INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE ON AESTHETIC EDUCATION AND SCREEN STORIES

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ABSTRACT

This article is an introduction to the special issue of the *European Journal of Analytic Philosophy* dedicated to aesthetic education and philosophy of screen stories.

Keywords: analytic aesthetics; aesthetic education; screen stories; philosophy of film.

The present issue of the *European Journal of Analytic Philosophy* is mostly composed of papers that were presented at the conference *Aesthetic Education and Screen Stories*, held at the University of Rijeka in September 2023 and organized as part of the research project *Aesthetic Education through Narrative Art and Its Value for the Humanities*, funded by the Croatian Science Foundation (project AETNA).

The aim of the conference was to bring together scholars working in philosophy of art and aesthetics, film theory, media studies, cultural studies and other domains dedicated to the study of film and television, with the aim of exploring cognitive, ethical, educational and other aspects of the aesthetic experience of film and television series and serials—screen stories for short. We were also interested in analyzing the notion of aesthetic experience, aesthetic education and in exploring methodological advantages and disadvantages of various approaches to screen stories, in particular those related to neuro-aesthetics, naturalized aesthetics and cognitive aesthetics. In our opinion, the papers collected here present illuminating theoretical perspectives on these issues.

The papers collected here can be roughly divided into those dedicated to the problem of aesthetic education, those dealing with ethical dimension of specific artistic genres, and those concerned with particular kind of knowledge available from cinematic art. In the following, we provide an overview of the papers in this special issue.

In "Artistic Freedom Realized", *Murray Smith* considers the notion of artistic freedom and the question of when or how it is realized, contrasting two dominant views on it: on the theory advanced by Jon Elster, the problems with which artists engage arise from a mix of chosen, imposed, and invented constraints; on the theory of David Bordwell, those problems can be solved through the replication, revision, synthesis, or rejection of existing solutions. Smith concludes that neither the folk theory, nor the alternative theory, are correct; rather, there is a "sweet zone" of artistic creativity poised between a disabling surfeit of options, and a stifling sparsity of them. The inspiration for this view comes from Stravinsky, who claims: "[t]he more constraints one imposes, the more one frees one's self of the chains that shackle the spirit". To corroborate his view, Smith analyzes the interplay between invention and convention in art, drawing on a variety of examples from film and rock music.

In "Aesthetic Education: A Perceptual-Cognitive Model", *Ted Nannicelli* discusses the puzzle of aesthetic education, pointing to the fact that although we invest significant time, energy, and resources to aesthetic education, we also act as if it is true that there is no disputing taste: while

we may try to persuade students to come around to particular judgments, we do not penalize students for judging one way or another. Nannicelli explores the implications of this puzzle, emphasizing the importance of aesthetic education and suggesting a new paradigm that may better explain its value. As he argues, the primary purpose of aesthetic education is not to educate taste but to facilitate the development of certain perceptual-cognitive capacities so as to enhance aesthetic experience and improve aesthetic appreciation. To support his theory, Nannicelli relies on research in perception and shows how one can improve one's perceptual capacities.

In "Ethics Education from Suffering on Screen? Tragic scenes from Arrival", *James MacAllister* discusses the capacity of tragedy to enhance ethics education. He first discusses Amelie Rorty and Peter Lamarque's accounts of the relationship between tragic art, moral education, and aesthetic value, claiming that they face issues due to the manner in which they employ the notion of aesthetic value. MacAllister then presents his own account, arguing that tragic films have potential to ethically educate audiences in a way that enhances the aesthetic value of the films in at least three directions: 1) by deepening moral understanding, 2) by deepening understanding of the nature of human beings and ethical purpose, and 3) by deepening understanding of ethical theory. To exemplify his points, MacAllister analyzes Denis Villeneuve's film *Arrival.*

Horror genre is at the center of *Cara Rei Cummings-Coughlin*'s paper "The Summit of Safe Horror: Defending most Horror Films", intended as a defense of horror from the charge issues by Di Muzio, who fears the morally corruptive influence of horror films on the audience who regularly engages with them. Cummings-Coughlin proposes the category of safe horror, which does not invite the effect of uncanny, but rather has features that allows films to be intense enough to cause excitement and terror yet not so intense as to cause a negative moral attitude to form in our soul, such as comic relief and foolish choices by the characters.

In "Cringe Overhang: The Perlocutionary Effects of Cringe Comedy", *Alexander Sparrow* brings the speech act theory to his analysis of cringe comedies, i.e. those that make people uncomfortable. Sparrow analyzes the mixture of feelings that comedies can have, showing how the surplus of embarrassment is due to maximization of the violation in the comedy at the expense of the benign. On Sparrow's view, cringe comedy's funniness is reliant on its lack of social psychological distancing; by leaving no room between the viewer and the character, embarrassment is maximized, the comedy is less benign (i.e. a stronger violation) and more polarizing as a result. His account explains i) why cringe comedy produces a comedic "overhang" in some viewers, where they continue to cringe even after the

comedy has stopped, and ii) why cringe comedy produces a laughter response in some audiences, and stress responses in others.

In "What Counts as (Evidence of) Narrow Aesthetic Cognitivism", *Mario Slugan* presents a critical analysis of narrow aesthetic cognitivism, the view that narrative fictional works are a source of knowledge. Slugan does a great job in showing deficiencies of theoretical approaches to the notion of learning from art, suggesting that scholars have to a great extent neglected to consider empirical evidence on the issue. Focusing on the claim that fiction gives us true propositions, Slugan points out that arguments in favor of the possibility of works expressing truth do not discuss how truth is justified. He then concedes that justification of truths in fictional and nonfictional works rests on the experiences outside of the work and that it is an empirical matter whether belief has been acquired or not. He concludes with a discussion of what would count as evidence in favor of aesthetic cognitivism.

We would like to conclude this introduction by expressing our gratitude to the *European Journal of Analytic Philosophy* for dedicating this issue to the topics discussed at the conference *Aesthetic Education and Screen Stories*, and to its editor, Marko Jurjako, whose help, support, and assistance were fundamental in bringing this issue together. Special thanks go to Murray Smith (University of Kent), the conference keynote speaker, for agreeing to contribute a paper to this special issue. We would also like to thank all the authors who submitted their papers and the reviewers whose critical comments were invaluable in refining the final versions. This is the first time the *European Journal of Analytic Philosophy* has featured papers primarily dedicated to art and focused solely on screen story arts. We hope this collection of papers will be an enjoyable and thought-provoking read and that it will inspire further discussions!