

is well shot; in fact, it is strongest when King uses the camera to depict the natural and fecund beauty of the New England landscape. He seems to juxtapose the blossoming of the scenery with that of the two female leads; indeed, this is a sophisticated device that could have been explored further to the film's benefit. *Daddy's Girl* is ambitious, to say the least; it covers a time span of approximately fifteen years in the lives of two young girls, necessitating using two actresses each for the roles of Sarah and Becky – no small feat for an introductory film project. And it is this ambition that, at times, weakens the whole: the scope of the story is simply too large to do justice to all the issues that King tries to tackle. But he shows great promise as a storyteller; to date, *Daddy's Girl* has collected Best Drama at the New York International Film Festival and Best Director at the Los Angeles International Film Festival. His next feature, *Deception* (currently in production), is certainly something to look forward to. One hopes, however, that he harnesses the talent of other experienced film technicians for his future projects so as to soften some of the rougher edges of his methods and refine, overall, his film style. Kudos to King and his troupe, though, for making feature film-making more family friendly and fun. For information about *Daddy's Girl* and Dennis King's other projects, please visit [www.sironastudios.com/index.htm](http://www.sironastudios.com/index.htm). ●

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## Features

# Film as a radical pedagogic tool



Above Third Cinema  
Influence: *Who Am I?*

By Deirdre O'Neill  
and Michael Wayne

Keywords: Inside Film, radical pedagogy, prison, crime, class

### Introduction

*Once the dispossessed and powerless have access to the means of information they can no longer be misled by Establishment bullshit. And that in itself is a revolution. (Patrick Watson)*

THE TITLE OF THIS article flags up the complexities inherent in the following discussion. It refers to film in its most complete sense as praxis, where the categories of theory and practice are integrated. Pedagogy is



## Feature Inside Film

concerned with education, not only in the conventional model of knowledge transmission and acquisition but as a reaction to our environment and how we respond to what we find there (Biesta 2006: 27). Thus film as praxis attempts to contest the structural weight of the power concentrated in elites and to create opportunities for the underprivileged specifically by fostering a critical engagement with the structural and ideological underpinnings of the media in our neoliberal corporatist world. Therefore film as a radical tool refers to the meshing of film and pedagogy as a force for social and political change.

Crucially any radical pedagogy must acknowledge that the relationship between the teacher and the student(s) is not a neutral one but one that can liberate or domesticate (Paulo Freire). This recognition is more urgent when the students have been systematically disempowered by wider social structures and inequalities. These thoughts on film as a radical pedagogic tool are grounded in a film-making project that took place in HMP Wandsworth. The location of the project inevitably inflects the questions that this radical film pedagogy must deal with in the direction of questions around crime, considerations of criminal behaviour, education practice in prison and the purpose it serves.

The students who took part in the project are excluded in many ways – ultimately by their status as prisoners – but this is pre-empted by their pre-prison identity as working class, black, unemployed, homeless, uneducated, drug users, etc. We do not use the notion of social exclusion in this instance as a catch-all expression to present the inmates as a homogenous mass who remain invisible behind the prison walls. Arguably the discourse of social exclusion functions to negate the issue of social class and unequal distribution of wealth, putting in its place programmes to include those previously excluded in the social/cultural life of the country but on terms that do not question that exclusion in the first place (Cultural Policy Collective 2004: 6).

The aim of this project was to explore the potential of a radical pedagogy of film as a way of providing working-class offenders with an education that fosters the development of a critical awareness around issues of identity (classed, gendered and racial), cultural representation and ideology. Len Masterson has argued that a media education is a matter of some urgency (Masterson 1985: 10). In fact he has gone so far as to call it a matter of life and death (Masterson 1985: 6), not least because the media has the power to shape our perceptions and our ideas not only of others but also of ourselves.

There has always been a dialectical relationship between pedagogy, politics and the media and the primary motive of this article is to foreground this relationship in ways that offer new frames of reference for thinking about all three. In order to do this it is important to recognize that

a quarter of a century of neo-liberal policies have resulted in changes in the environment in which ideas about democracy circulate (Dahlgren 2007). Not only have we witnessed the dismantling of the public sector in the name of progress, so that its functions can be handed over to the corporate sector, but we have also seen the democratic decision-making process become corporatized so that most decisions that affect the lives of ordinary working people are based not on their welfare but how advantageous it will be for the market. In the last two decades we have seen a progressive criminalization of the working classes and the insistence on the functionalism of culture so that the arts must prove that they are 'value for money' as defined by the bureaucratic collation of quantifiable measures. The media landscape itself has changed dramatically over this time, becoming more concentrated into fewer hands, more deregulated and with the advent of the Internet much more disseminated (Dahlgren 2007). The availability of relatively cheap media technology has, if we think about it optimistically, made the media more accessible.

### Inside Film

The Inside Film project ran for five months in HMP Wandsworth from August until December 2006. The project attempted to act as a counter hegemonic intervention utilizing popular culture within a particular strand of the media (film) as a vehicle to develop a language that is analytical and adequate to understanding the social determinants that impact upon all our lives. With funding received from UnLtd we were able to purchase laptops and editing software, three palm-held cameras, basic recording equipment and tripods. Like all advances in access to film production this project was made possible by new technology – most specifically the ability to edit films on a laptop – this facilitated those who do not usually have access to the media to participate in all stages of production. The prison governor gave us permission to run the project for two evenings a week in a room that was usually used by one of the prison social programmes. Due to financial and institutional constraints we were only able to accommodate 20 students. All the funding we received was spent on the equipment, which meant that everyone working on the project (professional actors, writers, academics) did so on a voluntary basis.

The project ran camera and editing workshops followed by idea sessions that involved scripting, storyboarding and casting. But before these practical sessions, the first six weeks or so explored the theoretical and historical aspects of film and film-making. It is our contention that without this grounding the students taking part in the project uncritically mimic the established filmic practices they are familiar with from watching mainstream mov-



ies and television. This insistence on the theoretical and historical is not a sterile educational requirement but a recognition that we exist in a world where we are constantly bombarded with media images and that in order to make sense of those images and the purposes they serve, we need to be able to engage critically with them.

To create a space in which the potential of the students to produce original and thoughtful work is realized they require a critical media literacy. It is essential to recognize the role played by the media in the transmissions of ideas about the world, other people and our own sense of identity. A theoretical underpinning of the practical work involved in the film-making process allowed those taking part in the project to understand how media images are constructed, how those constructions are linked to questions of power and legitimacy and how they can use the media to document and articulate issues in their own lives or create new ways of looking at the world. Of course working in a category B prison we were very limited as to where we could film. We were confined to the one room that had been allocated to us and all exterior shooting had to be done by members of Inside Film who were not inmates. It is a testimony to the creativity and ingenuity of the inmates involved that all the films though filmed in the same space looked so completely different.

For most of the inmates taking part in the project their previous experience of education had been one of alienation and disconnection. Education institutions mimic the hierarchal structures of dominance and subordination found in society at large and these are the very structures the inmates have rebelled against and become casualties of. Their marginalized position in society and their status as prisoners effectively function to exclude them from any participatory role in the public sphere. Warehoused away from law-abiding citizens, their right to self-representation does not exist.

An alternative media model to the current neo-liberal one where ownership of the media is concentrated in fewer and fewer hands, would increase access and participation to allow those voices currently disenfranchised the opportunity for self-representation. This participatory model of the media is one that Inside Film is committed to whilst at the same time being aware that such a commitment raises profound moral, political and social questions (ones that we do not have the space to discuss here).

Although the project was hugely successful with all those who took part and has inspired some of the students to want to carry on with film-making when they leave the prison (and in the case of one student serving a life sentence to try and secure funding to make a film whilst he is in prison) we have been unable to secure further funding.



'For the duration of the project the inmates demonstrated a solidarity and sense of common purpose, which only people mutually committed to each other, and to a common goal, would be capable of demonstrating.'

### The films

When the films were completed, they were screened at the very first Wandsworth Prison Film Festival. We produced five films. One was a documentary (*The Wandsworth Way*) about the project itself, made by Inside Film. The other four were short films (10 to 20 minutes) scripted, storyboarded, acted in, directed, shot and edited by the inmates taking part in the project.

For the duration of the project the inmates demonstrated a solidarity and sense of common purpose, which only people mutually committed to each other, and to a common goal, would be capable of demonstrating. They worked within their own groups and across each other's groups acting in each other's films and offering technical and at times emotional support. This collective outlook we could argue is the most important effect of the project. In a climate where the neo-liberal goals of competition and profit orientation permeate education, culture and the arts, the egalitarian practices of Inside Film placed the tools and experience of cultural production in the hands of those excluded from such experiences, and it also promot-

ed a sense of collect

Who Am I? is an an... by the traditions of... connections between... film-makers use an... ing a series of dram... probe the question... material drawn from... suggests links betwe... war in Iraq, and the... the United Kingdom... about the way we live...

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## Feature Inside Film

ed a sense of collectivism amongst all those who took part.

*Who Am I?* is an angry and passionate film influenced by the traditions of Third Cinema. It attempts to make connections between personal identity and society. The film-makers use an unconventional approach, mixing a series of dramatic vignettes in which characters probe the question of identity, with montages of found material drawn from print and television news. The film suggests links between international events, such as the war in Iraq, and the struggle to survive on the streets of the United Kingdom. The film also poses vital questions about the way we live our lives and the choices we make.

Another film, *Deathwatch*, deals with the commodification of pain and suffering by a deregulated media where profit and viewing figures are the most important consideration. A tragi-comic mockumentary, it charts what happens as a group of documentary film-makers follow the last hours of a man condemned to be executed live on the Internet in a not too distant future. The film is very knowing about how 'justice' is constructed and represented to the world outside the walls of a prison and very perceptive about the inequalities of knowledge, power and opportunity which allows the condemned man to be manipulated by his corrupt lawyer and the executive of the company that has bought the rights to screen his death. The film engages with contemporary arguments around the fine line between documentary and reality TV.

The third film produced by the inmates was *The Interview*, a kind of reworking of *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946). Following a car crash the driver wakes up in a bureaucratic celestial court where his life's deeds are represented by two opposing forces (God and the Devil, both represented by women). The accused himself is not permitted to contribute to the arguments, suggesting the way in which disadvantaged people are not allowed a voice to represent themselves. Again this film deals with perceptions of right and wrong and the basis on which judgements about people are made. Thus the Devil, who is trying to claim the man's soul, always looks at an apparent 'misdeed' in the narrowest way, while God always looks at the issue in context.

The final film, called *Change*, is a moving narrative about the possibility of turning one's life around within the prison system. The film traces the journey of one of the inmates as he comes to terms with his crime and the effect it has had on those who care about him. His determination to address his offending behaviour results in him taking part in a rehabilitation programme and dealing with his drug addiction. The protagonist's main support, however, comes from his fellow inmates who have experienced the same problems in their own lives.

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### Defining a radical pedagogy

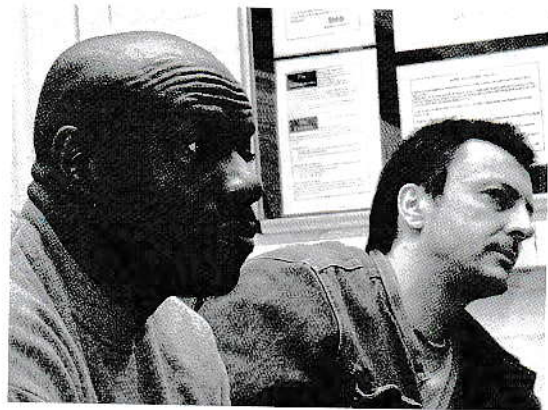
It is difficult to define the components for a radical pedagogy of film, partly because one of the components of that radicalism is its contextualization. The ability to function radically depends crucially on a flexible approach to difference and the willingness to adapt to different people with specific needs in particular situations whose experiences are specific to them. This works against the contemporary neo-liberal discourse of globalization which, whilst suggesting a democratic interdependence within the global economy that considers all people as equal, functions to submerge specificities and to construct a universal subjectivity – that of the consumer (Biesta 2006: 105). As Biesta argues:

... global capital threatens the opportunities for different ways of being a subject, different ways of leading one's life and of being human, it tends to make one contingent subject position – the subject as consumer – into something that is inevitable and has almost become natural; a mode of subjectivity for which there is no alternative. (Biesta 2006: 105)

The vast majority of 'crime' is constituted by attempts to illegitimately fund consumption. In practice, only certain types of people are penalized for this illegitimately funded consumption. Most prisoners are from the working classes and/or ethnic minorities and the discourse around crime remains firmly focused on the behaviour of the poor and the dispossessed and those without the power to change things. The actions of those with money and power are not classified as criminal and if they are, the perpetrators receive fairly lenient sentences, which they carry out in open prisons. In fact in 2005 corporate frauds in the United Kingdom were running at £72 billion a year whilst VAT frauds cost the Treasury £5 billion in lost revenue (Sim 2006). As one commentator noted:

politicians ... stay stoically silent with respect to crimes committed by middle class 'respectables'. The constant barrage of publicity around benefit fraud compared to the ongoing silence around middle-class fraud and income tax evasion, remains the classic example of how the crime problem is ideologically constructed by the majority of politicians, media commentators and state servants. (Sim 2006)

Therefore, working in a prison we needed to take on board the conditions of the people in the prison, their experiences and life histories and move away from the vacuous universality that encapsulates educa-



'A democratic society should include, in ways not dictated by the marketplace, the voices of those historically marginalized by mainstream society.'

tion provision in contemporary society. This includes a consideration of how working-class children and working-class experiences are pathologized leading to a negative experience of and relationship to the education system (Reay 2001). This negative experience of education often forms a working-class subjectivity that is angry and resentful against authority while at the same time consigned by the institutions of education and the market to poverty and marginalization.

Antonio Gramsci theorized that the working class are aware of their exploitation and their disadvantaged position compared to other classes under capital. He claimed that their lives are marked by the contradictions and antagonisms inherent in capitalism but that they are often unable to articulate their discontents in a constructive way. Rather, their hostility and aggression is channelled into (at best) reformism or more negative and individualized areas such as crime (Landy 1994: 14). In the experience of Inside Film, many of the inmates see the 'choices' they make as an expression of resistance to the life they might otherwise lead. This is not to suggest that crime is an act of political rebellion. Crimes as they are committed by the working class are often committed as a matter of survival or as a way of reaping the perceived material benefits of a capitalist society that your race and/or class position excludes you from.

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Film studies is extremely marginal in prison education, reflecting long-established (class) biases towards traditional arts subjects (literature, drama, art). One of the assumptions that we worked on was that because the inmates taking part in the project were very familiar with Hollywood cinema and were well aware of its codes and conventions (even if they would not refer to them as such) we could utilize that familiarity as a starting point. By building on already established student skills with and knowledge of commercial and mainstream visual culture we could use them as stepping stones and not see them as stumbling blocks. This acceptance of the validity of the cultural forms they valued functioned to increase the confidence of the students whose leisure activities are often dismissed by education and art professionals who attempt to impose their own concept of (high) culture onto an uninterested working class. A radical pedagogy must start from a point that recognizes the ways in which education within a capitalist society oppresses and reproduces hierarchal relations and reinforces class divisions.

### Film in higher education

It is important to acknowledge that we are not referring here to the promotion of popular culture by middle-class academics and their appropriation of the popular to their own careerist ends. Popular culture became integrated into film studies in the late 1960s and 1970s and was part of the radical impetus aimed at validating mass cultural forms including TV, pop music and, of course, film, but has since been absorbed into the area of identity politics that has institutionalized the marginalization of class politics (James 1996). The opportunity these forms afforded working-class youth to construct a cultural identity not imposed on them from above has been neutralized by an academic elite who utilize the study of the popular in their conservative institutions far removed from the people who actually engage with these forms. The possibility of a more egalitarian cultural landscape was destroyed by the Thatcher government from 1979 and since then the teaching of culture and cultural provision has been placed firmly back into the hands of a university-educated middle-class elite whose very existence is dependent on the cultural inequalities that sustain their jobs and which they do very little to challenge (Cultural Policy Collective 2004).

In the tertiary sector higher education increasingly functions to serve the needs of employers. Students have become consumers in search of a degree whose main purpose is its use as a bargaining tool in the marketplace and which prepares students to take up their ideological role of conformity to the status quo in a capitalist society.

There is not space to go into a history of education in the United Kingdom but it is sufficient to point out that

since the provision of free universal education the number of children from manual working-class backgrounds who make it to university has barely changed in 60 years. And if they do get there they find middle-class educators and a student body firmly ensconced within hegemonic education practices and ideological beliefs. Although there has been an expansion of media courses in education over the last 30 years, their institutionalization particularly within the university sector has resulted in a top-down delivery presented by the professional expert that privileges the tastes of the middle classes, tastes that are often irrelevant to working-class people. The professional academic exists in a parasitical and self-interested relationship to popular culture. Working-class students also find themselves in an environment where on the whole the teaching of media has become severed from any broader commitment to social change and where a television programme like *Sex and the City* can be claimed as a 'revolutionary text'.

### Conclusion

Economics, culture, politics and education all serve the overarching interest of the market and have become so entwined with it that it is almost impossible to distinguish one from the other. When university courses in film-making include 'pitching' and 'networking' as part of their teaching programme, it is safe to say that the corporatization of university-sector pedagogy is complete: its goals are market driven and any hope that education can be utilized to emancipatory ends is diminished.

The democratic project of Inside Film was a contradictory one, taking place as it did within the prison and being funded by a scheme that promoted the rather contradictory notion of 'social entrepreneurship'. Basically this meant that after our initial award we needed to become financially sustainable. Of course we could not do this as we had no product to sell. It also meant that the projects funded by the first-level awards had to compete with each other for further funding and demonstrate their sustainability in the marketplace. This insistence on financial sustainability and entrepreneurship only reinforces the corporatist logic of the market within the area of cultural and social provision and does nothing to solve the problems of structural inequalities. Neither does it offer such programmes as potential models of social transformation. We were part of the very structures and system we sought to challenge. Did we end up: 'project[ing] an illusion of civility and democratic practice that ultimately has a civilising influence on the market and state rather than create a genuinely free space where political agency might be articulated and lead to a political project' (Fenton 2007: 228).

This is a problem we still struggle with. The Inside Film project was not an experiment, nor did we wish to



## Feature Inside Film

institutionalize class difference, always a danger when 'professionals' carry out projects like this with under-privileged groups. We worked alongside the inmates, the project belonged to them and the films were theirs. We take no credit for the films produced, nor do we wish to deny the limitations of what we achieved.

A radical pedagogy of film cannot be left to the mercy of the market. The situation that exists at the moment means that projects like Inside Film are competing for money in the marketplace through grants and charities while central government slashes the money going into the public sector. These projects should not be forced to compete with each other. Long-term funding should be put into place. A democratic society should include, in ways not dictated by the marketplace, the voices of those historically marginalized by mainstream society. Inside Film only involved a few of the prison inmates in the film-making project. We cannot claim to have made a substantial difference to the lives of those caught up in the prison system. But considering the project optimistically, for five months we created a democratic space that acknowledged the cultural and economic inequalities involved in education and the media. We attempted to intervene and recognize these inequalities rather than accept them. We attempted an alternative model of media involvement that moved away from the hegemonic notion of the professional and attempted to democratize film as a form of communication and creativity. Maybe for those five months we created a disjuncture that demonstrated the potential for a rearticulation of the dominant discourses around pedagogy, politics and film. ●

For more details of the Inside Film project visit <http://www.insidefilm.org>. The films will be shown at the COMPASS OF RESISTANCE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL, taking place in Bristol in November, with some of the film-makers present for discussion. For more information visit the website of the event: <http://www.compass-film.co.uk>.

### Contributor details

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