t exist before’ (Bingham & Biesta, 2010, p. 35). A group that appears does so on account of its distinction from the common or the norm—the spectrum of the permissible is disturbed by a voice. This is an idea of democracy as dissensus. In dissensus a separation occurs, revealing a different positioning, way of seeing, and way of acting.

For education, much has been written on the thinking that emerges from *Dissensus* and the functioning of educational institutions in policing and politics (see for instance Bingham & Biesta, 2010; McDonnell, 2022). With democratic politics understood as ‘the disruption of the existing institutions and the given political order’ (McDonnell, 2022, p. 115), educational institutions are necessarily implicated in maintaining the configurations that make possible the policing of democratic rule (Rancière, 2009b, 2010b). Rancière’s insight into a politics of education as a ‘supplementation of all qualifications by the power of the unqualified’ (Rancière, 2010a, p. 53) invites, we argue here, a recognition of cinema as an approach to that supplementation.

For Rancière, cinema, as art, is not political because it can convey a position, through the types of stories it can tell—or even the signs and semiotics it can transmit. Nor is it political because of its representational articulations of society, culture, and identity. What makes cinema political indexically (that is in the medium itself) is ‘the very distance it takes with respect to these functions, because of the type of space and time that it institutes, and the manner in which it frames this time and peoples this space’ (Rancière, 2009b, p. 23). For this reason, a Rancièrian cinematic understanding becomes a means for reading and thinking democracy and education differently—shaping alternate approaches for critical engagement.

Rancière’s notion of a *politics of aesthetics* (1995, 2010a) manifests in the cinematic in the ruptures of dissensus and in the recalibration of the real. Cinema is a mode ‘of dissensual subjectivation’ through which the politics of difference, the distribution of the sensible, is revealed to a society—the ‘essence of politics resides’ in the cinematic mode (Rancière, 2010a, p. 42).

Rancière recognises in cinema a ‘production of a double effect: the readability of a political signification and a sensible or perceptual shock caused, conversely, by the uncanny, by that which resists signification’ (Dasgupta, 2008, p. 74). In this way, cinema offers a thinking-feeling encounter (see Massumi, 2011) with the darkness and flickers of democracy (Rancière, 2013). Cinema is, then, a specific sensorium, a ‘sensation of an apparition, of shadows’ that ‘lives in our memories’ (Rancière, 2011, p. 295). This discursive and slippery realm of encounter makes the watching and feeling of films a useful place to think and sense democracy and education.

The ‘labour of fiction’ in cinema is a ‘reframing of the real’ (Rancière, 2010a, p. 149). Fiction here is not in opposition to that which appears real. Through an understanding of the real as a labour of fiction, as a construction, cinema practices may be explored for their relationship to expositions of reality (Rancière, 2006b). The tangible, tactile and affective register that entering into a cinematic labour of fiction provides is immediate and slippery in its encounter, making it a discursive locus for situating the conversations we explore here. ‘No longer the causal ordering of events, ‘fictionality’ in the aesthetic regime consists in the arrangement of signs found in everyday actions and objects’ (McDonnell, 2022, pp. 55–56).

That is why essayist forms of cinema, such as Chris Marker’s, are compelling in their work with the realness of reality as a work with the production and disruption of consensus. What ruptures consensus are ‘political and artistic fictions [which] introduce dissensus by hollowing out that ‘real’ ...’ (Rancière, 2010a, pp. 148–149). There is a letting go of a calculated ethic to be factual or actual, in favour of contemplative ethics.

Whatever the filmmaker’s intentions, the uncontrollable medium of cinema is rife with ‘mobile compositions of percepts and affects’, which transform audiences through subjective emotional transactions—steeped in their memories (Rancière, 2013, p. 187). This affect is particularly potent when locating cinema, democracy, and education as shared, community, and social experiences. The fictions of cinema tell stories of the real to real people.

Who then is telling the story and who is its audience? Dissensus and politics and the distribution of the sensible are also of concern in relation to the distributions of cinematic order—the distinction between high and popular cinematic works. Rancière's thinking on cinema is not wedded to the traditions of film schools and cultural studies. He is interested in all kinds of film, spanning the art-house of Jen Luc Goddard, the voyeurist gaze of Alfred Hitchcock, to the campy, oversaturated *mise-en-scène* of Vincent Minelli (Rancière, 2016). Our selection of films for this article draws on this appreciation of the value of film across its artistic, popular, and commercial contexts. This, in many ways, is a crucial point for engaging with cinema for the purpose of thinking about education and democracy.

We cannot be tethered to the prescriptive order of what we are told should be seen and heard (Rancière, 2009a)—but look instead for the polyvocal, ever-fluctuating emergences that happen no matter what. In this position, Rancière is involved explicitly in an *agit*-conversation about education, democracy, and cinema. He positions himself in the cinematic discourse as engaging with the 'politics of the amateur' (Rancière, 2013, p. 185), acknowledging that his project is resistant to the negative connotations of reflections on art and aesthetics found in academic discourses that are themselves resistant (or allergic) to mainstream entertainment or 'canonical' (read classic) cinema (Rancière, 2013, p. 187). His experience of film traverses the lines between art and entertainment. The explorations are not tethered to a narrow view of cultural legitimacy (Rancière, 2013, p. 187). Rancière challenges the order that a particular type of (legitimatised) film education and scholarship are bound to. In this challenge, like his early writing on the principle of intellectual equality (see Rancière, 1991, 2009a, 2010b), Rancière composes spaces for cinema to test the limits of experiences of democracy and education. According to Bowman (2013, p. 16) Rancière issues a challenge to reified and explicatory philosophies and theories of cinema that negate their own emancipatory regalia.

There is no global concept of cinema that would allow its particular forms to be analysed. There are singularities that present a certain number of features by which the power of an art allows itself to be grasped, on the condition that we grasp there precisely something other than a collection of means for producing effects (of conformity or of distinction): a way of describing the contours of a shared sensible universe, the forms of a certain community, in short a certain distribution of the sensible [partage du sensible] (Rancière, 2013, p.193).

The evocation of sensational affects produces effects of dissensus where cinema has no lesson to give, no knowledge to impart, nor no development to produce. Cinema and education grapples with this presence and absence of the giving of lessons as democratic communities grapple with police and politics. 'In a certain way, the political interpretation of the uncanny in terms of effects is always a kind of negotiation' (Rancière, 2010a, p. 143). Cinema that accepts its role as policy is propaganda—didactic practices of cinema that attempt to produce more of the same (more real, more consensus), contrasted to the politics of cinema in which the viewer questions that which appears as real, and recognises that which has not been seen nor heard—a recognition of the real as a function of questioning democracy through which the viewer will never be the same. This contrast is not a framework or spectrum; it is an idea to explore in relation to the filmmaker's intentions and the viewer's experiences. The contrast cannot be a spectrum or framework, moreover, because even the most didactically-minded pieces of cinema can and will produce uncanny affects—the scope is uncontrollable.

### ***Politics, education, and cinema***

The police order is built on fictions, and in the study of fictions, we approach the functioning of cinema. Cinema is fictional—documentary or not (Rancière, 2010a). Rancière (2010a, p. 141) explains fiction as:

far more than the constructing of an imaginary world, and even far more than its Aristotelian sense as 'arrangement of actions'. It is not a term that designates the imaginary as opposed to the real; it involves reframing the 'real', or the framing of dissensus.

We can navigate complex subjects, objects, and topics through the art of moving images. Critic Roger Ebert (2018) described cinema as an empathy machine, providing access to characters and circumstances outside our quotidian travails.

The essential work of politics is the configuration of its own space. It is to make the world of its subjects and its operations seen. The essence of politics is the manifestation of dissensus as the presence of two worlds in one. (Rancière, 2010a, p.37)

In this sense, politics and cinema come together in the presenting/revealing of worlds. Deploying cinematic texts as a tool for thinking through Rancière's project in relation to democracy and education is compelling because cinema's interests span all manner of contexts politically, socially, artistically, ethically, and culturally. Orbiting these contexts is a rich opportunity to think critically about education. If we reject the type of cinema that sets out to control populations as a piece of 'devised education,' we release ourselves to the sensible to affectively encounter, think, and act (see Denton, 2016).

Like politics and education, cinema is in constant movement. Attempts to restrain will always be broken through. Rancière and his reflections on fluid forms underpin a cinema-education-democracy nexus of thinking that orbits the following discussion. We do not view these films as convenient metaphors to define Rancière's project. Rather, they are experimentations and, crucially, the experimentation is playful (see also Frimberger, 2023, and Hwang, 2022). Playing with cinema reveals encounters with ideas and worlds outside the everyday. Playing surfaces dissensus through alternate, sometimes amplified sensations of the world. We are differently tuned to atmospheres, people, and things in these moments.

### ***Sans Soleil (1983)***

Chris Marker's *Sans Soleil* (1983) engages themes of history and memory—their unreliability—and the unreliability of an image's capacity to represent them. The film is anchored by the letters of an itinerant cameraman, Sandor Krasna, sent to his friend, narrated by the actress Alexandra Stewart. This structural device of filtered subjectivities scaffolds the overall concerns of Marker's stratified film, acting as a spine, loosely holding together the discursive celluloid. Krasna wanders the globe, commenting on what he sees, using the literary convention of the letter narrative. His alien-like observations are post-colonial and post-modern—social, political, philosophical—open questions on the state of the world as he sees it at this time of touch down for him. Stewart languidly reads his words, 'offer[ing] her own reflections on the letters she is receiving, becoming more than a dutiful mouthpiece and subtly placing the viewer at a distance,' adding layers of tension and unreliability to the narrative (Lupton, 2005, p. 156).

Rancière's *partage du sensible* and his writing on the politics of aesthetics provide some insights into *Sans Soleil*. Dissensus emerges from the aesthetics through the blurry 'lines of division' (Rancière, 2006b, p. 96), which develop over the film's length. For Marker, the tiny stories of the unheard intrigue his lens. He reveals and revels in stories of the common people, uncommonly perceived, and dreams of their dreams and aspirations on celluloid. The emergence of the invisible finds its way into the film through the layering techniques of the image, voice-over and sound.

Over images of WWII warplanes, we hear:

He spoke to me of Sei Shonagon, a lady in waiting to Princess Sadako at the beginning of the 11th century, in the Heian period. Do we ever know where history is really made? Rulers ruled and used

complicated strategies to fight one another. Real power was in the hands of a family of hereditary regents; the emperor's court had become nothing more than a place of intrigues and intellectual games. But by learning to draw a sort of melancholy comfort from the contemplation of the tiniest things this small group of idlers left a mark on Japanese sensibility much deeper than the mediocre thundering of the politicians.

Marker cuts to street celebrations in a Tokyo suburb.

Shonagon had a passion for lists: the list of 'elegant things,' 'distressing things,' or even of 'things not worth doing.' One day, she got the idea of drawing up a list of 'things that quicken the heart.' Not a bad criterion I realise when I'm filming; I bow to the economic miracle, but what I want to show you are the neighbourhood celebrations.

The reality of the economic powerhouse, the social and cultural moment that is 1980s Japan is pushed up against a core sample of macro-history. But Marker's attention cannot hold on to this for long. He prefers the real micro-history of the common. Through this layering, he can parcel feelings of memory and simultaneously ask: what is memory?

Rancière says of Marker's techniques:

[He] is not just having a little FUN by confounding those well-established temporal systems, the simple chronological order or the classical narrative told in flashback. He is working out a narrative structure that creates a memory in the present as the intertwining of two histories of the century. (2016, p. 161)

This cinematic work reveals a role for fiction in the thinking of the real. The point is not to need to see everything as constructions of fiction, but rather that fiction produces certain approaches to making sense of apparent truths, making truths apparent in a sensible way. Rancière (2016, p. 158) suggests that documentary can take 'artistic work back to its essence, to a way of cutting a story into sequences, of assembling shots into a story, of joining and disjoining voices and bodies, sounds and images, of lengthening and tightening time.'

*Sans Soliel* produces these blurring affects through sequencing of memories. The importance of memory to questioning what is real through and in *Sans Soliel* slips into the narrative explicitly, yet with subtlety, with a revelation that we are engaging with observations shared with the narrator by a visitor from the future. In the visitor's future, 4001, memory has lost a sense of purpose—the brain is a fully functioning organ, described by the narrator as an 'era of full employment.'

Everything works to perfection, all that we allow to slumber, including memory. Logical consequence: total recall is memory anesthetized. After so many stories of men who had lost their memory, here is the story of one who has lost forgetting, and who—through some peculiarity of his nature—instead of drawing pride from the fact and scorning mankind of the past and its shadows, turned to it first with curiosity and then with compassion. In the world he comes from, to call forth a vision, to be moved by a portrait, to tremble at the sound of music, can only be signs of a long and painful pre-history. (Marker, 1983)

A melancholy emerges for the power of fiction that memory makes possible and that is made possible by the functions of memory to which fiction has contributed. Democracy and justice, and even education, are only sensible to us through the stories that we tell and memories we have. If educational sciences have as their goal the eventuality of total recall, what is left for democracy and justice? What kind of a democracy is real at a time when memory is forgotten?

### **Minority Report**

In appearance *Minority Report* appears as a significant cinematic contrast to *Sans Soliel*. A blockbuster production that has all the fixings of the film industry with superstar actors, big budget

special effects and a smooth script. Yet, as argued above, even the most apparently prescriptive piece of didactic work, work that appears to be telling us what to think, cannot hope to control the proliferation of disruptions to the appearance of the real. *Minority Report* is not what it appears to be. The film produces intentional disruptions in the appearances of the real. It achieves these disruptions with intentional subtlety—the movie is an adaptation of Philip K Dick after all, and so the appearance of the real, a questioning of whether we can trust what we can see, is in the psychological DNA of the work.

In the film we observe the future paradoxical lives of a precrime society. Murder is all but eradicated in this future because the murderer is caught before the act. The police can access the visions of future murders through three precogs—the visions enable the police to arrest a murderer before they commit the murder. Police are provided with the name, and they see a vision of the murder before it happens. A police officer must then patch the vision and the name together to determine where and when the murder will occur. The precrime programme banks 'on the utter infallibility of the system' but not everyone is convinced. Those who are not convinced do not question the precogs they question the human error in enacting the visions.

The surveillance society still has holes in it—visions can be manufactured, and details in the visions can be misleading or incorrectly understood. In fleshing out this level of predictive control, the movie depends largely on the senses of the eye. Each citizen is tracked through a seemingly ubiquitous surveillance of their eyeballs. That tracking at the same time allows each citizen to be subjected to targeted marketing. In order to disappear, to not be seen by the police, you need to purchase someone else's eyes—a twist that produces some grisly eye-opening, eye-extracting, and eye-rolling scenes.

*Minority Report* plays with the extents of a future-proofed world. The safety of the present is assumed through the visions of a real future that will never happen because those visions then negate the possibility of that very future. Importantly, the production of visions depends on a police state enslaving individuals who can see the future—rendering an invisibility to those that see that which is yet to come. They are the unseen seers seeing a future that will never be seen. They are essential to the machinery of the future-proofed society.

In a society concerned with predictability and the future—let us call it a big data society—it is not just the precog child that becomes a part of the machine, it is all children. All children provide a glimpse of the future and as such are subjects that require policing. One example of this concern for a predetermined future is the growth of the OECD's 'Baby Pisa' (see for instance Moss & Urban, 2017; Urban, 2017). The political is reduced to the technical, the reign of the scientist whose world is objective and neutral demands an ever-decreasing horizon of pedagogies and curricula. The universal and general as more desirable than the different and diverse, a fictional account of a shared love of predictability and efficiency, or the 'everybody loves metrics' pathology (see Gibbons, 2013).

A few years before Baby Pisa, this concern for predicting the future, and the problem of difference, played out in a failed policy to screen all of a nation's four-year-olds for conduct disorder (see Gibbons, 2008). This very real approach to a minority report, was proposed as a cost-effective way of rooting out that minority of children by measuring every single child and then treating the children and families of children before those children could, at later ages, become more expensively disordered. In this ideal reality, long before the potentially expensive dissensus in which the youth and adult with conduct disorder keeps being political and resists policing, the safety of consensus is ensured.

### **After Yang**

*After Yang* manages to reflect a very contemporary critique of artificiality and reality. It does not do this through a vision of a decaying, broken world. Surveillance, control, politics, love,

loss, and regret can be composed and then rupture in many forms. The film presents us with the last stop on the late-capitalist train—a place where we can fall in love with non-human objects. The characters are cushioned in convenience and style, but this comfort does not eschew melancholy. The film is imbued with human sadness. Marriages still falter, parenting is hard, and the products we buy have built-in obsolescence. The warranty is void.

The aesthetics constructed by Kogonada in *After Yang* provide a saccharine-bitter aftertaste often present in dystopian imaginings of the future world. *We* by Eugene Zamiatin, is the precursor to this vision, where sexual congress is the only place for opaque privacy outside the windowed surveillance present during the rest of the population's lives. In *Brave New World* (Huxley, 1932/1938), Aldous Huxley sands off the imperfections with a pristine verisimilitude that enhances the menace quietly boiling in his critique of totalitarianism in its many forms. The noble savage, riffed from Shakespeare, jolts the reader (and the key protagonists) back into consciousness from the soma dream state—such that its genetically constructed society is exposed as naked fascism. George Orwell (1949/1986) selects a different aesthetic approach. His totalitarian conception is drawn from the grey-scale melancholy of Stalin's Soviet Russia. Words disappear. Individuals are eliminated in a managed flow. In Ridley Scott's cinematic rendering of twenty first Century Los Angeles, *Blade Runner* (1982), we see a mashing up of glossy techno-postmodernism. Artificial intelligence, neon, architectural wonders (old and new), and advanced technology exhale onto the screen through shafts of light, smoke, and rain. Everything glistens, and everything is coated in the dust and grease of a dying world. The lure of the uncanny renditions of a familiar world made strange transforms the reader into an altered state, such that they can think of the world they live in differently through highly crafted fiction.

Kogonada's aesthetics are corporate modernism, composed of glass, concrete, landscaping, manicured houseplants, and a muted palette. The temporal pace of the film enhances the languid ennui of Kogonada's worldbuilding. The perfect, clean, and softly glinting images allow human and non-human imperfections to splinter into the viewers' consciousness. Though modular in design, the sets are bespoke in their construction. We can see that the future is carefully curated. Aesthetics, like democracy, can lull us into inertia. Only when the ripples of human (and now non-human) frailty emerge can we see and hear the unseen and unheard. We are affected by an emotional shift, and our perspective can change.

In this scenery, the death of a family's android offers insight into humanity's capacity to expand in its sense of the sociopolitical world. Yang is purchased by a family in order to provide an artificial, programmed, cultural reference point for an adopted daughter whose birth parents' culture are not that of her adopted parents. Yang represents an anxiety of adopted parents for an idea of a complete and necessary environment in which a child can flourish. Yang is indeed a successful deployment as he/she/they/it/Yang builds a thorough and lasting bond with the child—a bond then broken as Yang breaks, leading to an adventure and series of revelations as to the nature and purpose of androids. That nature and purpose raises questions as to the limits of democracy in a technologically enhanced surveillance society in which every machine designed to produce a real happy household is at the same time producing data for a control society. The film offers more on the limits of democracy because of the affects that flow around Yang. Yang challenges a perception of 'it-ness'. Democracy is urged then to continue its expansion of not just who can count and be counted in democracy, but also what. It is perhaps too late for democracy to realise that it should have taken seriously the counting of the more than human world, but at least, in *After Yang*, cinema produces such care and concern, even perhaps love, for the other than human that there will be less anthropocentric concern for a future without humans.

*After Yang* offers insight into an enduring question concerning the real. In Ghiraldelli (2000) this question concerns the recognition of the real boy—a concern for Pinocchio who is experiences a social world of marginalisation from what counts as real. School systems produce a proliferation of mechanisms and rubrics to decide what is real and these instruments determine

who can and cannot be at school, who can and cannot learn, and who can and cannot learn some subjects. *After Yang* invites thinking about who can and cannot teach. Yang is employed to teach a child about her birth culture. At the same time Yang builds an enduring relationship with the child. Is Yang a real teacher? It is worth working with Kogonada's speculations on AI futures given the developments in large language models (Heimans et al., 2023) that have given education systems and teachers much to fret about with regard what counts as real learning—if we take seriously the idea that learning and teaching are interdependent, then it makes sense to consider what such models mean for teaching and teachers, and for the future of democracy in a world of AI teachers.

## Conclusions: Cinema and an inaccessible reality

By the year 4001, Marker invites us to imagine, the human brain has reached its full employment. Is this the inevitable conclusion of the often stated and little questioned teacherly cliché to support the learner to reach their maximum potential? It might seem odd to not wish that a learner might use the entire faculty of their brain—this of course assuming the learner and teacher believe the sciences of the brain that tells of a mysterious majority of the brain that remains somehow unemployed—or at least, that whatever the brain is doing, it is doing in the shadows.

Here's another possibility. In 4001 there is only one teacher—an AI master teacher. This idea induces a sense of concern for a future in which democracy is experienced as a totalising consensus, prescribed and delivered with maximum efficiency, and therefore eradicating difference, dissensus, politics, affect, and aesthetic. Perhaps that reality is already here—or at least it is a reality that is a focus of educational concern right now.

In this paper the selected cinematic pieces offer insight into both the 'problems' of democracy and education for government, and ways to make space for democracy and education. 'Rancière's view of democracy as a disruption of the distribution of the sensible and of politics as a process of political subjectification involving the creation of new, supplementary subjects provides a different ... view of democratic expansion' (McDonnell, 2022, p. 115). One tendency to be particularly concerned with here is any apparent functioning of school systems and teaching professions as the only legitimate providers of education. Kupferman (2018) challenges this problem in the tendency to talk about the aims of schooling as if they are the aims of education and to really mean school when discussing education.

A didactically minded democratic society has no capacity for a freedom to be democratic. To be participants in that apparent democracy, the citizen must subject to the common understandings not just of what to think, but also how to think. Democracy has a history of communities being policed to think in particular ways—programmed cognitively. Learning becomes a preconfigured duty—even the playing learner must be playing for the fear that otherwise they will not grow to be a healthy member of the democracy. The creativity often imagined, and even shallowly popularised, to be an important disposition or characteristic in a democratic world, has little hope of incubating and/or thriving in a didactically minded education system. Cinema offers both focus and process for an immersion in democracy and education without that didactic policing. Rancière (2007, p. 64) offers cinema as 'a quite different interest in the uncertain boundaries between the familiar and the strange, the real and the symbolic'. As democracy, and as education, cinema offers less deception on the grounds that reality is already inaccessible (Marker, 1983).

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Notes on contributors

**Andrew Gibbons** is a Programme Leader at the School of Education, Auckland University of Technology. The study of teaching is at the heart of Andrew's work and draws upon his experiences as an early childhood teacher, academic dean, social worker and journalist. At the School of Education, he has contributed to the programme development, delivery, and postgraduate research supervision of early childhood, primary, secondary, and tertiary teacher education programmes. In each programme, Andrew engages with student teachers as they critically explore their practice through intensive research and reflection, engaging with enduring and emerging theories of teaching and learning. Andrew's teaching and research is dedicated to growing teacher education programmes that break out of disciplinary siloes and generate powerful connections between teachers and the research community.

**Andrew Denton** lectures on Creative Practice Research Design, Contextual Review, Design for Social Impact, Cinematic Arts, as well as supervising Doctoral, Masters, Honours, and Directed Studies projects. Andrew's research resides within a moving image practice that applies methods aligned with essayist cinema and video installation, as well as historical avant-garde film. He works predominantly with the subject of 'ecological emergency'. Responding to subjective experiences of environmental devastation, which have induced a personal state of melancholy. Andrew's art practice is activated by his belief that the sensate realm offers an alternate and provocative cinematic approach to expressing threats to our environment. His media works eschew 'storytelling' or 'documenting' a crisis, in favour of a poetic-emotional register. Alongside his practice-based research, he is committed to the development of postgraduate curricula, applying an approach to learning and teaching that seeks to enable meaningful research practices that are agile, responsive and collaborative. He has presented and published papers and chapters on creative-based pedagogical approaches, and project-based curriculum design, locally and internationally.

## ORCID

Andrew Gibbons  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0847-5639>

Andrew Denton  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2074-9196>

## References

- Bassett, K. (2014). Rancière, politics, and the occupy movement. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 32(5), 886–901. <https://doi.org/10.1068/d5013>
- Bingham, C., & Biesta, G. J. J. (2010). *Jacques Rancière: Education, truth and emancipation*. Continuum.
- Bowman, P. (Ed.). (2013). *Rancière and film*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Dasgupta, S. (2008). Art is going elsewhere: And politics has to catch it: An interview with Jacques Rancière. *Krisis: Journal for Contemporary Philosophy*, 1, 70–76.
- Denton, A. B. (2016). *Cinematic affect in a time of ecological emergency* [Doctoral dissertation]. Monash University.
- Ebert, R. (2018). Roger Ebert on empathy. <https://www.rogerebert.com/empathy/video-roger-ebert-on-empathy>
- Frimberger, K. (2023). The craft of acting as a pedagogical model for living a flourishing life in a world of tensions and contradictions. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 56(1), 74–85. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/00131857.2023.2226862> <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2023.2226862>
- Ghiraldelli, P. (2000). The fundamentals of Gepeto's philosophy of education: Neopragmatism and infancy in the post-modern world. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 32(2), 201–207. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-5812.2000.tb00444.x>
- Gibbons, A. (2008). Child-rearing practices and expert identities: A tale of two interventions. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 40(6), 747–757. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-5812.2008.00467.x>
- Gibbons, A. (2013). 'People love metrics': A super sad true love story. [https://pesa.org.au/images/papers/2013-papers/People\\_Love\\_Metrics\\_-\\_A\\_Super\\_Sad\\_True\\_Love\\_Story\\_\\_Andrew\\_Gibbons.pdf](https://pesa.org.au/images/papers/2013-papers/People_Love_Metrics_-_A_Super_Sad_True_Love_Story__Andrew_Gibbons.pdf)
- Heimans, S., Biesta, G., Takayama, K., & Kettle, M. (2023). ChatGPT, subjectification, and the purposes and politics of teacher education and its scholarship. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 51(2), 105–112. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2023.2189368>
- Huxley, A. (1958). *Brave new world*. Penguin. (Original work published 1932)
- Hwang, S. Y. (2022). Time we do not have: The challenges of silence in an emancipatory, conversation-oriented curriculum. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 54(14), 2520–2531. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2022.2033211>
- Kogonada. (2021). *After Yang*. A24.
- Kupferman, D. W. (2018). Dangerous liaisons: Metonymic effects between school and education. *Policy Futures in Education*, 16(7), 906–917. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210317753029>

- Lupton, C. (2005). *Chris Marker: Memories of the future*. Reaktion Books.
- Marker, C. (1983). *Sans soliel*. Argos Films.
- Massumi, B. (2011). *Semblance and event: Activist philosophy and the occurrent arts*. MIT Press.
- McDonnell, J. (2022). *Reading Rancière for education: An introduction*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Moss, P., & Urban, M. (2017). The organisation for economic co-operation and development's international early learning study: What happened next. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 18(2), 250–258. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1463949117714086>
- Orwell, G. (1949/1986). 1984. Martin Secker & Warburg.
- Rancière, J. (1991). *The ignorant schoolmaster: Five lessons in intellectual emancipation*. Stanford University Press.
- Rancière, J. (1995). *On the shores of politics* (L. Heron, Trans.). Verso.
- Rancière, J. (2006a). *Hatred of democracy* (S. Corcoran, Trans.) Verso.
- Rancière, J. (2006b). *The politics of aesthetics: The distribution of the sensible*. Continuum.
- Rancière, J. (2007). *The future of the image* (G. Elliot, Trans.). Verso.
- Rancière, J. (2009a). *The emancipated spectator* (G. Elliot, Trans.). Verso.
- Rancière, J. (2009b). *Aesthetics and its discontents* (S. Corcoran, Trans.). Polity.
- Rancière, J. (2010a). *Dissensus: On politics and aesthetics* (S. Corcoran, Trans.). Continuum.
- Rancière, J. (2010b). On ignorant schoolmasters. In C. Bingham & G. Biesta (Eds.), *Jacques Rancière: Education, truth, emancipation* (pp. 1–24). Continuum.
- Rancière, J. (2011). Re-visions: Remarks on the love of cinema: An Interview by Oliver Davis. *Journal of Visual Culture*, 10(3), 294–304. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470412911419747>
- Rancière, J. (2013). Remarks by way of a postface. In P. Bowman (Ed.), *Rancière and film* (pp 185–193). Edinburgh University Press.
- Rancière, J. (2016). *Film fables*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Scott, R. (Dir.). (1982). *Blade runner*. The Ladd Company.
- Spielberg, S. (2002). *Minority report* [Film]. Twentieth Century Fox.
- Urban, M. (2017). We need meaningful, systemic evaluation, not a preschool PISA. *Global Education Review*, 4(2), 18–24.