

Issue 49

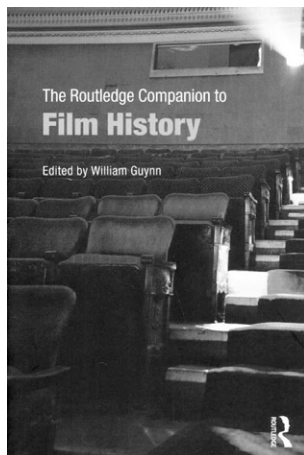
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The Routledge Companion to Film History, William Guynn (ed.), Routledge 2011, £18.99, 296pp, ISBN: 9780415776578

The blurb suggests this 'companion volume' could "serve as well as the central text, certainly in the study of film history". The claim is also in the Editor's introduction where he offers an 'analytic' approach as an alternative to narrative histories, "essential texts in film studies, but they tend... to overwhelm the beginning student." My feeling was that students need a map to follow as they investigate the long complex history of cinema. There are, though, other possibilities apart from the chronological. This book privileges the thematic though it also tends to the chronological in individual articles. The collected articles also attempt to provide overviews, including theoretical standpoints. But there are substantial areas of history that the volume is unable to cover in the space available. Generalisations on that basis tend to favour the established canons.

In fact, the articles form only half of the book, and the rest is given over a Critical Dictionary. This is helpful as many terms in general use suffer from rather varied usage: *mise en scène* and *auteur* are both examples of this. And whilst the contributors do sometimes themselves offer slightly different usage, the

dictionary clarifies this. But I felt that the analytical study alone required at least a full book of this size.

The writers all work in academic institutions, mainly in the US and the UK, and the volume appears to be mainly directed at undergraduates. It's low on jargon and generally provides specific examples to illustrate general points. The majority of the eleven articles take a theme and concentrate on one or more aspects from a particular period or sector of cinema. Two of the articles attempt a larger overview, Experimental cinema and Animation, but in both cases this tends to produce a listing of key works and filmmakers but not a great sense of what is actually constituted. The section on Documentary film restricts itself to Western cinema and this limitation works effectively.

However, this limitation operates to a degree over the whole book and is the main reason why I would suggest it is not suitable as a main text. The majority of the book deals with what might term the 'dominant cinemas' – European and North American mainstream and art cinemas. Indexes are always revealing. This book's includes *The Birth of a Nation* but not *Battleship Potemkin*. In fact, Sergei Eisenstein and his film do get a mention in 'Film as Art', and the director has several references in the Dictionary. But a standpoint that privileges D. W. Griffith's extremely problematic film is worrying. And there are only brief references to Third World filmmakers. Yasujiro Ozu and Ousmane Sembène both turn up in 'Filming 'difference''. But this article views them from the perspective of Western film industry and audiences. And here, as elsewhere, there is sparse attention to Indian or Latin American film.

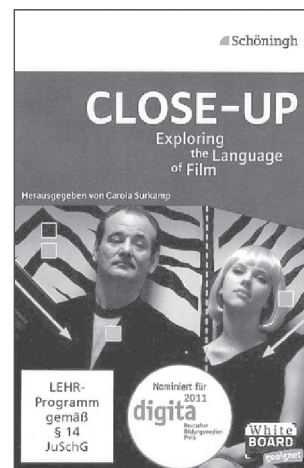
'Natural magic' places film within the larger context

of 'a short cultural history of moving images'. This is informative, though I think this approach misses out on the performance and spectacle aspects of cinema. The stages of the film production process is predominantly from a critical point-of-view. There is a detailed discussion of the issues of *mise en scène* and editing, but limited comment on actual techniques. The evolution of sound in cinema provides just this aspect in pretty good detail: welcome for an aspect of film that still needs much more coverage.

Making history through media ranges more widely than the rest of the volume and includes several individual case studies. The focus is the nation and war, including Stanley Kubrick, Derek Jarman and Ousmane Sembène [again]. The final article Inscripting the historical is about context, and specifically French film and issues of censorship. The last piece points to another major limitation: case studies have very particular contexts and often drawing parallels gives an emphasis to what is common at the expanses of what is different.

The Critical Dictionary is written by the same authors and generally an entry occupies about a page. As with the articles there are references and suggested further reading. Where most of the articles do score is in offering an overview, and a theoretical stance, and mostly with a fairly distinctive stance. So they should stimulate student study of particular aspects of film and the film industry. I would think they need some basic acquaintance with the area in question to benefit from this. Certainly that was my feeling reading the volume; in many places I was using my existing knowledge to contextualise and fill out the articles.

Keith Withall



Close-Up: Exploring the Language of Film (DVD-ROM) €36.99 from Lernsoftware at: <http://www.schoeningh-schulbuch.de/close-up> and [amazon.de: http://www.amazon.de/Close-up-Exploring-Language-Film-Lernsoftware/dp/3140624298/](http://www.amazon.de/Close-up-Exploring-Language-Film-Lernsoftware/dp/3140624298/) (NB. The installation instructions are in German but the language of the resource is English.)

Close-Up is an incredibly detailed and beautifully illustrated classroom resource. It is helpfully divided into 2 sections – 'The Shot' and 'The Cut' and, within that structure, the lexicon of the filmmaker is explored and explained in depth through an impressive range of well selected clips from an engaging array of films. It's easy to see how this could be projected on to a whiteboard and, through a number of interactive tools, be used for highly appealing and 'hands on' classroom teaching. The potential to explore and make all kinds of creative decisions is contained within this resource, from playing about with the colour palette to re-cutting and transforming well-known scenes from internationally regarded movies. In addition there is a large number of individual tutorials on specific techniques that take the user on a step-by-step walk-through a scene or shot with a simple click of the mouse

and are certain to deepen a student's understanding of the process in making meaning through film.

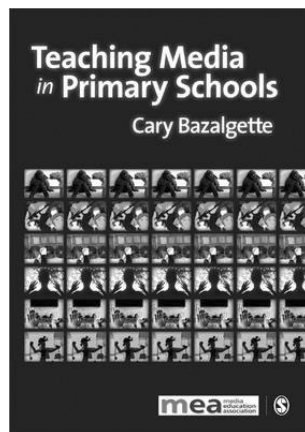
One of the most useful aspects of *Close-Up* is the way that it introduces new terminology through pop out windows. So while looking at the famous long take at the beginning of *Citizen Kane* you can find yourself, through a series of prompted button clicks, learning more about related issues such as proxemics, continuity editing or panning. And for each of these there is the possibility that it will take you off to yet more clips which illustrate and deepen your understanding of the *Citizen Kane* shot you began with. This is a feature likely to be extremely useful to any student of film.

Still, I have a feeling there may be a flaw in the design of this resource – if its intended audience is classroom teachers in secondary education that is – the flaw being that there is a feeling of overdesign: I have messed about with the resource for a week or so and am still finding it a little difficult and unintuitive. To use it properly I think I would need a good bit of uninterrupted study time to get to grips with the many icons and tools on offer as, without fully understanding these, I can't help but feel I am missing out on the full potential of *Close-Up*. This is a real shame as this is a brilliant bit of software which features 250 interactive clips from 153 original films but, for this reviewer, less might have been more here. There is a whole section entitled 'Creative Use' that I have not yet begun to understand how to use but again the potential is tantalising. I am reluctant to criticise something simply because I am yet to fully understand it so would simply say that this is a great resource for which you will need to set aside a serious amount of time to get

it running in the way that it is clearly intended.

My other concern is that it is likely to be way too resource heavy for practical use in my classroom. The basic requirements are for 7.1 GB of memory and 1GB of RAM and I would find this a) very difficult to make room for, and b) very likely to lag out and prove frustrating on my sluggish work PC. That said, the *Close-Up* resource would work brilliantly from a single, high(-ish) spec machine and would definitely be of massive use to any Media Studies teacher. I would also highly recommend it to the FE sector as I'm sure that the more complex materials provided would be of interest, in the main, to older students. It's a fantastic resource if you have the technical support to use it properly in your teaching.

There is an iPod/iPad/iPhone app costing £3.49 based on this product. Type <Close-Up Film Language Glossary> in the App Store.
Martin Cairns



Teaching Media in Primary Schools, Cary Bazalgette (ed), Sage 2011, £21.99, 152 pp, ISBN: 9781849205764

This is a welcome book. In recent years the combination of an explosion in the media industry and the sudden proliferation of powerful and affordable media devices has brought the subject of media education hurtling into every classroom. Once the sole

domain of those who had access to specialist training and specialised equipment, it now raises its head in almost every educational context.

In reacting to this development, two extremes evidence themselves amongst practitioners; at one end a confident use of both the technology and the context of media to deliver almost all learning and teaching, at the other a rejection of these new tools as 'faddish' or unnecessary. The majority of practitioners occupy the middle ground; perhaps seeing the 'greener grass' afforded by the new context but feeling unwilling to step across the bridge for fear of the 'trolls' that might be encountered in doing so.

Consequently, although media education is well established in national conversations about fitting the curriculum for the 21st Century, it is perhaps not as evident in the classroom as it might be. And so, this is a welcome book. In clear and practical terms the authors aim to inform and equip the practitioner to use the powerful context of media education in the classroom.

The book itself is concise and well organised, packing a lot into its 152 pages. Information is presented in an easily accessible format. It is divided into three main sections with nine chapters, each opening with clearly stated objectives and closing with practical exercises. Added to these are case studies, references and a good index, covering topics from 'advertising' to 'YouTube'. The style of writing varies from technical to anecdotal.

The authors (nine with a further three contributors) are all from education and, according to the potted biographies included at the start of the book, are all eminently qualified to write on the subject. Each chapter has a single author and the whole has been edited

together by Cary Bazalgette, a freelance researcher, writer and consultant specialising in media education development.

In her introduction, Ms Bazalgette defines the subject of media education well and gives a good summary of the important distinction between page-based texts (for example books and newspapers) and time-based texts (or example films and television). This distinction, and the outflowing ramifications, provide the context for understanding the real importance of media education.

The three main sections of the book that follow are titled 'Cultural Learning', 'Critical Learning' and 'Creative Learning', presenting the subject in a way that progresses naturally from passivity to activity, from experience to expression. 'Cultural Learning' covers experience of television, social networking and film. 'Critical Learning' focuses in on media analysis, whilst the section titled 'Creative Learning' looks at some practical aspects of using media in the classroom.

Again, this is a welcome book. Time-based media is an increasingly powerful and accessible means of communication and children need to be educated both in how to critically engage with it and in how to use it effectively as a means of creativity and expression. The authors and editor have written on this subject in an engaging and practical way and the presentation of the information is such that it would be very easy to use this book as a springboard for further, more detailed research. Using the book in the classroom, the practitioner would be well guided on the path towards employing relevant and engaging media education with confidence.

Simon West