
Article

Our Cinema: exploring the development and proposal of a new programme of vernacular-based film education in Scotland

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Abstract

This article explores the development of the Our Cinema project in Scotland: a revolving annual curriculum of film education for upper primary and lower secondary age children in state schools that, at the time of writing, is approaching a pilot phase. Discussion explores the project's origins in France's Cinéma Cent Ans de Jeunesse, and its relationship with the Catalan film education project Cinema en curs, before focusing in particular upon how a school-based programme of film education might seek to explore vernacular conceptions of cinema, through a focus on dialect, place and the lived experiences of participants. The article concludes by offering a detailed, concrete proposal of a film education curriculum, comprising two years (each broken up into 32 weeks) of creative learning activities.

Keywords vernacular; dialect; Bill Douglas; Cinéma Cent Ans de Jeunesse; Alain Bergala; Cinema en curs

Film education scholarship, as it has been represented to date by perspectives published in the *Film Education Journal*, seems – happily – to have considerable interface with film education practice. Frequently, those considering film education pedagogies are simultaneously those delivering them (Nåls, 2018; Donald, 2019; Chambers, 2020), and – in some instances – designing them (Eckert and Martin, 2018). In most instances, formal research and reflective consideration in this respect tend to *follow* practice, within a relatively evaluative mode, reflecting upon aspects of activity that have already taken place. Unlike the great divide between theory and practice elsewhere bemoaned in broader film studies (Petrie, 2011), film education discourses would thus seem to embody a healthy interface with what practitioners are doing on the ground, reflecting a relatively unsiloed interplay and welcome holism of perspective, in which knowledge exchange is not retroactively enacted as an addendum to research, but rather is inherent within the emergent construction of film education as a discipline.

This article aims to invert the normative relationship between practice and scholarship, instead seeking to explore the role of film education scholarship within the *formation* and *inauguration* of practice. It locates the moment of reflective critical activity earlier within a chronology of film education, in detailing the role and impact of research upon the development of a film education project *before* it is delivered, through a case study of the development of the Our Cinema project in Scotland. While this article utilises aspects of the past tense in reflecting upon Our Cinema's development process (and some of the prior experiences which led to our decision making), the central aspect of film education practice detailed here is located largely in the future tense. Admittedly, this may seem a more methodologically precarious form of scholarship, in contrast with the more readily justifiable format of a reflective case study, in which project delivery serves a similar function to that which an experiment plays in harder, more 'scientific' forms of scholarly enquiry, in testing out a hypothesis, from which various conclusions might be drawn. More complexly, however, while what is here hypothesised pertains largely to aspects of delivery yet to be undertaken (and which thus remain relatively untested), there is also – as explored below, in the broad tradition of action research – a dialogical relationship between practices past, present and future; in particular, how reflections upon past delivery thus shape and inform proposals for future work. While exploring the development of the Our Cinema project, this article thus seeks to illuminate the ways in which research, scholarship and productive critical activity may directly shape and inform film education work, rather than simply serve to evaluate in retrospect, and thus to advocate for a form of activist-scholarship in which there is a dynamic, dialectical relationship from film education theory to practice, as well as that from practice to theory. Here, I draw considerable inspiration from notions of film pedagogy arising from, and at the centre of, a 'thought laboratory' of multivocal discursive practice, as has been previously discussed in relation to the Catalan project *Cinema en curs* (Aidelman Feldman and Colell Aparicio, 2021; Chambers, 2021), or – elsewhere – the notion of an explorative 'experimental pedagogy', as has been discussed in relation to *Cinéma Cent Ans de Jeunesse* (Gibbs, 2018: 91). Ultimately, the formation of pedagogy is itself, I argue, a creative act, and an aspect of practice that requires illumination and critical reflection.

As detailed elsewhere (Chambers, 2020, 2022; Satchel, 2020), from 2012 to the present day, the French film education project *Cinéma Cent Ans de Jeunesse* (CAAJ) – informed by the work of Alain Bergala (2016) – has been delivered in a variety of forms among a small number of Scottish primary and secondary schools, renamed 'Understanding Cinema' (UC). While aspects of the project – including its title and, in 2017/18, aspects of pedagogical framing (Chambers, 2020) – have been gently modulated in order to fit its new Scottish context, to date, the project has relatively faithfully followed the form it has inherited from CCAJ. The project focuses upon an annual curriculum, typically delivered in partnership between classroom teachers and visiting film-makers, which each year focuses upon a new 'question of cinema'. At times, this annual 'question' has focused upon a central aspect of cinematic aesthetics and form (such as 'The Long Take' in 2013/14), while at other times, its focus has been more thematic – 'Weather' (2015/16); 'Play' (2016/17); and 'Place' (2017/18). The 'question' is accompanied by a series of (usually) three or four exercises which culminate in learners making a short film. Throughout the programme, watching and making film are relatively inseparable, intertwined activities, and CCAJ's annual 'question' comes accompanied by a curated series of excerpts from other European and world

cinemas provided by CCAJ's organisers, serving to exemplify and instantiate what is elsewhere being explored in practical work.

The experience of delivering CCAJ/UC in Scotland to date has proven a great source of inspiration and provocation for young learners, film-makers and teachers alike in terms of the rich degree of access that CCAJ's pedagogical approach is (at times) able to open up to fundamental questions of cinematic aesthetics. While currently remaining at a relatively anecdotal level, certain remarkable stories have also arisen from various years of the project's delivery (Donnelly et al., 2018; Chambers, 2022) that tentatively suggest that CCAJ's approach assists young people not only with the development of ciné-literacy, but also in making significant parallel progress with their sense of self-efficacy, self-confidence and holistic aspects of learning.

Simultaneously, however, as I have explored in detail elsewhere (Chambers, 2020), aspects of Understanding Cinema's structure and approach have not proven entirely congruous with long-term ambitions to establish a deeply rooted approach to film education pedagogy within Scottish schools. In particular, CCAJ's ever-novel annual curriculum presents a series of notable problems and frustrations. Notably, as the programme's 'experimental pedagogy' never repeats itself, there is no opportunity to consolidate aspects of strength from past experience and build confidence in project delivery, a significant obstacle given the extent to which classroom teachers have tended to lack confidence in engaging with what many see as the relatively specialist activity of film practice. Further, CCAJ's decision not to repeat stronger aspects of delivery, and instead to continue to search for new 'questions' of cinema, has led to uneven experiences of the project, with certain years of delivery being highly successful in providing a gateway for young learners to an initial experience of film education, whereas others – particularly those exploring more thematic or oblique conceptions of cinema (rather than more fundamental questions of filmic aesthetics) – are considerably less so (Chambers, 2020). Such frustrations have led me, first as a film education practitioner delivering CCAJ/UC in Scottish primary and secondary classrooms, and subsequently as a researcher of film education based in a Scottish university, to seek to shape a version of the project that consolidates its considerable strengths while also addressing certain recurrent weaknesses. Scotland is not the first international partner to aim to devolve and shape a more locally specific variant of CCAJ in this respect. In 2005, Catalonia's A Bao A Qu's Nuria Aidelman – previously a student of Alain Bergala at the University of the Sorbonne – was the first international partner to deliver CCAJ outside France (Chambers, 2021). With the establishment of Cinema en curs, Aidelman and collaborator Laia Collel have subsequently delivered a partially modulated, culturally particularised version of CCAJ through a bifurcated route which retains a respectful, ongoing engagement with its parent project, alongside other aspects of project delivery which have departed more considerably in their approach.

Consciously seeking to follow in the footsteps of Cinema en curs, over the course of 2021, I led a small team – including Queen Margaret University's Dr Robert Munro, the *Film Education Journal's* Filip Kulakiewicz, film-makers Kate Burton and Chi Yu (both of whom had previously delivered CCAJ themselves with young people in Glasgow and London respectively), and two small groups of Scottish primary and secondary school teachers – which sought, over the course of a multifaceted period of development (supported by Screen Scotland and the British Film Institute), to shape a new programme of film education for Scotland. In doing so, we drew upon the considerable strengths of Cinéma Cent Ans de Jeunesse and Understanding Cinema in fashioning a new project more consciously tailored to providing initial, formative encounters with film education within a curricular context in state schools in Scotland. As part of this development process, we engaged in dialogue with Cinema en curs – leading to the publication of an essay summarising these conversations (Chambers, 2021) – which has subsequently become a second, key source of inheritance and inspiration. For reasons explored in detail below, the project that we subsequently developed together has been named 'Our Cinema'.

This article provides a reflective account of our process of development with Our Cinema over the past year, and how this drew upon prior research (which, I should stress, has been almost entirely qualitative rather than quantitative) and experiences of film education, and it concludes by openly

presenting a detailed proposal of our film pedagogy, which comprises a two-year programme, each year requiring roughly thirty weekly sessions to deliver. During the decade I have spent working within film education, I have sometimes encountered a certain reticence to share aspects of film education pedagogy, which frequently has the character of a closely guarded recipe not to be shared beyond contexts of delivery. This has been as much the case within the highly neoliberalised contexts of the contemporary university (frequently now cast as competing suppliers), as it is in third-sector organisations in and beyond the United Kingdom. In the latter case, in particular, caution around the sharing of pedagogies would seem an understandable, albeit regrettable, response to the frequently under-resourced nature of film education as a sector, where a unique approach to film education might thus be relatively inseparable from a secure livelihood. Given the utopian ambition of an 'open cinema' (Chambers, 2018a) or a 'film education for all' (Burn and Reid, 2012), however, we seek here a greater transparency and conviviality in sharing our workings and findings openly, in order that they might be adopted by whomever may find them useful. At present, we are in the process of developing a series of accompanying resources for Our Cinema, and, at the time of writing, a pilot of the project is intended to begin in the next few years, which will encompass aspects of free, online training. In the meantime, however, we would welcome those who wish to make use of the exercises and broader pedagogy formulated below to do so as they see fit.

The following discussion details a series of concerns that we addressed during the Our Cinema development process – in particular: our approach to the question of curricular repetition and the temporal structure of the project; our prioritisation of primary modalities of cinema in a manner both drawing from and stepping beyond precedents within CCAJ; our construction of a series of exercises embodying a progressive chronology of learning (and, subsequently, a parallel series of exercises for learners to produce on their own equipment at home); and, finally and cumulatively, the notion of vernacular film-making which we position at the core of Our Cinema. This notion of a vernacular cinema – a cinema of local place, voice and experience, which draws upon a rich global history of counter-hegemonic film-making, such as Italian neorealism, a postcolonial Third Cinema, and an Indigenous Fourth Cinema – is, I argue, simultaneously in political, pragmatic and pedagogical terms, a powerful source of stimulus for progressive conceptions of film education. The deliverable pedagogy itself can be found in simpler terms in Table 1, and a timetable indicating how we suggest the exercises are deployed across a Scottish school year in Table 2. It is worth noting that, given the limitations of space, discussion focuses upon (and thus foregrounds) the practical, film-making activities within the project, albeit within an understanding that these aspects are inextricable from the activity of watching film found elsewhere in the project.

In the discussion that follows, I use singular (I/my) and collective (we/our) pronouns relatively interchangeably in reflecting work that simultaneously drew upon almost eight years of personal research (and which seeks to continue the line of critical enquiry inaugurated within a series of outputs [Chambers, 2018a; 2019; 2020; 2021; 2022] spanning almost eight years of participation with, and research into, *Cinéma Cent Ans de Jeunesse*, *Understanding Cinema* and *Cinema en curs*), and a collaborative and collective dialogical process in which my own ideas, experiences and convictions were subject to considerable discussion with multiple interdisciplinary interlocutors, key among them my colleagues Robert Munro, Flip Kulakiewicz, Kerry Abercrombie, Kate Burton, Chi Yu, Scott Donaldson (Screen Scotland), Gail Robertson (Screen Scotland) and Mark Reid (BFI). In these terms, and given the limited scope of a single article, this essay is thus best read alongside these earlier aspects of research, to provide further context and illumination.

Balancing cumulative activity with consolidation within a revolving two-year structure

One of our first considerations within the development of Our Cinema was the broader temporal structure of the project, and the resulting formal implications for our curriculum. As above, one of my

key frustrations with CCAJ/UC had been that its annual curriculum (or 'question of cinema') is/was never repeated, leading to situations in which it has been difficult to consolidate learning from previous years (and subsequently build confidence for future delivery), but also in which subsequent years of the project have become increasingly obtuse in the access they have granted (or, rather, struggled to grant) for learners encountering film education for the first time. In my experience, CCAJ/UC was at its most successful when it focused upon what might be considered aspects of cinematic *ontology* (Chambers, 2020) and *primary* modalities of film-making – fundamental aesthetic questions of how cinema works as a medium, rather than relatively *secondary*, thematic aspects of content, such as how cinema expresses sensory depictions of 'Weather' (2015/16) or 'Play' (2016/17). In this respect, the most successful year of delivery I experienced was 2013/14's 'The Long Take', which allowed young people to experiment with the expressive parameters of a single, unbroken shot, from a number of different approaches (as explored in more detail below). Here, the project afforded simple but deep access to a primary modality of cinema, thus serving as an effective gateway to fundamental encounters with cinematic aesthetics for learners encountering film education for the first time. CCAJ's approach did not *simplify* cinematic aesthetics, but rather stripped away all extraneous considerations in order to focus on essential parameters both particular and fundamental to the medium of cinema. During this year of delivery, I witnessed various remarkable moments in which relatively young (10-year-old) learners were able to grasp the temporal and dramaturgical aesthetics of an unbroken shot that we tend to associate with the theory of André Bazin (Chambers, 2022; Bazin, 1967). In comparison, the secondary modality of 'Weather' in 2015/16 not only failed to provide the same level of access for initial encounters with film education, but equally failed to enthuse or motivate young learners to the same extent (Chambers, 2020). Despite these significant weaknesses, the ever-changing curricula of CCAJ/UC have, however, served – for those able to be involved on a longer-term basis (for more than one year of delivery) – to foster a sense of both cumulative learning and shared experience and community between longer-term participants. Most of these, it is worth noting, are those adults involved in the project's longer-term delivery, for, given the relatively resource-intensive nature of CCAJ, and the need to share opportunities widely, it is rare, at least within UK contexts, that the same children participate in the project for more than one year.

I thus sought a compromise that simultaneously incorporated aspects of an ongoing, cumulative approach alongside regular moments of curricular repetition, to allow for the consolidation and greater sharing of the project's strengths. This led us to adopt a revolving two-year curricular structure for Our Cinema, which repeats itself after every two-year cycle. Crucially, given that young learners would in many (and perhaps a majority of) instances be unlikely to experience more than one year of the project, I also felt that – while complementary – each year of the project should be designed to serve effectively as 'Year One', as an initial gateway to film education for young learners. It is also our hope that such a structure will allow for a summative approach wherein teachers who participate in the project once will – after two years of the project – have greater confidence when participating in the project in subsequent iterations. While CCAJ relies almost entirely on an approach whereby outsider film-makers are present in the classroom in order to support classroom teachers with the ever-novel delivery of the programme, this relatively resource-intensive approach inevitably incurs a certain degree of tension within the context of a small nation wherein there is simultaneously limited state film education funding, and a subsequent need to share film education activities as broadly and equitably as possible across the country. Our intention has thus been to adopt what we hope will be a cumulative approach, wherein we continue to provide film-makers to support classroom teachers in a small number of schools within one two-year phase of delivery, with the expectation that when the project subsequently resets itself, these classroom teachers will henceforth have the confidence to deliver the project themselves.

Prioritising a focus upon primary modalities of cinema

Following my experiences with CCAJ/UC, I felt it essential that the 'question of cinema' each year focused upon a primary aspect of cinematic ontology that opened up the sort of simple-yet-deep access to the

exploration of fundamental expressive parameters of cinema afforded by CCAJ at its best. We thus chose to base our first year of Our Cinema on the previous structure of CCAJ/UC's 'The Long Take', and then – departing from precedents within both CCAJ/UC and Cinema en curs – to adopt a contrasting approach in the second year through a focus upon montage. Our rationale was various. First, in more pragmatic terms, I had personally frequently found in previous years of delivery with CCAJ/UC that editing was a complex skill which there was frequently not sufficient time to teach within a single year of the project, alongside a detailed approach to camerawork. (As discussed elsewhere, this frequently led to situations in which I would perform the editing myself [Chambers, 2019]). A bifurcated approach to 'the long take' in Year 1 and 'montage' in Year 2 would thus hopefully allow us to focus largely upon camera skills in Year 1 (helping young learners develop a more sophisticated understanding and experience of camerawork), with little to no editing (beyond that effectively taking place *in camera* within the complex construction of *mise en scène* within a *plan sequence*), and subsequently to bring in editing as a core skill in Year 2, alongside a more simplified approach to camera.

On a deeper level, however, as explored elsewhere (Chambers, 2018a), editing and montage is frequently backgrounded (if not outright excluded) from CCAJ, with the chapter of film history surrounding Soviet montage cinema (and the work of Sergei Eisenstein in particular) notably absent from the project's discussions of cinema. This is, one might speculate, likely to be due to the centrality of Bazinian theories of cinema at the heart of the Franco-centric canon of cinema advocated within CCAJ (and instantiated within the clips that CCAJ's team provide to illustrate the 'question of cinema' each year), which tends to focus on aspects of French cinema (and sympathetic international adherents, such as Ozu and Kiarostami) in which the approach to film form is largely embodied within unbroken shots, and with an emphasis on naturalism and verisimilitude. While recognising the considerable pedagogical strength of an initial approach to film education focusing primarily on what is expressively possible *within a given shot*, we nevertheless felt it important for Our Cinema to build in a counter, by elsewhere exploring what is possible *between shots*, through editing. Here, I argue, is one of the central formal dialectics of cinema, as reflected in its fundamental, ontological construction as a medium: on the one hand, aesthetic meaning and sensation is articulated visually *within* a shot, through aspects of *mise en scène*, screen direction, composition, diegetic sound, and the manner in which time and events unfold within a single unbroken frame. On the other hand, meaning is articulated by the *co-positioning of two (or more) shots*, and also by the co-positioning of image and non-diegetic sound, and the subsequent signification and sensation that arises from the encounter (or, at times, collision [Eisenstein, 1969]) of different elements, as more than the sum of their respective parts. With certain exceptions (of largely experimental and semi-experimental cinema such as *Nightfall* [James Benning, 2012], or the sub-history of films such as *Rope* [Alfred Hitchcock, 1948] or *Birdman* [Alejandro G. Iñárritu, 2014] shot to create the impression of a singular shot), both aspects of cinema are present within almost every film (and, indeed, aspects of montage are present even within an unbroken shot, through the sense of editing-in-camera in which subsequent framings are juxtaposed in sequence) and, as such, I argue that the emphasis upon one singular approach to cinema is aesthetically (and, perhaps, ideologically) partisan in a manner that is difficult to justify within a programme of education. Rather, it would seem beholden upon foundational approaches to film education to offer a polycentric rather than an overly prescriptive approach to film aesthetics, seeking to open up the possibilities of the medium, rather than to close them down. Such an approach would also seem befitting to a project seeking to put down deep roots in Scotland, given the presence of this central dialectic of cinema within the work of one of the country's most significant film-makers – Bill Douglas – which, as Duncan Petrie (2008: 75) describes: 'articulates the basis for an integration of apparently antithetical understandings of cinema: namely André Bazin's ontology of the photographic image as a transparent window onto the world and Eisenstein's doctrine of dialectical montage'.

Douglas's interest in the history of cinema, and reflexive interest in cinema as a medium (Chambers, in press), make his cinema a fertile ground and source of inspiration for playful explorations of filmic form (beyond what might be considered more chauvinistic, nationalistic reasons for positioning his work as a key coordinate

for Our Cinema!), as will be explored further below. As Petrie (2008) suggests, the dialectic (as articulated within Douglas's filmography) between understandings of cinema that locate the ontological basis of the medium *within a shot*, and those that locate the ontological basis *between shots (and sound)*, is perhaps most legibly enacted within film studies (and wider film culture) within the discursive clash between the Soviet montage theory of Sergei Eisenstein in the 1920s, and that of André Bazin in France in the 1950s. Indeed, Bazin's (1967: 25) 'ontology of the photographic image' itself explicitly sought to respond to Eisenstein:

Montage as used by Kuleshov, Eisenstein, or Gance, did not show us the event; it alluded to it. ... The combinations [of montage] are infinite. But the only thing they have in common is the fact that they suggest an idea by means of metaphor or by an association with ideas.

While Bazin's dogmatic proposal that approaches to cinema rooted within unbroken shots are somehow closer to lived experiences of life (and thus possess a more concrete, privileged relationship with realism) is of course problematic – as is the resulting conclusion, which CCAJ seems to have inherited, that such a mode of cinema is aesthetically superior to that premised more upon montage – I argue that both Bazinian and Eisensteinian aesthetics can usefully be decentred and repositioned as *possible*, rather than essentialised or unequivocal, approaches to cinematic creation. Neither render the other invalid nor, indeed, are they mutually exclusive; a yin and yang relationship, perhaps, rather than one of chalk and cheese. If one decentres Bazin to instead read his notion of verisimilitude as one possible approach through which to achieve a highly impactful *performance* of the real within art-house cinema (such as in the films of Christian Mungiu or Béla Tarr), popular cinema (such as in the films of Alfonso Cuarón and Alejandro González Iñárritu) and television alike (such as in *True Detective* or Yeon Sang-ho's recent Netflix serial *Hellbound*), and adopt a similar perspective on the theory and practice of Eisenstein, then both can be repositioned as possible aesthetic strategies for learners and film-makers to adopt and explore in the development of their own tastes and practice.

Constructing progressive chronologies of learning

In formulating specific exercises for Year 1: 'Within a Single Shot', and Year 2: 'Between Two Shots' (and I should reiterate that the following discussion focuses on the aspects of film-making within Our Cinema, rather than those aspects of *watching* elsewhere in the project), we were particularly concerned with designing a step-wise, chronological and cumulative programme of learning in which each subsequent exercise built upon previous aspects of learning. My previous experience of CCAJ/UC had frequently been that exercises were somewhat discontinuous, thus requiring aspects of suture and bridging during delivery in order to shape them into a cohesive programme of learning. For example, CCAJ's initial 'Long Take' curriculum comprised only two exercises, before students attempted their final film, formulated as follows:

1. Students making a 'Lumière Minute', an exercise in which each participant across CCAJ shot a 60-second documentary from a static perspective.
2. Students in groups shooting a brief (2–3-minute) scene in one long take that was filmed twice, from both a static and a moving camera perspective. These two versions of the scene were intended to correspond to a typology of long takes provided by CCAJ (under headings such as 'double focus' and 'changing during the shot'), and the exercise came with the additional specification that 'particular attention will be paid to the use of sound in this exercise'.

In these terms, students were initially expected to make the significant leap from documentary film-making in Exercise 1, to working with actors and staged dramatic scenarios in Exercise 2, a moment of relative epistemological whiplash for 10-year-old learners. Further, camera movement is introduced in Exercise 2 without the graded introduction that might help students gain a sense of both its logistical and expressive functions within cinema. Similarly, subsequent years of CCAJ would expect young people to film dramatic scenes without equipping them with an understanding of how to break scenes down into

separate shots that subsequently construct a sense of dramatic continuity in the edit (something that we sought to explicitly address with Year 1's Exercise 4 and Year 2's Exercise 3). This led to certain absurdities in which, for example, 10-year-old directors filmed a two-shot scene of reverse angles, as a series of twenty different shots – moving the camera backwards and forwards for each subsequent line of dialogue, between increasingly inconsistent angles to scene-left and -right!

With such broken chronologies in mind, we sought to underpin Our Cinema's exercise structure with a graded, step-wise approach wherein, starting with a highly focused set of creative restraints (what Mark Reid [2018: 11] has described as the 'dirigisme' of CCAJ's approach), a new expressive parameter was subsequently introduced sequentially within each exercise. (Happily, this chronology also served to mirror the history of cinema, through initially static camera placement, followed by the introduction of camera movement – what Mike Figgis [2007: 83] has described as 'the real birth of cinema'.) With this in mind, our exercises for Year 1 ('The Long Take') start with documentary with a static camera (as in the initial 'Lumière Minute' exercise), moving to a second exercise, now exploring *drama* with a static camera (thus allowing students to explore how they might now control action happening in front of the camera, in particular blocking the movement of actors within a static frame). A third exercise then introduces simple, tripod-based camera movement (with an emphasis on how changes in camera perspective serve to open up new spaces within a single shot). Subsequently, a fourth exercise introduces hand-held camera movement (initially using still photographs to scaffold the construction of a more complex sequence shot, which effectively serves to 'edit-in-camera' between a succession of different framings, introducing a sense of montage into the unbroken shot), before finally arriving at the 'compare and contrast' exercise that initially formed the basis of CCAJ/UC's Exercise 2, as above, in which learners are able to compare contrasting camera perspectives upon the same scene. Throughout these exercises, we place an emphasis upon visual storytelling, wherein dialogue should be kept to a minimum. This graded approach between exercises, we hope, will allow not only for a more organic chronology of learning, but also allow young learners to explore the expressive possibilities of each new additional element (whether that be the ability to create a sense of foreground, middleground and background through blocking, or the expressive properties of a controlled camera movement) in order to arrive at their final short film projects with a more clearly identified palette of expressive devices to draw upon. (Full details of these exercises can be found in Table 1.)

Formulating exercises without any prior blueprint inherited from CCAJ/UC for the second year of Our Cinema proved somewhat more of a challenge. We thus sought guidance within the films of Bill Douglas, which – appropriately, given the project's emphasis on the vernacular and dialect aspects of cinema (as discussed below) – provided examples of highly imaginative, expressive usages of montage within a cultural and social context that was recognisably Scottish. The Bill Douglas Trilogy (*My Childhood* [1972], *My Ain Folk* [1973], *My Way Home* [1978]) in particular includes a number of instances of montage in which unities of scene construction (in terms of visual continuity of eye-line, screen-direction), time and place are boldly broken. Many commentators have remarked upon the resulting gaps and ellipses within Douglas's style (Barefoot, 2006), and the manner in which this has subsequently been adopted by Scottish film-makers such as Lynne Ramsay (Craig, 2009), which fractures the manner in which space and time tend to be constructed in cinema, in favour of a more atomised approach to storytelling in which, as Douglas himself remarked, 'every shot is a sentence' (Noble, 1993a: 24), or – elsewhere – 'every shot is a verb' (Noble, 1993b: 127). As Barefoot (2006: 23) describes, the approach to editing and direction in the Trilogy 'provides a montage of shots rather than the continuity of Hollywood cinema ... there is little concern with providing a clear sense of duration or explanation'. Tony Rayns wrote similarly, of Mark Donskoi's *The Childhood of Maxim Gorky* (1938), a film that reportedly exercised significant influence upon Douglas (Caughie, 1993), that Donskoi's 'concern with the lyricism of individual images leads him to neglect continuity of almost any sort: at one level, the films play like an anthology of continuity errors' (Rayns, 2004: 224). Arguably the approach to film form and meaning making that Douglas adopts in the Trilogy is thus one informed and afforded by the displacements and contradictions *inherent within*

the medium of film, rather than an approach defined by its reference to external experience and the aspiration to a Bazinian sense of spatial or temporal verisimilitude; in the words of Alfred Hitchcock, 'not a slice of life but a piece of cake'.

Significant uses of montage within the Trilogy thus informed particular exercises within the chronology of Year 2 of Our Cinema. In particular, the striking opening sequence of *My Ain Folk*, in which Tommy (Hughie Restorick) cries in the cinema while austere miners descend into the darkness of the earth outside, alongside the sequence in which Jamie (Stephen Archibald) sits miserably in class, while miners elsewhere wade across a subterranean expanse of water, served as the inspiration for our 'Inside/Outside' exercise, in which learners are asked to contrast two separate (interior/exterior) locations and aspects of activity taking place *at the same time*, which are then co-positioned within the edit in order to achieve aspects of expressive contrast through montage. Elsewhere, the striking sequence midway through *My Way Home* conveying Jamie's descent into a directionless depression, through a series of shots drawing from different locations and times (most of which Jamie is not himself visible in) – such as an empty country lane, a desolate overhead shot of an empty street within the mining village of Newcraighall, an empty departures board at a railway station, and a mournful close-up of Jamie, his head sunk upon his chest – served as the basis of approach for our 'Film Poem' exercise, in which a lyrical series of shots (spanning different times and places) are placed in counterpoint in order to imply the interior experience and emotions of a character. In this 'Film Poem' exercise in particular, we encourage learners to follow Douglas's example in using shots spanning different locations and places, and to explore non-literal connections between images (outside recognisable forms of montage, such as the flashback or training sequence) in exploring the full expressive potential of montage. Douglas's notion of 'every shot is a verb/sentence' subsequently informed the conception of our 'Every Shot Matters' exercise, in which learners are asked to construct a sequence from a set of contrasting images (first from still photographs, and subsequently with a series of moving images), in which every image is tasked with being a sequential beat serving to move the shape and feeling of the scene forward. This exercise (like our 'Sequence Shot' exercise in Year 1) also draws on Alain Bergala's (2016) discussion of the limited usefulness of the storyboard within film education, as a divergent medium one step away from cinema, dependent upon abstract representation and a student's ability to draw. Bergala instead suggests the use of a stills camera which records actual locations and spatial relations, and is thus a more effective bridge to the construction of a sequence of moving images. Finally, following Douglas's general style (which, across the three films of the Trilogy barely moves the camera once [Chambers, in press]), we have provided the general suggestion that dialogue be kept to a minimum in order to emphasise visual parameters of storytelling, and that all shots within Year 2 of Our Cinema be static, in keeping with Our Cinema's approach of seeking to balance the respective demands of editing with a simplified approach to camerawork in Year 2 (as opposed to the more sophisticated approaches to camerawork in Year 1, when relatively free from the requirement to teach editing).

When structuring the chronology of exercises for Year 2, we once again sought to provide a graded, step-wise 'dirigiste' approach, wherein initially tightly focused parameters were gradually expanded to include new expressive affordances and considerations. Mindful also of the greater time required to teach both aspects of editing and camerawork in Year 2, we sought an approach whereby aspects of pre-existing footage would be provided to learners during the first two exercises, in order to begin the year with editing skills, thus situating the affordances of montage as a primary creative concern right from the outset. Reflecting upon how the 'Lumière Minute' exercise provided not only a strong pedagogical starting point for Year 1, but also usefully gestured to the early history of cinema, we looked to the Kuleshov effect, as a similarly archetypal reference point within a world film history premised on montage, to serve as the basis of our first exercise for Year 2. As famously replicated by Alfred Hitchcock (MediaFilmProfessor, 2011), the Kuleshov effect serves to demonstrate how montage can fundamentally change the meaning of any given shot by substituting different point-of-view shots which are cut alongside the same closely framed shot of an onlooking man (esteticaCC, 2009). Correspondingly, within Exercise 1 of Year 2, young

learners are invited to work with pre-existing footage in order to demonstrate to themselves, and each other, how the combination of different shots serves to fundamentally change their meaning.

This is subsequently followed by the first (2: 'Film Poem: Experiment') of two exercises inspired by the 'directionless' sequence from Douglas's *My Way Home*, in which learners are invited to effectively *make a mess*, and to experiment creatively in a relatively untempered manner with the expressive potential of montage, in combining newly shot footage of a relatively static character (such as Jamie hunched at his desk in *My Ain Folk*, or dejectedly stuck in place at the railway station in *My Way Home*) with pre-existing material serving to imply their internal life. In order to allow the focus of the exercise to remain mostly upon what is happening in the edit, a pre-existing body of shots will again be provided, with the intention of serving as a 'spice rack' of different flavours, each articulating a certain emotion or sensation (a dripping tap, a raging fire, a harsh wind in the trees and so on), which can then be added to the 'recipe' of co-positioned shots to suit the tastes of the individual learner. The exercise also extends the notion of montage beyond that between two shots, to that more broadly between two relatively differentiable layers of footage (which may have different connotations in terms of location and time period, as below). The explicit intention of the exercise is to provide an initial opportunity to experiment with montage without the need for refinement or focus, before the exercise returns later in the chronology of exercises, in a more directed capacity. As described above, the third exercise (3: 'Every Shot Matters') seeks, after the space for exuberance, abstraction and relatively untempered creativity in Exercise 2, to begin fostering a sense of discipline in terms of how a chronological series of shots serves to construct a dramatic continuity. (As the first exercise in which there is no pre-existing footage provided, it will also thus serve as a focused exploration of [static] camera perspective.) Here (following Bergala's suggestion to avoid storyboards, as above), learners are asked to construct a scene first using a series of 6–10 still photographs, which subsequently serve as the basis for a series of 6–10 moving images. Recalling Douglas's relatively atomised style, aspects of visual or spatial continuity (in terms of eye-lines, screen direction and so on) are here of less importance than the power each new image possesses as a discrete, rhythmic beat within an ongoing series of shots, and participants are actively encouraged to think about creating a sense of difference between the shots (in terms of angle, shot size and so on).

Drawing upon the aforementioned sequences within *My Ain Folk*, the following exercise (4: 'Inside/Outside') returns to the notion of montage as creating contrast, not only between two shots, but also between two differentiable layers of footage, this time between an aspect of action within an interior space, and that within an exterior space, which – crucially – are happening *at the same time*. Here, learners are again required to film both aspects of footage, before exploring how to intercut them so as to elicit expressive contrasts. Finally, a fifth exercise returns to the 'Film Poem' format of Exercise 2, with learners this time expected to consciously plan, film and edit all aspects of the sequence themselves, which should ultimately seek to intercut between a character experiencing a powerful internal moment and a lyrical sequence of shots (crucially drawn not only from other locations, but also from other times) serving to imply some aspect of their inner predicament.

Bridging between school-based film education and learners' lived experiences outside the classroom

A further concern we took into account when shaping the curriculum for Our Cinema was how to bridge film-making in classroom environments and young people's lives and interactions with visual media outside school contexts. This priority was shaped and informed by a variety of factors. First, arising from a similar concern to that of providing an organic, graded, step-wise chronology of learning, I had found during previous deliveries of CCAJ/UC that the need to devise a longer story for the final film project frequently proved something of a leap, without any prior investment in story development. Second, recalling the similar efforts of Cinema en curs to incorporate the image-making devices to which young people themselves have access within the Moving Cinema project (Aidelman and Colell, 2018), we wanted

to ensure that the experiences of practical film-making within the project were not entirely divorced from the means of production already available to students. Third, and perhaps most importantly (as explored below in relation to a vernacular cinema), we felt it important for *Our Cinema* to incorporate within its pedagogy a concrete, tangible mechanism through which to encourage learners not only to draw story content from their own lives, but also more generally to reconcile their understanding of cinema with their own lived experiences both in and outside school. Generally speaking, I had noticed during previous years of CCAJ/UC that moments in which young people were able to take cameras home, or otherwise conduct aspects of practical work without any direct adult influence or participation, frequently produced much more expressive, exploratory and focused work than that conducted in school time, whether on school grounds or on trips out of school accompanied by adults. During 2013/14 ('The Long Take') in particular, I noticed a striking contrast in the 'Lumière Minute' exercises produced by a primary school in a relatively privileged area of Scotland's central belt, who were allowed by the school to take cameras home to complete the exercise in their own time, and those produced by a nearby primary school from a less privileged area, where learners were not permitted this degree of agency with the cameras, and therefore had to shoot their Lumière Minutes with an adult present (and frequently with several other children waiting impatiently in line behind the camera to take their turn next).

Arising then from interlinked motivations pertaining to narrative development, the hope of allowing learners a greater degree of agency and freedom with certain aspects of project work, and the aim of encouraging learners to reconcile their conception of cinema with their own lived experiences outside school, we subsequently developed a second, complementary, yet much simpler series of homework exercises to be conducted in parallel with the core exercises as above. These exercises are to be performed outside school time on whatever equipment is readily available to children, but – equally importantly – are subsequently to be brought into school and discussed as a class. Our intention is also that this series of exercises takes place in *either year of Our Cinema*, thus serving as a point of continuity between both years of the project, whether the annual 'question of cinema' focused on the long take, or on montage. As per the project schedule (see Table 2), learners would be given approximately three or four weeks to complete each of these exercises in their own time (and on their own equipment), with the sessions in which each was shared and discussed among the class interspersed between the more formal school-based series of exercises exploring the long take or montage. Again, we took care to construct the sense of a progressive chronology of learning within this parallel series of homework exercises, beginning with specific, narrowed parameters, before gradually broadening the affordances to allow more scope for expression and exploration. We also took notable inspiration from the precedent of *Cinema en curs*, both in terms of using photographs as an initial bridge to moving image work (Chambers, 2021), but also more specifically in terms of exercises focusing on light and faces (Chambers, 2021) and a sense of place (Chambers, 2021, 2019). In order to assist learners in developing a sense of intentionality and self-awareness with regard to camera placement and composition (frequently one of the biggest challenges within practical film education [Chambers, 2020]), the exercises start with a series of documentary still photographs: (1) a close-up of a significant face paying attention to how light falls upon the face; (2) a mid-shot of a person performing a significant activity; and (3) a wide shot of a significant place at a time of day when the light is interesting. This subsequently moves on to a series of static, one-shot, filmed exercises mirroring the same structure as the photographs while introducing an element of drama and acting: (1) a close-up of a face experiencing a powerful sense of emotion; (2) a mid-shot of a character performing an activity that may or may not conflict with the emotion they are feeling; and (3) a wide shot of a significant place and the moment when a person either enters or exits it. Finally, the exercises conclude with a series of written tasks that culminate in the writing of a short film: (1) write a short piece of writing about a time that you, someone you know or someone like you experienced a powerful sense of emotion; (2) write a short piece of writing about a time that you, someone you know or someone like you experienced a significant change in your life; and (3) draw upon all your experiences of the project to date to write a short story about something that happened to you, someone you know or someone like you.

In order to ground what we hope will be a gradual accumulation of story matter primarily in visual terms, writing is here deliberately introduced *last* in the process, as a distinctly *secondary* modality serving to scaffold and complement audiovisual work. In general, I have found over my time with CCAJ/UC that the best approach to script is very simple stories, which – rather than becoming fully instantiated as scripts – are never formalised beyond a single page of A4, with each scene detailed in a simple sentence outline. In my parallel experiences as a film-maker, I have found that when working with non-actors – or, as the American independent film-maker John Sayles prefers, ‘new actors’ (Chambers, 2022, in press) – allowing actors to improvise their dialogue around a relatively broad scene outline allows for more naturalistic, individualised performances and ‘being in the moment’, rather than the more memory-based task of remembering lines.

This parallel series of homework exercises seeks to encourage young learners to open up visual windows on their own lives, sharing significant locations, faces, activities and – subsequently – written accounts of significant experiences. Various commentators within the pages of the *Film Education Journal* have touched upon the rich rewards of film education work in this respect being able to establish inroads into family homes and wider communities (Abercrombie and Chambers, 2021; Chambers, 2021), and similarly, I have found in my own experience of CCAJ/UC (as above) that younger learners in particular frequently enjoyed the semi-diaristic, ‘show-and-tell’ function of being able to share moments from their own lives, both through the initial ‘Lumière Minute’ exercise in 2013/14, and through some of the longer films that developed out of it (Chambers, 2022). In this respect, this parallel series of home-based exercises is designed to be cumulative in both pedagogical and creative terms, building up a body of material from which learners can then draw for their final films. The moment of writing scripts late into the project’s annual chronology in CCAJ/UC had frequently involved another significant epistemological leap, introducing a need for story content and story development that did not tend to be covered within the preceding exercises. Our Cinema correspondingly seeks to integrate an accumulation of story material from the start of the year, as part of the process of reconciling cinema with our own lives.

Towards an approach to film education rooted in vernacular conceptions of cinema

The notion of a cinema reconciled with the lives of young people touches upon the final and most central aspect of Our Cinema, which seeks a vernacular articulation of cinema arising from the lived experiences of those making it. Throughout the five years I worked as a classroom-based film-maker with CCAJ/UC, I frequently encountered a sense of alienation – a sense that young people approached cinema primarily as the exoticised experience of elsewhere. Cinema, for many young people in Scotland – or so it seemed to me at least, was a medium that spoke of other places, voices and identities more valid and legitimate than those within their own lives. When I asked one participant in 2015 why his film was set in America, I was told ‘nothing interesting happens in Scotland’. In moments when young people started to act in front of cameras during the project in CCAJ/UC’s early exercises, they would sometimes use American accents rather than their own voices (Chambers, 2022). Throughout, it seemed, there was a pervasive, somewhat insidious sense that cinema was not about *me* or *us*, but about *them*; not about *here*, but *there*; not a cinema of *self*, but a cinema of *the other*. As Ryan Shand (2021) recently remarked within the pages of the *Film Education Journal*, ‘excitement lies elsewhere’.

A corresponding counter which seeks to encourage young people to partially resituate their understandings of cinema within their own lives might be seen as a dormant tendency within CCAJ, which – through its prioritisation of Bazinian, naturalist conceptions of cinema (and frequent references to the ‘global neorealisms’ [Giovacchini and Sklar, 2011] of Vittorio De Sica, Abbas Kiarostami and Satyajit Ray) – frequently emphasises naturalism and verisimilitude. What might be said to be dormant within CCAJ/UC in this respect is, however, rendered significantly more explicit within Cinema en curs, which prioritises a

conscious engagement with localised experiences of place and community. It is an element that we seek to foreground further still in Our Cinema.

With Our Cinema, I sought to explicitly formalise the vernacular approach that I had implicitly adopted in five years working with CCAJ/UC. My rationale in this respect was simultaneously: (1) ideological; (2) pragmatic (in terms of the logistics of no-budget film-making); and (3) aesthetic, in respectively seeking to advance a cinema that, correspondingly: (1) enables young people to articulate certain experiences within their own lives; (2) adopts a resourceful approach to no-budget film-making, using resources that are at hand; and (3) articulates a coherent, convincing aesthetic of cinema in which places and people are presented as *themselves*. Wherever possible and appropriate, young people are encouraged to play versions of themselves, or characters with experiences similar to their own, and to draw stories from their own lives, of those they know and others like them. Dialogue is kept to a relative minimum, both in order to emphasise visual parameters of storytelling and to lessen pressure on performance and the need to memorise lines. Where dialogue is used, everyone uses their own voices, accents, dialects and idiolects and – where possible – dialogue is improvised by the actors themselves, allowing them to articulate the content of scenes in their own words. Places and age-appropriate actors are presented as themselves, rather than placeholders signifying off-screen referents (such as children pretending to be teachers). While not a compulsory aspect of Our Cinema, this approach has frequently proven highly compatible with exploring social justice issues such as racism (*See You Tomorrow*, Granton Primary School, 2017), homophobia (*Get Over It*, Granton Primary School, 2016), gender discrimination (*Dancing is for Girls*, Granton Primary School, 2019) and the experiences of displacement of migrant children in the UK for the first time (*The Strada*, Granton Primary School, 2018; Chambers, 2020).

It might be argued that such an approach risks being somewhat austere in over-tempering children's imaginations, perhaps even verging upon a Leavisite programme of edification, whereby the trappings of slow cinema and high culture are imposed upon young learners (a criticism that elsewhere has convincingly been levelled in part at the work of Alain Bergala, upon whose work CCAJ is based [Chambers, 2018a]), in contradiction to children's own prior experiences and tastes in cinema. Ryan Shand (2021: 195) recently gave voice to a recurrent debate within British media education discourses, arguing that rather than 'making films of personal significance', as film education practitioners like myself might hope, young people often instead use opportunities for practical work within film education settings 'to engage in a parodic dialogue with popular culture, in a process which feels more familiar and/or comfortable to them, providing as it does a creative space unburdened by expectations of sincere expression'. More starkly, David Buckingham (2003: 33) has opined that:

teacherly attempts at imposing cultural, moral or political authority children experience in their daily lives are very unlikely to be taken seriously. If, as in many cases, they are based on a paternalistic contempt for children's tastes and pleasures, they certainly deserve to be rejected.

Such debates cut to the heart of questions of what can truly be described as 'popular' within contemporary film culture: the mass box-office hits of Marvel and Disney, or more independently made and distributed films that exercise a greater claim to being not only *for* the people, but *of* the people (and, in some instances, even *by* the people), such as the collaboratively made films of the Amber Collective with communities across the North-East of England, or – indeed – the cinema of Bill Douglas, the only British film-maker to have worked in a mine, chronicling his own childhood within Newcraighall (Chambers, 2018b). Here, as Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel (1964) have discussed, one can still identify the ongoing schism inaugurated within the early days of mass culture, between more localised, 'folk' forms close to place and community, and the increasingly de-individualised and de-localised films produced within the culture industry.

Rather than seek to re-enact an already over-rehearsed and oversimplified Great Divide between art-house and popular modes of world film culture, the notion of a vernacular cinema drawing upon

localised experiences of place, identity and community might be positioned as a *third route* sharing aspects of what tends to be rehearsed respectively as *popular* and *art-house*, and yet sits wholly comfortably within neither. The rationale for such an approach within Our Cinema is manifold. First, such an approach explicitly draws upon diverse precedents within world cinema – such as Italian neorealism, the respective decolonising projects of a postcolonial Third Cinema and an Indigenous Fourth Cinema, Hamid Naficy's (2001) conceptions of an 'accented cinema', and the 'poor cinema' Colin McArthur (1994) previously proposed for Scotland – which have each explicitly sought to 'unlearn the dominative mode' (Williams, 1960: 322) in countering the insidious projections and externally formulated representations of hegemonic power. Such approaches to cinema consciously seek to detach themselves from what the Moroccan documentary film-maker Nadir Bouhmouch described as an 'imitative' relationship with dominant (and dominative) forms of cinema (Chambers, in press), in order to instead re-envisage cinema as part of a revisionist and restorative programme of identity (re)construction. Given the exoticised (and, I argue, alienated) manner in which many young people seem to approach cinema (as an out-of-reach medium speaking of other experiences, elsewhere), such a conception of cinema would, I argue, seem highly appropriate. Rather than a cinema concerned with the heightened, the exoticist and the extraordinary, Our Cinema thus seeks to position cinema as something that takes place on our street, in our home, in our classrooms, and within our own dialects and idiolects.

Second, in these terms, a vernacular cinema is frequently – as Colin McArthur (1994) has discussed – a 'poor' or no-budget cinema, in terms of having access to limited resources. This, too, would seem appropriate for a cinema arising out of school contexts which, also, are highly unlikely to be able to dedicate financial resources to the making of a film. In this respect, the conception of vernacular film-making articulated within Our Cinema is of a *possible* cinema made, as Colin McArthur (1994: 121) has described (in relation to the 1950s Italian art movement *arte povera*), 'out of the materials which were to hand'. In this respect, rather than elaborate costumes, production design, special effects and the ability to cast widely, stories are conceived which draw upon the readily available places, people and stories within a localised setting of a given school or learning space. Here, what might be considered a more political or cultural objective to articulate localised experiences within cinema overlaps considerably with the more pragmatic objective of maximising resources in order to work with what is to hand.

Finally, and crucially, within a programme aspiring to assist learners with the development of fundamental ciné-literacy, a vernacular cinema in this respect seeks to deal with its aesthetic components – whether these be locations, people, faces or events – as *they are*. There is frequently an element of make-believe within school-based film production, in which young children play teachers or members of the police force. Here, there is a complex construction of deferred signification where characters, objects or places seen on screen are not presented as-they-are, but rather point to off-screen referents. In a similar manner, it might be argued that film-making which explicitly draws upon forms of genre pastiche, and does not consider how it articulates *on its own terms*, within a given scene or shot, also risks its primary referent being something which is off screen, an association triggered in the mind of the viewer, rather than something achieved aesthetically on screen, on its own terms. One of the fundamental objectives of the development of ciné-literacy is, arguably, the development of aesthetic apprehension: of being able, in relative terms, to perceive the effect of a given shot, identify *how* it is achieving such an effect, and the relative degree of success with which it is achieving it. In more simplified terms, in my time working with CCAJ/UC, I frequently asked learners 'Do you believe this performance?' or 'Do we believe this character is sad?' In order to suspend disbelief, and move beyond our implicit knowledge of the artifice of filmed drama, we tend to require performances conveying either verisimilitude or (recalling the films of Bill Douglas or Terence Davies, whose work with actors prioritises expression and emotion over naturalism) sufficient emotional affect. The same might be said in more abstract terms about the extent to which a given shot or sequence achieves a certain affect. Here we might ask: 'Does this scene actually make us feel scared?' Or, 'At this point in the film, do we really empathise with this character?' Or, more simply, 'Does this shot really make us feel cold?'

It is important to underline that such an approach does not necessarily insist upon a po-faced, prescriptive realism, nor does it preclude engagements with either aspects of popular genre cinema or, indeed, the magical-realism of young people's imaginations. Rather, in the film *Meet Me in The Park* (made at Lorne Primary School as part of CCAJ/UC 2017/18), a horror film in which a series of young people disappear from the local park, the park is allowed to be itself, as are each of the actors who play (versions of) themselves, improvising their own dialogue, and the film carefully considers how to create a convincing sense of dread and unease, keeping elements that would undermine plausibility (such as creature design or special effects) off screen. Elsewhere, *In My World* (made at Granton Primary School as part of CCAJ/UC 2016/17) features a provocative sequence (see from 5.21 onwards) set within the protagonist's imagination, in which various members of the class are made to disappear, as part of an imaginary tribunal! Again, the sequence considers what can be rendered convincingly, with each image existing as *itself*, rather than as a referent to higher-budget cinema that does not achieve, in and of itself, the effect to which it is referring.

I have discussed elsewhere how the priority placed by Cinema en curs upon cultivating awareness – not only of cinema, but also of the world around them – with young learners interestingly intersects with mindfulness meditation practices (Chambers, 2021), in which one is encouraged to approach the world on a relatively material basis, *as it is*, and – subsequently – our own experiences, emotions, sensations, *as they are*. Here, we seek to de-abstract our awareness in order to pay attention to the material qualities around us. And here, arguably, the three-point rationale underlying a vernacular approach within Our Cinema comes full circle, for the activity of seeking to see things as they are – or rather, as they appear to each of us individually – is simultaneously the activity of seeking to unlearn inherited, hegemonic ways of seeing, and to value anew what we have implicitly learnt to devalue, and to see as boring or mundane. As Cinema en curs is aware, this way of seeing is inseparable from the subsequent activity of cinema, as Nuria Aidelman and Laia Collel describe:

For us, attention is the central methodology or crucial approach to everything that we do. Paying a lot of attention. Cinema is a way of looking and relating to the world and to others. Our essential approach is that cinema is a way of being in the world. It's an opportunity to look at the world in a new way, and find other ways to relate to places and people. When you make cinema, you spend time and have to relate to the places and people that you are filming. For us, one of the most important results of the project is that children start looking at their environment with a different gaze. Taking time to be in the place, taking time to be with people. Then, during the practices and all the activities, we have an objective of relating to the place and the world around you. It's both in the conception of cinema and in the development of the activities. We work a lot using a documentary approach, being inspired by the reality around us. (Chambers, 2021: 119)

Bill Douglas's *My Ain Folk* begins with a powerful sequence in which Tommy (Hughie Restorick) sits silently in the cinema, experiencing a powerful, personal moment of the sublime as he watches *Lassie Come Home*. Significantly, the rhapsodic images Tommy watches on screen are placed by Douglas in swooning technicolour, whereas Tommy and the town of Newcraighall outside the cinema are seen in black and white. Such a sequence mirrors the experience certain young people seem to have of cinema in Scotland: exotic experiences on screen are in lavish colour, whereas their own lives, experiences and the places in which they live outside the cinema are – comparatively – in black and white. Our Cinema thus seeks to redistribute the colour from the cinema screen back into our own lives, in reconciling our own experiences, voices and the places we live as a source of considerable value, worthy of being up on the big screen alongside those from elsewhere in the world.

In conclusion, while Our Cinema draws upon a significant breadth of experience and conviction (both in terms of the five years I spent participating in CCAJ/UC and in terms of the parallel experiences of the other academics, classroom teachers, film-makers and policymakers that fed into

the development process), the ambitions expressed here are yet to be tested in earnest within the context of film education practice. Further research is undoubtedly required to now explore whether the pedagogy formulated here and presented below delivers upon its ambition to establish a deeply rooted project of film education within Scotland, and whether the conception of a vernacular approach to film education advocated here does indeed support learners with the development of both ciné-literacy and self-efficacy beyond the level of relatively isolated anecdotes (Chambers, 2022). Despite aspects of enquiry that are still ongoing, however, it remains the explicit intention of this article to contribute – in the spirit of Cinema en curs's 'thought laboratory' or CCAJ's 'experimental pedagogy' – to critical understandings of how and why film pedagogies are formed, and how action-based research might directly impact upon, shape and contribute to ongoing programmes of film education. Table 1 and Table 2 provide the pedagogy we have formed over the past year, which we happily invite anyone who so wishes to use as they see fit.

Declarations and conflicts of interest

Research ethics statement

Not applicable for this article.

Consent for publication statement

Not applicable for this article.

Conflicts of interest statement

The author is Editor-in-Chief for this journal. All efforts to sufficiently anonymise the author during peer review of this article have been made. The author declares no further conflicts with this article.

Filmography

Birdman (US 2014, Alejandro G. Iñárritu)

Dancing is for Girls (GB 2019, Granton Primary School) – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1V88G5zaSNI&list=PLxYQCw0Fv2odbk9LxVenqfBPlchrJSIMC&index=4>

Get Over It (GB 2016, Granton Primary School) – <https://vimeo.com/170974213>

Hellbound (KR 2021, Yeon Sang-ho)

In My World (GB 2017, Granton Primary School) – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2cdV103COTY&list=PLxYQCw0Fv2odbk9LxVenqfBPlchrJSIMC&index=23>

Meet Me in the Park (GB 2018, Lorne Primary School) – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ebm0tIMnHnc&list=PLxYQCw0Fv2odbk9LxVenqfBPlchrJSIMC&index=12>

My Ain Folk (GB 1973, Bill Douglas)

My Childhood (GB 1972, Bill Douglas)

My Way Home (GB 1978, Bill Douglas)

Nightfall (US 2012, James Benning)

Rope (US 1948, Alfred Hitchcock)

See You Tomorrow (GB 2017, Granton Primary School) – <https://vimeo.com/221750662>

The Childhood of Maxim Gorky (SU 1938, Mark Donskoi)

The Strada (GB 2018, Granton Primary School) – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qEjHUcD15Eo&list=PLxYQCw0Fv2odbk9LxVenqfBPlchrJSIMC&index=11&t=46s>

True Detective (US 2014–present, various)

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Table 1. Our Cinema curriculum

Each year of Our Cinema is comprised of a series of six core exercises exploring film form (Table 1a and Table 1b, to be undertaken in class time on school equipment) and a series of nine, simpler 'story-focused' exercises exploring aspects of film content (Table 1c, to be undertaken by learners outside school time on whatever equipment they have available, and then discussed together in class).

Where time allows, film form exercises should be repeated so as to allow learners to have an opportunity to perform an exercise again, in order to consolidate the learning they have drawn from completing, watching and discussing their first attempt.

Table 1a. Year 1 – Within a Single Shot

Across Year 1, the expectation is that little to no editing will be required, and that the primary focus will be upon the expressive parameters of camerawork, and what is achievable within a single shot.

Year 1 Core Exercise (to be performed in class, on school equipment)	Core Exercise Outline
1) Lumière Minute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Film a one-shot documentary, from a static camera perspective, on a tripod. • Ideally, each student in the class should have a go at this exercise. • Think about the 60 seconds you are filming: What could you film which is interesting to watch for that amount of time? What changes? What is revealed?
2) Foreground / Middleground / Background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In groups, film a one-shot drama (of approx. 1–2 minutes duration) with actors, from a static perspective, on a tripod. • During the shot, the action should move from the extreme foreground of the shot to the background, or vice versa. • The focus of the shot (and how it is discussed) should be upon how this movement feels. • As with all the 'drama' exercises that follow, don't worry about creating a full or complex story: focus on a simple dramatic moment in which something changes.
3) Revealing a New Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In groups, film a one-shot drama (of approx. 1–2 minutes duration), on a tripod, where at a key moment in the scene, the camera moves (via either a pan or a tilt) to reveal a new space. • The camera movement must be motivated by the movement of a character (or object) in the frame. • The focus of the shot (and how it is discussed) should be upon how this movement feels, and how it changes the feeling within the shot.

Table 1a (continued)

Year 1 Core Exercise (to be performed in class, on school equipment)	Core Exercise Outline
4) Editing in Camera	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In groups, plan out a handheld sequence shot, in which the camera moves through a series of (4–8) pre-planned frames, as if we are ‘editing-in-camera’. • These frames should vary in angle and size and should include at least one wide shot and one close-up. • The sequence should be shot twice: first, as a series of still (4–8) photographs, then second as a one-shot film. • Think of the one-shot film as joining the dots between the photographs, and think carefully about how the camera moves between each frame. Consider whether the camera movement is motivated by the characters, or if there are moments when it moves on its own accord.
5) Compare and Contrast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In groups, film the same scene twice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ The first time, the camera should be fully static and on a tripod (like Exercise 2). ◦ The second time, film the scene as a sequence shot (like Exercise 4) where the camera is at least partially handheld, and is able to move with the action. • Discuss the differences between the two. Which shot works better? Which shot suits the action better? Why do you think this is? (The answer will be different for every group.)
6) Final Film	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a short (7–10) minute film, comprised of a series of long takes, that explores the idea of a troubling encounter. • It is expected that editing will largely take place ‘in-camera’ (as per Exercise 4), and that very little actual editing will be needed to assemble the series of long takes into a final film. (It is also assumed that, in most cases, these basic aspects of editing will be performed by adults.) • Do not write a full script for the film, but just a simple scene outline, which allows the actors to improvise their own dialogue.

Table 1b. Year 2 – Between Two Shots

Across Year 2, the expectation is that a more simplified approach to camera perspective will be adopted in order to allow more scope for editing. Like the films of Bill Douglas, all camera shots should thus be static and on a tripod.

Year 2 Core Exercise (to be performed in class, on school equipment)	Core Exercise Outline
1) The Kuleshov Effect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using pre-made footage provided by Our Cinema, experiment with combining shots of i) a person and ii) what they are looking at. • Edit the sequence two different ways, to tell two different stories.
2) Film Poem: Experiment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A character is in a relatively static position (sitting, standing, or similar) and experiencing a powerful internal moment. • Using a small number of shots (3–5), film the person in their environment. • Using pre-made footage and aspects of audio provided by Our Cinema, experiment to put together a film poem that expresses how they are feeling. The film should cut between two different layers: the person in their space, and shots that suggest how they might be feeling.

Table 1b (continued)

Year 2 Core Exercise (to be performed in class, on school equipment)	Core Exercise Outline
3) Every Shot is a New Beat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adapt the following basic scene: two characters find themselves in the same space together and tension develops between them. • Shoot this scene twice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ First, using 7–10 frames, shoot this scene as a series of still photographs, thinking carefully about the camera placement of each shot, and how each shot feels different to that before it. At least one wide shot and at least one close-up must be used. ◦ Second, use these photographs to go on and shoot the scene as a series of 7–10 shots, each using a static frame. ◦ Third, edit the shots together. If you feel you need to, allow yourself to change the order of the shots. • In this exercise continuity editing is less important here than the new, expressive value of each new shot. Bill Douglas says that ‘every shot is a verb’: make sure that every shot matters and gives us something new.
4) Inside / Outside	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A character is in a relatively static position within an interior space, while a contrasting action or activity is happening somewhere outside the place where they are, at the same time. • Film both the character inside (using a maximum of 5 shots), and whatever is happening outside (using a maximum of 5 shots). Pay careful attention to the different sounds arising from these two spaces. • Now crosscut between the two in the edit. The feeling of the sequence should be generated by the contrast between these two different layers of the film: the different actions, and the different places. • Pay particular attention to sound, and consider what happens if you overlay the sound from one layer of the film over the other layer.
5) Film Poem: Focus and Refine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This exercise returns to Exercise 2, but now asks that you plan and film all the footage yourself. Whereas Exercise 2 was a chance to experiment, Exercise 5 asks you to approach the same brief in a more focused, refined way. • A person is in a static position (sitting, standing, or similar) and experiencing a powerful internal moment. • Using a small number of shots (maximum of 5), film the person in their environment. • Using footage you have shot yourself – drawing from other times and other places – put together a film poem that expresses how they are feeling. The film should cut between two different layers: the person in their space, and shots that suggest how they might be feeling. • Think also about the use of sound as part of your montage. • Try to think beyond the conventional usages of montage (for example, those conveying flashback or flashforward). How might you combine different shots to create some new feelings that you haven’t felt before in cinema?
6) Final Film	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a short (7–10) minute film, in which montage is a core component, that explores a tension between two contrasting elements within the film. • The time for the final film should be divided between shooting and editing: in this second year of Our Cinema, editing is an essential part of the creative process of making the final film. • Do not write a full script for the film, but just a simple scene outline, which allows the actors to improvise their own dialogue.

Table 1c. Both years – ‘story’-focused exercises

The following exercises should be conducted at home with whatever equipment is available, and then discussed all together in class. As per the suggested schedule below, students should be allowed 2–3 weeks for each exercise.

Both years – ‘story’-focused exercises	
1)	Take a photograph, with a close-up framing, of the face of a person who is significant for you, paying careful attention to the light upon their face.
2)	Take a photograph, with a mid-shot framing (top of head to waist), of a person doing an activity that is significant or interesting for you. Pay careful attention to light and location.
3)	Take a photograph, with a wide-shot framing of a space that is significant for you, at a time of day when the light is interesting.
4)	Take a one-shot film, from a static camera perspective, using a close-up framing. Film an interesting face, at a moment when a person or character is experiencing a powerful sense of emotion.
5)	Take a one-shot film, from a static camera perspective, using a mid-shot framing. Film a person or character performing an interesting or significant activity. As they perform the activity, consider whether what the person is feeling is the same or different to what they are doing.
6)	Take a one-shot film, from a static camera perspective, using a wide-shot framing. Film an interesting place, and the moment when a person or character either enters or exits it. In part of the film the space should be empty.
7)	Write a short piece of writing (1 page) exploring a moment in your life (or the life of someone you know, or someone like you) when you/they experienced a powerful sense of emotion.
8)	Write a short piece of writing (1 page) exploring a moment in your life (or the life of someone you know, or someone like you) when your/their life changed significantly.
9)	Drawing on aspects of the previous images, films and stories you have produced as part of the project, write a short story that could serve as the rough outline for a short film. Don’t write dialogue, just what we see happening in the film.

Table 2. Our Cinema schedule

Time has been allocated for certain exercises to be tried twice, or for extra time if time is running short.

Week	Year 1 – Within a Single Shot	Year 2 – Between Two Shots
1	Introduction / Set 1st ‘Story’ exercise.	Introduction / Set 1st ‘Story’ exercise.
2	Story (discuss Ex. 1 / Set Ex. 2)	Story (discuss Ex. 1 / Set Ex. 2)
3	Lumière Minutes	The Kuleshov Effect
4	Lumière Minutes	Story (discuss Ex. 2 / Set Ex. 3)
5	Lumière Minutes	Film Poem: Experiment
6	Story (discuss Ex. 2 / Set Ex. 3)	Film Poem: Experiment
	OCTOBER BREAK	OCTOBER BREAK
7	Foreground / Middleground / Background	Story (discuss Ex. 3 / Set Ex. 4)
8	Foreground / Middleground / Background	Every New Shot is a New Beat
9	Story (discuss Ex. 3 / Set Ex. 4)	Every New Shot is a New Beat
10	Revealing a New Space	Every New Shot is a New Beat
11	Revealing a New Space	Every New Shot is a New Beat
12	Story (discuss Ex. 4 / Set Ex. 5)	Story (discuss Ex. 4 / Set Ex. 5)
13	Story (discuss Ex. 5 / Set Ex. 6)	Story (discuss Ex. 5 / Set Ex. 6)
14	Extra week	Extra week
15	Extra week	Extra week

Table 2 (continued)

Week	Year 1 – Within a Single Shot	Year 2 – Between Two Shots
	WINTER BREAK	WINTER BREAK
16	Sequence Shot – photos, Week 1	Inside / Outside – filming
17	Sequence Shot – photos, Week 2	Inside / Outside – editing
18	Sequence Shot – shoot	Inside / Outside – filming
19	Sequence Shot – shoot	Inside / Outside – editing
20	Story (discuss Ex. 6 / Set Ex. 7)	Story (discuss Ex. 6 / Set Ex. 7)
	FEBRUARY HALF TERM	FEBRUARY HALF TERM
21	Compare and Contrast	Film Poem: Focus and Refine – filming
22	Compare and Contrast	Film Poem: Focus and Refine – editing
23	Compare and Contrast	Film Poem: Focus and Refine – filming
24	Compare and Contrast	Film Poem: Focus and Refine – editing
25	Story (discuss Ex. 7 / set Ex. 8)	Story (discuss Ex. 7 / set Ex. 8)
26	Story (discuss Ex. 8 / set Ex. 9)	Story (discuss Ex. 8 / set Ex. 9)
	EASTER BREAK	EASTER BREAK
27	Final Films	Final Films – Shoot
28	Final Films	Final Films – Shoot
29	Final Films	Final Films – Shoot / Edit
30	Final Films	Final Films – Shoot / Edit
31	Final Films	Final Films – Edit
32	Final Films	Final Films – Edit