



Resource Review

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Name of reviewed item:	<i>Screen Education: from film appreciation to media studies</i>
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Review:

The sleeve notes for Terry Bolas' *Screen Education* describe it as, 'not only the first but also the definitive history of the development and study of film and television in Britain through most of the twentieth century'. It is the thorough and seemingly complete engagement with screen education that makes Bolas' eleven chapters, four hundred pages plus, single-authored monograph a must-have resource in this area. Addressing key organisations (British Film Institute, Society for Education in Film and Television), reports (*The Teaching of Film*), publications (*Screen*, *Screen Education*, *Screen Education Notes*), and events ('Popular Culture and Personal Responsibility', various media education conferences), Bolas weaves a fascinating history and poses contemporary questions.

Bolas provides a hugely stimulating account pointing to how we can understand the connections between career academia and public institutions, and the emergence and development of media and film as discipline. As a resource for teaching and learning, *Screen Education* is not particularly accessible given its historical and chronological structure. That said, for unpacking specific periods and debates it is detailed and accessible in style. The contextualisation and depth as standout elements are highlighted by Toby Miller in the 'Foreword' when he describes Bolas as a, 'skilled and event remorseless researcher and guide'. Miller's foreword presents a helpful overview of methods (memory, oral history, archival investigation, and textual analysis), academic and institutional contexts, and the significance of the work of the BFI and SEFT. Bolas' involvement in SEFT from the 1960s (as a member, and later Honorary Secretary and other roles) underpins the rich descriptions and allows many of the nuances to unfold. At times it may seem that *Screen Education* is too closely descriptive. There are keen points of analysis (for example the unpacking of the inoculatory approach, p.118), but these are not always as frequently and clearly stated as possible to allow readers to extract chapters if

needed. Given the depth of the subject matter and the focus of this piece as a resource review, this review will focus mainly on the debates and connections that can be drawn out with *Screen Education* (A breakdown of chapters can be sought using Amazon's 'Look Inside' function, for example).

The early chapters provide an engaging account of the nuances of film appreciation and the different trajectories envisaged for the study of film. Bolas notes how Maurice Woodhouse's 1952 PhD explored what film appreciation might involve, but cautions that 'his theoretical references are literary ones' (p.52). This comment resonates firmly with the debates around the emergence of Game Studies as a distinctive academic field. In the editorial introduction to the first issue of the journal *Game Studies*, Espen Aarseth cites the notion of 'media blindness' to suggest 'how a failure to see the specific media differences leads to a 'media-neutral' media theory that is anything but neutral' (Aarseth, 2001, online). Noting the disciplinary fields that games could and should be studied within, Aarseth suggests, 'games are too important to be left to these fields' and that Game Studies 'should exist as an independent academic structure, because it cannot be reduced to any of the above [Media Studies, Sociology and English "to name but a few"]' (Aarseth, 2001, online). Given the development of fields such as Game Studies and Internet Studies, Bolas' discussion of film is instructive for reflecting on these broader, more contemporary debates.

Screen Education provides the kind of rich contextualisation that could be an important contributor to the debates on Media Studies as a discipline. Contemporary debates (see Lister and Dovey; 2009; Merrin, 2009; *Television and New Media* special edition, 2009) may be well served by returning to those that Bolas helpfully points to, such as *Screen* 27(5) – 'Pedagogy – Critical Accounts of Media Education'. Reflecting on the gaps that *Screen Education* responds to and the limited coverage given to disciplinary concerns, Bolas ventures the following (in an interview with the book's publishers, Intellect): 'perhaps it was simply that media teaching was now such an integral part of institutions that its graduates had no more curiosity about its provenance than an English or History graduate would have had about the institutional establishment of their respective studies'. Given the restructuring activities that shape media and film in higher education and how these disciplines are situated in relation to 'industry', *Screen Education* prompts important questions. Of significance for tracing the historical contingencies of academic collaboration, Bolas draws revealing comparisons between the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies and SEFT (p.267). This then leads into an account of the emergence of Media Studies, and early debates in media education (chapter 9) and those that took place in the pages of *Screen* between Len Masterman and David Buckingham (chapter 10).

A thoroughly engaging aspect of this book is the way in which it may allow the reader to contextualise and situate contemporary approaches. For instance, Bolas' account of film appreciation and children may be connected with David Buckingham's discussion of creative production (2003) and the research methods that David Gauntlett (1997) puts forth involving schoolchildren making their own video productions. In doing so we can trace the changing agencies attributed to children and the changing approaches to media education. As producing and distributing films and documentaries, for instance, becomes accessible and part of children's everyday 'social life' (Merrin, 2009), how media production is introduced and at what age become increasingly significant questions. Along the same lines, as media literacy takes an increasingly prominent place on the policy agenda (Livingstone, 2008), the essential context that Bolas presents could contribute to the evaluation of future directions. In the epilogue chapter, Bolas explicitly addresses Ofcom's role following the Communications Act 2003 and suggests that, 'it would seem that a SEFT-shaped gap may be about to reappear' (p.353).

Screen Education provides some remarkable insights into the practices and processes of a number of key institutions. The vital and prominent role that the British Film Institute plays in much higher education research and teaching is carefully traced, and helps to situate, for example, the *In View* web-based learning resource (<http://www.bfi.org.uk/inview/>) - one of the latest services introduced by the BFI around universities in the UK. The Media Studies Conference at BFI Southbank (1-3 July 2007) similarly points to the BFI's educational and outreach activities. A pathway to these events is characterised by uncertainty and tensions, and the history to these events and initiatives is documented rigorously by Bolas. The tensions that marked the development of screen education are a recurrent theme that Bolas is able to draw out through his own personal involvement and interviews with key figures. The different trajectories argued for in relation to the journals *Screen* and *Screen Education* are most fascinating in this respect with the accounts of reservations and resignations.

There are a number of interesting and practical points to take from Bolas' analysis about how institutions may organise and document decisions and developments. One that struck me in relation to the ADM-HEA concerned the taking and archiving of notes from conferences. This is something that the ADM-HEA does consistently and thoroughly, and the importance of this kind of practice is clear when Bolas highlights the significance of delegate reports in relation to the April 1987 'Teaching Alternative Media' conference (chapter 10). Further practical tips and comparisons around organisation may be gleaned in relation to fellowships, editorial boards, advocacy organisations, and cross-sector educational collaborations.

Screen Education is written in such an engaging, personal and compassionate way that by the time the reader is immersed in the closure of SEFT in chapter 11, it may not be surprising to describe the experience as a dramatic novel or journey. *Screen Education* presents a comprehensive historical analysis that poses many contemporary questions, and it is a highly instructive read that will hopefully prompt consideration of the context and content of teaching in media studies across education.

References

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