

Theory, Practice, and the Significance of Film Schools

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I

The significance and contribution of film schools to the wider fields of film history and the development of the cinema as a creative and cultural form remain a largely unexplored area in academic research. Yet, after the Second World War these institutions became a major route into a career in film for aspiring practitioners across the world, and consequently have been central to the formation and cultivation of individual film-making talent and the forging of creative relationships. Film schools have had considerable impact on wider stylistic trends, production practices, national cinemas, and film-making movements, yet within most historical accounts of cinema, film-makers' education has tended to be treated as a minor biographical detail or is simply assumed to be one aspect of on-the-job skills-acquisition.

In addition to the general paucity of historical knowledge and understanding, the lack of a critical and scholarly engagement with film schools has meant that current debates on the education and training of future practitioners have been devoid of any deeper contextual understanding. This has allowed free reign to a particular hegemonic policy agenda which, in many places, has been increasingly guided by the rhetoric of the market and neo-liberal economics. The current direction of film education and training in the UK is instructive in that it has been profoundly influenced by the Creative Industries agenda. A characteristic doctrine of New Labour's "third way" politics, this agenda has entailed a fundamental shift in cultural policy away from the subsidizing of what used to be called "the arts" as something valuable in and of itself, towards a new focus on investment in the creative industries, directed towards supporting entrepreneurial activities and growing sustainable businesses. Thus the language and values of neo-liberalism have come to inform the role of the State within the cultural sphere. With specific regard to film, this has entailed the wholesale reorganization of public funding and

support, leading to the creation in 2000 of a single, all-powerful agency, the UK Film Council (UKFC), and with it a new emphasis on a more market-responsive British film industry.

In 2003 the UKFC, in partnership with Skillset, the UK's sector skills council for film and television, announced a new national strategy for training and education. Entitled *A Bigger Future*, the heart of this strategy was a desire to rationalize the wide range of film and media courses offered by universities and colleges – many of which were regarded as being of dubious quality and relevance. The executive summary of *A Bigger Future* spells out the desired response by making a direct and logical link between an “integrated approach to skills provision which assesses and calibrates demand from the industry for specific skills and which will match that demand through further, higher and postgraduate provision”, the implementation of a process by which “Through Skillset the UK industry will approve relevant training and education provision”, resulting in the creation of “a small network of screen academies recognized to provide an agreed mix of creative and commercial skills needed by the industry.”¹

Such a network was subsequently created in 2005. This currently comprises the UK's two long-established and internationally recognized film schools – the National Film and Television School in Beaconsfield and the London Film School in Covent Garden – alongside a number of new institutional entities: the Bournemouth Screen and Media Academy (a collaboration between Bournemouth University and the Bournemouth Institute of Art); the Scottish Screen and Media Academy located at Napier University in Edinburgh; the Screen Academy Wales (bringing together the University of Wales in Newport and the University of Glamorgan); and the Screen Academy at the London College of Communication and the Ealing Institute of Media. The network also includes a new Film Business Academy, begun at the Cass Business School at City University London. In addition, a second network of nineteen media academies focusing on television and interactive media has also been set up, and a range of individual courses in screenwriting, computer games, and animation have also gained official Skillset accreditation, completing the picture.

Whatever the wider pros and cons of the Skillset-UKFC strategy in the UK, it has created a one-way and instrumental relationship between “the industry”, which is consistently presented as an undifferentiated and unified entity, and “the education sector”, which is now clearly differentiated between those institutions and courses that have the official stamp of approval and those that do not. Moreover, the underlying concept of what constitutes a relevant education is encapsulated by the assertion in the strategy that “there is a clear distinction to be made between academic study and vocational provi-

sion”.² Given that it is the latter that is actively promoted by Skillset, the participating educational institutions are effectively being positioned as “training providers”, servicing a British film industry that has itself been rebranded as a creative “hub” within a globalized – in other words, Hollywood-dominated – motion picture business.³ Consequently, what has emerged in the UK is an educational environment in which any serious intellectual dimension in the instruction of film and media practitioners has effectively been eclipsed by the vigorous promotion of a rather reductive concept of skills training.

II

Contrast this state of affairs with the vision that informed the creation of the world’s first film school in Moscow in 1919, just two years after the Bolshevik Revolution. Initially the State College of Cinematography (GTK), the school was subsequently upgraded to a State Institute (GIK) in 1930, and then a Higher State Institute (VGIK) in 1934, giving it status on a par with a university. Moreover, the Moscow school was fundamentally bound up with the wider revolutionary ferment that marked the formative years of the Soviet Union, for as Malte Hagener notes:

the avant-garde spirit of the revolutionary country was sure that the education of a new generation was of paramount importance in the construction of a communist reality. Teaching in the Soviet Union not only began earlier and was undertaken in a more intensive manner than in other countries, it was also the most experimental in form: traditional hierarchies were toppled, conservative teaching methods were discarded and radical forms were put to the test. Teaching methods modelled on project work or workshop situation fit in especially well within avant-garde conceptions of overcoming distinctions between theory and practice.⁴

Its founding director, Vladimir Gardin, effectively used it as a laboratory to develop his theories concerning a new anthropology of acting which, as Mikhail Yamplosky has argued, laid the foundations for the emergence of montage as the central intellectual principle around which both Soviet film making and film theory were subsequently elaborated.⁵ One of the school’s first teachers, Lev Kuleshov, started his famous workshop in 1920; among his students was the young Vsevolod Pudovkin. Then in 1932, Sergei Eisenstein was appointed head of the Institute’s directing faculty, providing a forum within which he was to develop his influential and ground-breaking theoretical writings on film, an activity went hand in hand with his teaching practice. The four-year directing curriculum devised by Eisenstein in 1936

provides a wonderful example of his polymathic approach to practice, outlining a rigorous training that, in addition to learning the theory and practice of film-making, also involved the study of philosophy, social theory, and the arts in general.⁶ Writing in *Sight and Sound* in 1950, John Francis Lane noted the influence of pedagogic principles derived from the Soviet model in the context of the later development of the French national film school, IDHEC:

We have learned from Eisenstein's writings that the fundamental basis of film study is the absorption of what he terms "montage creation in all cultures". For many whose minds are more practical in their approach to the cinema (and this, strangely enough, describes most of the French students), the idea of learning about Stanislavsky or Shakespeare; of delving into the past wonders of prehistoric art; or of investigating the intricacies of musical form and rhythm, may seem somewhat unnecessary to the study of the *craft* of a film director. But although everyone cannot be expected to agree with Eisenstein's conception of cinema as the sublime realisation of all art creation, no one with genuine sympathies for the film will deny that such an education is absolutely essential to the director's *art*.⁷

The central importance of the cultivation of knowledge and understanding of film history at the Moscow State Institute was further enhanced by the founding of its own *cinémathèque* in 1931, with an initial collection of five hundred Soviet and foreign films, followed three years later by the initiation of formative research under the supervision of film historian Nikolai Lebedev. Consequently, despite being a part of the Soviet system and therefore subject to the diktat of the Communist Party (to say nothing of Stalin's purges), VGIK gained a considerable international reputation, and was to prove highly influential in the development of film schools in other parts of the world.

That history has essentially been dominated by two major types of institution. Following the Soviet model, the first type of school is the conservatoire, often established as a cornerstone of an explicitly national film industry, and funded directly by the state. Such institutions have tended to operate with a small permanent administrative staff with practicing film-makers being brought in for limited periods to teach their particular speciality, be it directing, writing, cinematography, or production design. The second model is the university department, in which a film school is part of a larger educational establishment and therefore constrained and guided by the academic policies and practices of that institution. This type of school is staffed mainly by permanent career academics or former practitioners turned educators, with possibly some additional contribution from visiting professional film-makers. While the conservatory model may have a more overt industry-focus com-

pared to the academic imperative of the university department, both types of institution have sought to combine hands-on film-making and an intellectual framework that embraces the theory, criticism, and history of cinema, providing students with a context for locating and understanding their own creative practice. Although, somewhat ironically, within many universities the teaching of practice and theory subsequently was split or polarized as the new academic discipline of film or cinema studies began to emerge.

The first wave of film schools that emerged in Europe followed the national conservatoire model. These included the *Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia*, established in Rome in 1935 by the Fascist leader Benito Mussolini, whose enthusiasm for the cinema also led to the construction of celebrated Cinecittà studios and the creation of the Venice Film Festival. As at VGIK, practical training was augmented by intellectual and cultural elements, with students enjoying access to a wide range of films, including some banned for open public consumption by the authorities. The school also published its own magazine, *Cinema*, which subsequently provided a forum for advocates of the new realism that was to transform Italian cinema after 1945.

Next were the French with the *Institute des hautes études cinématographiques* (IDHEC), founded in Paris in September 1943, a year before the end of the Nazi occupation,⁸ under the directorship of the avant-garde filmmaker and theorist Marcel L'Herbier. Active in the Parisian ciné clubs of the 1920s, L'Herbier had long campaigned for a school that would promote a socially progressive and artistically innovative French cinema. As Colin Crisp notes,⁹ the founding aims of the institute were threefold: (i) to produce filmmakers endowed with profound human values; (ii) to foster pure artistic and technical research; (iii) to spread cinematographic culture. The first of these subsequently became the school's core mission, with courses being offered in direction, production, cinematography, sound, editing, scripting, décor, and costume. The second was facilitated by the creation of an extensive library of films, books and periodicals which, like the library at VGIK, became an important resource for cultural education and scholarly research. And while Crisp notes that L'Herbier's third aim never eventuated, the highly influential role that French cinema and film culture was to assume in the 1950s and 1960s arguably negated this particular need.

Following the Second World War, film schools were set up in a number of countries, often as part of wider initiatives to rebuild national film industries and rejuvenate national film cultures. The Eastern European nations were generally quicker off the mark: the Hungarian Academy of Dramatic and Film Art was established in 1945 in Budapest, with the celebrated critic and theorist Béla Balázs, newly returned from exile, responsible for developing the four year curriculum at the Academy. In Czechoslovakia, the Film and TV

School of the Academy of Performing Arts (FAMU) was set up in Prague in 1946, while in Poland the National Higher School of Film, Television and Theatre was founded in Łódź in 1948, with several of the key individuals involved having previously been members of the influential Society for the Promotion of Film Art (START) during the 1930s. Despite being subject to fluctuations of relative openness and repression that affected the entire Soviet Bloc during the Cold War period, all three institutions were to play key roles in propagating the waves of vitality that came to distinguish their respective national cinemas. This is notable in the case of the Polish School of the 1950s led by Andrzej Wajda, Andrzej Munk, and Kazimierz Kutz; and subsequently in that of the Czech “New Wave” of the 1960s associated with Miloš Forman, Jiří Menzel, Věra Chytilová, and Ivan Passer. As in the Soviet Union, these film schools enshrined a vibrant environment in which the intellectual dimension of a film-maker’s education continued to be stressed in conjunction with the acquisition of practical skills. Jerzy Toeplitz, president and one of the founding faculty of the Łódź film school, stressed in a pamphlet published in the early 1960s that such a combination was essential for the cultivation of culturally-aware film-makers able to address their audience in such a way as “to make them understand the world they live in in order to make it better”.¹⁰

With the exception of the *Instituto de Investigaciones y Experiencias Cinematograficas* founded in Fascist Spain in 1947, developments in Western Europe tended to occur later: the Netherlands Film and Television Academy in 1958; the Swedish Film School in 1964; and the National Film School of Denmark in 1966. In federal West Germany, schools started to appear in the various *länder* in the mid 1960s, preceding the emergence of a new German Cinema in the following decade: the DFFB (*Deutsche Film- und Fernseh-Akademie Berlin*) in Berlin, and the HFF (*Institut für Film und Fernsehen*) in Munich. Typically late in the day, a National Film School was finally founded in the UK in 1971 after more than a decade of lobbying by the likes of the émigré producer Carl Foreman and the director Thorold Dickinson.¹¹ However, the first UK film school was actually the London School of Film Technique, set up in 1957 in Brixton as an entirely privately-funded institution, and which more than fifty years later continues to thrive as the London Film School.

In the US, the development of film schools tracked that of the formal higher education sector. While the hegemonic domination of Hollywood served to retain formal industry training firmly within the studio system, at the universities courses in practical film-making began slowly to be established as part of the wider development of film studies programmes and departments. However, production initially tended to be restricted to non-theatrical modes such as 16 mm documentary, information, and educational films. The

formation in 1947 of the University Film Producers Association provided the growing sector with a forum for collaboration, debate, and discussion, predating the founding of the Society of Cinematology (the forerunner of the Society of Cinema and Media Studies) by a dozen years. In addition to holding an annual conference, the Association founded its own journal, *The University Film Producers Association Journal*, to publish research and debate on production techniques and developments in moving-image technology.¹²

American film schools came to assume a greater significance in the aftermath of the gradual break-up of the Hollywood studio system in the 1950s and 1960s, a process brought about by the demise of vertical integration and the advent of television as a popular mass medium. The move from a model of in-house factory production to a more diffuse system of one-off projects created the opportunity for university programmes to assume an enhanced role as the training ground for aspiring feature film-makers. Unsurprisingly, the institutions that were best placed to capitalize on this opportunity were those sited closest to the industry in Los Angeles. One of these, the School of Cinematic Arts at the University of Southern California, had been initially established in 1929 as a collaboration between the university and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences intended to bestow academic credibility on the seventh art, and founding faculty included such industry luminaries as Douglas Fairbanks, D. W. Griffith, William deMille, Ernst Lubitsch, Irving Thalberg, and Darryl Zanuck.¹³ While the focus of its courses tended to be academic, by the mid 1930s the first student films were being produced, again primarily in the fields of educational, information, and documentary film.

Over at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) in Westwood, the establishment of the School of Theatre, Film and Television in 1947 placed a greater emphasis on the potential of drama and the production of fiction films, arguably anticipating opportunities to come. And by the 1960s, students from both Los Angeles institutions had become increasingly involved in the production of fiction films by students seeking a potential calling card for a career in Hollywood. This new environment paved the way for a third film school to appear in Los Angeles, although this time a conservatoire model was adopted when the new American Film Institute, established in 1967 with funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, set up a graduate programme in film production at its Centre for Advance Film Studies. Meanwhile, developments in California were being echoed on the east coast with the setting up in 1965 of film production programmes at New York University and Columbia University. And in addition to “the big five”, the sector began to mushroom across the US with many other universities establishing their own programmes.

In providing a very different kind of educational experience compared with a studio apprenticeship, the new film schools became midwife to the emergence of a “new Hollywood” in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This was led by a number of ambitious and cine-literate film-school graduates, dubbed “the Movie Brats” by Michael Pye and Lynda Myles,¹⁴ whose number included Francis Coppola, George Lucas, Martin Scorsese, Steven Spielberg, Paul Schrader, John Milius, and Terence Malick. Noel King notes that this group made American films that recalled the spirit of the French nouvelle vague, something that could be related directly to their intellectual and cultural formation:

They were reading the 1960s American film criticism of Pauline Kael, Andrew Sarris and Manny Farber, absorbing the influence of *Cahiers du cinema* on Anglo-American film criticism, and admiring the films of Bergman, Fellini, Antonioni, Bertolucci, Truffaut and Godard. Accordingly, some accounts of New Hollywood see this moment as the explicit inscription of the critical practice of auteurism, resulting in a self-consciously auteur cinema.¹⁵

Within a decade, fellow graduates such as David Lynch, Jim Jarmusch, and Spike Lee would begin to create a vibrant independent cinema in the US that would continue to preserve a space for formally innovative and thematically challenging cinema. For by the late 1970s, mainstream Hollywood was starting to take refuge in a new form of blockbuster-led conservatism, a development spearheaded, somewhat ironically, by former film school “brats” Spielberg and Lucas.

Beyond Europe and the US, film schools have also played a key role in the development of cinematic movements, with some of the most significant contributions being made in the developing nations and regions. These included China, where, following the Soviet model, the Beijing Film Academy was founded in 1950 a year after Mao’s Communists came to power. Following a decade of inactivity during the Cultural Revolution, the Academy subsequently played a key role in nurturing the breakthrough fifth generation of Chinese film-makers led by Chen Kaige and Zhang Zimou. In India, a National Film and Television Institute was founded in Pune in 1960, while one of the first African schools was established in Ghana in 1978. In Latin America, the major development came in Cuba with the founding of the *Escuela Internacional de Cine Y TV* (EICTV) in 1986 by the Foundation for Latin American cinema. This institution has subsequently had an important continent-wide impact by attracting and training students from all over Central and South America.

The Cuban school is instructive for despite the often overtly national role of film conservatoires, most of them have also welcomed international students, sometimes as a gesture of political or cultural solidarity. For example, as Dina Jordanova points out, during the Cold War the schools of the Eastern Bloc had a permanent contingent of international students from “brotherly” countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.¹⁶ Consequently, in the 1960s some of the leading pioneers of African cinema including Djidril Diop Mambéty, Ousmane Sembène, and Souleymane Cissé studied at the VGIK in Moscow. International students were also integral to Western European schools: in the first two decades at IDHEC over 40 per cent of the graduates were foreign, their numbers including the Greeks Theo Angelopolous and Costa Gavras and the German Volker Schlöndorff; while in 1974 the London School of Film Technique, which had always relied on the higher course fees paid by overseas students to guarantee its survival, rebranded itself the London International Film School. During the Vietnam War, several Americans, most notably the director Michael Mann, studied at the school in order to avoid the draft.

International collaboration in the sector has also been greatly enhanced by the existence of the *Centre International de Liaison des Ecoles de Cinéma et de Télévision* (CILECT), an association founded in Cannes in 1955 to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and the fostering of communication and co-operation when Cold War antagonism was at its height. More than forty years on, CILECT boasts some 137 members drawn from 56 countries, and, in addition to publishing a regular newsletter, the organization continues to organize an annual congress hosted by different members.

III

So what historically have been the major sites of contestation, disagreement, and tension at the film schools? To take universities first, while the rapid growth in the number of film departments in the US and elsewhere that offered some kind of practice-based educational component undoubtedly expanded the opportunities for aspiring film-makers, there were also a number of problems that became endemic to the system. Colin Young, former head of the film program at UCLA and founding director of the British National Film School, outlined some of these problems in a keynote address to the University Film and Video Association conference in 1988.¹⁷ Young notes that the high cost of teaching film production at university departments necessitated the introduction of large undergraduate programmes, which prevented a more effective concentration on the graduate programmes in which students had already attained a certain level of academic proficiency and intellectual development. It could also be argued that the burgeoning

of such courses created an unrealistic level of expectation on the part of students, given the mismatch between numbers enrolling on film-making courses and subsequent opportunities for pursuing an industry career. Another problem identified by Young is the subject's – and lecturers' – perceived lack of academic credibility, which created tension between faculty in film departments and their university colleagues in other disciplines. Thirdly, there is the problem of the professional relevance of such programmes, stemming from indifference or even hostility from the industry and the unions towards university film departments – an issue that has motivated recent developments in educational and training policy in the UK. For Young, the European conservatory model proved more effective, with its government subsidies and more direct relationship with the industry. However, it should be noted that it took some time for sectors of the British industry, particularly the unions, to recognize the skills and status of graduates from the National Film School, so even this model has not been entirely trouble-free.

But it is the relationship between the provision of hands-on technical training and a wider intellectual and cultural education that remains one of the most interesting and pressing issues. This relationship has been somewhat more complex in practice than I have hitherto suggested. For example, despite the generally high reputation enjoyed by the VGIK, some commentators have sounded a note of caution concerning its effectiveness as an institution. Malte Hagener for one appears to regret the Institute's move away from the initial seamless integration of theory and practice towards a more overtly academic establishment in the 1930s, characterized by what he describes as “functional differentiation into film history, vocational film education, archiving, screening alternative films and cinema in the service of the national interest.”¹⁸ While Jamie Miller is more overtly critical of the Institute in the 1930s, identifying inadequate technical resources including a lack of sound recording equipment until 1935, the high levels of unemployment experienced by graduates, and a more generalized lack of “relevance to a cinema industry that had moved away from the Formalism of many 1920s films to the ‘cinema for the millions’ of the 1930s, with its simple, comprehensible plots.”¹⁹ While acknowledging that the Institute provided students with the necessary technical skills, Miller suggests there was no real attempt to engage in the needs of a popular cinema, implying that the Institute had rapidly become an isolated academic community without a clear purpose.

Interestingly, IDHEC has been criticized from the opposite perspective. Colin Crisp, for example, suggests that despite its cultural activities, its strong emphasis on technical training and practical competence began to work against Marcel L'Herbier's founding commitment to innovation and radicalism. The priorities of the school were to contribute directly to the “cinema of

quality” in the 1950s that the young Turks of *Cahiers Du Cinema*, and François Truffaut in particular, were to rail against and use to create their own new cinema of innovation and vitality. As Crisp notes:

If the New Wave can be seen as, in some limited sense, an artistic revolution in the cinema, and thus in line with the romantic myth appealed to by IDHEC’s founder in his opening address, it nevertheless had to be made in the face of the IDHEC-inspired professionalization of the post war personnel.²⁰

While perhaps lacking the subsequent profile of *la nouvelle vague*, IDHEC graduates such as Louis Malle, Alain Resnais, Arnaud Desplechin, Claude Sautet, Claire Denis, Éric Rochant, Patrice Leconte, Claude Miller, André Téchiné, and Jean-Jacques Annaud were nevertheless to play a substantial role in the development of French cinema in the latter half of the twentieth century.

In more recent years it is clearly the case that all film schools have become increasing subject to the demands of industry, marginalizing the overtly intellectual or theoretical in favour of a renewed emphasis on the practical sphere of vocational relevance. This is certainly what underpins the present Skillset/UKFC strategy in the UK, but it is consistent with earlier developments.

When it was established in 1971 the British National Film School was noted for its “active” or “learning based” curriculum, described by Colin Young as being designed to “respond constantly to individual student needs”.²¹ Young also recognized the value of

a dialogue between critics and film-makers which supports the work film-makers are trying to do ... Help is needed in clarifying the aesthetics of fiction and documentary... especially where these overlap. The connections between film and television need to be re-examined, both for reasons of economy but also as a boost to the imagination.²²

But by the mid 1970s this vision was coming under pressure, as David Robinson noted in a *Sight and Sound* article:

There are signs that the National Film School’s apparent inclination to move towards slightly more structured curricula – despite the nervous fears of the faculty that it symptomises “a hardening of the arteries” – is a response to a clearly expressed preference on the part of the student for something that looks at least rather more tangibly like formal “training”.²³

In line with this general direction, the 1980s saw the School set up more formal specializations under direct pressure from the industry.²⁴ Then in the late 1990s the length of the course was cut from three to two years, with students moving more rapidly into specialized areas.

This creeping anti-intellectual instrumentalism has contributed to an apparent waning of interest in what film history (let alone theory) has to offer the aspiring film-maker. This is abundantly clear in an interview between film student Fraser MacDonald and Roger Crittenden, deputy director of the NFTVS, published in the 2002 issue of *Projections*. MacDonald not only complains that being forced to write a 10,000 undergraduate dissertation “stifled his creativity”, he also bemoans “academia getting its fingers into the practical world”, suggesting that rather than studying the classics, fledgling film-makers should spend more time actually making films and learning from their mistakes.²⁵

Holding together the practical and the theoretical at the universities has not been any easier, even in departments combining film studies and film-making. The history of serious film analysis, which I see as falling into three distinct periods, witnessed the opening up of a division between theory and practice that quickly became a chasm. The formative activities of the 1920s and 1930s generated a productive dialogue between practitioners and theorists, with several key individuals operating successfully as both. The second wave of serious film study that emerged in the post-war period – focussed on the politics and aesthetics of realism, on *mise-en-scène*, and on *auteurism* – continued to provide a bridge between the concerns of intellectuals and film-makers. Indeed the 1950s and 1960s witnessed the migration of several serious critics into film-making, most notably the leaders of the French *nouvelle vague* and stalwarts of the British new wave such as Lindsay Anderson and Karel Reisz.

But the development and expansion of academic film studies in the 1970s, underpinned by the emergence of new modes of theoretical enquiry derived from Marxism, semiotics, and psychoanalysis, unfortunately opened up a gap that remains to this day. While this development undoubtedly created an intellectually rich and challenging range of discourses, the avowedly anti-humanist impulse of structuralist and post-structuralist theory entailed a turning away from perspectives founded on the centrality of the creative agency of the film-maker. It also made such theorizing much easier to reject on the grounds that it had no practical application or value.

This not only polarized theorists and practitioners in university film departments, but it also impacted on independent film schools. So when Colin Young approached the BFI Education Department in 1970 to discuss the provision of a film studies/film history element in the curriculum at the new National Film School, he claims that he “couldn’t find anyone who was willing to come and talk about movies in terms of the decisions that are made in the choices of subjects and the way in which subjects are dealt with.” He turned instead to former film-makers such as Thorold Dickinson and Basil Wright to provide this input.²⁶ And while film history has continued to be

taught at the National Film School, frequently by distinguished scholars, it has also remained a very minor part of the curriculum.

IV

So this is the problem we currently face. It may be particularly acute in the UK, where the Anglo-Saxon mindset has always mistrusted the value of theoretical knowledge, insisting on a false split between the practical and the theoretical. But the increasing market-oriented imperative of the global film industry has also strengthened demands for certain kinds of education and training in line with the priorities of Skillset and the UK Film Council. The comprehensiveness of their training strategy has been further aided by changes in UK government policy towards the funding of higher education, which led to independent film schools such as the NFTVS and the LFS to offer degrees validated by the Royal College of Art and London Metropolitan University respectively, effectively closing the gap between the two types of school.

The advent of the film school as “training provider” is something that should concern all in the field, whether we work in departments that teach practical film-making or not. Not only does it erode a pluralistic and challenging film-making culture, it also suggests that if the serious study of cinema has little or nothing to offer those who aspire to make films, then our own legitimacy may be challenged by policy-makers. For in this time of global economic crisis we must all confront the increasing emphasis on the role of universities in knowledge transfer and supporting economic activity and enterprise – even if this remains at the level of caring about our students’ career aspirations.

Which brings me back to the history of film schools and the valuable insights this can yield. If the integration of the practical and the intellectual helped to lay the foundations for not only revolutionary Soviet cinema but also the Polish and Czech New Waves, New Hollywood, Fifth Generation Chinese Cinema, and the New Danish Cinema to take just a random selection of examples, then there is a great deal this terrain can offer the rather sterile debate on current education and training provision. Such knowledge can help guide an attempt to critique the new instrumentalism, and assist us in offering a relevant and credible alternative. Despite common assumptions, theory-practice is a false dichotomy, and production-oriented courses must strive to combine hands-on skills training with the fostering of an intellectually driven creativity that is rooted in a thorough understanding of moving image aesthetics, history, criticism, and theory, and how one’s own practice is located within these structures and contexts.

As someone contributing to the building of a new department of theatre, film, and television at the University of York that has a strong emphasis on production, I will be grappling directly with the problem of ensuring that students continue to be exposed to wider intellectual debates and issues. In addition to being skilled practitioners, our graduates need to fully understand and be able to critique the institutions, policies, and strategies of the industry. Rather than being content to churn out suitably compliant workers who will share a cripplingly limited vision of the global entertainment industry, we should all – to misquote Jerzy Topelitz – strive to encourage our graduates to continue to use their creativity and intellect to change and improve not on the world but the industry in which they aspire to work. In line with this, I also want my department to play an active role in generating research that is relevant to current debates and controversies, and which can both inform our curricula and teaching but also be of relevance to practitioners as well as academics. In formulating a relevant and forward-looking strategy for both teaching and research I – and I hope others – can learn much from the guiding philosophies, the experiences, and the achievements of the world's great film schools.

Sammanfattning

Filmskolors betydelse för och inflytande över filmhistoriens område och utvecklingen av filmkonsten som kreativ kulturform fortsätter att vara ett i stora drag ouppmärksammat område inom akademisk forskning. Ändå utgjorde sådana institutioner efter andra världskrigets slut en betydande karriärväg för aspirerande utövare världen över. De har följaktligen varit centrala för formeringen och kultiveringen av individuella filmskapares talanger och skapandet av kreativa relationer. Filmskolor har haft ett avsevärt inflytande på bredare stilistiska trender, produktionssätt, nationella biografier och filmskaparrörelser. Denna essä inleds av en betraktelse över rådande förhållanden inom brittisk filmutbildning, där en smal och förhållandevis praktiskt inriktad agenda blivit dominerande. Begränsningarna i denna hållning kontrasteras sedan mot en undersökning av den historiska utvecklingen i europeiska och amerikanska filmskolor och hur olika påbud och influenser, både industriella, kulturella och artistiska, bidrog till deras utveckling och funktion som institutioner. Artikeln fortsätter sedan med en betraktelse över hur förhållandet mellan teori och praktik sett ut inom olika slags institutioner (särskilt nationella konservatorier och universitetsinstitutioner) och i olika epoker, och tittar särskilt på hur sådana förhållanden frambringat pågående spänningar och konflikter. Slutligen förs diskussionen tillbaka till den aktuella situationen i Storbritannien genom några förslag på sätt på vilka en bättre förståelse av filmskolornas historia kan kasta ljus över och bredda pågående diskussioner.

Keywords: Film schools, Europe, USA, institutions, 1950–2010

Notes

- 1 *A Bigger Future: The UK Film Skills Strategy*, London 2003, p.10.
- 2 *A Bigger Future*, p.17.
- 3 For a characteristically bullish elaboration of this vision see Alan Parker, “Building a Sustainable UK Film Industry”, a speech given by the then Chairman of the UKFC, London, 5 November 2002.
- 4 Malte Hagener, *Moving Forward, Looking Back: The European Avant Garde and the Invention of Film Culture 1919–1939*, Amsterdam 2007, p. 136.
- 5 Mikhail Yamplosky, “Kuleshov’s Experiments and the New Anthropology of the Actor”, in *Inside the Film Factory: New Approaches to Russian and Soviet Cinema*, (eds.) Richard Taylor and Ian Christie, London 1991.
- 6 S.M. Eisenstein, “Teaching Programme for the Theory and Practice of Direction 1936”, in *Selected Works*, iii: *Writings, 1934–1947*, id., London 1997.
- 7 John Francis Lane, “Amateur Activities: On Studying the Film”, *Sight and Sound* 19/2 1950, p. 93.
- 8 As Susan Hayward has noted, the institutional framework that would prove so vital to the survival and subsequent flourishing of French cinema was imposed by the Vichy government and “it took the rationalising and organisational modalities of the Occupation to put in place a fully fledged school of film studies”. Susan Hayward, *French National Cinema* Second Edition, London 2005, p. 37.
- 9 C. G. Crisp, *The Classic French Cinema 1930–1960*, Bloomington, Ind. 1993.
- 10 British Film Institute Library, 791.40, typescript of Jerzy Toeplitz, “The Role of Film Tradition in Training New Cadres of Film Artists” Pamphlet 27, a paper prepared c. 1965 for the Moscow Film School Congress.
- 11 Dickinson had started teaching film at the Slade School of Art in 1960, part of a wider set of developments that saw the introduction of film-making to the curricula of art schools, polytechnics, and universities in Britain. David Robinson, “Better Late Than Never”, *Sight and Sound* 31/2 1962, pp. 67–70.
- 12 For a history of the Association, see William O. Huie Jr., “UFVA at 40: A Brief History”, *Journal of Film and Video* 38/2 1986, pp. 21–41.
- 13 For a detailed discussion of the early developments at USC, see Dana Polan, *Scenes of Instruction: The Beginnings of the U. S. Study of Film*, Berkeley 2007, ch. 4.
- 14 Michael Pye and Lynda Myles, *The Movie Brats: How the Film Generation Took Over Hollywood*, New York 1979.
- 15 Noel King “The Last Good Time We Ever Had’: Remembering the New Hollywood Cinema”, in *The Last Great American Picture Show: New Hollywood Cinema in the 1970s*, (eds.) Thomas Elsaesser, Alexander Horwath and Noel King, Amsterdam 2004, p. 20.
- 16 Dina Ijordanova, *Cinema of the Other Europe: The Industry and Artistry of East Central European Film*, London 2003, p. 22.
- 17 Colin Young, “Keynote Address”, *Journal of Film and Video* 40/1 1988, pp. 5–12.
- 18 Hagener, p.136.
- 19 Jamie Miller, “Educating the Filmmakers: The State Institute of Cinematography in the 1930s”, *Slavonic and Eastern European Review* 85/3 2007, p. 489.
- 20 Crisp, p. 212.
- 21 Young quoted by David Robinson, “Film Schools: Active and Passive”, *Sight and Sound* summer 1975, p. 67.
- 22 Colin Young, “National Film School”, *Sight and Sound* winter 1971/72, p. 8.

- 23 Young 1971/72, p. 168.
- 24 Roger Crittenden, in conversation with Fraser MacDonald, in *Projections 12*, (eds.) Fraser MacDonald, John Boorman and Walter Donohue, London 2002, pp. 11–12.
- 25 See *Projections 12*, (eds.) Fraser MacDonald, John Boorman and Walter Donohue, London 2002, pp. 9–20.
- 26 See Duncan Petrie, “British Film Education and the Career of Colin Young”, *The Journal of British Film and Television* 1/1 2004, p. 88.