

Tanya Jones takes a look at ***Fifty Contemporary Film Directors 2<sup>nd</sup> edition*** edited by Yvonne Tasker. Routledge 2011. £16.99

My expectations were high for this new edition of *Fifty Contemporary Film Directors*. My 2002 edition had been thumbed through on countless occasions, both in the classroom and for personal reference and was now looking distinctly battered. So, it was with one eye on classroom use and another on my personal film library that I started to review this book. The Yvonne Tasker edited Routledge Key Guide did not disappoint.

For 'A' Level Film Studies students who have chosen an Auteur perspective for their A2 Research project, this type of guide is invaluable. Alphabetically organised, *Fifty Contemporary Film Directors* is very easy to navigate. Students can see at a glance whether their chosen director is featured and are then presented with a short (enough), but comprehensive (enough),

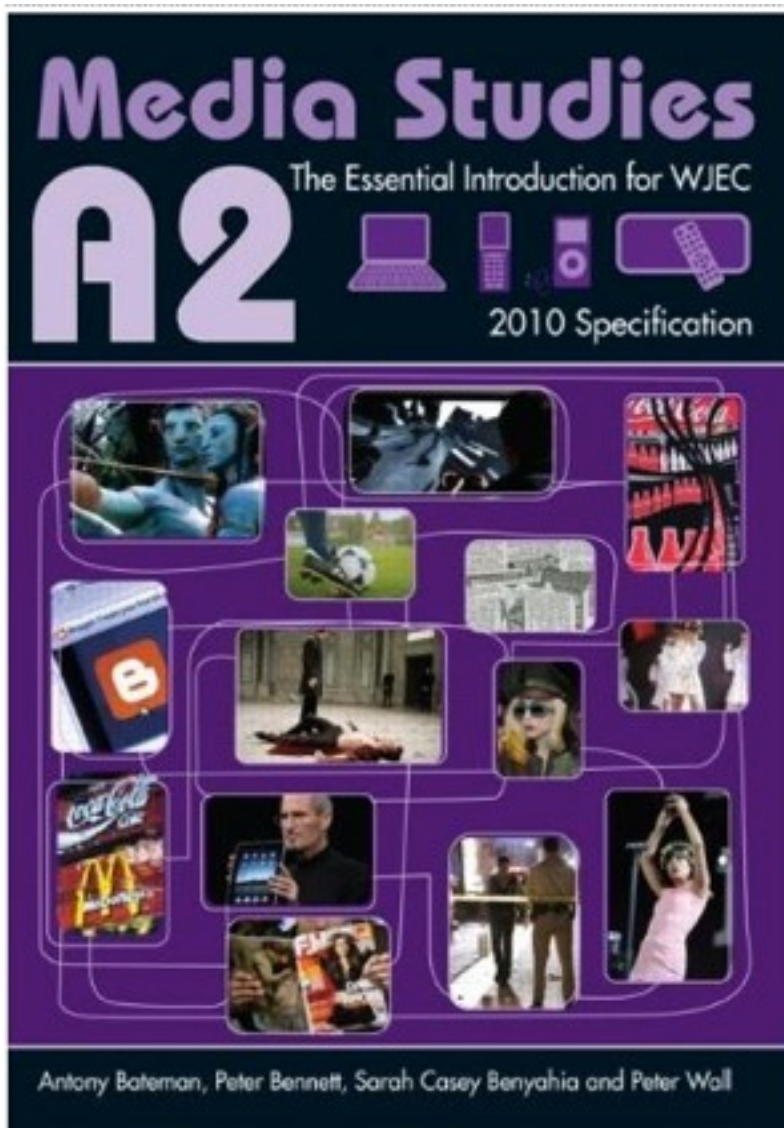
essay that introduces them to the key features of that director's work. This guide does not only offer students a potential introduction to one director, however. The structure of the individual essays and the reference sections that end each chapter also provide a framework for potential study.

If a student were about to embark on an investigation into a particular director, they could do much worse than to note down the different types of information and comment housed in each chapter and then use it as a generic research structure. For each featured director, the reader is given a chronological evaluation of the director's films. Themes are discussed, as are technical signatures and institutional information. The chapters also contain detail of relevant collaborations, critical response and theatrical release. Some chapters use other film critics/ academics to discuss or substantiate their points and this, too, can offer students an example of how to use substantiation effectively. Clear links are made between the films discussed and contrasts in critical/box-office success are evaluated. There are mini critiques of the individual films which could act as a springboard for a student's own investigation of a particular film. Each chapter ends with a biography of the director, notes, a filmography and further reading; all extremely useful and a prompt to extend discussion of the chapter's featured director beyond what is contained in the section.

For students, teachers and any other interested reader; this guide provides a stimulating insight into fifty directors working today. As the title of the guide acknowledges, what is contained is a selection and as with any selection, an informed reader will find omissions. Where is Michael Haneke, for example, or Alfonso Cuarón? Julie Dash is African/American and creates films that challenge standard/stereotypical representations of black women, but her films are not products of the African film industry or necessarily about what it is to be an African in Africa. However, this is a somewhat redundant and reductive criticism, if the breadth of coverage that is evident is good. The selections made are contemporary and although the 'old guard' of film auteur anthology, ie Lynch, Cronenberg and Burton, are in evidence, what is written about them is often fresh and doesn't re-run the same readings of their work. Lynch's 'poetics of weirdness', for example, are addressed as they often are, but Marc O'Day's chapter also examines the relationship between the director's neo-romantic vision and his surrealist 'palette'. The majority of the directors selected for this guide are, however, male and although this, to some degree, reflects attitudes to gender and female directors within some national cinemas, the weighting towards male rather than female filmmakers in this guide, would be perhaps my only criticism.

Directors have been included who are popular with filmgoers today, but do not necessarily have the amount of critical appraisal attached to them that could begin an academic or more personal investigation. Shane Meadows and Sofia Coppola both have chapters, as does Michael Moore. The chapter on Meadows presents various useful ways in which his films can be seen to have a signature, including discussion of a recurrent motif of the intrusive outsider who has a disturbing impact on the safe social groups that exist at the beginning of the films. Queer cinema is also represented with a study of Greg Araki's films, in a very interesting chapter by Glyn Davis that discusses the impact of Araki's work on the Road Movie genre, as well as identifying the part his films play in the discourse about how gay identity is constructed and perceived. Iranian cinema has its advocate in the guise of Abbas Kiarostami and Sharon Lin Tay's excellent chapter on this director presents a case that the mainstreaming of New Iranian Cinema is a productive counter-point to stereotypical depictions of hardship and violence, rather than a diluted representation of 'the truth' about the country.

Having a wide range of different critics writing within *Fifty Contemporary Film Directors* keeps the tone of the book varied and fresh. Although one way of reading this type of guide is to 'dip in' for the reading of one chapter, it is an interesting exercise to read through several sections and hear the different critical voices and the different critical frameworks evident. There is a fluency of register and tone across the guide that allows for a variety of critical voices, without losing unity. There are 12 new entries in this 2011 edition of the guide that marks it as a clear revision of the original version. There are fresh critical readings and a real sense that the guide is deliberately engaged in a discourse with, rather than just an homage to, the directors and films discussed. The language used is academic, but not abstruse or pretentious. Obviously, this collection endorses an auteurist perspective, but this is neither prescriptive nor offered without challenge. As with the first edition, I would buy it to use in the classroom, but would also make sure that I had my own copy at home. Thoroughly recommended.



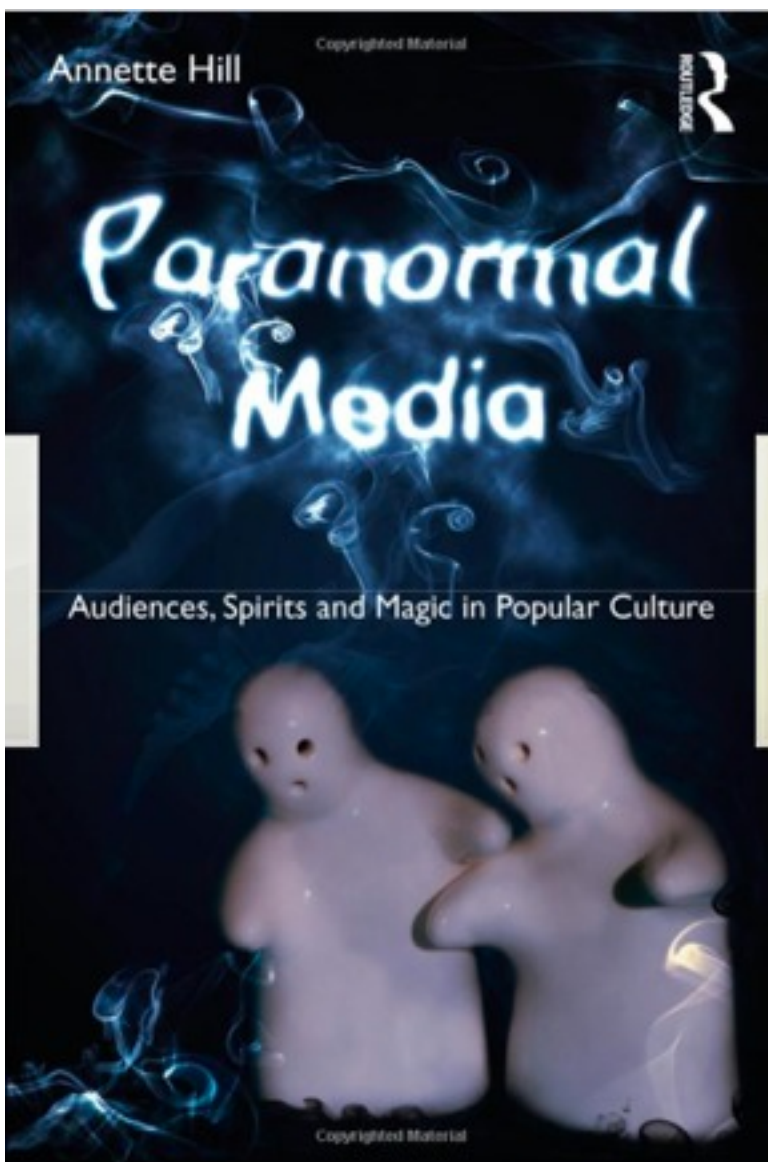
Steve Murray considers *Media Studies A2: The Essential Introduction for WJEC* by Antony Bateman, Peter Bennett, Sarah Casey Benyahia and Peter Wall, published by Routledge 2010. £19.99

This is a comprehensive student textbook, covering in detail the requirements for the coursework unit MS3 and the examined unit MS4. As in all titles produced by Routledge for WJEC media and film specifications, the book is well laid out with full colour pages featuring well-illustrated contemporary texts. Each chapter contains a variety of activities, although the majority of students will need lots of additional teacher input beforehand if they are to be completed in a meaningful way. The book is divided into two parts: the first focuses on media theories, concepts and issues with an initial focus on the key concepts of genre, narrative and representation. These chapters are concisely written and serve as an excellent introduction to the concepts. Further sections on developing textual analysis and theoretical perspectives are also insightful, although it is true to say the first half of the book works as a general

introduction to A2 Media Studies and could be read by students of any of the three specifications on offer at A level.

The second half of the book focuses more sharply on the two WJEC units featuring a number of case studies. These are helpful but one slight disappointment is that teachers delivering both WJEC's Media Studies and Film Studies specification will see some crossover in the material featured in the equivalent book for Film Studies. For example, the section covering film as a choice for the MS4 exam features a case study on gender and horror, which in many ways mirrors a case study used for British horror in the title *Film Studies AS: The Essential Introduction for WJEC*. While this may not matter much to many teachers, I teach a number of A2 Media Studies students who have picked up AS Film Studies in their second year. As I teach British horror for AS Film Studies, this means I am unable to make use of the case studies in the A2 book. However, it is true to say that case studies generally exist as a starting point and the studies in each of the four areas that can be chosen for the MS4 exam provide an excellent introduction to teachers to the requirements of the specification. A companion website, shared by resources for the AQA specification, contains lots of useful resources to download but this is an open access site and is not protected by a username and password given to those who buy the book.

Overall, this book is ideal for students studying the WJEC course but as always with Media Studies textbooks, the title clearly has a shelf life and it's unlikely I'd invest in multiple copies. For example, the newspaper case study section contains circulation figures up to August 2009 and mentions only that Rupert Murdoch plans to construct a paywall around his on-line titles. Twitter is referred to simply as an "innovative" website and there is no reference at all to the iPad or the existence of the Independent's new publication 'i'. Case studies on Jordan and Peter Andre, Cheryl and Ashley Cole and references to computer games titles such as Just Dance and Football Manager 2010 (both since superseded) remain relevant in the short term but will quickly begin to date and be replaced by better examples. This is not a criticism of this title in general, more an acknowledgment that the ever-changing nature of our subject means it is impossible to make long term investments in textbooks that won't date.



Andrea Joyce reviews '***Paranormal Media: Audiences, Spirits and Magic in Popular Culture***' by Annette Hill Published by Routledge 2010. £21.99

This book is an immersion into how the paranormal has transformed from being a specialist area of interest that the 'mainstream' either viewed with suspicion or scepticism to something of significant interest to the mainstream, the new fascination. As a result of this shift culture has begun to encompass this new interest and many industries have capitalised on this change.

The first chapter '*Ordinary and Extraordinary*' discusses the nature of paranormal experiences, paranormal beliefs and paranormal ideas and the problematic nature of differing definitions of these key terms. It is very much an introduction to the need for and rationale behind the book.

Chapter Two '*Spirit Histories*' is a fascinating insight into 'spirits', the representations of spirits throughout history and the role that photography and then cinema had in that trajectory. For example the early 'trick films' of the

1890s like George Melies '*The Vanishing Lady*' (1897).

Chapter Three '*Paranormal in popular culture*' is a riveting read that explains how the paranormal has shifted to become a part of lifestyle and entertainment. What becomes

strikingly obvious to the reader, particularly in this chapter, is that Hill's work is underpinned by empirical research undertaken with over 70 individuals in the South East, the results of which permeate all of the conclusions that Hill comes to in the nine chapters. There is also a very interesting overview of the research conducted in the appendix. This is quite insightful for many students wishing to undertake any kind of empirical audience research.

Another notable merit of this book is that it is extremely well researched and is informed by many noted cultural theorists, like Raymond Williams as well as numerous other, very varied insights on the reason for this growing interest in the paranormal. The myriad of sources used by Annette Hill illustrates the far-reaching nature of the phenomenon of the paranormal.

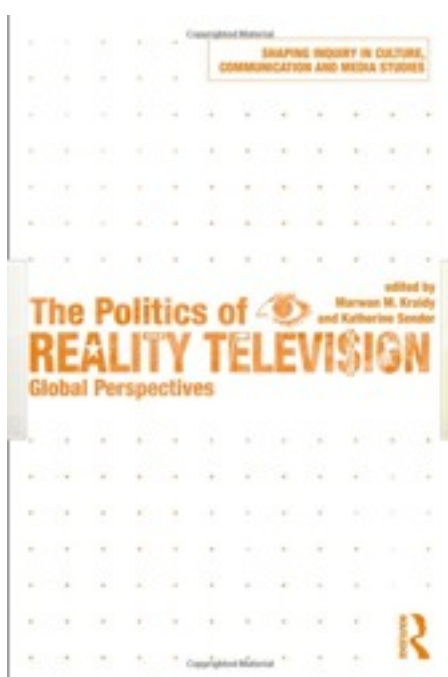
Chapters four to seven, Hill states in the introductory chapter, are "thematically driven case studies of the cultural and sociological practices associated with paranormal beliefs and ideas" (P17). Chapter four focuses on ghost hunters and uses well known TV programmes such as 'Most Haunted' to explore the paranormal in reality TV. Chapter Five looks at the phenomenon of 'psychic tourists', chapter six at personal experiences of the paranormal and issues of authenticity and trust in the media. Chapter seven examines Derren Brown's contribution to paranormal beliefs.

Chapter Eight brings together the idea of the audience producing their beliefs by participating in the culture of the paranormal. This is a highly informative chapter on the nature of audience and could be read and then applied to other areas of the media in terms of gaining a fuller understanding of the relationship between audience, cultural practices and belief systems.

Chapter Nine is a highly informative and fascinating section on the nature of people's fear and anxiety of death and how it explains some of the fascination with the paranormal. It is one way of being part of one of life's greatest mysteries, what happens to us when we die.

I found her discussion of the reasons that the paranormal fascinates people extremely interesting, informative, highly academic yet still very accessible. It is a detailed account of the development of interest in the paranormal and how that has manifested in culture itself.

It states at the beginning of the book that it is for undergraduates or postgraduates with an interest in this area, I would definitely agree that this book is not particularly suitable for A-level students across the board. It is however, very entertaining and educational for someone who has no particular specialist interest in the topic, which proves that it is extremely well written.



Mark Readman discusses ***The Politics of Reality Television: Global Perspectives*** (ed. By Marwan M. Kraidy and Katherine Sender) Routledge 2010 £21.99

Reality Television is a term which, as Nick Couldry argues in this collection, "is more than just a series of texts or generic variations", but something which "needs to be understood as a form whereby objects, mechanisms of representation, and people...are arranged so as to sustain claims – plausible at some level – that social 'reality' is presented through these means".

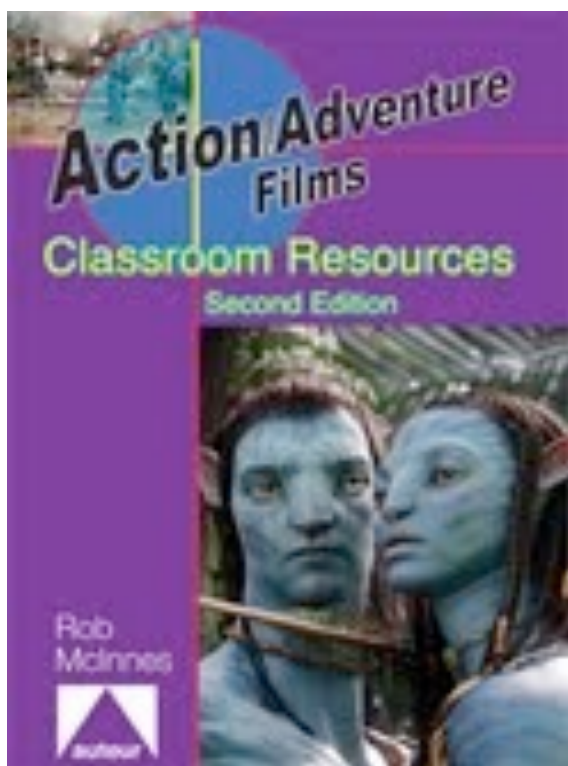
This thesis underpins all of the contributions in this book and indicates that the word 'politics' in the title relates not just to ideology, but also power and economic relationships within professional and social networks. The strength of this position is that it enables us to move beyond the rather static arguments about whether or not reality TV shows 'represent reality' and, at best, the contributions here resist 'explaining away' the features of particular shows by attributing them to particular monolithic causes.

Occasionally this commitment to 'decentring' slips slightly – where Bourdieu is favoured over Foucault as a theoretical touchstone, for example, analyses of identity production tend to be elided with class *reproduction* – but there is a range of fine-grained analysis of particular programmes within in particular contexts of reception. These contexts include specific, micro conditions of TV viewing, and also macro national stages.

The 'global perspectives' are extended beyond the usual terrain of UK and US TV in the Balkans, India, Norway, South Africa and Singapore, all of which are used to illustrate and render 'other' the ideological underpinning of neoliberalism which, arguably, obtains in reality TV formats. The tensions that are revealed when a 'global' format, which depends upon particular versions of the self-determining individual, plays against particular ideologies of national identity, makes for fascinating reading.

Similarly, the alternative perspectives on the nature of 'labour' in 'surveillance formats', such as *Big Brother*, *Voyeur Dorm* and *Sorority Life*, raises questions about the nature of work and exploitation, even in situations where it is voluntarily offered. Useful connections are made here with social networking sites, such as Facebook and My Space, in which emotional and creative work are freely offered, but 'exploited' for commercial applications; variations on Marxist economics and 'feminised labour' are explored in relation to this.

The book is neatly structured in four sections: Producing Identity, Laboring the Self, Performing the Nation and Migrating Economies and the 20 authors provide some genuinely fresh perspectives on how we might make sense of Reality TV. The academic register means that it is probably best suited to postgraduate or undergraduate students, but media teachers will be able digest these ideas for A level and GCSE students in order to offer questions and approaches which enrich a key area of inquiry.



Holly Taylor takes a look at **Action/Adventure Films: A Teachers Guide: Revised Second Edition** by Rob McInnes, published by Auteur 2010 £18.99

The second edition of this book comes from Auteur, beginning with a detailed introduction discussing the difficulties in defining such a complex genre; it becomes apparent to the reader that the book will be just as thought provoking as it is educational. This genre debate is informative and up to date, linking well with the A2 specification, particularly the Production Evaluation element of the G325 exam where students must discuss the genre of their own work. McInnes highlights early on the wide variety of films that fall under this genre, from the

*The Mark of Zorro* through to the more recent and highly successful animation *UP*, and the issues faced by the industry in promoting them in a variety of ways to appeal to both genders. McInnes also ventures into recent television developments such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

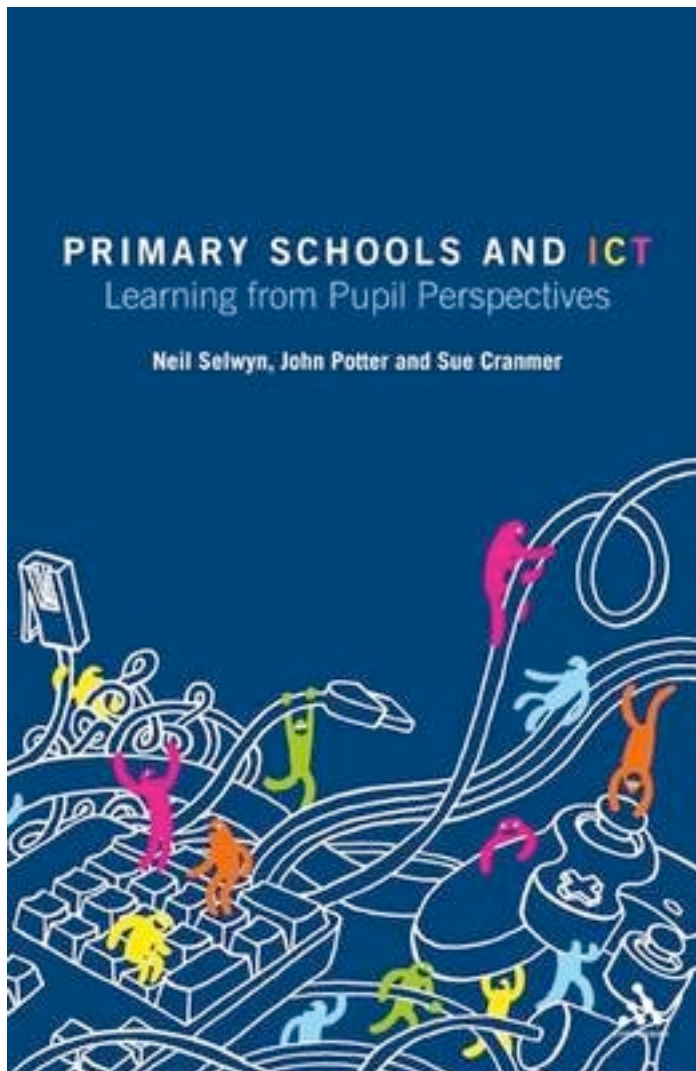
The book contains 'An Annotated Action/Adventure Chronology'; this is an extensive catalogue of films from the genre with brief details on the inspiration and production background of each. The chronology is divided into different time periods, each with a description of the industry context enabling the reader to understand the challenges and developments of the time (this is developed further in chapter five). The discussion of these wider issues links well with wider areas of the Media Specification, for instance Institutions and Audiences. As well as individual films the book looks at franchises such as the Rambo films, which would be useful for case study material.

McInnes also places information throughout all chapters in easily accessible chunks, for instance text boxes are used to highlight key terminology and sub headings are used to separate essential theory from the main body of the chapter. Theories are simply broken down and then applied to a key text for ease of understanding. These make great resources to pass on to the classroom.

The third chapter, 'Formal Features of Action/Adventure Movies', has a detailed review of the micro elements in this genre. These are then analysed via several examples, McInnes' analysis of an extract from *Jaws* is thorough, with the DVD chapter provided this would be an excellent exemplar to use in the classroom at any stage of the A Level programme to boost students' ability to deconstruct a text.

The final chapter of the book is a new element to the second edition, bringing it fully up to date. This chapter looks at the development of fantasy franchises in a post 9/11 industry looking to provide escapism, discussing the successes from re-launched franchises such as Batman's *The Dark Knight* and Bond's *Casino Royale*. McInnes also discusses the impact of technological developments and the expectations this places on the industry, as audiences become used to spectacles such as *Avatar*.

Although the title of this book would suggest it focuses on one genre, there are many sections that hold educational value for numerous units of the A Level specification; it is packed with information that varies in range and depth and links soundly with the activities and resources also available from Auteur.



Seon- Jeong Ki examines *Primary Schools and ICT: Learning from Pupil Perspectives*, Neil Selwyn, John Potter and Sue Cranmer, published by Continuum 2010 £24.99

This insightful book based on a yearlong research project should surely inspire teachers, ICT co-ordinators, school leaders and primary education stakeholders to make changes to, or at least to tweak any existing ICT practices in primary schools. It seems more insightful and more challenging as it gives an unusual and invaluable opportunity to listen to pupil perspectives on how ICT is being used in schools and how it could get better. More than 600 pupils in five different primary schools carefully selected to demonstrate the typicality with some variation of primary schools in England — two inner-city schools in London, two suburban schools in London, and one in a small town in the West Midlands — were involved in different phases of this research. Their views and voices were being reflected and heard in a variety of research activities: filling in a simple questionnaire,

discussing and debating ideas and opinions with and without adults, drawing ideas for future change of ICT in school, and expressing ideas on the specially designed website used exclusively for the research subjects by writing stories, making short video clips, and submitting drawings and digital images.

From the outset it makes a clear yet firm statement about the main thrust of this book. It is 'not a manual on 'how to use technology in the classroom', nor does it offer a complete overhaul of primary ICT. It rather aims to seek for ways in which primary ICT could be 'improved, re-imagined and reinvigorated so that children and teachers no longer see the classroom as technologically inferior to the rest of their lives'. Working along with the main priorities of the primary school on a daily basis, this book goes further to suggest five proposals for change to primary ICT to make informal, innovative and imaginative forms of ICT use happen.

This book generally forms a research paper, beginning with the rationale for the research project followed by a series of research questions, brief description of the actual research including its methods and research subjects, then explicating and analysing the data collected along with its research findings, finally concluding with suggestions. Yet two notable features appearing throughout the book make it more accessible and easier for readers to refer to later. It provides an 'Overview' that succinctly sums up what each chapter is about and what it aims for. It also offers 'Key Issues' (Ch 1, 2, 3, 4, 7 and 9), 'Points to consider' (Ch 5, 6 and 7) and 'Five proposals for change' (Ch 9) distinctively

presented in a box so that all the important issues discussed, some points to think about, questions to debate, and last but not least a five-point agenda for change primary ICT use are highlighted.

The first chapter provides the background to this research project. It identifies a series of big priorities that constantly challenges primary ICTs and demands an appropriate response: the priority of keeping up with the rapid development of our modern life, particularly relating to computer technology, to which primary schools are expected to respond accordingly; the priority of keeping up with children known as 'digital natives', with demands for their school environment to equate to their technology-saturated lifestyles; the priority of public expectation that epitomises an economic driving force to produce future skilled workers for society and parents' aspiration to their primary schools fully equipped with the latest technology; the priority of education policy where the maximisation of investment in technology in primary education is central. Chapter 2 demonstrates what primary ICTs promise to bring about for pupils — the allegedly beneficial improvement of learning — and, by contrast, what it fails to deliver. It argues that there have been ongoing technological deficiencies in primary ICTs to achieve these potential benefits of ICT use at school. Primary pupils experience relatively low-tech ICT resources and rather a rigid and limited in-school use of ICT. This growing digital gap between primary schools and their pupils has created the need for schools to improve their everyday practice of ICTs.

To set the scene, Chapter 3 describes a detailed procedure of this research: a set of research questions to address, a description of sampling subject schools, of different phases of the research, and importantly of its analytical methods. It lays out two main aims to achieve in this project:

- investigate the experience of primary pupils in using technology for (in)formal learning;
- help pupils to imagine ways in which technology could be better used in schools in the future (p.43)

It is followed by eight research questions that help readers figure out what this project sets out to address more specifically, and later identify to what extent it has achieved what it promises to achieve:

- What was the technological background of primary pupils in terms of their access to ICTs?
  - How were pupils using computers and the internet in school and out-of-school settings?
  - What ICT applications did pupils favour in schools and at home? Conversely, what aspects of ICT did they not like?
  - How did pupils think ICTs influenced the way they learnt, both formally (i.e. learning related to school work) and informally (i.e. learning not related to school work)?
  - What changes to ICT provision and practices within schools did pupils see as desirable?
- What types of ICTs did pupils imagine could be developed in the near future, and what forms of learning could they lead to?
- What qualities/capabilities of current ICTs would learners like to see continued, and what new qualities/capabilities would they like to see developed?
- How did pupils' ICT uses, perceptions and opinions differ by factors such as their gender, age, and school attended?

An extensive and rigorous analysis of data is demonstrated for the following four chapters. Chapter 4 focuses on the comparison between school and home in terms of pupils' use of ICTs drawn out of the survey. Types of pupils' access to ICTs outside school and types of activities using computers within the school at different schools attended are separately presented in graphs. There was a clear difference between these different settings in what pupils do with ICTs available to them: they play computer games more at home than at school, whereas they regard the school-based use of ICTs as a tool for writing things. Pupils used ICTs at school differently by their age and year group: the more ICT use in databases and spreadsheets from Year 3 through to Year 6, and the decrease of ICT application in making pictures, using CD programmes, digital cameras, scanners and playing computer games as they approached secondary school. It is interesting to note that games were the most favoured ICT applications in and out of school, although their use of ICTs in and out of school in general was not as strikingly unusual or spectacular as it is believed to be.

All the views and elicitation of the pupils involved in a series of discussions with and without adult researchers as regards to how they see ICT at school and at home are presented in Chapter 5, which reinforces the overall findings of the previous chapter: the digital disconnections between pupils' schools and homes. Pupils' described ICTs inside school as boring, less inspiring and constrained, whereas their experience of home-based ICTs — mainly to do with playing computer games, watching videos and searching for new information — was enjoyable although this was not always true for some children.

This chapter is followed by the most interesting aspect of this project: the pupils' (actual) drawings of their ICT use in the near future. It offers a snapshot of how they see the present use of ICTs at school and in what ways they think it could be improved. These drawings of a desired future use of ICTs inside school again point to the differences between the ICT use at school ('work') and the home-based use of ICTs ('fun' or 'play'). They further depict the school-based ICT provision as restricted and formally structured, yet still they identified a clear boundary between school and home when it comes to the types of ICTs available and permitted in each setting.

Chapter 7 deals with pupils' understandings and experiences of handling issues of risk and safety when using ICTs. It demonstrates the e-safety provision of different study schools and pupils' responses to e-safety-related questions by school, gender and year group. Although pupils were well aware of ICT-related risks and dangers, they tended to exaggerate their fear of risks during their use of ICTs. Their personal experiences of actual risks were rather related to operational problems that they would face when using ICTs, far remote from the e-safety agenda officially set in schools. In this respect, it seems appropriate to ask for reconceptualising pupils' poor and quite abstract concept of e-safety.

It is worth taking note of the penultimate chapter, as it does include teachers' views on ICT use in primary schools, which has not been dismissed in this research adopting a 'learner voice' approach. Having acknowledged little knowledge of what pupils use ICT for — generally 'the communal, communicative and creative aspects' (p.131) — teachers identified an increasing gap between some pupils' experiences of ICTs at home and those at school. They admitted that they had to attend firstly to demands of local authority and national policy, which pushed the use of ICTs at school aside. Yet still they pointed out the need for staff training and development to make them a

competent, confident, and comfortable ICT user who could then integrate ICTs into their teaching practice. They finally identified changes that might be difficult to achieve and those that would work successfully and usefully to the provision and use of school ICTs. The five-point suggestions in the final chapter are welcome and useful in the sense that the research findings were translated into a more realistic and down-to-earth set of plans. These suggestions mainly aim to create a dialogic, democratic, and comfortable zone of using ICTs where teachers act as orchestrators and managers of pupils' ICT use, and where pupils are to develop 'critical digital literacy' alongside their 'media literacy' (p.157)

The only drawback that I identified when reading through the empirical chapters is that there was relatively a lack of detailed analysis of pupils' engagement with internet activities at and between the study schools, which is argued to 'vary significantly by pupils' gender, age and school attended' (p.65). At the beginning of the empirical chapters it is clearly stated that the subject schools were specifically selected considering different pupils' backgrounds, which made me expect more meaningful comparison and contrast between different schools in terms of various analytical points as much as I could identify differences in gender. Yet this aspect would not seem to do any harm to the essence of this inspiring book.

This book is mainly for teachers, school leaders, ICT co-ordinators, and primary education stakeholders, who would be placed under pressures from the growing expectations of parents and policy makers for primary education with the most up to date technology and its wide and active use. Yet it can be stretched much farther to school governors and even parents like me, who not only have an interest in the general welfare of their primary school, but also in discreetly and indirectly influencing school policies, to keeping our eyes wide open on how the use of ICT is managed, operated and improved. If you think that most academic books are incomprehensible and hard to approach, you'd better change your view, as this one is very readable and easily accessible.



Pete Fraser took a look at the **Routledge Film Guidebook- Westerns** by John White Routledge 2010 £16.99

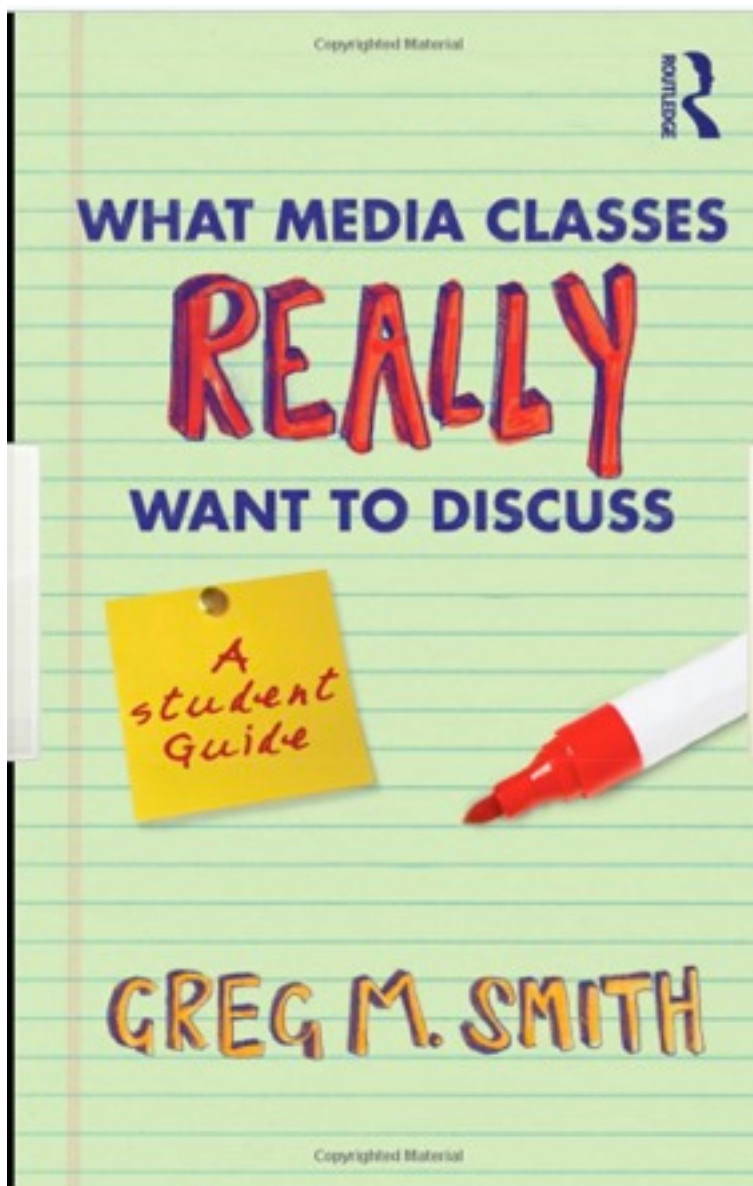
Some people would argue that the Western has had a bit of a revival recently, especially with the popularity of the game 'Red Dead Redemption', but in a sense it's never gone away; it's one of those genres that males in particular store away in the back of their minds, then bring them out when some trigger goes off (Pun intended). For me it was seeing my 11 year old son playing on 'Red Dead' that made me introduce him to Clint Eastwood a few months ago, in turn leading onto both modern films like 'The Quick and the Dead' and back to the 50s with 'High Noon' and 'The Searchers'. It reminded me of first watching westerns on black and

white TV in the 60s, from *The Virginian* through to John Ford films and then late night in colour with my Dad in the 70s, seeing the Leone Westerns for the first time.

So I was interested to see this useful little guide. It surprised me. The cover lulls you into thinking you are going to get a cut-down version of a coffee table book, but actually what you get is a really well written and researched application of a wide range of theoretical perspectives applied to the genre. I shouldn't have been surprised, as John White is a sharp thinker with a detailed knowledge *of* and passion *for* film.

The book takes a very different approach from most guides to the Western. It sets out to analyse some key examples but also to systematically apply an exhaustive range of approaches to a number of other examples and to place the films in context with an historical and institutional context. This approach contrasts with that of many other guides which either simply repeat myths about the west or tend to focus entirely on iconography. Here the approach is to mix genre analysis with the full range of theoretical traditions in Film Studies: semiotics, representation, ideology, discourse analysis, narrative structure, realism, auteur, star, psychoanalysis, postmodernism and reception theory are each applied to at least a couple of different examples in each case, giving the reader a real sense of how different slants might help us in our reading of films. As White suggests, this might lead the reader on to try out some of these approaches to other genres too, which would certainly help deepen our understanding.

The book starts with a really interesting institutional history of the genre, looking at studio output and the changing face of the genre from the very early days of film-making right up to the present day. This was very well researched and I learnt a lot from it. The middle part applies all the theoretical approaches across films ranging from 'Bad Day at Black Rock' to 'Dances with Wolves' reminding me of the old BFI slide packs from the early days of school Film Studies teaching when a sprinkling of diverse texts was often the starting point for semiotic work on genre. The more detailed case study examples come in the last part of the book, with the eight 'Key Westerns'- 'Stagecoach', 'My Darling Clementine', 'Shane', 'The Good, the Bad and the Ugly', 'McCabe and Mrs Miller', 'Unforgiven', 'Brokeback Mountain' and 'The Assassination of Jesse James ...'. My immediate impulse was to start trying to name a different top eight, but of course that isn't the point of the section; so many films are unpicked throughout the book, that these eight are just slightly more in-depth examples to cover the ground. White's analysis of them is always succinct and well argued, making the reader want to delve a bit further and especially to come back and see the films again.



Andrea Joyce took a look at *'What Media Classes Really Want To Discuss, A Student Guide'* by Greg M. Smith published by Routledge. £14.99

This book purports to be nothing like your average discussion guide. Having never read an average discussion guide, that didn't give me much of an idea of what to expect. I do however have a good understanding of what some of my student's find difficult and that is articulating some of their views on areas of the media they have never discussed in a critical sense before.

When starting a Media Studies A-level some students' discussion skills would be more akin to arguing with their parents over the merits of *Skins* or *Misfits* because they just *like* them. Discussing how they are somewhat representative of the adult world's fears of what happens to youth when it is over exposed to life's Bacchanalian excesses doesn't come quite so naturally to them.

I instantly liked this book because it deals with one of my bugbears straight away. "We're reading far too much into this", is one of the common statements made by

students of film and television studies. The very first chapter in this book sets about justifying the activities of TV and film analysis. It discusses it from the perspective of the director as well as the audience of the film; it examines how meaning is attributed to moving images and how analysis can kill the pleasure of watching a movie. I often have to give apologies to students who come into class and state that they can't watch television in the same way anymore.

The rest of the book is split into three parts:

Part One: Discussing how media work.

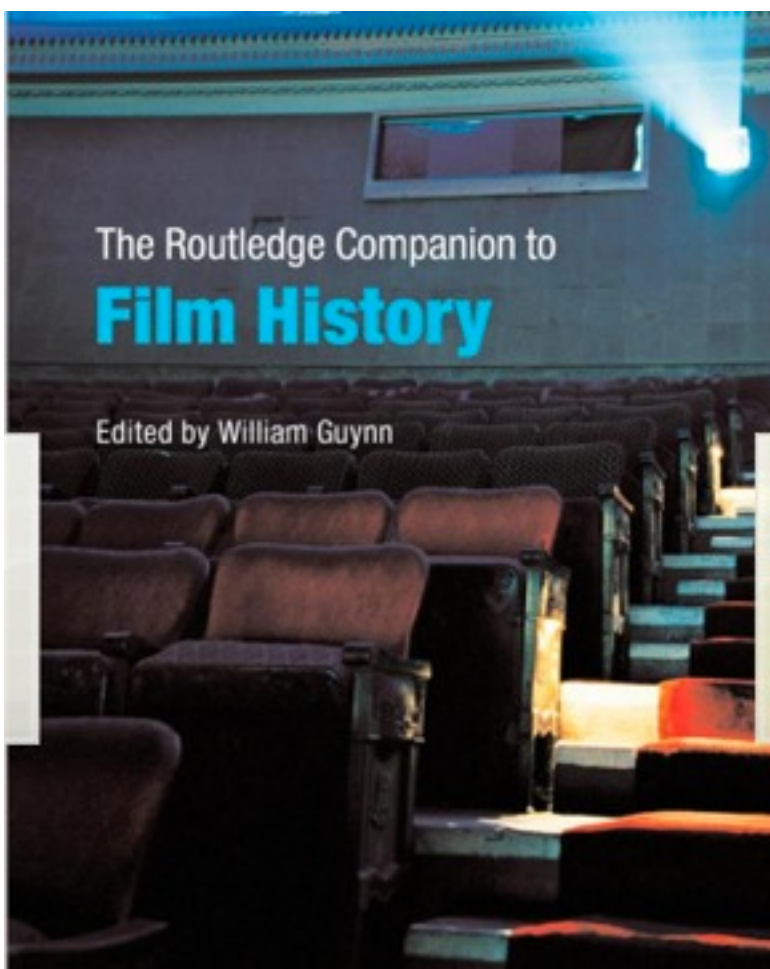
Part Two: Discussing media and society.

Part Three: Discussing media's future now.

Part one offers a very interesting discursive paper on the nature of realism in film, as well as a very insightful paper on how we identify with characters. That paper does an excellent job at picking apart the process of identification and spectatorship. It is an excellent introduction to understanding the relationships that viewers have with texts. The last paper in this part of the book is on genre or 'genre shmenre' as Smith terms it. This is an extremely comprehensive introduction to the concept of genre, one that I will be referring to, and using, in my upcoming A2 lessons on genre for Section A of G325 Critical Perspectives. It does a superb job at breaking down the concept, questioning its uses as a critical tool and offering some alternatives to classical genres.

Part Two of the book tackles what feels like one of the oldest media debates, the 'effects of media violence'. It does so in an extremely detailed and methodical fashion by stripping down different research methods and questioning the interpretation of different types of studies and their differing results. It is a great way of exemplifying the need to justify and quantify evidence before assuming a definitive answer to a question such as 'does violence in the media cause people to be violent in real life?' This is another chapter I am fairly confident I will be using to help communicate to my students the importance of building a carefully structured argument in response to a question. The next paper in this part of the book is on role models and stereotypes. Another brilliantly useful resource to assist in getting students to understand how the media uses innate knowledge of stereotypes to create a 'us and them' scenario, whether it is the evil them or the funny them and why it is even relevant to understand the construction of the 'other'.

Part Three begins with a thoroughly absorbing account of the nature of media and our relationship with different mediums. It effortlessly weaves in theoretical perspectives on the topic in an easily accessible fashion. The second and final paper in this part of the book is on interactivity. It discusses the concept in a general sense and then begins to offer some context to it by talking about it within the framework of the passive audience looking for easy entertainment after a busy day, I have to confess to enjoying the guilty pleasure of half an hour of Australian soaps each day. It charts the shift to ways in which audiences now interact with the media in a multitude of ways. It also expertly discusses the different levels of interactivity experienced in the different types of media. This paper offers such intricate discussions of the concept of interactivity, the like of which I haven't come across before. This could also be an excellent resource for students trying to get to grips with this concept as part of the audiences and institutions section of G322. I'm not advocating the use of large chunks of Smith's book for all A-level classes as I know not all of my students would be able to get to grips with it. But I do think that this is a fabulous resource for teachers and many students. It is superb at picking apart and explaining many of the lynchpins of our subject, I highly recommend it to all.



Tanya Jones reviews *The Routledge Companion to Film History*, edited by William Guynn. Routledge 2011. £18.99

Books on film history often fall into two categories: those that are organised chronologically and those that use styles or movements or technology to organise their contents. Both have their merits. A chronological approach can give a real sense of the evolution and accumulative journey of cinema, providing the reader with a broad knowledge from which he/she can subsequently draw. An anthology approach that includes a range of essays discussing aspects of film

history can allow for a discrete and in depth analysis of one aspect of the history of film. *The Routledge Companion to Film History* is the latter type of guide.

There is one key distinguishing feature between this guide and many other studies of film history and that is the 'Critical Dictionary' that makes up nearly half of the publication. In the 'How to use this volume' instruction from the editor, we are advised that terms in the essays that are in bold have definitions in the 'Critical Dictionary' section. The reader is also advised that reading can start at any point in the guide, there is no fixed guiding principle to the organisation and that the budding film student should cross reference their chosen essay with the critical dictionary.

So, with these instructions from the editor in mind, I opened the guide and looked at the contents list to find an interesting place to start. This proved difficult, as at least three of the chapter headings caught my attention immediately. 'The evolution of sound in cinema' sounded very promising, as did 'Making history through media'. Some of the chapters had much more generic, predictable titles, such as 'Animation' and 'Film as popular culture', and these could have benefitted from a title that at least hinted at the thesis within. I chose the chapter entitled 'Filming "difference"' written by David Desser and read, as instructed by William Guynn.

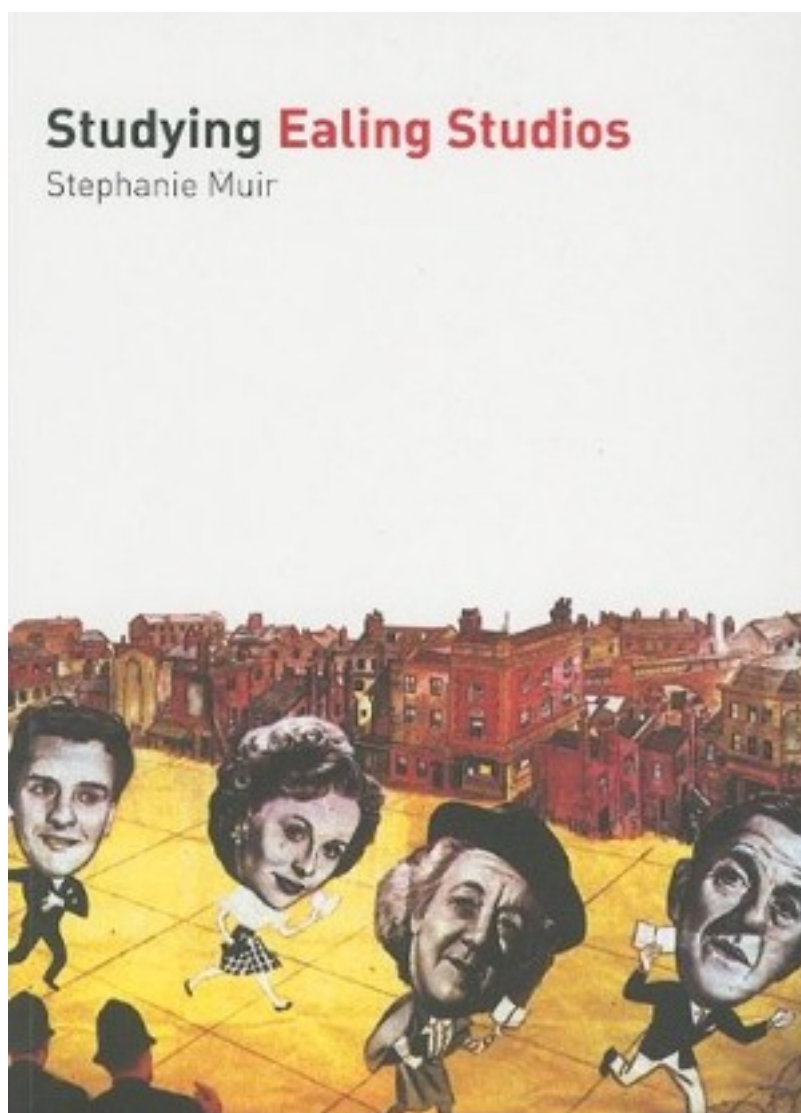
The premise of the chapter was immediately engaging; that the distribution practices of some companies when promoting (especially) foreign language films abroad, was to attempt to target countries with films that were culturally different enough, but not so much that they were alienating. These 'different enough' films might still be a world away from say a US or European sensibility and would draw audiences and critics to them via their exoticism. However, they might include 'codes' through which to interpret this exoticism. Once I had decided that I liked the thesis, albeit rather cynical, I then started to cross-reference with the Critical Dictionary. I looked up *avant-garde*, *Surrealism* and *Post-colonial* and each time was offered a succinct, relevant and accessible definition of the term, plus advice on possible further reading. Desser's chapter was cogent, challenging and energetic in its tone. An appropriate level for the film studies undergraduates that Guynn says in his introduction are the target audience for the guide..

The 'how to use this volume' advice from the editor is useful and does encourage the reader to use the extremely good 'Critical Dictionary'. The definitions in the dictionary aren't long and they are not over-complicated; they function as promised, i.e. to confirm or inform understanding of a term used in the chapter. I do think that there are other productive ways that this kind of guide can be used, however and it is worth experimenting with one's own reading practices. Having read one chapter in its entirety, I then decided to read all of the first pages of all of the 11 chapters and note down what the central premise was for each. This proved very productive and indicated a range of critical approaches within *The Routledge Companion to Film History*. Critical diversity is invariably a good sign because it stops a guide pushing one critical agenda and it also gives the reader (student or otherwise) a keen sense of both the need for an individual voice and the necessity of seeing critical frameworks as tools, rather than monoliths.

The tone and register of the chapter openings was consistent and although the chapters presented a wide range of critical perspectives, this consistency made the guide feel coherent. There is an assumption in this guide that the reader has some pre-existing film related knowledge. There is also an assumption that the reasonably high level of discourse used in the chapters will be understood. However, given the fact that the guide "is designed as a basic text for undergraduate students in film studies", this assumption

should definitely have been made. The potential market for the guide is perhaps even wider than this, however. 'A' Level students in need of extension reading could do well to look at some of the chapters and, indeed, any film enthusiast who enjoys challenging themselves by engaging with critical approaches would do well to have a delve into this new companion.

*The Routledge Companion to Film History* has both breadth and enough depth to move beyond a more generalised and popularist approach to the topics within each chapter. The structure of each chapter is accessible and designed to push the reader to investigate the topic in even more detail. Both the chapters and the Critical Dictionary entries end with Further Reading lists in an attempt to motivate the student/reader into more study. The chapters often reference art, literature and popular culture, as well as film and in doing so present interesting ways to connect films within a wider cultural context. An impressive addition to the film history 'library'.



Pete Fraser reviews '***Studying Ealing Studios***' by **Stephanie Muir**, from **Auteur 2010 £8.99**

This is a very handy, pocket-sized guide (with a lovely cover!) which references all the bigger, weightier tomes on the subject by providing a useful summary of the institutional history, the ideological and critical contexts and a number of the films themselves. It is clearly geared to helping those teaching film studies A level who might be using the films in one of the AS topics. There are chapters on Ealing at war, with detailed reference to 'Went the Day Well', to the immediate post-war films, with analysis of 'Dead of Night', which spurred me to order the DVD to see it again after many years, to 'passions and repressions' with 'It Always Rains on Sunday' and 'The Blue Lamp', and to two chapters covering the key comedies- 'Passport to Pimlico', 'The Lavender Hill Mob', 'Kind Hearts and Coronets' and 'The Ladykillers', finishing up with chapters on the decline of the studio in the 1950s and its aftermath.

This is a really useful summary of the subject, potted enough for busy teachers but pointing to further reading and to the key films that you might want to use for your teaching. I'd recommend buying it and getting the Ealing comedy box set to go alongside- the DVDs are on discount everywhere. It would give you a really good starting point for your teaching.

# Ordinary Lives

Studies in the Everyday  
Ben Highmore

**Julian McDougall reviews *Ordinary Lives: Study in the Everyday*. by Ben Highmore. Routledge 2010.**

This is probably the most exciting and relevant period in Media Studies' history, precisely because we have started to turn our attention away from 'the media' and back to ourselves – and each other - in the tapestry of our mundane everyday making sense of the world – we do this through taste, habit, routine and reception and this is the stuff of Cultural Studies but until recently, I would argue, Media Studies has obscured this with its over-attention to self-contained texts and the 'Big Other' of the all powerful, influential and 'affective' Big Media.

Whether we call this Media 2.0, Participation Culture or even Media Studies 'After the Media', Ben Highmore's book should be essential reading on all Media courses and it is striking, therefore, that the text contains very little analysis of media products, being a study of theoretical ways of looking at 'the everyday'. As David Gauntlett has pointed out in the least controversial aspect of his

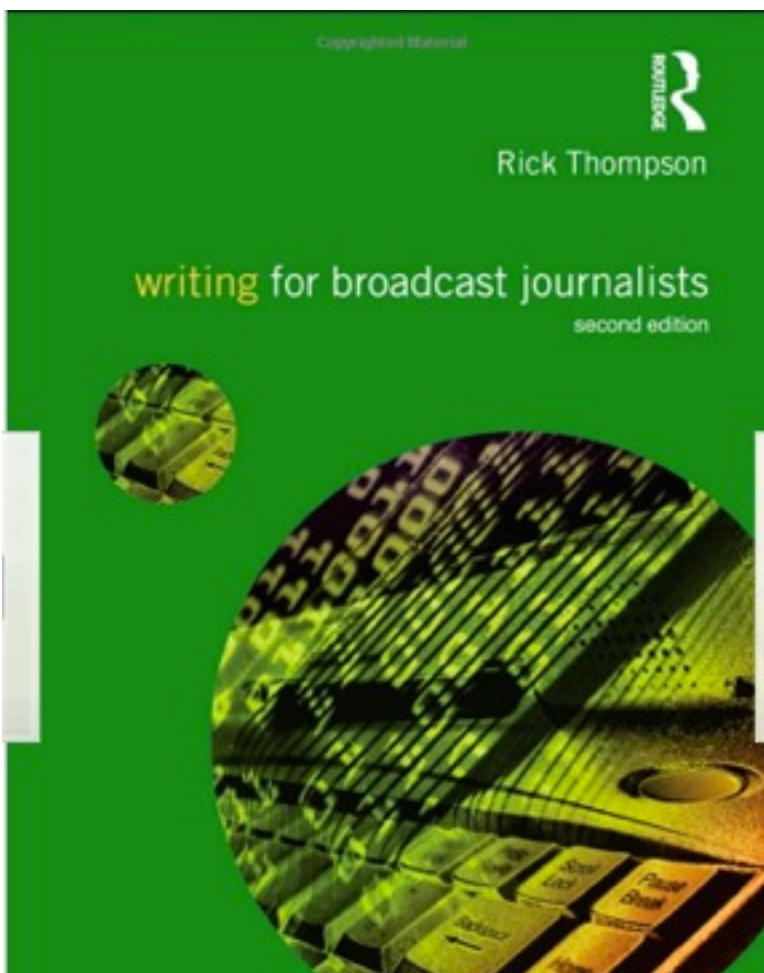
recent work, media plays a part in habit, routine, taste and how we construct identity, but it only makes sense to look at media as an element in 'habit networks' (my words) – Matt Hills makes similar points in his work on fandom and, whilst David Buckingham would be resistant to being included in a paragraph with things '2.0', his recent research does locate engagement with social media within a 'nexus' of socio-cultural factors.

In 'Ordinary Lives', Highmore connects media to objects, work and food, describing his project as 'calling attention to the affective life of people' (p166). More specifically, he is interested in developing further a 'science of singularity', which he relates dialogically (and not always clearly) to Thatcher's famous 'anti-society' declaration – or the more detailed full version of that much simplified speech. It's a great shame that the book was (presumably) written before the Big Society came along as there are some interesting elements of 'social aesthetics' at work in Cameron's vision that I would expect Highmore would find resonant.

Highmore's theoretical contribution to Media Studies is to offer a complex, but thoroughly 'applied' theory of distraction – a state he describes as the contemporary condition of media reception which is 'simultaneously agile and tenacious, vacant and absorbed' (p119). In other words, whilst the 'toxic childhood' thesis laments our declining attention spans and the 'digital natives' response over-celebrates the idea of 'new literacy', Highmore's theory allows us to scrutinise the oscillating nature of attention and distraction without recourse to such binaries – a 'scattering outward of attention' (p119).

De Certeau is cited as a major influence and we can see this in the excellent 'case studies' that I would love to see students referencing and using as analogies for their own research – the pedagogy of coriander describes the author's coming to 'learn' to enjoy the herb and he discusses the ways in which children come to be discerning and appreciate of previously despised tastes, and then wonders why Media Studies doesn't account for this – I was minded of the 'secondary encoding' of *The Wire* as a programme it was not OK to not have seen, for example. Elsewhere, we consider public and private experiences of time, the familiarity of objects (although he goes for 'Rosebud' here and in so doing risks a trace of the Canon) – "familiar things call attention to time and call time on attention" (p82), but it's the chapter on 'absentminded media' which ought to be on all reading lists for Media teachers and their students. Here, he turns around the familiar 'paradigm shift' rhetoric around the scarcity of attention towards a theory of 'a new habit of mobile attention' (p121) – this is more complex than it sounds in my paraphrasing – evoking eighteenth century theories of aesthetics from Kant and William James, in dialogue with Adorno and Benjamin and (I can't resist this) we end up with a compelling kind of 'Frankfurt School 2.0' where we deal with (again, my words) new modes of hegemony around the incorporation of aesthetic breaches via apperception. Readers will doubtless find their own 'habits' under the lens, as I did with my over-consumption of 'Keep Calm and Carry On' merchandise – office wall poster, rug in conservatory (now destroyed by dog – and dog walking is analysed here in relation to Orwell and the duality of routine – as keeping going and also as ignoring the possibility of action).

The only gripe with Highmore's book might be (and I use 'might' because I am not expert enough in the particular strand of enlightenment aesthetics he takes as his point of intervention) that he cherry-picks sources and theoretical 'ways in' in the same way that some see Gauntlett doing with theories of creativity. But for my money 'Ordinary Lives', in its refusal to engage with 'The Media', provides a clear and politically important framework for us to use with students to help draw 'microsketches of ordinary media reception' (p134).



Alex Fraser gives his views on the usefulness of the second edition of **Rick Thompson's *writing for broadcast journalists* Routledge 2010**

Eight ways that this book can help aspiring young journalists.

1.It demonstrates a wide range of different methods of writing for different media. This is crucial as the modern journalist now has to be able to write for online, radio and television as well as print.

2.It contains valuable information to stop newer reporters falling into the traps of cliché reporting and

difficult scripts. Uses the great line of K.I.S.S: Keep it simple stupid.

3. It gives young journalists a firm grounding in how to write scripts and how to avoid the pitfalls of 'churnalism' and regurgitation of press releases.
4. It looks both to interest and inspire students. Every single concept in the book is linked to a modern news example, something that a younger aspiring journalist can instantly relate to, as all the examples are current.
5. It explains all the basics with the reporting of European issues, particularly with the courts, to make sure that future journalists know the correct names and roles of the organisations.
6. It features contributions from many leading broadcasters that budding journalists will aspire to be like. For example a broadcasting script of BBC News' John Simpson is analysed and it is clearly demonstrated how he uses many of the techniques that are detailed in the book.
7. It contains advice on how to write a voiceover for a television package. Broadcast journalism students can also use this to help in their university courses, as it teaches good technique when editing the pictures for a story.
8. It contains an appendix at the end of the book for 'dangerous' words, a great guide which can be used and referred to constantly for a budding journalist writing scripts to avoid falling into many of the same traps that even the most senior and seasoned reporter have sometimes done in the past.

*POV reviewers for this March 2011 special were:*

**Tanya Jones**, Course Team Leader for Media Studies at Long Road Sixth Form College, Cambridge and two of her colleagues, **Holly Taylor** and **Andrea Joyce**.

**Dr. Mark Readman** from the Centre for Excellence in Media Practice at Bournemouth University

**Steve Murray**, MEA executive member and Curriculum Director of Film and Media at Havant Sixth Form College

**Pete Fraser**, co-editor of <http://www.manifestoformediaeducation.co.uk/> and MEA executive member

Dr. Seon-Jeong Ki

**Dr. Julian McDougall**, MEA executive member and Reader in Media and Education at Newman University College, Birmingham

**Alex Fraser** is studying Broadcast Journalism at Leeds University



















