

# O'Neill, Deirdre (2018) *Film as a Radical Pedagogical Tool*, Routledge, New York, NY.

## Review by Sarah Attfield

Deirdre O'Neill's book adopts a Marxist approach to research based on a series of practice-led filmmaking workshops in UK prisons run by O'Neill called *Inside Film*. O'Neill outlines her interest in 'collective filmmaking practice' (1) and attempt to answer 'questions of subjectivity and representation as they relate to the issue of (working) class in theory and practice' (1). This theory practice nexus is an important aspect for O'Neill as she introduces students to radical film theory but uses a working-class perspective garnered from her own working-class background and experience.

The book is structured around seven chapters, which present theoretical aspects of filmmaking with examples from O'Neill's practice and the workshops. She argues that film can be a form of 'critical pedagogy' (5) and the films she introduces to workshop participants and the filmmaking practice they learn equips them with tools to counter bad representations of working-class people and to articulate a working-class politics.

Marxist writers such as Gramsci are utilised in making the argument which includes criticism of capitalist structures, neoliberalism, and the ways in which the media and educational institutions operate to reinforce and reproduce the class system. Ultimately, O'Neill aims to develop 'a theoretical and practical, politically committed radical pedagogy of film in the service of the working classes' (29) and she lists seven ways that film can operate as a radical pedagogical tool. The list includes a call for film and its context of production to be analysed dialectically 'through the lens of the wider social and political spectrum of capitalist relations particularly as they relate to class' (33).

While generally quite theory heavy, the book does also contain some descriptions of the films made by students taking part in the *Inside Film* program, and demonstrates that the students have been influenced by film concepts and movements such as Third Cinema, and Imperfect Cinema<sup>1</sup> (introduced to them as part of the workshop program). O'Neill argues that the students become 'organic intellectuals' (90) as a result of their taking up critical positions in relation to class and capitalism through film practice.

The book's central argument, that film can be a radical pedagogical tool, is sound and is presented clearly and the questions that O'Neill raises about representation and the value of self-representation are important. O'Neill also provides historical context of radical filmmaking practice which helps to situate the work she does both in terms of analysis and her

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<sup>1</sup> Third Cinema is a term coined in the 1960s by Argentine filmmakers Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino to relate to anti-colonial cinema that sits outside of Hollywood and European auteur cinema. Imperfect cinema relates to concepts of film articulated by Cuban filmmaker Julio García Espinosa in the 1960s which is focused on struggle and hardship of ordinary people.

own filmmaking practice (the final chapter of the book describes an *Inside Film* project that was centred on a foodbank in South London).

I would have liked more though on the films made by the students in the prison system – more on their experience of the project and more detail of the content and production process of their films. Their voices are somewhat missing from the book. However, overall, this is a well-written analysis that would be very useful for film scholars and film studies educators interested in the radical pedagogical potential of film.

### **Reviewer Bio**

Sarah Attfield is a lecture in communication in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Technology Sydney, Australia. She is currently working on a book that examines the representation of the global working class in contemporary cinema. She is the co-editor of the *Journal of Working-Class Studies*.