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Banal or Extraordinary? Pedagogical Dilemmas in the New Audiovisual Environment¹

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ABSTRACT

The article identifies some of the pedagogical challenges that arise in relation to technological, institutional and discursive changes in the production, circulation and reception of audiovisual texts which suggest a re-negotiation in the ways in which we value, conceptualise and engage with audiovisual texts. It relates these challenges to the specific pedagogic environment of British Film Studies by considering in detail the institutional context within which they operate. It focuses on specific issues of legitimisation as they arise when the belief in the 'extraordinary' nature of the film experience is replaced by an all-engulfing technology that enables the production and enjoyment of 'banal' works. It concludes by proposing a way in which such perceived 'banality' can be creatively recuperated within Film Studies.

KEYWORDS

Film Studies
legitimisation
digital technology
cinephilia
pedagogy
BFI

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INTRODUCTION

This article addresses a specific pedagogical problem that Film and Television Studies as a discipline is now facing. It is a problem that is not giving us, in the Department of Film & Television Studies at the University of Glasgow, unbearable headaches or sleepless nights but is serious enough to be an important aspect of the ongoing reviews of our programmes. Its lynchpin is the alternative and antagonistic definitions of audiovisual works and their experience as either extraordinary (in the romantic, transcendental, transformative sense) or banal (in that they saturate our everyday life). The article aims to identify some of the pedagogical challenges that arise in relation to technological, institutional and discursive changes in the production, circulation and reception of audiovisual texts which, in turn, seem to suggest a re-negotiation in the ways in which we value, conceptualise and engage with audiovisual texts. These challenges will be related to the specific pedagogic environment of British film studies and facilitated with a sketchy overview of the history of film and television studies in that context.

It is essential then that an indication of what is particularly 'new' about our audiovisual environment is offered at this stage. However, it should be noted that conceptualisations and concerns around the changing nature of the cinematic experience have a long history that far exceeds the boundaries of our 'new' condition and go back to the earliest days of cinema – the debate around the arrival of sound in the 1920s provides a clear demonstration of that. So concerns around the 'newness' of the audiovisual environment and the cinematic experience must be cut to their proper size and contextualised. It is worth noting (in a rather eclectic but hopefully pertinent manner) just three instances of the numerous accounts of transformation.

In the context of British cinema, Christine Geraghty identifies a significant shift in the experience of cinema-going from a communal, inclusive social experience of the post-World War II era towards a more fragmented, 'semi-private' experience, addressing diverse audiences in specialised ways (Geraghty 2000). Significantly this development is not linked to technological shifts such as electronic or digital imaging but to transformations in exhibition and distribution strategies and the nature of the films themselves. 'New technology', however, is addressed directly by Miriam Hansen's work in the early 1990s (Hansen 1991 & 1993). Hansen's account of a changing cinematic experience (openly influenced by the advent of VHS recording and playback capabilities) where the cinema ceases to be the primary site of film viewing and is replaced by more privatised, distracted and fragmented acts of consumption not only has particular resonance today but also connects with Geraghty's observations. Equally evocative is Hansen's suggestion that such (primarily domestic) mode of consumption of audiovisual material

affects the way we view films in cinemas and even the films' aesthetics as they aim to appeal to diverse interests and fragmented audiences.

Of course this is a well visited area of scholarship with the consideration of cinema in relation to other audiovisual forms (more recently the digital formats) attracting the attention of prominent figures in the field such as Mary Ann Doane (Doane 2002). Doane has suggested that cinema is '... a medium that harbours a desire for instantaneity... but the digital intensifies this desire'. Similarly in relation to cinema's embrace of the contingent she speculates: 'perhaps in digital media contingency is relocated in the concept of interactivity – where the click of the mouse can lead the user to unexpected virtual places' (Doane 2007: 20).

What is important for the purposes of this paper is the clear acknowledgment by Hansen and Doane (and by numerous others that are omitted here for the sake of brevity) that while our current condition is perhaps the latest within a continuum of a constantly evolving audiovisual environment, there might be something qualitatively different about this latest electronic/digital transformation that signals an important shift in our relationship with audiovisual texts. It seems to me, then, that since film education is on a fundamental level an engagement with such texts it is only logical that in our pedagogical practices we must address shifts in the affective and intellectual investments that necessarily come with such change.

Of particular importance are the new systems of delivery of audiovisual material, systems that rely heavily on the Internet, the computer and other even more compact platforms (from iPods and tablets to mobile phones). I have chosen two examples, both presented as YouTube clips, which demonstrate in my opinion two extreme and diametrically opposite modes of engagement with audiovisual texts: the final scene of *Cinema Paradiso* (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wEFugVbzsSo>) and the short 'film' *Ninja Cat* (AKA *Stalking Cat*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fzzjgBAaWZw>).

The former foregrounds the emotive attachment to film as a unique and unified text (the missing kisses restoring the unity of the fragmented by censure incomplete films of Salvatore's childhood cinema-going repertoire) and to cinema-going as an experience that is deep, transformative and passionate (with the on-screen kisses creating affective links with passion and love). In *Cinema Paradiso* cinema is heaven and the viewing experience possesses extraordinary qualities that stay forever in the memory of the viewer. The unmistakable sense of loss that exhumes from the clip is a clear indication of the particular anxieties around the changes in the European film industry at the time (Eleftheriotis 2001).

The tone and mood are dramatically different in *Ninja Cat*: the 'film' demonstrates a playful engagement with low spec technology and relishes the joy of discovering and exploiting a simple visual effect (the camera movement that masks the transition and the work of editing). The clip is simple, non-ambitious but celebratory. Whereas *Cinema Paradiso* laments the loss of an original (experience and text), *Ninja Cat* is a text without origin (as the endless re-appropriation has erased any certainty of which version is the first) and without author. Furthermore it is also a film that is overwhelmingly rooted in the domestic (the cat, the 'author's' bedroom) and sipped in the banality of the everyday.

I will propose that the two clips encapsulate two distinct modes of engagement with audiovisual texts, which, in their difference, have serious pedagogical implications. *Ninja Cat* celebrates banality; the final scene of *Cinema Paradiso* laments the loss of the extraordinary.² The former grounds the audiovisual experience in the everyday and it envelops it with an aura of ordinariness and possibility: every one can make something like this and that is precisely its main appeal. The latter is about difficulty, about loss and the impossibility of compensation, about the uniqueness of the cinematic experience, the integrity of film as a work of art and the romance of the masterpiece.

However, both instances presented here share the YouTube platform and coexist in virtual proximity, a click or two of the mouse away from each other. Ironically YouTube's delivery of the ending reproduces the extraction, the loss that *Cinema Paradiso* laments. But this is increasingly the way in which younger generations of students experience audiovisual texts not just in the short playful bliss of *Ninja Cat* but in the eclectic fragmentation and circulation of extracts from films: the shower scene from *Psycho*, the Odessa steps, the slashing of the ear in *Reservoir Dogs*, the list is endless and embraces the sublime and the ridiculous, the banal and the extraordinary.

All teaching is a dialogic relationship between educators and educated that is both shaped and transformative but crucially depends on a 'common ground' of similar if not shared beliefs, values and experiences. Is the 'common ground' on which film education is built shifting in a qualitatively significant manner? ('Common ground' defined as the negotiated terrain of cinematic culture within which the relationship between teacher and student unfolds). Is the new audiovisual environment opening up a gap in that relationship, a gap that possibly we, tired and old pedagogues, are too slow to bridge and too stuck in our own values and beliefs to be able to address?

² It is important to clarify that banality and extraordinariness as descriptive 'labels' do not refer to the clips (neither to the totality of *Cinema Paradiso*) but to the mode of engagement with audiovisual texts that they represent.

Expressed in a more positive and less self-pitying way, how can we adjust our pedagogy to account for such shift and to make the most of the new audiovisual environment that we inhabit? Of course much more than pedagogy is at stake. In a climate of economic austerity and severe cuts in arts education in the UK and in Greece the social usefulness of film education is once again questioned and challenged. What are the implications of the changes in the perception of cinema and in the new modes of circulation and consumption of audiovisual texts for the discursive manner in which film legitimises itself as an art form and film education justifies its social value? While all these are particularly urgent questions in the UK context they are perhaps even more pressing in Greece where film education has a different and shorter history and is still at a stage of development that makes it more vulnerable but also potentially more open and therefore in a better position to respond to the new challenges.

FILM STUDIES IN THE UK

My brief sketch is structured around two key moments: the introduction of the first theoretical/historical film studies courses in the late 1970s and the contemporary academic landscape.

Late 1970s, early 80s and the British Film Institute

Film Studies with a theoretical/historical flavour and at university level emerged in the late 1970s out of a very active and diverse film culture: film societies, amateur clubs, the often antagonistic journals *MOVIE*, *Screen* (part of SEFT – the Society for Education in Film and Television) and *Sight and Sound*, but crucially the British Film Institute (BFI) and its Education Department. There is interesting and ongoing scholarship on each one of the above but it is worth identifying some characteristic trends of that specific cultural formation around film and its study: a clear emphasis in theory with an intense engagement with French paradigms (psychoanalysis, semiotics, structuralism, Althusserian Marxism), auteur politics, textual analysis as method, and the often explosive interaction with critical, industrial and academic institutions.

The BFI is a particularly interesting case both as an object of controversy but also as a key mechanism for the development of Film Studies. It was founded in 1933 as a private company with funding from the Cinematograph Fund and main tasks:

‘to provide information on all aspects of film, to encourage public appreciation of film, to advise teachers, to act as a mediator between teachers and the industry, to carry out research, to maintain a national repository of films and to undertake the certification of films as cultural or educational on behalf of the government.’³

³ http://www.jigsaw.com/id53285/bfi.org.uk_companywiki.xhtml; visited 5 March 2013.

The Institute took over the journal *Sight & Sound* (which remains its flagship publication) and founded the *Monthly Film Bulletin*. The particular significance of the former lies in its establishment of a long-standing interaction between academics and critics, constituting a rather productive 'contact zone' between theoretical and journalistic discourse. Its educational activities intensified in the late 1960s and 1970s with film classes in colleges, evening classes and summer schools, culminating with the funding of the first specialised film lectureships in British universities in the late 1970s (at a small number of universities including Warwick, Sterling, Keele and Essex). It is significant that film studies as an academic discipline in the UK was initiated in that way because the relationship between the academia and the BFI is often strenuous with the Institute taking a holistic approach to film and film culture and supporting the academic study of film but also distancing itself from it. The ambivalence in that relationship notwithstanding, the BFI's sponsorship was crucial and enabled the first spurt of growth of film courses with critical, theoretical and historical focus which appeared in addition to the several already existing practical programmes offered by colleges and film schools.

In 1983 the BFI was given a Royal Charter that redefined its mission:

'ELIZABETH THE SECOND by the Grace of God of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and of Our other Realms and Territories Queen, Head of the Commonwealth, Defender of the Faith: TO ALL TO WHOM THESE PRESENTS SHALL COME, GREETING!

WHEREAS it has been represented unto Us that it is expedient that We should be graciously pleased to grant a Charter of Incorporation to the unincorporated organisation founded in the year of our Lord One thousand nine hundred and eighty-three and formed to succeed The British Film Institute (a company incorporated under the Companies Act 1948 limited by Guarantee and not having a share capital) (hereinafter called "the Company"): NOW THEREFORE KNOW YE THAT WE, by virtue of Our Prerogative Royal and of all other powers enabling Us in that behalf have granted and ordained and do by these Presents for Us, Our Heirs and Successors, grant and ordain as follows...

.....
The objects of the Institute shall be to encourage the development of the arts of film, television and the moving image throughout Our United Kingdom, to promote their use as a record of contemporary life and manners, to promote education about film, television and the moving image generally, and their impact on society, to promote access to and appreciation of the widest possible range of British and world cinema and

to establish, care for and develop collections reflecting the moving image history and heritage of Our United Kingdom.’⁴

There are several interesting points emerging from the above extract (and that hopefully justifies its excessive length). First, that this later definition of the BFI’s mission is remarkably similar to the founding ‘vision’ of the Institute fifty years earlier. Secondly, it signals the opening of the definition of national film culture to a broader context embracing ‘world cinema’ – *Sight and Sound*’s continuing role in promoting precisely that has had a significant impact in the expansion of the scope of film studies. Finally the first part of the extract demonstrates not only the fact that some of the most socially progressive initiatives can coexist with the most arcane forms of governance but that the BFI and by extension film, film culture and education are subjects to ‘Her Majesty’s pleasure’ – in other words their legitimacy cannot and should not be taken for granted.⁵

The 2000s

Film studies departments increased steadily in the 1980s and 1990s, many of them becoming ‘Film & Television Studies’. Questions of legitimisation regarding television surfaced in that context: Is it an art form? Is it worthy of academic attention? Is it to be studied alongside film or within different contexts? At the same time departments of cultural, media or communication studies also proliferated to the extent that there are now more university level courses under the umbrella term ‘Media & Cultural Studies’ than under any other subject area classification in British academia. The rapid expansion of that broad discipline attracted considerable and overtly critical attention from the British media and often the government itself with the ironic description ‘Mickey Mouse courses’ directed at institutions and programmes.⁶

One of the effects of the sustained campaign against what was perceived to be a decline of educational standards was a redefinition of the specificity of each discipline under the ‘umbrella’ and a new emphasis on the differences between approaches and institutions. Stressing the political and social aspects of communication, for example, was used to justify a specific take on the study of media, while a strand of cultural studies focused on the study of everyday

⁴<http://www.bfi.org.uk/sites/bfi.org.uk/files/downloads/bfi-royal-charter-2000-04.pdf>; visited 5 March 2013.

⁵ Although the Royal Family are keen supporters of new information technologies it is not certain that they would fully embrace the teaching of *Ninja Cat* as part of film education in UK universities.

⁶See, for example, “‘Irresponsible’ Hodge under fire’ (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/2655127.stm>; visited 5 March 2013) as an example of the demonisation of media studies; also John Ellis’s later response ‘Media Studies. Discuss’ (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/magazine/4158902.stm; visited 5 March 2013).

activities and their identity-forming processes. Meanwhile film studies continued to defend its purpose and usefulness primarily in terms of the aesthetic value of its object of study. Inter- or multidisciplinary approaches involving film studies also flourished but from a position of confidence, indicating a secure, special and thriving discipline.

A significant development in relation to the institutional position of 'the media studies' umbrella was the so called 'benchmarking exercise', first undertaken in 2002 and reviewed in 2008. Partly initiated by the emphasis on increasing access, transparency and accountability in the higher education sector that became a flagship policy of successive Labour governments and partly as a way of monitoring the increasingly diverse in quality and scope academic programmes, 'benchmarking' was an exercise that involved all academic disciplines and all university level institutions in the UK. It produced a comprehensive mapping that described the very broad range of courses included in the extensive spectrum of communication, media, film and cultural studies. It identified the nature and scope of the areas, the subject knowledge and understanding and the skills characteristic of each and set standards for degrees. Significantly the benchmarking statement opens with a bid for legitimacy:

'As fields of study, communication, media, film and cultural studies are distinguished by their focus on cultural and communicative activities as central forces in shaping everyday social and psychological life, as well as senses of identity in the organisation of economic and political activity; in the construction of public culture; in the creation of new expressive forms; and as the basis for a range of professional practices.'⁷

Ingenious as this is in its attempt to ground the social value of the field on the everyday impact of the forms that its constituent parts engage with, it is also heavily biased towards a 'media studies' perspective within which theoretical/historical film studies is sidelined if not totally ignored.

There are institutional but also ideological reasons for that. Film studies in the UK exists securely only in a limited number of universities (e.g. East Anglia, Warwick, Glasgow, Kent) but in the vast majority of cases it is part of the larger ensemble of media and communication studies and more often than not in a hegemonically subordinate position.⁸ Furthermore, the most secure of such departments have

⁷ The Benchmarking Statement for Communication, Media, Film and Cultural Studies can be accessed at <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/CMF08.pdf>; visited 5 March 2013

⁸ The position of film studies within the structures of other influential UK bodies (such as the Arts and Humanities Research Council - AHRC - or the Research Excellence Framework - REF) is equally marginal without a clear recognition of its distinctive

defined their 'mission' in terms of aesthetic rather than social value and promoted intellectual/critical/analytical engagement with film as an art form. This is more forcefully represented in the benchmarking statement in the outline of the 'subject-specific' skills that the document provides: skills of intellectual analysis, research skills, media production skills, creative, innovative and imaginative skills, skills of social and political citizenship. Despite having to precariously prop up the 'umbrella', the document still manages to capture the inquisitive, curiosity-driven, critical nature that is characteristic of film studies in the UK.

Shifts in Film Culture

While the previous two sections focus primarily on the changing institutional conditions in the period 1980-2010 it is worth considering briefly some of the transformations in the overall film culture of the period and of the attendant shifts in the discipline itself. This is accomplished very successfully and remarkably succinctly by Mark Betz in a brilliant essay entitled 'Little Books' which traces some key developments in British (and USA) film education by considering the publication activities of certain periods, connecting thus pedagogy and research with the broader formation of the film culture of the period. Focusing on 'little books', defined literally as 'small format publications', Betz identifies four distinct periods: 1965-71 (the first wave), 1972-1980 (second wave), 1981-1996 (ebb tide), 1997-2005 (resurgence) (Betz 2008: 319-49).

The first period focused on directors, nations/movements, genres, historical periods and actors and produced an initial 'canon' of Film Studies. The second phase (like the first) addressed readers as a specialised public in the UK with the study of film (and increasingly television) taking place outside the academia. Meanwhile in the USA the theoretical foundations of an academic discipline are consolidated. The 'ebb tide' sees influence shifting from the 'little' to the 'big book' (big literally but also about grand theory and with a distinct historical scope) as film studies becomes an established academic discipline in the UK, too. Crucially, Betz, sees a 'resurgence' of the little book in recent and contemporary times which places the study of film back into a more general, less specialised and non-academic film culture arena:

'The rise of the internet as a forum for film writing of all stripes, from chatroom salonspeak to online articles to blogs, by authors of varying relations to film studies as a profession, represents a different challenge to disciplinary definition and control of its object. In short, the repressed film

identity and usually (mis)placed in between media and communications and performing arts.

culture that gave rise to film studies has returned with a vengeance.' (Betz 2008: 320)

This clearly alludes to a crisis of authority, a crisis of legitimacy and a crisis around the cultural value of the audiovisual text as an object of study. In such context *Ninja Cat* can be seen as representing more than just a playful experiment and can become emblematic of the momentous shift in film culture that forces the reevaluation of our pedagogical methods and practices

ISSUES OF LEGITIMISATION

It is the perceived ability of film to offer an extraordinary aesthetic experience, its status as a work of art in other words, that has historically legitimised its place in society and the academia. In the international conference on the 'Importance of Audiovisual Education' organised by the Hellenic Film Academy in November 2010 a number of speakers, including contributors with institutional and political positions, strongly and passionately pleaded that cinema and film education must be properly supported by the government because they promote, encourage and develop a great form of art. The underlying assumption was that film, as all art, adds value to life and has the potential to enhance the lived experience of citizens. The more generalised legitimisation argument is eloquently made by Jürgen Habermas who, in his appraisal of the 'incomplete project of modernity', defended the separation of art from everyday life as a necessary evil that ultimately aims to enrich the banal everyday with the experience of the aesthetically extraordinary (Habermas 1985: 3-15).

Film usually legitimises itself as an art form on the assumption that it possesses a similar extraordinary potential. It is on the same basis that it enters the academia in its own terms rather than as a sociological subcategory of mass-culture. But this is also a belief that permeates the curricula of film courses and the way we deliver them, from the structure of courses to the selection of films. More importantly it acts as a potent justification of the demand made on our students that they should dedicate their precious time to the study of film after film after film, to familiarise themselves with complex theories and commit themselves with energy and enthusiasm to lengthy discussions of point of view structures in *The Birds*, for example. All this is only possible when there is a cultural and social consensus that the object of study merits investment (of time, resources and good will).

And while there are social and economic arguments that can be mobilised in order to justify such investment (for example, on the grounds of active citizenship or as contributing to the qualitative improvement of a national 'industry' and the culture of the nation or in terms of stimulating economic activity and addressing the demands of the market) they do not feature heavily in the way film education

has historically legitimised itself, in the UK at least. This is of course a great variable and the specific national context of legitimisation arguments must always be acknowledged. However, the fundamental and most often employed legitimisation case is based on the assertion that film is worthy of study as an extraordinary artistic form of expression and our objectives can be summarised by the commitment to study, value and create extraordinary films.

What happens then when contemporary audiovisual works in their fragmented diversity are no longer perceived as extraordinary but quite the opposite, as ordinary instances sipped in the banality of the everyday? It seems to me that a Habermas inspired claim of a possible reintegration of art and life is not readily available - it is entirely inappropriate to suggest that the struggling project of modernity finds its completion in the cyber space of YouTube. We are forced in the inevitable and extraordinary position that we have to face and address banality.

Of course there is nothing banal about banality. In fact, if we believe de Certeau, the banal is truly extraordinary in its potential to 'restore historicity to the movement which leads analytical procedures back to their frontiers' or as Meaghan Morris sharply re-contextualised 'the ordinary can reorganise the place from which discourse is produced' (Morris 1990: 27). From such, entirely credible even admirable perspective, confrontations with the banal can lead to theoretical productivity and innovation rather than instigate a panicky retreat to the sanctity of the masterpiece and the canon. However, such positive evaluation of the banal emerges within cultural studies, a field that neighbours film studies but is distinct from it both in its object of study and, more pertinently, in its pedagogy.

What is to be done then with our students, these eclectic consumers of the banal? One way of dealing with this is to surrender them, together with their enthusiasms and obsessions, to an altogether different discipline where banality is not only studied but often celebrated. Or, to moderate this rather extreme and provocative option, and terrifying as it is (in more than one ways), we can look *Ninja Cat* straight in the eye, not as an aesthetic atrocity or a pedagogic anathema but for what it really is and how it is placed in our complex contemporary cultural formation. We need to identify the parameters that inform the changes in film culture that Betz indicates and the shifts in the educational 'common ground' that *Ninja Cat* announces.

I want to conclude this essay by considering just two particular ways in which the new audiovisual environment can be evaluated in its pedagogical dimensions.

The YouTube 'revolution' privileges the fragment over the whole, the ephemeral over the classic, the contingent over the planned and framed and in that respect it renders the attachment to the text a somewhat problematic (even anachronistic) behavioural trend. However, a teaching based on the fragment has been a long standing tradition in film studies: the numerous educational packs that the BFI produced and distributed were precisely collections of fragments in the form of film stills, slides and extracts. It was the surrounding educational context that integrated the fragment with a discursive whole. This probably provides us with a strong suggestion on how to deal with the qualitatively distinct, but still operating within a knowable and teachable context, fragment that emerges from/through the YouTube platform.

Furthermore, this and many other platforms, as well as new Internet based distribution networks, are now enhancing access to material that was next to impossible to view a few years ago. Clearly this helps research but remains problematic in terms of teaching – using YouTube clips is more often than not a very frustrating pedagogic experience. On a parallel track, the availability of films from around the world on DVD can be seen as a further fragmentation of audiences but considerably expands the scope of our teaching possibilities and opens up our curricula to 'other' cinemas.

Of even more critical and pedagogic importance is to identify some of the key characteristics underlying the production and circulation of '*Ninja Cat* texts'. Younger (mainly but not exclusively) generations use highly accessible, often inexpensive and yet sophisticated hard and software to produce audiovisual works exploiting social networks to circulate their creations. Such works, as the *Ninja Cat* example illustrates, often display acute awareness of audiovisual conventions – a new type of 'literacy' that is deployed very effectively. It is also evident that audiovisual forms are used in order to assert, celebrate or interrogate (personal or shared) identities and they demonstrate a clear awareness of critical, often ironic, positions from which to view such forms and identities. Furthermore, there is a clear sense of community (virtual and actual) even solidarity in the circulation of and engagement with such work.

Both instances, the enhanced access to audiovisual material and the *Ninja Cat* associated phenomena, indicate a process of transformation in our object of study and in what constitutes the essential competences, skills, types of knowledge and desire that our students bring into the negotiated common ground that lies at the foundations of audiovisual education.

It seems to me that in both cases there are dangers and potential losses but also opportunities and benefits that arise from our contemporary audiovisual environment. The playful but critical, ironic yet invested and celebratory nature

of the 'Ninja Cat text' provides a politically useful blueprint for a sensitive and responsive but still transformative pedagogy. In the UK and in Greece, however, we need to face the double challenge of whether and how to teach *Ninja Cat* to our value-demanding students as well as to find persuading ways to justify our continuing existence and the legitimacy of our public funding as a discipline. Of course the extraordinary conditions of Greece at the moment play an important part in any such considerations. Given that the rubric of 'crisis' seems to describe every aspect of social life in the country the call for funding to study cinema as a 'life-enhancing great art' sounds at best nostalgic, while the banality of *Ninja Cat* makes its relevance at least problematic. Having to navigate the hazardous path between perceptions of film as extraordinary but unnecessary luxury on the one hand and irrelevant banality on the other the discipline must resist tempting answers such as the elevation of social media and amateur film-making as forms of resistance, legitimising in other words film purely in political and social terms. If the British experience is anything to go by, preserving the tensions between the extraordinary and the banal, film as art and film as social medium, is a difficult but productive way of responding to present challenges but also securing an enduring role and a responsive pedagogy for film studies.⁹

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⁹ It is important to clarify that while there are Greek scholars in Film Studies departments abroad and that Greek cinema is studied in universities around the world they face different and distinct issues of legitimisation that are not in any sense pertinent to the Greek context.

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