

# Media culture, cinema, and moral values: *CinÉtica's* pedagogical experience

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**Abstract:** The article reports on the pedagogical experience of *CinÉtica*, a film debate activity offered by the *Fundamentos da Ética* (Introduction to Ethics) discipline of the ICSEZ/UFAM journalism course. The experience had three consecutive years and, according to the students, the discipline's monitors, and its coordinator, served as an expressive support for the course's contents, making the involved academics strive for more readings. We sought to reveal cinematographic works' stances on ethical and moral dilemmas. That is, our activity was guided by an investigation on how audiovisual narratives can either reinforce the dominant moral and intellectual orientation, or, through a counter-hegemonic perspective, lead spectators to reflect and question dominant codes of conduct.

**Keywords:** Ethics; movies; educommunication; hegemony; values.

**Resumo:** O artigo relata a experiência pedagógica do *CinÉtica*, atividade de cineclubismo e debate de filmes da disciplina *Fundamentos da Ética*, do curso de Jornalismo do ICSEZ/UFAM. A experiência foi viabilizada em três anos consecutivos, e na avaliação dos próprios alunos, mas também dos monitores e do coordenador, serviu como um apoio expressivo dos conteúdos e aguçou a gana dos acadêmicos por mais leituras. Buscamos perceber nas obras cinematográficas seus posicionamentos em torno de dilemas éticos e morais, ou seja, nossa atividade se norteava pela investigação de como as narrativas audiovisuais podem ora alimentar a direção moral e intelectual predominante, ou, na perspectiva contra-hegemônica, apresentar material capaz de fazer os espectadores refletirem e questionarem os códigos de conduta hegemônicos.

**Palavras-chave:** Ética; cinema; educomunicação; hegemonia; valores.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper reports on the experience of *CinÉtica* (CinEthics), a monitored activity for exhibiting and discussing motion pictures related to the subject matter of Introduction to Ethics, a discipline of the Social Communication – Journalism course of the Institute of Social Sciences, Education and Zootechnics (Federal University of Amazonas, ICSEZ/UFAM), in Parintins (AM). The activity's goal was to promote a reflection on moral dilemmas through the fruition of movies, establishing relationships between the situations described in media narratives and the themes addressed in the classroom. The classes provided a critical panorama of the philosophical currents of ethics, as well as a discussion on the limits of moral thought, understood as historical, dynamic and part of a processual material totality. Inspired by the practice of *cine-clubism*, the initiative emerged as a programmed activity of the discipline, with weekly screenings of films and discussions supported by monitors<sup>1</sup> who, at the end of each film, conducted the discussions, making connections with the programmatic content of the classes. As an exercise, the students were invited to write movie reviews, also a way of developing their skills as future film critics and cultural journalists. To facilitate student attendance, there were two weekly exhibitions, and the discipline's professor was responsible for the movie selection. This selection had the goal of approaching ethical knowledge, as seen in the dilemmas presented by the movies, as well as filmic knowledge on important filmmakers and their aesthetic proposals. To be part of the roster, even popular, box-office films had to fulfill the requisite of being able to provoke polemics and moral crises among the students. This was the experience's motto.

Thus, the *CinÉtica* experience approached works by Vittorio de Sica, Alejandro Amenábar, David Fincher, Pedro Almodóvar, Fernando Meirelles, Bernardo Bertolucci, and Lars von Trier, among others. A synthesis was sought between art, ethics and politics, motivated by the instrumentalization of critical reading – increasingly necessary for future bachelor's degree diplomates. From this point of view, developing an aptitude for critical reading is a means for producing a truly active audience of communicating subjects and moral agents. As such, before demonstrating the possibilities for ethical debate present in some of these filmic narratives, we must present our understanding of cinema, media and the role of artistic products and cultural artifacts in the formation of spectators' imaginaries.

## 2. CINEMA AND MEDIA CULTURE

As a part of media culture<sup>2</sup>, cinematic products build values, worldviews, and ideologies. These instances influence the public who, hardly a passive entity, has its own understandings of the world, delimited by the sphere of cultural constitution permeating daily experience.

Media culture products, therefore, are not innocent entertainment; rather, they have a perfectly ideological character and are linked to devices of rhetoric, struggles,

1. The following students performed the role of monitoring the activity: Yasmin Gatto, Hanne Assimen, Jéssica Santos, Phelipe Marques, Kethleen Rebêlo, and Ana Alice Reis.

2. KELLNER, Douglas. *A cultura da Mídia: identidade e política entre o moderno e o pós-moderno*. Bauru, SP: Edusc, 2001.

programs, and political action. Given the above, to decode media culture messages and ideological effects one needs to learn how to interpret it politically<sup>3</sup>.

Returning to the problem of ideology in cultural products is essential for the vitality of cultural critique. To this end, here we propose a theoretical panorama pointing to the need for a rapprochement between the politicized wing of British Cultural Studies and the negative dialectics of Adorno and Horkheimer. This is justified by the fact that the Frankfurt School was able to establish a comprehensive perspective on modern culture's economic base, and also on the dictatorship of instrumental reason in the production of cultural goods. Agreeing with the criticism of the Frankfurt School, however, does not mean one has to agree with the characterization of the receiver as a passive entity, an empty slate to be programmed by the ruling class. Meanwhile, concepts stemming from Marxist cultural criticism (i.e., Critical Theory and British Cultural Studies), can contribute to a deep reflection on contemporary media. Kellner underscores this task when posing that part of the Cultural Studies school has abandoned not only the project of social transformation – in the vein of E.P. Thompson, Raymond Williams and the young Stuart Hall – but also any significant concern for the economic sphere which, as Jameson correctly points out<sup>4</sup>, can no longer be thought of as separate from the cultural sphere.

The economic reality of cultural industries is therefore integral to the media complex. It is impossible to debate the formation of identities, values, political positions, worldviews in the contemporary world without considering the crucial mediation of radio, television, internet, smartphones, cinema, newspapers, magazines, and so on. These compound the electronic sphere of media culture, which has an important role in the mass production of behaviors and customs, and is an important component in the formation of subjectivity. Looking at media culture requires a debate about the social totality in which it is produced. Thus, the class struggle, the capitalist mode of social reproduction, the social possession of mass media, as well as the models for the composition of narratives therein generated – narratives whose ideological source places them as vehicles of practical consciousness – are composite elements in the morphology of popular culture. A popular culture which, especially today, cannot be thought of without due consideration to the crucial phenomenon of the mediatization of social habits and imaginaries.

Every theory of communication presupposes a social theory. In this sense, the New Left wing of the British Cultural Studies offers an important lesson: thinking about culture requires investigating history and economics as sciences of the production of material life. Marxism thus becomes an inescapable horizon for this tradition, since, more than a discipline of study, it is a theoretical and practical systematization of the subaltern classes. The debate on media culture demands a rationalization capable of placing artistic and cultural production as part of a contradictory and open, dialectical, totality. Thus, our stance on the formative role of the media must overcome two dilemmas: the economicism of

3. *Ibid.*, p. 123. Own translation.

4. JAMESON, Fredric. *A cultura do dinheiro: ensaios sobre a globalização*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2001.

certain statements from the scholars of the Frankfurt School, and the sometimes idealistic culturalism of “postmodernist” Cultural Studies.

The Cultural Studies program proposed by Douglas Kellner has as its starting point a multi-pronged view that includes the investigation of cultural artifacts in three dimensions, namely: 1) the production and political economy of culture, 2) artifacts’ textual and critical analysis, and 3) the study of the reception and uses of media messages. This proposal implies, firstly, that Cultural Studies are themselves multi-dimensional. It is the task of social media researchers to pinpoint future trends of media and technological society<sup>5</sup>.

In this sense, Kellner<sup>6</sup> understands cinema as a product of media culture and, therefore, as a carrier-artifact of ideological and utopian elements. Furthermore, Kellner’s theoretical-methodological articulation allows us to investigate how films transcode political discourses in a given conjuncture. “A politically active cultural study should intervene in the social and political debates of its time and try to elucidate major political events and crises, as well as the popular texts of media culture, their reception by the public, and their practices”<sup>7</sup>. The author also argues that “to place cultural texts in their social context implies tracing the articulations by which societies produce culture, and the way in which culture shapes society through its influence on individuals and groups”<sup>8</sup>.

This perspective was a direct inspiration for *CinÉtica*’s experience, considering our proposal of exhibiting and debating motion pictures, aiming at a diagnostic critique of the exhibited works. Kellner’s method of diagnostic critique<sup>9</sup> employs history and social theory to analyze cultural texts, and uses cultural texts to elucidate trends, conflicts, possibilities, and historical yearnings. It subjects media culture to a dissection that, together with the contribution of cultural studies, allows one to uncover the political and ethical positions of filmic works. Pedagogical activities involving cinema allow for collective reflection on films’ themes and ideological visions, and also leads the active audience to establish a negotiated reading of the audiovisual media<sup>10</sup>. The tool of diagnostic critique empowers the receptor (in this case the students) to advance a description and characterization of media’s ethical and political positions. Thus, the power of communication can be challenged, with no illusions as to its overwhelming dimension and economic and material foundations.

Although it is plausible to consider that the audience establishes an active negotiation with media texts and technologies in the context of everyday life, this stance may become so optimistic as to lose sight of the marginality of the power of receivers in face of media. The euphoria regarding the vitality of the audience and of popular culture caused the latter to be understood as an autonomous space, resistant to the hegemony<sup>11</sup>.

Diagnostic analysis, then, contributes to a negotiated reading of the ideas transmitted by cinematographic work. The limits of hegemony can be challenged and, in the case of our debate on ethics, one can assess which types of moral behavior are encouraged and which are disapproved. This assessment takes place against the background of morality’s historical processuality<sup>12</sup>.

5. LEITE, Sidnei Ferreira. Reflexões sobre comunicação e sociedade: as contribuições de Douglas Kellner. *E-Compós*, v. 1, dez. 2004. p. 15. Own translation.

6. KELLNER, op. cit.

7. Ibid., p. 254. Own translation.

8. Ibid., p. 39. Own translation.

9. Ibid.

10. HALL, Stuart. *Da Diáspora: identidades e mediações culturais*. Belo Horizonte: Ed. da UFMG, 2003.

11. ESCOSTESGUY, Ana Carolina. Os estudos culturais. In: HOHLFELDT, Antônio; MARTINO, Luis C.; FRANÇA, Vera Veiga (orgs). *Teorias da Comunicação: conceitos, escolas, tendências*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2001. p. 60. Own translation.

12. VÁZQUEZ, Adolfo Sánchez. *Ética*. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2010.

### 3. MOVIES AND THEIR MORAL AND INTELLECTUAL ORIENTATION

The media appears to be central in the articulation of hegemony<sup>13</sup>. It is the private apparatus with the most impact on the formation of a socially valid moral and intellectual orientation. Cinema is part of this structure and can convey hegemonic or counter-hegemonic values – by either affirming or negating the status quo. We sought to perceive cinematographic works' positions on ethical and moral dilemmas, and so our activity was guided by an investigation on how audiovisual narratives can feed the predominant moral and intellectual orientation or, by means of a counter-hegemonic perspective, present cultural material capable of making the viewers reflect upon and question the hegemonic codes of conduct.

Hegemony, a Leninist concept reenvisioned by Gramsci<sup>14</sup>, expresses how a block of dominant classes, the historic bloc, holds the moral and intellectual leadership of society. Aided by the coercive powers of the state, the economically and materially dominant layers of society may also seek an hegemonic consensus to ensure their command of the subjective processes underlying the acceptance of order. The devices that ensure the fulfilling of this task are called private hegemonic apparatuses, which congregate institutions of civil society capable of disseminating and producing programs and lifestyles, as well as accepted customs and morality. Among these institutions are the schools, churches, unions, press, media, universities, the family structure itself and so on. Their main role is to manage worldviews that seek answers to the dilemmas of social life. Williams adds a variable to this process: the cooptation of hegemonized subjects' demands. He also points out that hegemonic processes always bear contradictions, since hegemony:

Also suffers from a resistance that is continuing, limited, altered, challenged by pressures that are not its own. We must then add to the concept of hegemony the concept of counter-hegemony and alternative hegemony, which are, in practice, real and persistent elements of hegemony<sup>15</sup>.

In *CinÉtica's* film cycle, we privileged counter-hegemonic narratives that offered an alternative vision on the present moral and intellectual leadership. The challenge was to overcome common sense through catharsis<sup>16</sup>, shaking moral certainties and dictates on right and wrong, and thus pointing to the existence of an ethical counter-hegemony. The main objective of the *Fundamentos de Ética* discipline is the understanding of moral behavior's dynamics from a historical-critical perspective, debating the implications of ethics in journalism and its social consequences. To this end, we employed art and media culture as a means of helping the students question current morality, broadening their views and denaturalizing dominant moral values.

As we emphasized previously, being a part of media culture, cinema has the power of transcoding social conflicts and expressing moral positions and

13. LIMA, Venício A. de. **Mídia: teoria e política**. São Paulo: Fundação Perseu Abramo, 2004.

14. GRAMSCI, Antonio. **Cadernos do cárcere**. São Paulo: Civilização Brasileira, 1999.

15. WILLIAMS, Raymond. **Marxismo e Literatura**. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 1979. p. 115-116. Own translation.

16. GRAMSCI, op. cit.

values. It is an artifact able to consolidate ideological discourses, manifesting, as a materialization of a practical conscience, models of behavior that can adhere to or negate a certain moral and intellectual orientation. Nevertheless, as an artistic expression, cinema also allows us to reflect and refract social reality, and when it appears as the portrait of an epoch's self-consciousness (something attainable in the productions of the true aesthetes), it can be a source of essential knowledge for the formation of the moral agent. According to Lukács, the film's double mimesis confers it an important ideological role, presenting an illusorily objective appearance able to potentiate its persuasive effect.

The authenticity of reproduction which we so often comment lends to the ideology represented in the film a particular matrix: the pieces of reality grouped tonally and organized among themselves seem to produce ideology from things themselves, from reality itself, and thus give it a force of immediate conviction that operates, frequently unconsciously, through emotional pathways<sup>17</sup>.

As such, cinema can be an important mechanism not only for the activation of aesthetic sensibility, but also for the elaboration of values and ideas. From the standpoint of morality, it becomes clear that cinematographic works are supports for ethical currents, i.e., vehicles of moral diffusion. Morality, then, has to be understood in a double sense<sup>18</sup>: as an object of analytical reflection or knowledge, and as a set of principles, values or norms that govern social relations among individuals or between individuals, certain groups and their community. In other words, morality is the mediation between the singular individual and its community, a support of social interaction. Thus, cinema and ethics approach each other, for media culture and social behaviors are part of the social complex, and amalgamate themselves in the constitution of the subject's historical journey.

#### 4. THE CINÉTICA

Debates were aimed at exploring the films' moral dilemmas and conflicts, with preference to themes in which morality was framed by human experience, transformable, and part of the constitution of a moral conscience in which subjective autonomy had a role in people's conduct. Another criterion was that the films had to emphasize the limits of human behavior, in order to evidence the material constraints of human actions, given that "men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past."<sup>19</sup>

During the discipline's four months, about 12 films were shown. This experience had three consecutive years. According to the students themselves, and also the monitors and the activity's coordinator, the Cinética provided an expressive support for the course's contents, making the academics yearn for further reading. The limited audiovisual repertoire of the students, due to

17. BEHAR, Regina Maria Rodrigues. Cinema em G. Lukács e W. Benjamin: uma análise comparativa. *Saeculum*, João Pessoa, n. 4/5, p. 117-136, jan./dez. 1998/1999. p. 133. Own translation.

18. VAZQUEZ, op. cit.

19. MARX, Karl. *O 18 Brumário de Luís Bonaparte*. São Paulo: Boitempo Editorial, 2011. p. 25.

their limited access to art films (there are no commercial cinemas, or art cine-clubs, in the city of Parintins) was shaken by the experience. Thus, attending to cultural and philosophical demands, CinÉtica became part of the academic journey of the university students.

The films shown throughout CinÉtica's lifespan were: *Fight Club* (David Fincher, 1999), *The Reader* (Stephen Daldry, 2008), *Bicycle Thieves* (Vittorio de Sica, 1948), *Million Dollar Baby* (Clint Eastwood, 2004), *Blindness* (Fernando Meirelles, 2008), *Mondays in the Sun* (Fernando Leon, 2002), *The Shawshank Redemption* (Frank Darabont, 1994), *The Sea Inside* (Alejandro Amenábar, 2005), *Big Miracle* (Ken Kwapis, 2012), *Network* (Sidney Lumet, 1976), *The Skin I Live In* (Pedro Almodóvar, 2011), *The Dreamers* (Bernardo Bertolucci, 2003), *Dancer in the Dark* (Lars von Trier, 2000), *The Bang Bang Club* (Steven Silver, 2010), and *American Beauty* (Sam Mendes, 1999).

We report on four of these works as examples of media culture that stand out in the ethics debate, revealing moral dilemmas. Our objective is to demonstrate the potential of these cultural texts to aid in the understanding of contemporary morality and the ethical challenges of a sociability governed by capital<sup>20</sup>.

#### 4.1. *Fight Club*

David Fincher's film was released in 1999, based on the novel by Chuck Palahniuk. The narrator, whose name is not revealed, is a typical character: a successful young man who lives alone in a large urban center. His life experience is restricted to the consumption of fashion goods; his free time becomes leisure through the purchase of superfluous goods. Enveloped by a meaningless life, suffering from insomnia and anguish, he seeks comfort in support groups for people with serious illnesses. From these groups he extracts the emotions missing in his daily life. After meeting Marla, likewise an addict, he encounters Tyler, a journey-changing figure. Tyler Durdeen, played by Brad Pitt, is the prototype of Dionysius. An emissary of chaos, seeking the transvaluation of values in the Nietzschean sense, he takes control of the taciturn narrator's body, as we find out by the end of the movie.

The film's conflict of multiple personalities represents the schizophrenia of modern life, in which we are led to assume different roles in the different spheres in which we act, often leading to mental illness. Tyler, the archetype of chaos, dismantles the middle-class life of the narrator, criticizing passivity, consumerism, and the cowardice of those who do not take control of their own lives. He creates the so-called Fight Club, where men fight with no concern for victory. It is a place of redemptive violence, where average citizens are brought into contact by the feeling of virility and the vitality of pain. The redemption of physical violence, in addition to creating a new morality, becomes a factor of attraction for new club members. This individualistic mantra, of seeking a primal sense lost in the experience of urban-industrial society, becomes insufficient for

20. MÉSZÁROS, István. *A Teoria da Alienação em Marx*. São Paulo: Boitempo Editorial, 2006.

Durdeen. The time for politics arrives: the club's subversive ethics must reach the collective sphere. The Fight Club becomes the revolutionary Project Mayhem.

In the film's third act, political actions gain a military dimension and Tyler Durdeen's plans to take down the main buildings of financial companies, clearing the debts of millions of people. The gist of it is that the global financial system is a symbol of consumer society, and must therefore be the principal target of the subversive movement. The narrator, aware that Tyler is an autonomous dimension of his own psyche, embarks on a mission to prevent Project Mayhem from advancing. The organizational characteristic assumed by the group is a kind of profascism; this opens a debate about its actual revolutionary character.

Appearing quite strongly in the work are the following themes: moral thinking in Freudian psychoanalysis (Durdeen is the expression of the narrator's *id*), Nietzsche's philosophy (Apollo vs. Dionysius, morality as oppression, subversion as freedom)<sup>21</sup>, the Marxist dialectic (capitalist society as the engine of human estrangement, the alienation of consumerism, the fetish of happiness and commodities, and freedom via revolutionary action)<sup>22</sup>, and Sartre's existentialism (individual actions always have social consequences, responsibility for moral conduct, and freedom's obligations).

The narrative style of the director is comprised of fast-paced montage in a rhythm akin to a music video, making it the most palatable film of CinÉtica's cycle and, perhaps for this very reason, one of the most worshiped. The dismantling of certainties and the possibility of constructing a new moral clearly exemplifies to the students the idea that morality is not a divine gift, but rather a form of human praxis, charged with historical traces and constituting a sphere imbricated in the society of capital. A proposal of ethical counter-hegemony, no doubt.

## 4.2. *Blindness*

Another literary adaptation, the 2008 film directed by the Brazilian Fernando Meirelles questions the limits of civilization in exceptional situations, in the same vein of the book by the Portuguese Nobel prize winner José Saramago. "White-blindness" becomes a global epidemic, and the state puts the sick into quarantine. The film takes place in one of the quarantine camps, where civilization gives way to barbarism, especially when the government abandons the quarantined to their own fate. The struggle for survival to meet the most basic needs represents a moment of ethical suspension. Under the rule of dehumanization, it is up to the only person still able to see – the doctor's wife – to act as a moral compass. The metaphor of white blindness alludes to the fetishized and reified world in which we live. An ocean of information clouds and obfuscates our cognitive abilities, with blinding clarity. This allegory points to alienation, as in people's lack of understanding of the world of work and the underpinnings of society. To see symbolizes being one step ahead: to perceive reality. The doctor's wife is thus the guide that leads the other

21. CHAUÍ, Marilena. *Convite à filosofia*. São Paulo: Ática, 2000.

22. BARROCO, Maria Lucia S. *Ética: fundamentos sócio-históricos*. São Paulo: Cortez, 2009.

characters into overcoming barbarism. As in Plato's cave, the seeing individual becomes responsible for the blind collective. Ethics presupposes this burden, and knowledge, as for the Greeks, is ethic's elixir.

The film succeeds in leading viewers to the realization that virtuous acts do not stem merely from individual character or belief in religious principles, but also, in a somewhat existentialist perspective, from freedom of choice. With the ability to see and the power that comes from it, the doctor's wife takes upon herself the task of ensuring collective welfare. Her commitment to others holds firm even through individual conflicts, such as her husband's betrayal. Capable of going beyond the misery of present society, possessing knowledge and virtue, she becomes an expression and synthesis of the morality necessary for survival. There is a risk that for the movie to be read according to the common sense interpretation that men are selfish by nature, and that humanity has no future. However, a deeper examination of the narrative shows collaboration and the building of solidarity as constituent of human nature and the pillars of a new society. The doctor's wife is the bridge between the world of barbarism and the world of a rational, welfare-bound society. The catharsis of the character is presented lyrically; the egotistic-passionate moment is surpassed, and ethical-political emancipation is reached<sup>23</sup>, leading others to recover vision. A range of issues stand out in this work of fiction, such as the social dimension of morality and its related factors (ideological, political, and economic life); the role of reason in the constitution of ethics; the undertaking of moral actions in face of the existing irrationalism; the fetish and the reification that characterize capital's sociometabolic system, and the gramscian catharsis. As a work of media culture, *Blindness* negates the dominant moral and intellectual orientation and proposes a critical reflection on contemporary ethics.

### 4.3. Dancer in the dark

Winner of the Palme d'Or in Cannes in 2000, Lars von Trier's musical is interpreted by the singer Bjork. She is Selma, an immigrant from Czechoslovakia working in the US in 1964. Contrarily to the doctor's wife in *Blindness*, she has a hereditary degenerative disease that makes her blind, and this deficiency leads her to virtue. To save her child from the same illness, Selma goes to the "land of opportunity," where she gathers money to pay for a cure offered by more capable doctors. Given the oppressive environment of the factory, only her daydreaming moments, in which she imagines herself a musical star, provide an escape from the aridity of everyday life. Her show, a dream world where anything is possible, contrasts with the character's dramas. Victimized by a policeman, who steals her savings – intended to secure his wife the farce of the 'American way of life' – the protagonist, at this point fully blind, ends up committing murder and being arrested. It is difficult to avoid sympathizing with her messianic action, since the police officer himself sees her as an agent capable of saving him from his spurious

23. GRAMSCI, op. cit.

and fanciful life. She accepts the death penalty in order to avoid losing the money intended to cure her son. The worker's chosen fate, her sacrifice, provides a lesson: injustices against the working class can no longer be accepted.

The moments in which the protagonist sings (even in the silence of the prison), illustrate the demiurgic role of art for the social being. Beyond mere dreaming, the alienated Selma, who sells her workforce at the factory, conquers agency by producing music. In the movie's final moments, her singing becomes a manifest: a song before the last song, which will not be sung, because we shall not allow so. The character is unable to fully reach virtuosity, due to the social whole around her. As Vazquez points out<sup>24</sup>, Selma collides with society's economic (the capitalist exploitation of her work), political (the police, the state, Justice, the political system), and ideological life (her musical daydreaming in face of market values). The film does well to exemplify the challenge of virtuous morality in the society of capital, and the abyss that separates the idealized discourse of morality and freedom and their concrete practice in such a society. With a scathing criticism of the Western way of life, the film has the working classes' social and moral experience as its central axis. *Dancer in the Dark* discusses important dilemmas and shakes the existing hegemony. Even though it is a work of media culture, its artistic values lead the viewer to a counter-cultural way of thinking. Once again, the contradiction between man and society and the mediation of society and its unjust system appear as nodules of the (im)possibility of ethics in earnest.

#### 4.4. *Mondays in the Sun*

The theme of the working class is also explored in Fernando León's 2001 movie, *Mondays in the Sun*. It deals with unemployment among shipyard workers in northern Spain, the effects of globalization and the structural crisis of capital<sup>25</sup> for the daily life of the characters Santa, José, and Lino. A lesson on the Marxist view on ethics and also an ode to working class solidarity, the film masterfully demonstrates the consequences of material life over human sociability.

In one of the film's scenes, a joke by the Siamese brothers can be read in terms of Lukácsian ethical theory<sup>26</sup>: when one of the brothers falls, the other falls along. To be ethical is to reach the human-generic dimension, an elevation only produced in its entirety by the concrete institution of a sociability, capable of providing concrete moral advancement. In a bar, the characters tell their stories, recall the moments when they went on strike and were agents of history. The characters suffer the pains of the class to which they belong, and seek each other's support in order to keep standing. The social struggle has ingrained itself in their imaginaries, and each one faces, in their own way, the consequences of unemployment, the difficulties of keeping a marriage, friendships, and social life.

The film is a clear example of an ethical counter-hegemony: a product of media culture capable of presenting a fair account of contemporary life,

24. VAZQUEZ, op. cit.

25. MÉSZÁROS, István. *Para além do capital*. São Paulo: Boitempo, 2002.

26. BARROCO, op. cit.

daring in its synthesis – which avoids propagandist political speeches – of the phenomenonic reality of today’s working class. The movie’s end, when the friends steal a boat, metaphorically represents the inescapable mission of workers: to take history by their own hands and guide it towards a world in which they will no longer be downtrodden.

Debate topics present in the film are: morality and history; the gap between moral discourse and concrete practice; human praxis as an expression of the dialectic between subject and object; neoliberal dismantling of welfare and productive restructuring as a scenario of desertification for humanity; the crisis of capital as a crisis of social institutions<sup>27</sup>; the challenge of a new morality, capable of empowering people into overcoming passivity and becoming agents of history. The film advances a perspective in which the current horizon of economic life is an obstacle to moral emancipation<sup>28</sup>.

## 5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The undergraduates’ reception to the movies and the ensuing monitored discussions demonstrated the impact of media culture on ideological and ethical formation. Although the selection of films privileged works that discussed social issues and had a counter-hegemonic character, movies of a more commercial and hegemonic character can also be debated. Our strategy, however, was to try to shake the current moral and intellectual orientation with films that negated the apparently natural character of prevailing customs; otherwise, we could end up reaffirming established morals.

With its commitment of demystifying ethics and expanding the student’s cultural repertoire while developing a reevaluation of current morality (seen as historical and social), *CinÉtica* was a successful pedagogical support. The experience allowed for a movement of diagnostic analysis<sup>29</sup>, able to cement abilities for the critical reading of media, elevating the active audience’s cognitive capacities to a high level of discernment.

Thus, difficulties such as the absence of a well-equipped exhibition room and the lack of cinematographic tradition in the municipality of Parintins (AM) notwithstanding, we believe that the exhibition of films in the classroom – when aimed at critical debate and complemented by academic content of proven relevance – is a vital tool in the learning processes of a generation captured by increasingly mediatized cultural practices. From this point of view, taking advantage of this technical medium as a starting point for philosophical reflection is an urgent need for teaching in higher education.

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27. MÉSZÁROS, op. cit.

28. VAZQUEZ, op. cit.

29. KELLNER, op. cit.

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