

Screening the World in the 16-19 Curriculum

Student exposure to 'World Cinema' is patchy at best, with A Level centres suffering from lack of access to prints and background material and a possible reluctance by some teachers to tackle films which their students won't see at the multiplex. The new AS/A2 in Film Studies from WJEC promises to be a popular choice for an increasing number of schools and colleges (see the News section) and Keith Withall takes the opportunity to look at films on offer and how they might be used in Film and Media Studies.

The new Film Studies Syllabus

First, I want to make some general comments about the changes introduced by the new AS and A2 syllabuses. The current Film Studies syllabus from the WJEC gives a wide choice to teachers and students, since they can select all sorts of films as long as they fit within certain conceptual areas, e.g. genre, authorship, alternative cinema ... One obvious change in the new syllabus is that a degree of choice has been replaced by a number of set areas of study and set films. (See Appendix). For example, Studies in World Cinema contains five set areas under Film Style and Movements; plus a list of eleven set films for contemporary World Cinema.

There seem to be at least three definite areas of pressure at work here. First, QCA's emphasis on standards and a degree of uniformity. The problem is that there has never been a debate about what should constitute these standards. Secondly, the canonic judgements of film studies notoriously exclude certain films, only to see a succeeding generation elevate them to the canon. Thirdly, there is only a limited choice of films on offer in the British film and video market (see section on availability below).

The way the syllabus handles world cinema would appear to reflect the narrowness of UK film culture. This is equally true of television: there are less foreign language films on British tv than a decade ago. The flagship channel for this sort of film, Film Four, concentrates on English language

independent films, with a limited number of European Art films. The tendency is highlighted in the annual BFI handbooks – year by year the percentage of the overall audience watching foreign language films decreases (under 2% of box office in 1998). Claims that this reflects demand would stand up better if audiences had real access to such films. And given that film audiences tend to follow the pattern set by for theatrical release, this problem persists on video, on terrestrial tv and satellite. These limitations constrain the work of the authors of the syllabus, who seem to have put a great effort into creating as broad and international a perspective on film as restrictions allow.

The problems of such limitation can be seen in the choices offered by the syllabus. The AS Modules are built round Hollywood and British cinema. The possible choice is limited by the advice that;

“It is expected that the focus will be on films of a kind with which candidates are already familiar, especially Hollywood genre films.”
(WJEC Syllabus)

It will be an unusual class that has majority of students familiar with, say, Bollywood, or indeed other non-western options.

A2 has a wider range of areas, but it should be noted that it suggests viewing three films for any particular area, and nearly always sets one required text. Thus the first module under Film Movements is

1920s German and Soviet Film, with the set text as *Nosferatu*. What would you then select from a list containing Eisenstein, Dovzhenko, Pudovkin, Vertov, Shub, Kuleshov...? Contemporary World Cinema includes films from Africa, India, China, Australasia... but, the assessment is on the set texts. What if one wants to study Bollywood? You could fit some films in under FS6 Critical Studies, which includes issues of the Auteur and Indigenous Cinema – you might manage Amitabh Bachchan movies or Guru Dutt films, but not the Golden Age of Bollywood.

Two important points arise from this narrow, restricted access. One is that it is difficult for students to get a sense of the richness and variety of world cinema. In a society that is increasingly polyglot and/or multi-cultural this is an important point. Just as important is the lack of an understanding of how cinema develops. The cutting edge of film in the second part of the last century was undoubtedly outside the western metropolises. This was true of a substantial part of the New Waves of the 1960s. It applies to new Latin American Cinema, Sub-Saharan African film; the Chinese Fifth Generation; India's parallel cinema; and the new Iranian cinema. Even in commercial terms, look at the global clout in the 80s and 90s of Bollywood and Hong Kong. Quite a lot of the style and quality of successful films seems less innovatory when you have seen an original – compare *Pulp Fiction* to *A bout de souffle*. (see Lacey 1996)

If the syllabus does impose such limitations, it still remains important to offer students a wider and more varied film curriculum. It does offer a variety of access points for this sort of cinema, and contains some striking and stimulating films within the set texts. I want to suggest some ways that alternative films can be



The concept of 'World Cinema' is of course a concept associated with 'art cinema' in Europe and North America and 'Third Cinema' in other parts of the world where developing a National Cinema is an important political and cultural aim. As to what many people across the world actually get to see – that is a matter of distribution. In the bigger cities of Africa and Asia, where middle-class audiences expect the big American studio films, they will be shown, but elsewhere, as these wall posters in Morocco demonstrate, the choice is most often Bollywood, Hong Kong martial arts or American exploitation films (sometimes made in Europe). *Screen International* often carries trade advertisements for these films, especially in its 'film market' editions.

studied and related to conceptual areas. The three films chosen are all available on retail video and have been screened on terrestrial television. They are also films that a local art cinema or regional film theatre might be willing to programme and they represent areas of film production in addition to those set by the syllabus.

Screenings of these, and other, World Cinema films could benefit students studying subjects such as history, geography and modern languages (particularly French and Spanish) as well as Media Studies (the comments below about conceptual references are equally applicable to moving image analysis in Media Studies).

The Battle of Algiers (1966)

An Italian-Algerian co-production, *The Battle of Algiers* traces developments in the War of Independence in the city of Algiers against the French Colonialists from 1954 to 1962. There are some professional actors, but most of the cast are ordinary Algerians, including many who had experienced the war. Shot in grainy black and white, the film seems almost like a documentary and, though it is dispassionate in showing both sides of the action, it clearly supports the struggle of the Algerian people. It became a landmark in cinemas of liberation, and has been followed by a large

number of films that detail the struggles of oppressed peoples.

The dramatic focus is a small group in the FLN (the liberation organisation), but the activities of the French occupiers, including torture, are clearly presented. As a powerful dramatic rendering I would expect that student groups would find the film interesting and involving.

In terms of conceptual areas there are a number of directions that can be explored. It is an early and key film in what has become known as 'Third Cinema' – the oppositional cinemas of the colonised peoples. There are a range of parallel films such as *Blood of The Condor* (1968) and *Mapantsula* (1988).

One obvious area in the new Film Studies syllabus would be within FS5: 'World Cinema, Neo-Realism and Beyond'. The set text for this area is *Bicycle Thieves* (Italy 1948), but the suggestion is made that the influence of neo-realism can be explored. *The Battle of Algiers* can be related to neo-realism through some of its personnel, and its style and techniques such as an emphasis on location shooting, natural light, and flexible camerawork. Such production techniques are to be found in a wide range of filmmaking, in Latin America, India, Africa, and even today in the work of Ken Loach in the UK.

Both *The Battle of Algiers* and neo-realism can be related to the work of Sergei Eisenstein and Soviet Montage. The

Print availability

The three films discussed here are all currently available on PAL VHS in the UK and can be purchased or rented from MovieMail (see page 5). Centres should note, however, that video prints are sometimes withdrawn with little notice and if you intend to use a specific film, it is always a good idea to acquire a print as soon as it becomes available. Remember that 'retail' and rental videos are only licensed for private study. ERA licence holders (virtually every school and college) can use any off air material. Despite the growth of channels, there has been no increase in availability (but it is worth checking Sky, as well as Film Four, for foreign language films).

Video prints are much more freely available in North America but UK retailers cannot sell them in the UK. You must purchase via the internet (amazon.com etc.). Note that NTSC prints must be played on a compatible VCR and monitor (many modern machines can do this). DVD material is also much more available in America. The same restrictions apply and DVD players must be adapted to play Region 1 discs (the legality of this is in dispute).

Cinema prints of some of these titles do exist and it is well worth contacting your local art cinema to see if a screening is possible.

film contains powerful use of montage techniques; a tendency to casting by type, typeage; and the combination of naturalistic filmmaking with deliberate distancing comments and titles.

Other key concepts found in both media and film studies provide interesting questions for analysis. It is clearly a melodrama of protest, and as such is amenable to genre analysis (see Withall 1996). There are innumerable examples of this in both oppositional cinemas and the mainstream. In particular, *The Battle of Algiers* would make an interesting comparison with some of the Journalistic based studies of war and rebellion – *Under Fire* (US 1983), *Salvador* (US 1986) and *Welcome to Sarajevo* (UK 1997). This would clearly also raise issues of representation, and apart from the feature films, one could use examples of film and television news coverage of such wars. Contemporaneous material could be found in episodes of *The People's Century* and some of the BBC and C4 schools history programmes. A rather different and intriguing take on representation would be to compare the scene where Algerian women dress up as Europeans in order to plant bombs in the French quarter, with the 'warpaint' scene from the British film *Scandal* (UK 1988).

Both director Gillo Pontecorvo and composer Ennio Morricone are open to study as distinctive 'authors'. Unfortunately the only other film directed by Pontecorvo available is the cut version of *Quemada!* (1969). However, Morricone has a wide range of material in both alternative and mainstream films. C4 has screened a profile of his work. And the study of film music would provide a distinctive strand in film and media work.

Through the Olive Trees (1994)

This film is directed by Abbas Kiarostami, the most celebrated exponent of 'New Iranian' cinema. It centres on the making of a film in an earthquake-devastated area of Northern Iran. However, it also tells a simple love story. The film is shot with deliberate slowness, and makes extensive use both of the long shot (distance) and the long take (duration). It may prove difficult viewing for students used to the fast pace and cutting

of action cinema, but Kiarostami's



FLN leader, Ali la Pointe and his two companions hide in the Kasbah in the climactic moment of *The Battle of Algiers*

careful and delicate depiction is likely to develop attention and interest.

The WJEC syllabus suggests it as a title in 'Neo-Realism and Beyond', and other Iranian films released here, like *The White Balloon* (Iran 1995), would also be suitable. But Kiarostami includes modernist, non-realist techniques which asks the viewer to reflect. The film actually uses his earlier films, including a scene from *And Life Goes On ...* (1992) and an actor from *Friend's House*. This latter aspect could be developed in terms of the area of 'New Waves'. The set text here is *Chungking Express* (Hong Kong 1994), so it would be a case of discussing the contrasting styles and contents of Iranian films with those from South East Asia.

For genre, *Through the Olive Trees* fits into the category of 'films about making films'. Earlier classics include *The Bad and The Beautiful* (US 1952), and *La nuit americaine* (France 1973). The latter's plot uses a similar sequence, of having to reshoot a scene, and the contrasts points up the basic differences in these films.

Kiarostami's film demands some discussion of representation, since the cultural differences in courtship are likely to surprise or even annoy people used to western mores. But the representation of filmmaking is likely to be equally stimulating as a topic.

Kiarostami himself would fit into the *auteur* discussion. He is undoubtedly a

distinctive filmmaker – he scripted, produced, directed and edited this film. And a sufficient range of his films circulate in the west for comparative study.

The Scent of Green Papaya (1993) and *Cyclo* (1995)

I include a choice of films as the second is an 'adult' film. Vietnamese director Tran Anh Hung is French educated, and in some senses an outsider in his country of origin. The first film, although set in Vietnam, was filmed in France. It follows the life of a country girl, Mui, who goes into service in a Saigon household. The films deals with the 'problems of servitude', but also Mui's own growth and development, ending with her marriage. It would connect with films centred on women included in the syllabus – especially *The Silences of the Palace* (1994), also about female servitude and female development.

Its production history could focus attention on the relationship between indigenous film and the dominant film industries, an option in FS6. Note, here the study would involve the relationship between a European Colonial Power and an ex-colony. Two set films in the syllabus that raise the same issues are *Xala* (Senegal 1974) and *The Silences of the Palace*.

Cyclo follows the fortunes of a *cyclo-pouse* (pedicab) who



becomes increasingly involved in the criminal underworld of Saigon. The film has an 18 Certificate (as do some of the titles listed in the syllabus). It is a violent film, and certainly disturbing. Arguably, this is one of the merits in studying the film. It would fit into the New Waves section. The action films from Hong Kong and the New Hollywood of Tarantino and Rodrigues all raise issues about representing violence. *Cyclo* offers a rather different take on both violence and sexuality. Much of its disturbing nature arises from the unconventional presentation. In fact it would make a fine text for another area of Critical Studies: 'Shocking Cinema'. Also, for the following option that deals with Censorship. *Cyclo* would appear to be premised (among other things) on the assumption that exploitation needs to be seen, not just described. An interesting point for debates on what we should or should not see and hear.

Both of Hung's films have a strong sense of style. Note though, the style is essential to the content of the films. Discussions of this could lead into the discussion of representation. But could also be used to study questions of technique and style itself.

The Film Studies Syllabus contains other areas of interest, as do the Media Studies syllabuses from OCR and AQA. One promising area for World Cinema would be the study of Documentary, for which television provides a sizeable and varied selection. It requires teachers to think about alternative possibilities to the fine, but so familiar 'classic' texts. Let's hope this will offer students a greater range and stimulation, it also is a small but important pressure for wider choice and selection on film, video and TV.

One last point. The argument above is (obviously) ideological. But it aims to counter some of the ideological arguments that the syllabuses presents as unproblematic. The WJEC syllabus ends with three specific notes – on 'Spiritual and Moral Issues', 'Environmental Issues' and 'the European Issue'. These are obviously part of the wider climate of curriculum change rather than being specific to Film Studies. So it's a sad reflection on the dominant educational ideology that it still fails in

third cinema revisited an analysis and an evaluation

A series of one day conferences on World Cinema for teachers, students and anyone interested in oppositional cinemas.

Africa Day

14th April 2000

09.30-16.30, Hall Place Studios, Leeds

The day will cover Frantz Fanon, the films of Ousmane Sembene and Djibril Mambety, the South African Film Industry Details from Ali Hussein, tel & fax 0113 283 1906

email: info@hallplacestudios.com

website: <http://www.hallplacestudios.com>

Latin America Day is tabled for 5 May 2000



Ceddo (Senegal 1977, directed by Ousmane Sembene)

2000 to include issues of imperialism (i.e. economic dominance) and racism.

Appendix on the new WJEC Syllabus

The AS is made up of three modules:

FS1: Film, Making Meaning 1

FS2: Producers and Audiences: Hollywood and British Cinema

FS3: Messages and Values: British and Irish Cinema

A2 also has three modules:

FS4: Film, Making Meaning 2

FS5: Studies in World Cinema

An externally examined module with two essay questions. Question 1 requires centres to select one film movement, from which students must study three films in detail, one of which must be the 'focus' film. In addition, students must write in detail on one film from the prescribed list of twelve (i.e. including *Xala* and *Silences of the Palaces*).

FS6: Critical Studies

Bibliography and Filmography

The Battle of Algiers (La Battaglia di Algeri)

Italy/Algeria 1966 b&w runtime 117 mins

Director Gillo Pontecorvo; scenario

Franco Solinas; cinematography

Marcelllo Gatti; music Ennio Morricone

and others. Available from Tartan.

Quemada (Burn 1969), in a cut version,

has appeared on terrestrial television.

Through the Olive Trees (Zir-e zeyton)

Iran 1994 colour runtime 104 mins

Director Abbas Kiarostami; scenario

Abbas Kiarostami; cinematography

Hossein Djafarian; music Mahmoud

Sanak Bashi. Available from Artificial Eye; plus two other titles, *Close-Up* (1990) and *Taste of Cherry* (1998).

The Scent of Green Papaya (L'Odeur de la Papaye Verte) France 1993.

Directed by Tran Anh Hung; screenplay Tran Anh Hung; cinematography Benoit Delhomme; music Tiet Thon-That.

Cyclo (Xich Lo) France/Vietnam 1995.

Directed by Tran Anh Hung; scenario Tran Anh Hung; cinematography Benoit Delhomme; music Tiet Thon-That

Available from EVS.

The Oxford History of World Cinema edited by Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, Oxford University Press, 1996 is a good resource.

The Oxford Guide to Film Studies edited by John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson, Oxford University Press, 1998. Again a good resource, but complex in parts.

Film History: An Introduction by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, McGraw-Hill 1993. There is very little not covered here, and well covered.

Third World Film Making and the West by Roy Armes, University of California Press, 1987 is very strong on culture and politics, nothing more recent has replaced its wide coverage.

Questions of Third Cinema eds Jim Pines and Paul Willemsen, BFI 1989. See the article by Clyde Taylor Black 'Cinema in the Post-aesthetic Era', essential reading.

itp Film Reader 1 1996, see Nick Lacey, 'Pulp Fiction – Back to the Future' and Keith Withall, 'Discourses and Tears – Movies and the Townships'. (See advert on Page 5)