MMedia Magazine

David Aaronovitch:
In defence of Media Studies

Media 2.1

Is Hollywood out of ideas?

Homeland and 24

Batman, dystopias and zombies

Skyfall

MM

English & Media Centre

Welcome to the last *MediaMag* of the academic year – and the run-up to the exams...

Our big coup for this issue is our interview with *The Times* columnist **David Aaronovitch** who, alone amongst his peers, has spoken out forcefully in support of Media Studies. His voice is particularly welcome at a time when the rest of the media regularly lambast it as a 'soft', 'non-facilitating' subject – which, as any A2 student desperately ploughing through the acres of Leveson coverage for their revision will testify, is very far from the case! David has his own ideas about why the press so often misrepresents Media Studies, what we should be learning, the limitations and potential of social media, and much more. From September you'll be able to see him speak in our MediaMagClips gallery about his career in journalism, the future of the media, and more.

This issue is all about Ideas – and be warned: some of them are really challenging! We've covered some of the most difficult aspects of A2 media theory – Baudrillard and hyper-reality: check; ideology in *Bond* and *Batman*: check; film-makers and existentialism: check. Film students will thrive on Pete Turner's analysis of Hollywood's endless reinvention of blockbuster franchises, and Michael Ewins' auteur study of Paul Thomas Anderson; TV drama fans can exercise their analytic skills with Jonathan Nunns' comparison of *Homeland* and *24*. And zombies pop up all over the place, most notably in James Rose's exploration of their prevalence in console games. Not much dumbing down here!

Next year's themes will be organised a bit differently, with a focus on some of the key skills your courses require. And we need you to get involved with your own contributions. Our homepage will tell you how to get involved.

In September we'll be focusing on **new ways of reading media texts** of all varieties and across all platforms (see below).

In December, we're going over to the dark side, with a genre focus on all things **Gothic** – horror in film, TV and literature, Goth style, art, music and fashion. This issue will also include tie-ins with the British Film Institute's Gothic Horror season.

February's issue will provide a range of **mini case studies** around some of the key topics in the AS and A2 Media and Film specifications, which you can use to inform your preparation for exams, production coursework or independent research studies

And April's issue will be all about **producers and production**, from your own production work to articles on the work of media professionals across all media fields.

And finally, a date for your diary: **the fourth *MediaMag* Student Conference** will take place on **Friday 13th December 2013**. More information to come in September's issue.

In the meantime, the very best of luck with the Summer exams – and hopefully see you in September!

Jenny Grahame

In September's MediaMag 45: Reading the Media

- New ways of reading music video; *Dr Who*; TV period drama; student video production; *The Big Bang Theory*; an interview with the editor of the *Guardian*, and much more.

In the pipeline for the MediaMag website 2013-2014

- Full video interview with David Aaronovitch.
- New resources on the TV industry and Working Title films.
- Prize-winning videos from our 2013 *MediaMag* Production competition.

contents

Time to renew your subscription!

This issue of *MediaMagazine* completes your subscription for 2012-13. Subscribers to the website will continue to have access to the site until August 31st 2013.

The magazine includes a renewal order form – please pass this on to the person responsible for ordering your subscription. You can re-subscribe for 2013-14 online at **www.mediamagazine.org.uk** or by returning the enclosed order form.

Front Page News

Introducing the BFI Film Academy delivered by NFTS

What do you know about the BFI Film Academies? There are 24 of them, all over England, funded by the Department for Education. They have been set up to ensure that young film enthusiasts, whatever their background or education and wherever they live, get to learn about and make the widest range of films possible. This Easter, the **National Film and Television School** is delivering the first ever BFI Film Academy Residential: an intensive 13-day training course over the holidays – (indeed, it concludes as this issue of *MediaMag* rolls off the presses) for 54 16 to19-year-old filmmakers to hone their talents across a range and breadth of film disciplines.

Participants have chosen a specialism – directing, producing, editing, cinematography or sound recording – and formed teams, tutored by film industry experts, to make short films using professional kit and actors, and NFTS's film studios and world-class teaching facilities. The tutors include *MediaMag*'s favourite filmmaker **Corin Hardy**, cinematographer **Brian Tufano** (*Trainspotting*, *Billy Elliot*), director **Brian Gilbert** (*Wilde*, *Tom & Viv*) and producer **Michelle Eastwood** (*In Our Name*). Also factored in are screenings and Masterclasses from some of the country's leading filmmakers, tailored industry support from BAFTA and visits to both the BFI National Archive and Pinewood Studios. At the end of the course, the students' films will be screened at a London Southbank event attended by industry professionals and ongoing support will be given to the participants in obtaining further training, work placements or jobs in the industry. Intensive doesn't even begin to cover it!

Well, readers, *MediaMag* was there at the first induction weekend and had an inspiring time surrounded by so much talent. But don't take our word for it – the following account is from David Aidoo, one of the participants. Amongst his other skills, as alter ego ThisisDA, David is a seriously talented rapper with a fast-growing reputation. Listen to him at **https://soundcloud.com/ThisisDA** and **http://www.youtube.com/user/ytthisisda/videos**

If you want to find your local BFI Regional Academy, read more here: **http://www.bfi.org.uk/education-research/5-19-film-education-scheme-2013-2017/bfi-film-academy** and **http://nfts.co.uk/bfi-film-academy-talent-campus**

David Aidoo's Experience

The weekend of 9th-10th March saw the gathering of 54 young filmmakers for the pre-residential weekend at the National Film and Television School in Beaconsfield.

I was privileged enough to be one of those chosen from around 330 applicants for the course designed for 16-19 year olds. I was allocated my first choice role as producer and my experience there was a memorable one.

On Saturday, the day started at 5.30am with me rushing around preparing for the unexpected. I met up with Adibah at the Temple Meads train station just in time for us to miss our 7 o'clock train. Never mind. We waited half an hour for the next one and boarded on our way to London.

Fast forward about three hours, two train changes and a 15-minute walk later, and we'd arrived. The canteen was full of buzzing teenagers eager to get on with the day. It officially began in the cinema with a presentation and talk from the heads of the school and an overview of all the great things we were going to achieve on the 2-week course. An interesting quote from Nik Powell, Director of NFTS, for all aspiring filmmakers:

when in deep shit, be confident and look like you know what you're doing.

We moved onto a tour of NFTS and took a look at the incredible facilities they have there. It's a truly wonderful place, a dream world for any budding film or television producer. Subsequently, we all then made the coach journey to the Lane End Conference Centre in High Wycombe, where we'd be staying for the duration of the BFI course. We took part in interesting 'team bonding' exercises, including Segway racing and a rocket-launching challenge. My team came first, second and third in the three games we played against the other five groups. This made me surprisingly happy.

After a break we headed into a conference with a talk on script adaption – our next task. Along with our mentor Brian Gilbert (http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0317981/), my group were given a stage script which we read and are currently re-drafting to create a short film. It was my first time reading a script of this sort, so I was already learning as I was going. Brian was extremely helpful and candid throughout, pulling no punches when it came to teaching us exactly what we had to do. Saturday evening concluded with a film quiz in which my group unfortunately came fourth. But God was on our side. Adding the results of the afternoon challenges with our position in the film quiz, we tied 1st place with another group, finishing with a tense game of rock, paper, scissors and a dead heat question – which my group won. The trophy we received topped off the experience of the first day there.

On to Sunday, and, after further work on the script, we ended the pre-residential with a talk from Edgar Wright (http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0942367/). He talked us through his progress as a filmmaker, and how he transitioned from a 17-year-old aspiring cameraman in Wells, to producing and directing films such as *Shaun of the Dead* and *Hot Fuzz*. He's a testimony to any of us desiring for greatness within the film industry. I learnt that opportunity is something you have to chase, or create if you can't find it. Whether you're shooting on your HD mobile phone or a Sony EX1, with the right amount of determination, you can take it as far as you want to.

This was one of the most educational and inspirational weekends I've ever had. I'm very much looking forward to the two-week stay in April.

Love your TV? Use your power!

When your favourite TV show is dropped from the schedules, what can you do? Within a week of the axe falling on BBC2's *The Hour* (BAFTA-nominated 1950s-set TV newsroom drama with starry cast), 13,000 had petitioned the BBC to bring it back. But will such audience-activism have any influence? Well, fan protest saved BBC6 Music, *Not Going Out* and *Being Human* – but not *Dr Who Confidential*, despite a petition with 57,700 signatures. The Beeb often maintains a lofty distance from fan forums, but in America they're seriously influential, bringing back *Star Trek*, *Arrested Development* and *Family Guy* after they were axed. And now that companies such as Netflix, YouTube and Microsoft are commissioning their own content, they will be watching fan responses very carefully to exploit the proven popularity of de-commissioned shows to build their own audiences. Netflix is already screening its own remake of acclaimed 1990s British political drama *House of Cards*, and new self-made series of *Lillyhammer* and *Arrested Development*, as well as original new series *Bad Samaritans* and *Hemlock Grove*. So if you want to save a favourite programme, fight for your right to view by contributing to forums, fansites and chatrooms. The BBC may be a hard nut to crack, but Netflix, Amazon or YouTube might just be listening in...

http://www.broadcastnow.co.uk/comment/when-the-axe-falls-think-again/5052212.article?blocktitle=Comment&contentID=2489

Spirit of '45: If you only see one film...
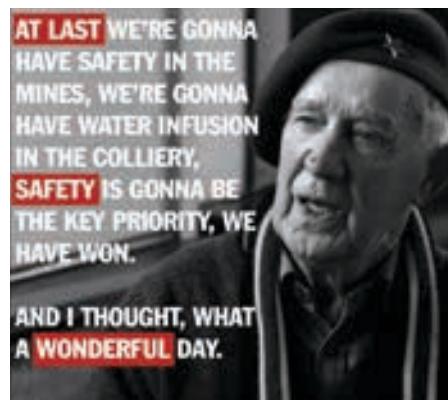
Make it Ken Loach's *Spirit of '45* – **essential viewing** whether you're studying documentary, representations of class in Britain over time, interested in Loach as an auteur, or simply wanting to get a handle on how the world is changing and the potential for a more humane society.

Way back in 2003, in the early days of *MediaMag*, we interviewed Ken about his then forthcoming film *Sweet Sixteen*, his unique observational way of working, and the radical ideas which have powered his long career in film. The interview ends with this comment from Ken:

If you can accurately show how things are, you are actually subverting the established authorities, because they then can't get away with the collective lies that they try and present. I think people do respond when they see something that they can say 'yes, I recognise that, that's how it is'.

MM 3, February 2003

This latest film fulfils that mission. At a time when the Coalition Government seems to be either privatising or dismantling our public services, from health to education to housing, this film takes us back to the birth of our much-loved Welfare State in 1945 and the spirit of optimism, collective action and community built by the post-WW2 Labour government, and reminds us of what we are losing. As Loach says online,

Generosity, mutual support and co-operation were the watch words of the age. It is time to remember the determination of those who were intent on building a better world.

Through a montage of archive footage, key events, interviews and vox pops from 'real people' who lived through the immediate post-war era, this is anything but dry history. The film's rich interactive website (http://www.thespiritof45.com) takes you right inside the period, enables you to experience the living conditions and social context, see what your own life would have been like if the Welfare State had never existed, and be inspired by interviews with older people who lived through it all and still hang on to their ideals.

MediaMagazine thinks this film should be part of every student's education. To quote a line from **Paul Thomas Anderson's** *Magnolia* (see page 52): **'we might be through with the past, but the past ain't through with us'.** And on that unusually philosophical note... just go and see the film!

Front Page News was compiled by Jenny Grahame.

Coming to a screen near you

MediaMag's limited selection from the most interesting new films released this Summer.

April 2013: *The Evil Dead* – a remake of Sam Raimi's famed 1981 horrorfest, often quoted by the likes of Edgar Wright (*Sean of the Dead*, *Hot Fuzz*, etc.) as a seminal influence.

Wajdja (Haifaa Mansour) – already famous for being the first film directed by a woman in Saudi Arabia, a film about the life of a young girl in Riyadh.

May 2013: *The Great Gatsby* (Baz Luhrmann) – the long-awaited adaptation of everyone's favourite 'American Dream' Jazz Age novel, with Leonardo Di Caprio and Carey Mulligan, in 3D with Luhrmann's signature-style visual opulence and flair. *MediaMag* will definitely be covering this!

The King of Marvin Gardens (Bob Rafelson) – the re-release of yet another seminal 70's movie, set in the decaying grandeur of Atlantic City, starring Jack Nicholson and Bruce Dern as contrasting brothers. Hollywood may be out of ideas (see page 15) but re-releasing this was a really good one.

June 2013: *World War Z* (Mark Forster) – book-to-screen adaptation featuring Brad Pitt in the aftermath of a worldwide zombie uprising. Hotly tipped as a horror movie in the garb of a major studio prestige picture (*Time Out*) and a potential Best Picture winner.

Man of Steel (Zack Snyder) – yet another reboot (see page 15 again), this time a Superman prequel – but with a storyline from Christopher Nolan, which might give it a lift.

July 2013: Two more re-boots for the silly season – *Monsters University*, a *Monsters Inc* prequel – and *Kick-Ass 2* (Jeff Wadlow). According to *Empire Magazine*, 'everyone's favourite superhero with no discernable powers, continues to fight crime with Hit Girl, only now he's supported by new vigilantes' – also starring Jim Carrey.

August 2013: *The Alan Partridge Movie* (Declan Lowney) – set in the studios of North Norfolk Digital Radio, with Steve Coogan, who calls it 'without doubt the greatest Anglo-French co-operation since the Normandy landings'.

The World's *End* (Edgar Wright) – an epic pub crawl to the pub of that name, just as the world is actually about to end... featuring his repertory cast of Simon Pegg, Nick Frost, Martin Freeman, et al. Expect gore.

> It is simply not true to say that everybody's opinion about everything is as valid as everyone else's opinion about everything.

An interview with David Aaronovitch

In defence of Media Studies

MediaMag interviews *The Times* columnist **David Aaronovitch** – a lone voice amongst journalists in recognising the importance of Media Studies. He tells us why he thinks the subject should be part of the core curriculum, what all young people should know about the media, why Media Studies is often received with such hostility in the press, and how far social media are a force for democracy.

Who is David Aaronovitch?

David Aaronovitch is a broadcaster and journalist with a very long pedigree. He's worked in television documentary, as a panellist on shows like *Have I Got News For You* and *What the Papers Say*, and as leader writer, television critic, parliamentary sketch writer and columnist for a range of newspapers, including *The Independent*, *The Guardian* and *The Observer*, *The New Statesman*, *The Jewish Chronicle*, and, since 2005, *The Times*. He is the author of *Voodoo Histories: the role of the conspiracy theory in shaping modern history* (Jonathan Cape, 2009).

Unusually for a journalist of this status, David was educated in London comprehensive schools. As a History student at Manchester University, he was a member of an infamous 1975 *University Challenge* team which lost its first round after answering every question with the name of a Marxist ('Trotsky', 'Lenin', 'Karl Marx' or 'Che Guevara'), as a protest against the fact that the individual Oxford and Cambridge colleges competed as separate teams, although not universities in their own right. It's an iconoclastic approach which has typified his writing. He was president of the National Union of Students, following in the footsteps of Labour politicians Charles Clarke and Trevor Phillips.

David's left-wing views are often contentious – he was a strong supporter of the Iraq War in 2003 – and he shares them vociferously via blogging, his columns, and on YouTube and Twitter. So as a political journalist who crosses a range of media and political orthodoxies, he makes an interesting interviewee in his own right. But what caught *MediaMag*'s eye was the following phrase from an article he wrote for the *Times Educational Supplement* in 2011:

Why should a Media Studies A Level be seen as any less valid, less weighty than one in Economics, Politics or Philosophy?

Why indeed? That kindled our interest. It's not often a 'real' journalist or media producer comes out in support of Media Studies A Level, particularly in the face of the 'Mickey Mouse'/ 'soft subject' battering it so often gets from the popular press, Higher Education and (sadly) many school staffrooms. And the following paragraphs really gave us food for thought:

> Can a young person understand the world without some significant capacity to evaluate critically what we call media and its operation? If the answer is 'no', then before we ever get as far as devising academic and semi-vocational post-16 courses, we should ask why Media Studies is not a core subject, and demand that it should be.
>
> Demand, because of course it should be. It should be there in the English Baccalaureate alongside History and Modern Languages, given the status its importance suggests, and with the necessary time and attention devoted to it. Its status should be as high as that of the canonical subjects, with revered and famous professors in Media Studies, Media Studies prizes and regular news of Media Studies breakthroughs.

When we heard that recently he actually challenged Michael Gove on this topic, it became a no-brainer. Media Studies needs

this man; we would have to interview him.

The full interview will be online in our MediaMagClips gallery next year. In it, David talks about his fascination with technological change and social media, the role of online comment, ethical questions of regulation, and his work as a journalist – plenty to fuel your AS and A2 studies.

But since this issue of *MediaMag* is all about **Ideas**, it felt like an ideal opportunity to take a closer look at David's ideas about what you're studying, why your subject is so often unjustly criticised, and some recent news stories which illustrate exactly how and why it should be a part of every child's education. And should you ever need to justify the importance of your Media course, read on for some wicked soundbites which will help you make your case.

On the importance of Media Studies

David comes from a pre-digital generation and has lived through the incredible social changes from a 'knowledge-scarce' society – no mobile phones, internet, Wikipedia – to a world of ceaselessly evolving communication and mutating technologies.

You can't really live a proper, productive life without discussing, and particularly, being able to evaluate media communication as it changes.

> We are in the position of having to understand both how to use and understand the media, and what is being said to us – where it comes from, who's saying it, what they mean by it, what they're trying to get us to do. So we're in this continual two-way process, and understanding it is essential if we're to operate in modern society. If that's true, what flows from that? So you can't really live a proper, productive life without discussing, and particularly, being able to evaluate media communication as it changes. If you say that school and the curriculum doesn't have a really major role to play in helping people to do that, then I think you're crazy. But are we at the stage where people recognise that? Not sufficiently.

What should all young people know about the media?

David is a historian, and for him the issues of reliability, accuracy and critical judgement about the media are crucial. Take Wikipedia, for example:

> the question is: how do you know which of these amazing sources of information – this cornucopia of stuff – is reliable, and which isn't? Let's take the example of something completely unexpected, which grew up all by itself, which is something I use all the time. What is Wikipedia? It was originally going to be like the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, except online. They were going to pay experts to write

Wikipedia is a perfect example of the importance of being able to evaluate critically where that knowledge has come from, and whether or not it's accurate. Any school which is not teaching young people about the use of Wikipedia and how to evaluate it is not preparing them for the world they live in, let alone the one they're going to find when they leave school.

about a myriad of subjects; what Jimmy Wales discovered was that this process took far far too long. So they did the most opposite thing that you could conceivably think of. They said: 'Anybody can do this. Anybody can put up a Wiki entry and then it can be moderated by a team of moderators, but also the general public can amend it'. So there grew up possibly the biggest general knowledge resource there ever has been in the history of the world. That's not an exaggeration. It's true. But here's the problem. Because it was available to anybody, and open to change, people put wrong things – mischievous, biased things – in there. So part of the problem of Wikipedia is trying to work out who put what where, and how much reliance you can place upon it, and where you need to go to check its truth or otherwise, before you yourself can use it. Wikipedia is a perfect example of the importance of being able to critically evaluate where that knowledge has come from, and whether or not it's accurate. Any school which is not teaching young people about the use of Wikipedia and how to evaluate it is not preparing them for the world they live in, let alone the one they're going to find when they leave school.

David offers three recent examples of the sorts of Media Studies issues children need to understand from very early on.

What do children need to know?

Example 1: the recent discovery of Richard III's skeleton in a Leicester car park:

> What we have to remember if we're teaching him in a primary school is that Richard III was overthrown by someone who had no right to the throne, Henry Tudor, who became Henry VII and was also the father of Henry VIII, grandfather to Elizabeth I, and the founder of the Tudor dynasty, which was in power when some of our most important playwrights and dramatists were writing. So when you say 'I think Richard III was a bad guy', it's important to know that the Richard we see depicted, and who is described in the period after his death, is largely a product of a propaganda factory effectively run by people who had obligations to the King, who was a very big powerful person at this stage. If you don't know this, how are you going to judge your sources of information?

Example 2: TV news

> You're watching TV news with a child, who says: 'These are the most important stories around the world'. And, yes, that may be true to a certain extent, as judged by the very good journalists at the BBC; but they're also the stories they've got pictures for. Because TV News operates on pictures. And people are going to prioritise stories where they have nice pictures, over stories without any pictures where nobody can go to. This is an essential part of the selection process. Compare the Top Ten stories on a TV news bulletin, with the Top Ten stories on a radio news bulletin, and see the extent to which they overlap or not, and then consider the reasons why they don't.

Example 3: The intention behind the text, and the impact it makes

> I want to show things which get people looking at the intention behind a piece of communication.
> For some time now TV, and C4 in particular, has got big audiences for 'freak show' programmes – transsexuals, and people having sex-change operations, the morbidly obese, bad parenting – and I felt that the intention behind these programmes was to get you to gawp. But this week I read a book by Andrew Solomon called *Far from the Tree*, about the relationships between parents and exceptional children with disabilities – deaf kids, dwarves, schizophrenics, autistic children etc. At the end of his book, he realises that these programmes have had the extraordinary effect of making things that were once hidden visible. And actually, it's possible that my reaction, seeing it as essentially voyeuristic, was actually my own discomfort at seeing these things represented, as I come from a generation where these things were hidden. I feel uncomfortable with it because it seems perilously close to poking fun, but actually the overall impact of it is not that at all – it's to get us used to the idea of the extraordinary diversity of the human condition.
> You could teach a significant part of a Media Studies course just about the ways that the media have altered our perceptions of those particular issues through those sorts of programmes. That really would be fascinating. And also, where else, other than Media Studies, would you be able to track a major social change like that?

I want Media Studies taught to everybody because it is applicable to everybody.

Why does Media Studies get such a bad press?

David is caustic about the reasons Media Studies is often receives such hostile response from people in the media themselves:

> Why are sections of the media hostile to a branch of studies which explores the ways they do what they do? Who can guess that? Everybody loves their secrets being rumbled, don't they?

He identifies three problems: firstly **an anti-vocational snobbery**, often held by those who've had a traditionally 'academic' education, against subjects which are job-related, and direct you towards a possible outcome for your studies (although funnily enough, this doesn't apply to medicine, or to law or to engineering) Secondly,

> media people don't really enjoy the discussions of what they do and how they do it from an academic perspective. Even someone as distinguished as the former editor of *The Guardian*, Peter Preston, has been known to write 'News is what news is' – in other words, there's a 'magic' which all news people can understand, which tells them what is and what's not a news story, which is impossible to describe or categorise, which exists out there in the ether, and which you 'catch' like a will o' the wisp… It's an attempt by the people who work in the news and on newspapers to do what we've always done, which is to resist accountability, to resist being looked at and having to explain what it is that we do.

Thirdly, there are some tensions within the subject itself: should Media Studies

Where else, other than Media Studies, would you be able to track a major social change like that?

be training journalists of the future, or is it about building critical communication skills? For David, both aspects are equally valid, but his radical views go beyond the championing of Media Studies as a specialist option subject; he argues that it should be an entitlement for all learners:

> Honing your critical faculties, being able to use the media and understand them – that's for everybody. I want Media Studies taught to everybody because it is applicable to everybody. The British, or English-speakers, are the 'communicators' beyond anyone else, for various historical and accidental reasons, reasons of language development, our proximity to America, the way in which America created Hollywood, the incredible vitality of our popular culture – which is after all what we were celebrating at the Olympics, in a very big way. We are in an amazing position to develop the best Media Studies anywhere in the world.

Social media – revolution or reinforcement?

Despite his extensive Twitter use (he has around 43,000 followers) and fascination for new digital technologies, David is highly sceptical about some of the claims made for them.

> One of the things that people argue is that 'New Media' means that anybody can be anything. I think this is absolute nonsense. It is simply not true to say that everybody's opinion about everything is as valid as everyone else's opinion about everything. That's a recipe for a lack of discrimination which is truly mind-boggling.

He warns against seeing citizen journalism as equivalent to proper journalistic judgement, and is highly critical of online comment, which he sees as **'letting off steam really. It's boo and hooray essentially'**. He also thinks the argument that social media are a democratising force needs unpicking. While he agrees that **'The thing that's democratising is that everyone now has the capacity to make some form of communication'**, he argues that Twitter and other networks are not in themselves democratic:

> Twitter is absolutely what you make of it. In other words, the only things you will see tweeted are people you've already decided to follow, who will then retweet things you might not have decided about. On the other hand, some bloggers are really good. That must be an addition. And because they're not constrained by having to be employed by a newspaper chief to be employed by a newspaper chief or a BBC section head, it provides other different

We are in an amazing position to develop the best Media Studies anywhere in the world.

avenues into the business of self-expression. And that's quite democratising. I think it's better on the whole when people do it under their own voices, where they say who they are, where they've thought about what they're going to do, and if that could feed into online comment that would be good too. But simply to say that the very act of saying 'Piss off' is a fabulously democratic act is going it a bit.

And the rest...?

From September, you'll be able to see David discuss a number of other issues on the MediaMagClips page of the subscription website: his experiences of working with nine different editors across the full range of broadsheet newspapers and why working for Murdoch-owned newspapers has defied assumptions about editorial intervention; why the Leveson Report is 'like locking the stable door after the horse has died'; why there is no such thing as privacy any more; and why the regulation of the internet is still a long way off.

But let's finish with the inevitable words of advice for wannabe journalists:

> My advice to anyone who wants to go into the business of communication is: Communicate. Write. Make films. Make radio programmes. Make advertisements. Make documentaries. Look for the places, which will be there in society in some form or another, for people who are good at doing that. Even though I can't tell you where those places will be, the one thing we can be sure of is that there will be loads of them, because we're not going to communicate less.

David Aaronovitch was interviewed by Jenny Grahame.

MediaMagClips

From September, web subscribers can watch David in person in **MediaMagClips** on the *MediaMagazine* website.

New Ideas for Media Studies needed (again!)
In search of Media 2.1

Steph Hendry considers the constantly changing media landscape, and offers a teacher's overview of the evolving ideas and debates which Media A Level students need to address.

Everyone involved in Media Studies is aware that the area we are studying is in a constant state of flux. This is one of the biggest challenges for Media Studies students as there is an expectation that you will demonstrate that you are 'up to date', and will have considered **the implication of recent media developments** – often before even university-based academics have had a chance to publish a paper.

'Web 2.0' has been the focus of much recent discussion, where increases in audience interactivity have been seen to be influencing changes in the production practices of media institutions and altering the relationship between audience and producer. 'Web 2.0' has also bought about new forms that are being considered as media products, such as Facebook pages, Twitter accounts and other outlets for user-generated content.

The talk about 'Web 2.0' led to a call for a 'Media Studies 2.0'. These discussions were relevant at the time and focused on the potential **democratisation of the media** offered by the audience's ability to **create, access, broadcast and publish** using the new technologies. Not only can individuals self-publish but large institutions are increasingly **relying on audiences for content** (for example, texts and emails being sought to add to debates during current affairs shows) and the ubiquity of the mobile phone camera means that audience members are often able to contribute images and videos. In addition, social networking offers journalists and media producers instant access to audience opinion, and so **Twitter** is increasingly leading the news agenda, and movements generated by **Facebook** pages are taken up by mainstream media institutions as they offer insight into audience interests and preoccupations. Trends can easily be identified and the tone of audience responses can reveal public mood – or at least the mood of the members of the public who take the time to comment!
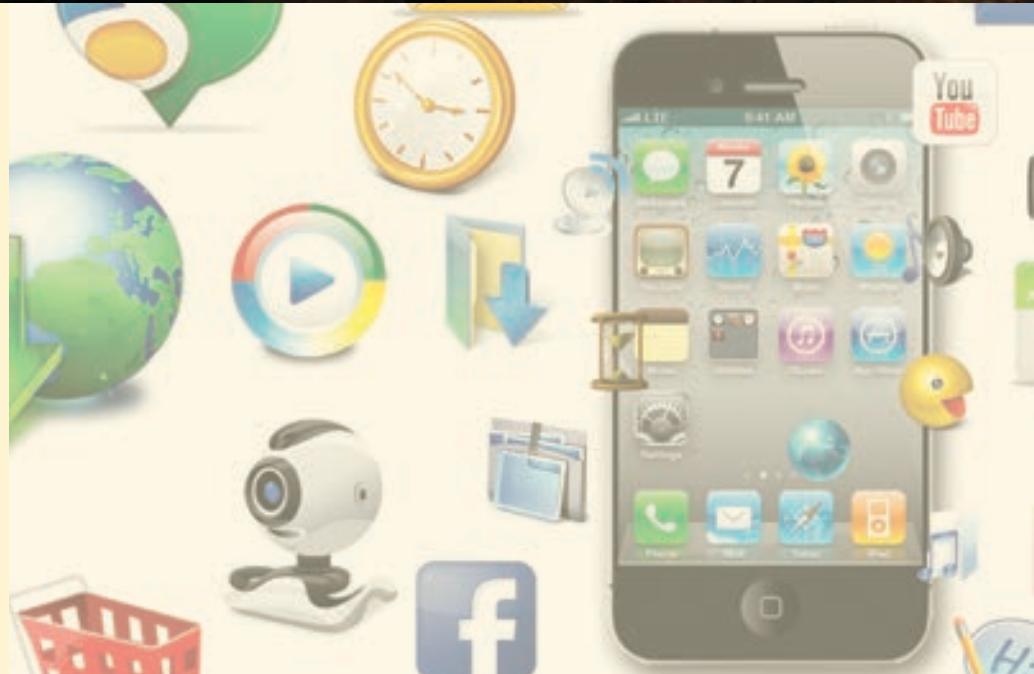
The 'democratisation' debate is a fascinating one and still often divides the utopians from the dystopians who can't agree whether Web 2.0 is creating a new freedom through the deregulation of production, or if the monetisation of internet audiences is heightening corporate control and reducing freedom of choice. These are debates that will, I am sure, continue to influence the development of Media Studies as a subject. But there is another set of issues about the rise of digital media that could perhaps also be considered in terms of how we see the subject.

The idea of the immediacy and impermanence of a TV programme – broadcast once and gone (pretty much) forever – is no longer relevant.

Are books media texts?

I am often asked why we don't study **books** in Media Studies. The query is usually linked to a student's desire to study *Harry Potter*, *Lord of the Rings* and, more recently, *Twilight* and *The Hunger Games*. No doubt the question will be raised again with the release of more literary adaptations, this year notably *The Hobbit*. Back in the *Harry Potter* years, the reasons why novels were not considered part of a Media Studies curriculum were logical and easy to explain. Everything came down to **production**, **distribution** and **availability**. Mass media texts were **produced** by large media **institutions**, were **reproduced** or **broadcast** to a mass audience using **specialist technologies** and had a **limited availability** ensuring that audiences accessed these texts during a definable time period – at the same time (as in television and radio broadcasts), or within a short predefined window of time (newspapers being daily, magazines weekly or monthly etc.).

In the days before the multiplex, for example, feature films would be released, first in London and then in the larger cities. A week or two later they would play in small provincial town cinemas, sometimes for a week or two, sometimes longer if the film was a 'blockbuster' or a 'sleeper' – and then it was gone. It might resurface some time later on television. In the 1980s, films started to become available on video and then later on DVD – but you'd need to be patient as the wait between theatrical and DVD releases could be up to several years.

So, **why was Media Studies always about the adaptation and not the book?** Put simply, one reason was because **the book is always there**. Accessing a book has no time limitations. A reader today

can choose from all sorts of literatures from a recent bestseller, a Victorian novel or works from Ancient Greece. Literature has a **permanency** that conventional mass media used to lack; and it was this impermanence that separated the 'high art' of (some) literature to the 'low art' of (most of) the popular mass media. There has been a whole school of thought in literary appreciation that the **longevity** of literary works reflected their **inherent value**… hence Shakespeare, Milton and the classics are seen as morally superior to modern work which is shown or read once, and discarded. Before home recording technology, media texts were largely **impermanent**.

Digital, mobile, virtual and permanent – new forms of consumption

But media technologies are changing rapidly. In the last ten years, we have seen the introduction of broadband and social networking including the ubiquitous Twitter. We carry Kindles and iPads; use Wi-Fi, 3G (and now 4G) to access on demand services such as 4OD, iPlayer and Sky Go at home and on the move. Netflix, LOVEFiLM, UltraViolet, Spotify and iTunes have changed the way we access music, television and film. Online news services/news apps are replacing paper newspapers… and these are just some of the recent technological developments that are impacting on audience behaviours.

All of these technologies and online facilities have altered the way texts are **produced**, how they are **distributed** and their **availability**. Technology has changed the way we view, access, buy, store and exchange media products. The idea of the **immediacy** and **impermanence** of a TV programme – broadcast once and

gone (pretty much) forever – is no longer relevant. Since the arrival of video, and later with DVDs and Blu-ray, films have become more like books in that they remain available long after their release dates; whether rented from Blockbuster (RIP) or bought from HMV (RIP) a film can now be collected and stored on a shelf next to works of literature.

The first media form that offered the potential for permanency was **music**. Albums, singles and CDs have been seen as highly collectable by people for several generations. People speak of 'music libraries' and the notion of collecting an artist's back catalogue has been part of music culture and its economic model for many decades.

Film may have only relatively recently become a consumer collectable, but it is a form that has been seen to have some permanency in its analogue, celluloid form. Some films have become revered in the same way as literary texts. A film **'canon'** has developed, and some directors are held in the same kind of esteem as a literary writer. Even casual movie audiences are aware of Hitchcock, Kubrick, Scorsese and Spielberg. 'Experts' could add to this list with names of directors who are perceived as being talented artists rather than simply effective craftsmen. Consider the media focus on **Quentin Tarantino** following the release of **Django Unchained**. Tarantino is a star director whose every film is eagerly anticipated and subject to intense critical scrutiny on its release. It's true to say that Film Studies doesn't suffer the same immediate dismissal as Media Studies; the discussion of films and directors in terms similar to those used when discussing books and writers could go some way to explain this.

A televisual canon?

However, the same thing is happening around some productions in television. The past decade or so is being described as 'the new golden age of television drama' (**The Independent**: Feb 20 2009). This new golden age had its genesis in the 1990s with TV shows such as **The X Files** (1993-2002) and **Buffy the Vampire Slayer** (1997-2003) setting new standards for writing and production values. These television programmes experimented with narrative structure and character representations and began to create a new paradigm of complexity in terms of plot and context. TV programmes such as these demanded a lot from their audiences. **Complex storylines over long periods of time demand a high level of commitment** but the size of the audience and the activity on early chatrooms/websites of these programmes

both reveal considerable loyalty – and suggest fans achieved a high-level of gratification from them. These television programmes had high profile creators (Chris Carter and Joss Whedon respectively) who generated a fan following of their own.

These shows led the way to the rise of the high budget programming created by American Networks such as **CSI** and **Lost** and the more adult-oriented extended narrative drama created by cable networks such as **The Wire**, **The Shield**, **Mad Men** and **Breaking Bad**. DVD (replaced in part now by streaming and downloading) was crucial in the development of these shows: the box-set allowed audiences to watch complex narratives at their own pace, and the revenue from sales fed into producers' profits.

Interestingly, a canon of 'great TV' is beginning to develop with some creators being seen to have an elevated artistic merit and, therefore, their programmes are often discussed in the same way as high literature. **The Wire** is often described as being 'like a Victorian novel' (**The Atlantic**: Sept 10 2012) and its creator David Simon is much admired. Television 'box-sets' can be bought (as DVDs or increasingly as downloads) many years after the original broadcast and can be watched at any time. In terms of **distribution** and **availability** there is little difference between watching an episode of **NYPD Blue** on an iPad or reading **The Shining** on a Kindle. Similarly, if an audience member is following Katie Price on Twitter, watching any number of the 'reality' shows Price has made with ITV2 or SkyLiving, are these distinctly different to reading one of her autobiographies? Modern celebrities do not differentiate between literary forms and media forms; all forms provide marketing

Audience behaviour is at the heart of Media Studies but there is far more to consider here than just ideas about 'interactivity' and audiences' ability to create 'user generated content'.

Audiences enjoy familiarity almost as much as producers love reproducing familiar films.

MADMEN

opportunities for them, whether it's to add to their PR image, or to sell a product they are endorsing.

Audiences – not just about interactivity!

Audience behaviour is at the heart of Media Studies but there is far more to consider here than just ideas about interactivity and audiences' ability to create user-generated content. The past ten years have seen the media having simultaneously both **less and more of an impact on our culture**. Less in terms of the fact that audience numbers for live TV broadcasts and sales of newspapers are declining, but more as the rise in 'soft', celebrity-based tabloid news and social networking continues, and as more and more people use online and downloading services to access music, television and film. The idea of a **consensus audience** is disappearing, as we become a collection of **niche audiences** who exist in atomised cliques based on our media choices. Communities can be formed around these cliques; it could be argued that mainstream culture seems to

be declining as newer subcultures form and develop. To be famous no longer means being a 'household name', as people and artists can become 'famous' within a large subculture but remain unknown by the majority. Take, for example, **Lewis and Simon**, the YouTube stars of *Yogscast* whose video channel has **3.5 million subscribers** at the time of writing – that's almost 1.5 million more than Lady Gaga's Vevo channel, and 400,000 more than Justin Bieber's.

The mass media, entertainment, news and current affairs, games and literature are all intertwined; attempts to make them separate and different are doomed to fail. We are more of a **'media saturated'** culture

today than we were in the 1980s when **Baudrillard** first made this observation (*Simulation and Simulacra*: 1981 – see page 48) but we exist in our own niche audience groups, sometimes aware of other groups but often not. We can access nostalgia TV, classic films and search the web for music, advertising and news reports from the past, often with limited awareness of their cultural context. We can watch a TV series in a 'marathon viewing' over a weekend even though it was originally broadcast weekly over a three-month period, and we can download a BBC programme to watch off-line on a mobile device whenever or wherever we choose.

These are some of the ideas we need to be considering when thinking about the way the media works. Media 1.0 – old-style Media Studies – assumed that audiences had limited power and thus there was a **focus on textual analysis which investigated what the media did to audiences**; Media 2.0 looked at the rise of the audience in terms of **interactivity and production and considered how institutions were adapting to the technological changes**. Both these approaches are still valid; but the cultural changes created by recent media developments also need to be integrated in to our studies. We definitely need ideas for a Media Studies 2.1.

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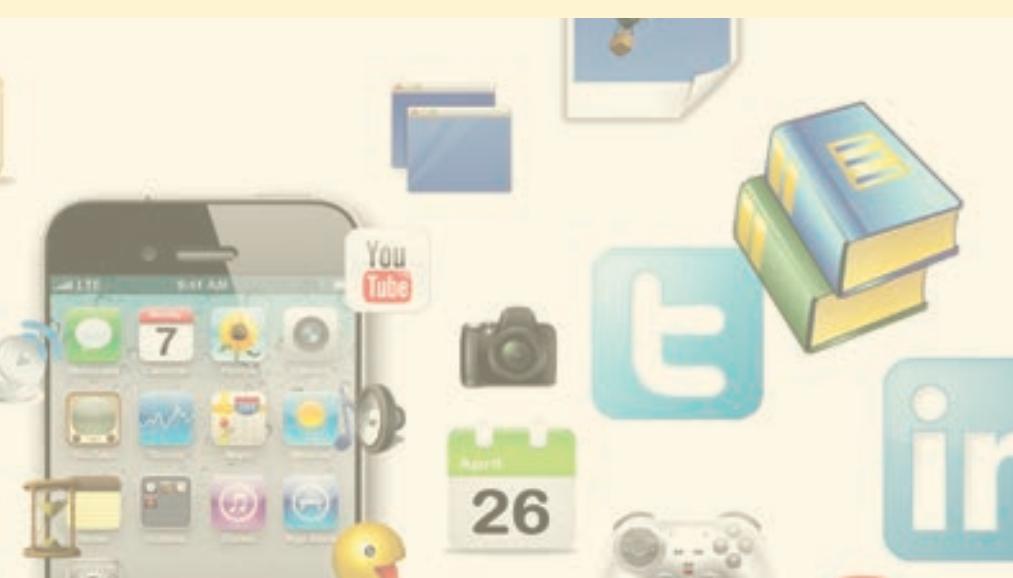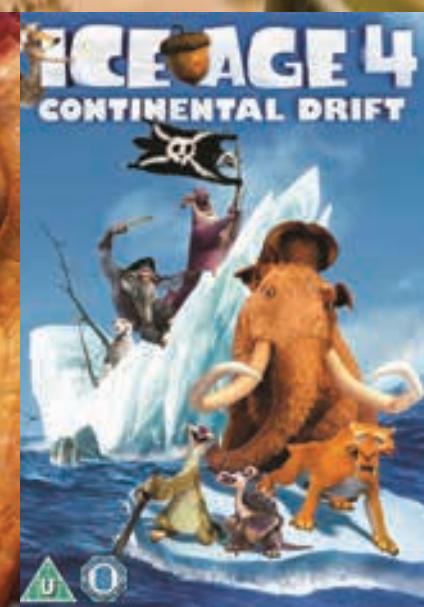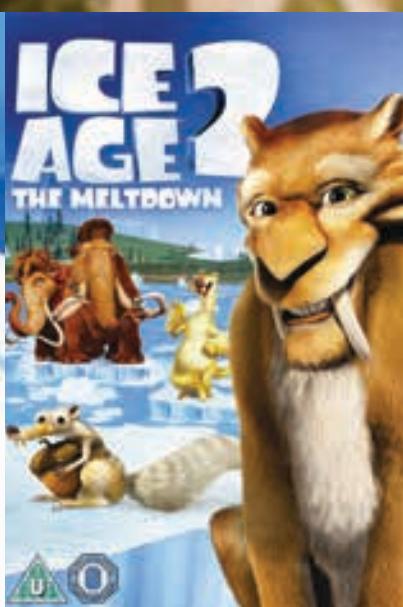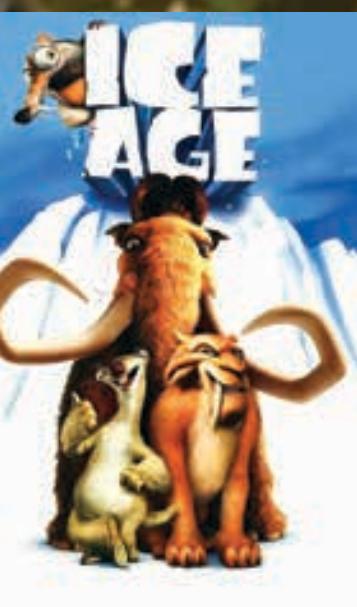
IS HOLLYWOOD OUT OF IDEAS?

While Hollywood may never have been known for its originality, in recent years the output of one of the world's biggest film industries has been a revolving door of franchises, remakes, reboots, sequels, prequels and adaptations. Pete Turner asks: is Hollywood all out of fresh ideas?

What is most concerning to those who look for unique, innovative and inventive entertainment from the Dream Factory is the procession of completely unoriginal work that is increasingly pouring into cinemas.

Hollywood is a business made up of profit-driven studios; small subsidiaries of multinational conglomerates that care little for the art of film. Their purpose is to succeed in a capitalist marketplace; profit ensures survival, growth and competition. Box office sales are the key to big profits. They spend big money to ensure they will deliver the biggest spectacles: cutting-edge special effects, globally recognisable stars, and locations that span the world and promise the biggest sets money can buy. Despite rising budgets, the corporations behind the biggest Hollywood films are not careless with money, resulting in a cautious mentality that thrives on repetition and giving the public safe, escapist entertainment that is almost guaranteed to be popular and profitable. Investment into film production is driven by committees of business people, analysing the marketplace, identifying trends, working within popular genres and attempting to repeat the successes of the past.

As you will be aware, audiences enjoy **familiarity** almost as much as producers love producing familiar films. **Stars** give us familiar faces, a 'brand' we can trust, often offering us a certain type of film. Stars can even be linked to **genres**, which again allow filmmakers to market their films to audiences using certain **recognisable conventions** that permit us to identify the

films we want to see. To a certain extent we enjoy the safety of knowing what to expect.

However, Hollywood has been using stars and genres since the beginning of the film industry and this is hardly a concern. Genres and stars can still offer original entertainment by **subverting expectations**. What is most concerning to those who look for unique, innovative and inventive entertainment from the Dream Factory is the procession of completely unoriginal work that is increasingly pouring into cinemas. Analysing the **Top Twenty films of 2012** (see page 17) at the international box office paints a frightening and bleak picture of audiences lapping up recycled ideas, a situation that can only lead to Hollywood cannibalising itself until it eventually starts to remake its own films every decade … a process that has, depressingly, already begun with *The Amazing Spiderman*.

Trends

Hollywood executives analyse the market to see what works, what sells and what they can imitate, steal or build on to capitalise on current market trends. Genres, cycles and trends can all overlap. For example, in the wake of *Scream* in the late 90s, a revived cycle of similar **self-aware slasher films** was produced. Trends that are clearly popular at the moment and currently exploited by Hollywood are the **superhero cycle of films**, and particularly since Christopher Nolan's *Dark Knight* trilogy, the tendency for superhero films to get darker in theme and tone. Three of the Top Ten films of 2012 are superhero movies. *The Avengers* and *The Dark Knight Rises* took the top spots and the rebooted *The Amazing Spiderman* also made the Top Ten. *The Dark Knight Rises* and its seriously dark themes and subject matter that reflect post-9/11 terrorism anxiety (see page 37) seems to have fed into the production of 2013's *Man of Steel* Superman update, judging by the teaser trailer.

Marvel Studios has become one of the biggest players in Hollywood in recent years as part of the **Disney conglomerate** and ever since the success of *Blade* and *X-Men*, has been churning out adaptations

of their own comic book characters. The recent *Avengers* film appeared to be the pinnacle, with numerous characters already set up in their own films teaming up in one mega-movie, but now Marvel are working on their second phase, with new films for all the individual characters, led by the darker-looking *Iron Man 3* out this year.

Other trends popular in Hollywood, showing **a lack of imagination and desperation** to jump on the bandwagon are **vampire films** spurned on by the success of the *Twilight* saga. *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter*, *Stake Land*, *Let Me In* (itself a remake) and, of course, an inevitable parody, *Vampires Suck*, all emerged recently, cashing in on the renewed popularity of the creatures of the night (or just Hollywood's desperation to

suck every last drop of cash from them).

Twilight is a teen literature adaptation, again showing Hollywood's love of taking properties with an existing fan base (see also *Harry Potter* and *The Hunger Games*). Horror has most recently replayed found-footage films on an endless loop ever since the success of *Cloverfield* and *Paranormal Activity*. Fairytales appear to be the latest source of unoriginal ideas for films, with *Snow White* getting two big screen outings in 2012 (only *Snow White and the Huntsman*, starring **Marvel's** Thor and *Twilight*'s Bella made the Top Twenty) and *Hansel and Gretel* and *Jack and the Beanstalk* getting adapted in 2013.

Technology-wise the biggest current trend is to use **3D**, ever since James Cameron's *Avatar* became the biggest box

> Not only does Hollywood appear to be out of ideas and looking to other mediums for sources of inspiration but they are also determined to milk every last good idea for the maximum profit.
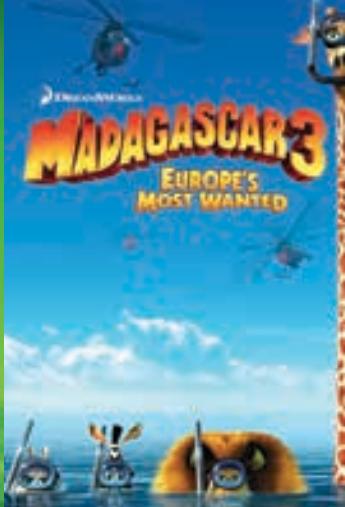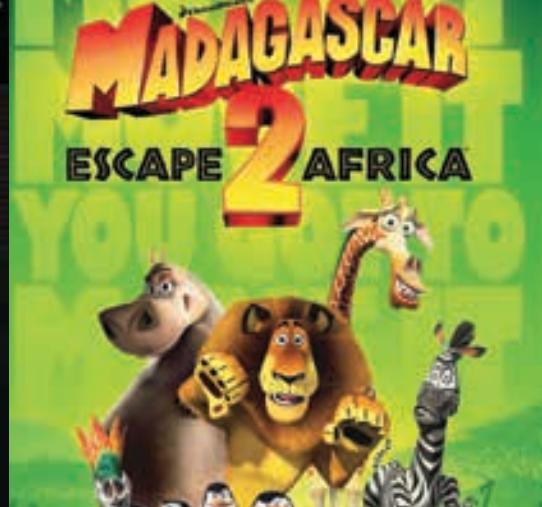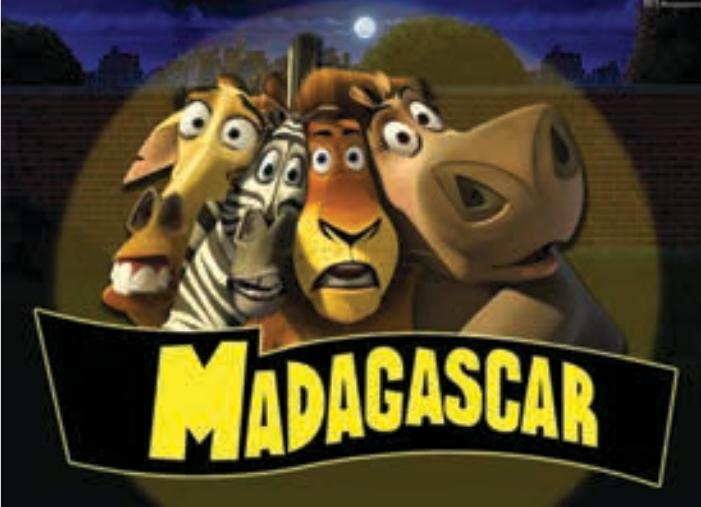
office blockbuster in history. *The Hobbit*, among others, utilised this tool to boost its box office potential in 2012 (see page 48). James Cameron's 1997 film *Titanic* was even re-released in 3D and made the Top Twenty of the year.

Remakes and reboots

Hollywood has begun plundering its own back catalogue in earnest, as well as seeking out popular world cinema films which, because of subtitling, will not make money at the US box office. So though the French film *The Intouchables* did great business around the world, Hollywood is already preparing a remake to cash in on the American audience. *The Dark Knight* trilogy is itself a reboot of an already successful Batman franchise that lasted four films and, as mentioned earlier, it took *Spiderman* only five years to be rebooted after the original trilogy finished in 2007. *The Star Trek* franchise was recently rebooted to great success, and horror classic *Evil Dead* is being remade this year, the latest in a long line of classic horrors being remade for a modern audience by an industry short on fresh ideas.

Foreign language favourites are continually remade by Hollywood with respected directors like **Martin Scorsese** (*The Departed*) and **David Fincher** (*The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*) becoming involved. Korean revenge flick *Oldboy* is also being remade this year by **Spike Lee**, suggesting that even successful directors are looking to previously produced scripts to make a buck. It is as sure a sign as any that Hollywood has nothing left to offer the world but exploitation of its past glories and the success of original international ideas. Hollywood even celebrates its complete lack of originality by awarding Scorsese a Best Director Oscar for his remake of Hong Kong's **Infernal Affairs**.

Position	Film	Studio	Worldwide	Domestic		Overseas	
				$	%	$	%
1	Marvel's The Avengers	BV	$1,511.8	$623.4	41.2%	$888.4	58.8%
2	The Dark Knight Rises	WB	$1,081.0	$448.1	41.5%	$632.9	58.5%
3	Skyfall	Sony	$1,033.4	$299.9	29.0%	$733.5	71.0%
4	The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey	WB	$889.0	$281.0	31.6%	$608.0	68.4%
5	Ice Age: Continental Drift	Fox	$875.3	$161.2	18.4%	$714.0	81.6%
6	The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn Part 2	Sum.	$822.9	$290.4	35.3%	$532.5	64.7%
7	The Amazing Spider-Man	Sony	$752.2	$262.0	34.8%	$490.2	65.2%
8	Madagascar 3: Europe's Most Wanted	P/DW	$742.1	$216.4	29.2%	$525.7	70.8%
9	The Hunger Games	LGF	$686.5	$408.0	59.4%	$278.5	40.6%
10	MIB 3	Sony	$624.0	$179.0	28.7%	$445.0	71.3%
11	Brave	BV	$535.4	$237.3	44.3%	$298.1	55.7%
12	Ted	Uni.	$503.0	$218.8	43.5%	$284.2	56.5%
13	Life of Pi	Fox	$452.2	$95.8	21.2%	$356.3	78.8%
14	The Intouchables (U.S.-only)	Wein.	$420.8	$10.2	2.4%	$410.6	97.6%
15	Prometheus	Fox	$403.4	$126.5	31.4%	$276.9	68.6%
16	Snow White and the Huntsman	Uni.	$396.6	$155.3	39.2%	$241.3	60.8%
17	Taken 2	Fox	$371.6	$139.5	37.6%	$232.0	62.4%
18	Dr. Seuss' The Lorax	Uni.	$348.8	$214.0	61.4%	$134.8	38.6%
19	Titanic 3D	Par.	$343.6	$57.9	16.8%	$285.7	83.2%
20	Wreck-It Ralph	BV	$336.4	$179.5	53.4%	$156.9	46.6%

http://www.boxofficemojo.com/yearly/chart/?view2=worldwide&yr=2012&p=.htm

Franchises, Sequels and Prequels

Hollywood's complete and utter dependence on franchises, sequels and prequels can be demonstrated scarily efficiently by the **2012 Top Ten**. Every single film is part of a **franchise** with recognisable brand recognition. Repetition of characters, narratives, stars and genres emerge in the Top Ten from James Bond, *Men in Black*, children's favourites *Ice Age* and *Madagascar* to new adaptations of *The Hobbit* (a trilogy) and *The Hunger Games* (a tetralogy). Even the once-banned low-budget horror *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* has become a continuing successful franchise with recent Leatherface outing *Texas Chainsaw 3D* tearing up cinemas. *Skyfall* was the biggest Bond yet, showing that, even at age 50, the franchise shows no signs of stalling, and though *The Dark Knight Rises* definitively ended that trilogy, it will not be too long until Warner Bros revive the *Batman* cash cow. *Prometheus*, the (sort-of) *Alien* prequel also managed to sneak into the Top Twenty of the year with a sequel to the prequel already planned. Most interestingly (or depressingly) is that *Dawn of the Planet of*

the Apes will be a tongue-twisting sequel to a prequel to a 1968 film that has spawned many sequels and a remake already.

Adaptations

Aside from the current popular trend for teen literature and comic book adaptations, Hollywood is increasingly on the look out
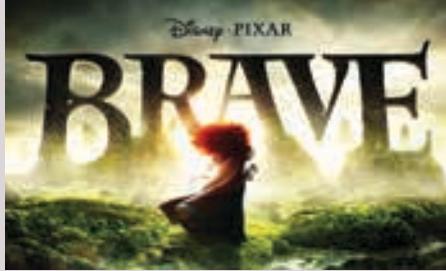
for more profitable properties to adapt from **television series, books, fairytales and video-games**. With the video-games industry over taking Hollywood in income recently, Hollywood is keen to capitalise on this. *Resident Evil: Retribution* is the fifth film in a franchise based on the popular video-games. Every new entry in the series gets consistently panned by the critics, yet they continue to be extremely profitable with fans of the games. *21 Jump Street* made the Top Fifty of 2012 with its adaptation of an 80s television show starring Johnny Depp, while the first of what Paramount was no doubt hoping would become an extremely lucrative franchise, *Jack Reacher*, under-performed, suggesting this time there may not be a sequel. Not only does Hollywood appear to be out of ideas and looking to other mediums for sources of inspiration but they are also determined to milk every last good idea for the maximum profit. *The Hobbit*, a children's book, has been adapted into a trilogy of films, to ensure revenue will pour in from this one idea for some time to come.

Is there anything original left?

So if we set aside all the trends, remakes, reboots, franchises, sequels, prequels and adaptations, what is left and do they actually make any money?

Well, it's not all doom and gloom; there are still some original ideas out there. In the 2012 Top Twenty, *Brave* and *Ted* emerge as the winners of the box office for films not based on existing properties. Both original concepts that just missed out on making it into the Top Ten box office earners of the year, they prove that there is still a market for something different, and that Hollywood can take a risk and have it pay off. While *Ted* had **Mark Wahlberg** and director **Seth MacFarlane** has his *Family Guy* fan base, *Brave* had only the **Pixar** studio name really to sell it; and both managed to make

massive profits. Unsurprisingly a *Ted* sequel has been confirmed and a *Brave* one will likely follow.

Other films like *Argo* and *Looper* offer more in the way of originality but fail to compete with the less unique but infinitely more popular Hollywood fare – although it remains to be seen whether *Argo*'s recent Oscar success will up its popularity stakes. *Wreck-It Ralph* is another novel concept, but trades on well-known video-game characters to feature in its story.

Overall it seems that Hollywood is happy to give audiences more of the same and on the whole, we are happy to take what they give us. But if you want to see more originality in cinema, then **vote with your wallet**. Find the films that *need* your

box office business. **Take a chance** next time you go to the cinema. Don't allow Hollywood to devour itself and churn out the same old stuff. Save the endless sequels, prequels, remakes and reboots for another day and **savour something new, unique and that you have not seen before**!

Pete Turner is undertaking a PhD at Oxford Brookes University, writes a film blog at http://ilovethatfilm.blogspot.com/ and is currently writing a book on *The Blair Witch Project*.

EXISTENTIAL FILM

IDEAS, FREEDOMS, AND APOCALYPSE NOW

Mark Ramey has revisited the existential angst of his youth – but what exactly is he on about? What is Existentialism, where do its ideas come from, and why are they so profoundly disturbing and influential? Sit back, put your thinking cap on, and prepare to explore one of the most powerful philosophies of the late 20th century, its impact on film narrative, and one of the greatest examples of Existentialism in practice: *Apocalypse Now.*

I have had an 'existential crisis' writing this article – not one brought on by my approaching 50th birthday, or by Michael Gove dismantling our education system – none of that. What has triggered my sense of profound doubt is **revisiting Existentialism** – a broad school of philosophical thought, which, in essence, tries to answer the following key question: **'What is human life all about and how should it be lived?'** Heavy stuff!

I studied the great Existentialists years ago and they have now returned from the far reaches of my brain to facilitate writing

An 'existential crisis' – a dramatic and personal questioning of the very foundations of one's being.

this article – and precipitate my crisis, for the topic is not simple. Indeed my own crisis is probably the best place to start, for **'existential'** is a term most often used when referring to an **'existential crisis'** – a dramatic and personal questioning of the very foundations of one's being. Such profoundly introverted questioning has helped cement in the public mind the idea of an Existentialist as a **hyper-intense, brooding miserablist**. At best such gloom-merchants are cynics – at worst they are nihilists.

'Hell is other people' (Sartre)
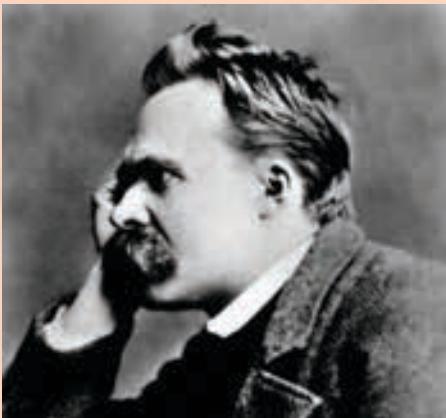
The story of existentialism – what's it all about?

Existentialism originated in the early 19th century and reached its cultural peak in the 1950s and 60s. Numerous artists, thinkers and writers have engaged with the philosophy but none more so than the French and Germans, amongst whom we find such legendary figures as **Jean Paul Sartre**, **Albert Camus**, **Friedrich Nietzsche** and **Martin Heidegger**. Like its bastard child, **postmodernism**, Existentialism has many faces, but for the sake of this article we can look at the philosophy's most popular caricature – one largely influenced by the French Existentialism of Sartre and Camus.

Sartre was a professional philosopher and **Camus** a journalist, but they both wrote fiction and served to popularise Existentialism at a time when the world was still trying to come to terms with the terrible after-effects of WW2. The once ennobling image of Science and Reason had been tarnished, and a loss of faith in God meant there was **a crisis of the intellectual and spiritual at this time**. If God and Reason can no longer help us then what hope do we have? Existentialists tried to provide an honest answer – but not always a positive one.

Sartre and Camus believed that the existential character of human beings is defined by **absolute freedom**. To exist as a human means to be unconditionally free. The profound awareness of this emotionally-charged, existential state, leads in all of us to feelings of 'angst' or anxiety. We recognise that we live in a world where we are free to act, where we *must* act, but where no fundamental justification for our action exists.

To act in 'bad faith', I deny my freedom and place my authority in the hands of others – the church, my employer, my country, my family, my reason. Conversely, to act 'authentically', I act knowing that I have no justification other than my own sense of freedom and my honesty in choosing to act.

For such Existentialists, even getting out of bed becomes a profound event. Camus famously stated:

'There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide.'
Albert Camus: *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942)

Neither Sartre nor Camus committed suicide, and both men dedicated themselves to life through political action and art. Nevertheless the tortured existential character described here was defined largely through their input.

Camus believed there was an inherent **'absurdity'** to our existence. One of his most enduring images is that of **Sisyphus, the Greek god**, whose tragedy is that he must eternally push a giant boulder up a hill – only for it to then roll down the other side. In such a view, human existence is **Sisyphean** – we must act, but our actions are futile. It's no wonder Existentialists sometimes seem a bit glum.

Sartre also had few consolations, famously claiming in his play *Huis Clos*:
'Hell is other people.'
Jean-Paul Sartre: *Huis Clos* (1944)

In other words: other people are the catalysts for our bad faith: we all necessarily act upon each other and thus crush the freedom of others. We can't help but become our own torturers.

What does it mean for film?

So what of existential films? What narratives are existential? If we use the notion of an 'existential crisis' then the following narrative arc seems all too familiar:

An individual (usually male) goes on an emotional and spiritual journey of self-discovery whereby old ideologies and foundational beliefs are questioned and new, more fulfilling and self-determined modes of existence are embraced.

Consider Neo's journey in *The Matrix* or Jack's transformation in *Fight Club* or Truman's self-realisation in *The Truman Show*. Then again even James Bond in *Skyfall* has a moment or two of existential disquiet, as does Woody in *Toy Story 3*, or Harry Potter or Bilbo Baggins or Luke Skywalker and so on. No. We clearly need a more precise definition of the existential. Merely having a mid-life crisis, as in *American Beauty* or *Sideways*, or discovering things are not quite the way you had understood them to be, as in *Inception* or *Midnight in Paris*, is not enough to qualify as truly existential – at least in terms of Sartre and Camus.

For a film to qualify as *truly* existentialist I therefore propose the following definition:
a film within which a character confronts the utterly contingent nature of all human action and reasoning but still chooses to act with complete commitment.

On such a definition we are clearly in the realm of film genres with deeply emotional themes and representations – films that shake the foundations of our belief systems. Many films can do this but few are as truly existential as **Francis Ford Coppola's** *Apocalypse Now* (1979 USA). This archetypal Vietnam War movie is an **anti-war movie** – depicting moral ambiguity played out brutally on a global scale. Cultural relativity is highlighted and Sartre's notion that, 'Hell is other people', is given its most literal illustration.

Existentialism in Apocalypse Now

The film is based on a 19th-century colonial novel by **Joseph Conrad**, *The Heart of Darkness*, transposing the action from the jungle interiors of the Belgian Congo to the war-torn jungles of Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. At the core of

'There is only one truly philosophical problem, and that is suicide' (Camus)

On such a definition we are clearly in the realm of film genres with deeply emotional themes and representations – films that shake the foundations of our belief systems.
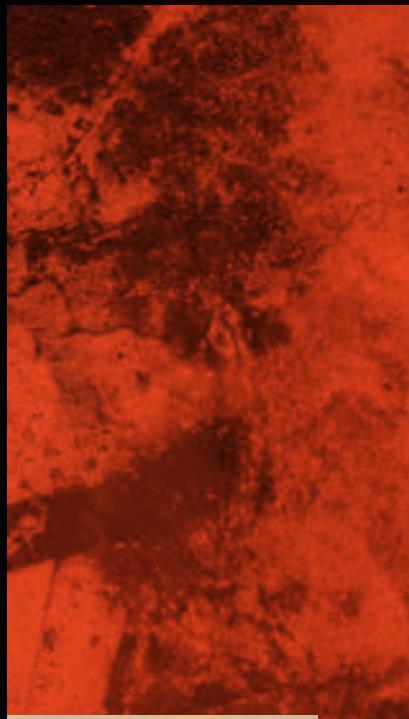
both narratives is the messianic enigma of Kurtz – a man carving out his moral niche in the jungle. In *Apocalypse Now*, Kurtz is a brave, respected soldier, a high-ranking American warrior, who has grown sick of the feeble incompetence of his overlords and has deserted – setting up camp in the jungle's moral desert and recruiting an army of savages. From there he successfully wages a brutal war on the Viet Cong; but his unofficial and unconventional triumphs embarrass his commanders, who send a military assassin into the jungle to kill him.

Aside from its literary connection (Conrad can be read as a proto-Existentialist) and the notion (suggested by the novel's title) that at **man's heart lies darkness** – not evil but a moral vacuum, an existential void waiting to be filled despite the patent absurdity of trying to do so; aside from all that, and from the film's noir styling (a weary voiceover, systemic corruption, illusion, violence and madness), **what identifies this text as truly existential is Kurtz and his monologues** – delivered from the fetid darkness by a pained Marlon Brando at his mumbling best. Towards the end of the film one monologue in particular stands out – perfectly capturing the absurd existential paradox of human existence. Kurtz is recalling a military mission when he visited a native village to inoculate children with the Polio vaccine.

... We left the camp after we had inoculated the children, and this old man came running after us and he was crying. ... We went back there, and they [the Viet Cong] had come and hacked off every inoculated arm. There they were in a pile. A pile of little arms. And I remember... I wept like some grandmother. I wanted to tear my teeth out; I didn't know what I wanted to do! And I want to remember it. I never want to forget it... And then I realised... like I was shot with... a diamond bullet right through my forehead. And I thought, my God... the genius of that!... The will to do that! Perfect, genuine, complete, crystalline, pure. And then I realised they were stronger than us, because... these were not monsters, these were men... trained cadres. These men who fought with their hearts, who had families, who had children, who were filled with love... but they had the strength... to do that. If I had ten divisions of those men, our troubles here would be over very quickly. You have to have men who are moral... and at the same time who are able to utilise their primordial instincts to kill without feeling... without passion... without judgment! Because it's judgment that defeats us.

Apocalypse Now (Coppola 1979 USA)

Kurtz was at war; but then so are we all – at least existentially. And as Kurtz notes, what undermines all our actions is a

We recognise that we live in a world where we are free to act, where we must act, but where no fundamental justification for our action exists.

need to judge in an absurd world. It is no wonder, as he lies dying at the end of the film, that his final words are, **'The Horror'**.

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WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA
MR BOND?

Warning: This article features plot spoilers!

The Bond films have achieved a lot; after all, they are the longest running film franchise in cinema history. The brand turned 50 in 2012 with the release of *Skyfall* (Mendes UK/USA 2012) otherwise known as Bond 23. The release rapidly became the most financially successful of the series, and in February won a BAFTA for Outstanding British Film of the year. **Jonathan Nunns** considers some of the ideas which have helped to reinvent the brand.

Skyfall **has so far made over one billion dollars worldwide**, easily eclipsing the take for the widely disliked but financially successful previous outing, *Quantum of Solace* (Forster UK/USA 2008). Much has been written about the cultural importance of the franchise. However, the theoretical importance of the films has seemed marginal. The films have been regarded, often rightly, as **sexist, homophobic and nationalistic** wish-fulfilment for a Britain mourning its loss of empire and international influence. They have also been seen as an arrogant statement of **the superiority of British and Western capitalist ideology** over the rest of the world.

Skyfall may offer some redress. This film is exceptionally literate and interesting, especially considering it is part of a series often thought of as sexist escapism for men who really ought to grow up. *Skyfall* could provide an entire Media Studies course packaged into one film.

Postmodern texts are frequently playful. However postmodernism as a concept is much more than that; it also acts as a means to describe the character of the modern world.

007

The film reflects the changing nature of real world conflict from state-on-state binary opposition, to a position where the threat is faceless, stateless and fanatical.

Take the **media language**, for example. **Roger Deakins**, the acclaimed **director of photography**, provides the most glowingly beautiful visuals in the series for years. As for studies of **genre, narrative, institution and audience engagement**, the film could provide an excellent case study on each.

However, it is in the areas of **ideology and representation** that this film, unlike its predecessors, really takes off. There are too many ideas to elaborate in one article, so I will concentrate on just two, the film's use of **postmodernism** and its use of **Sigmund Freud's Oedipus theory**.

'How safe do you feel?'

In keeping with many postmodern texts, *Skyfall* seeks to closely interact with the real world, merging fiction with references to real events, which gives an 'is it real or

life account by Parliament in 2011 for their role in the **phone hacking scandal**.

Postmodern texts are frequently playful. However postmodernism as a concept is much more than that; it also acts as a means to describe the character of the modern world. Under verbal attack at the enquiry, M angrily defends the work of MI6, asking the hostile panel, 'How safe do you feel?' In a sentence she sums up the insecurity of the modern world. Physical threats derive now from highly-motivated extremists rather than states, as would have been the case during the **modernist** era of the **Cold War**. M's point is proven when terrorists break into the Inquiry and a shoot-out ensues. The film reflects the **changing nature of real world conflict** from state-on-state **binary opposition**, to faceless, stateless and fanatical threat.

is it not?' dimension to the fantasy. For example, mid-film, Bond emerges onto London streets filled with ambulances and police cars, seconds after a breakneck chase with a terrorist on an underground train. Watching, it is hard not to recall the images of panic and confusion that followed the **7/7 bombings in 2005**. The blurring of fact and fiction is reinforced by the use of the real life BBC news anchor **Huw Edwards**, appearing in a **cameo role** to front a broadcast watched by the characters in the film, suggesting Bond is not a fiction but actually lives in our world.

The **intertextuality** does not end there. Bond's boss M (Dame Judi Dench), held to account for mistakes early in the story, is hauled before a parliamentary committee of inquiry, reflecting both the recent **Leveson** inquiry into press behaviour and the scenes of **Rupert and James Murdoch** held to real

'You've still got spots!'

Postmodern texts can be highly **self-referential** as well as **intertextual**. As the anniversary film, this Bond goes all out to reference the franchise. The moments of **homage** come thick and fast. Early on, Bond meets the new Q, a key Bond character not seen in the films for a decade, to be given a higher-tech version of his iconic gun, referencing a scene in the first film, *Dr No* (Young UK/USA 1962). The difference is that Bond is no longer the young blade given his armament by the crusty old dog. Instead it is Bond who is shocked by the youth of his armourer. 'You've still got spots!' is his horrified response. Later, in Shanghai, Bond traces an assassin by his use of a distinctive and specialist bullet. He defeats the killer in a disorientating hall of mirrors. The distinctive assassin's bullet and the signature hall of mirrors moment both reference *The*

Man With The Golden Gun (Hamilton US/UK 1974). The mirrors and Chinese location also reference the classic noir film *The Lady From Shanghai* (Welles USA 1949). Other references include Bond escaping a komodo dragon by stepping on its back, as Roger Moore did to escape a crocodile in *Live and Let Die* (Hamilton US/UK 1973).

The most resonant reference is the use of the *Goldfinger* Aston Martin. This is self-referential and nonsensical since it references an early film in the franchise by giving the ownership of the car and its earlier adventures to a character played by an actor not even born when *Goldfinger* (Hamilton US/UK 1964) was released. The best postmodern reference, though, exists outside of *Skyfall* itself. As part of the **2012 Olympic Opening Ceremony**, Bond meets the real life Queen Elizabeth in perhaps the world's best 'movie trailer', before

Hopkins in *The Silence of The Lambs* (Demme USA 1991). The **homage** is repeated when a captured Silva, held in a plexiglas cage, plays mind games with M; visually and thematically mirroring Lecter's confrontation with Jodie Foster's Clarice Starling in the earlier film. A last postmodern flourish is delivered when Silva arrives for his showdown with Bond aboard a helicopter gunship, loudspeakers blaring, referencing the Wagnerian helicopter attack in *Apocalypse Now* (Coppola USA 1976).

'Mommy's been very bad'

That *Skyfall* is packed with postmodern references is not unusual. Filmmakers such as Quentin Tarantino have arguably made a career of it, and have been attacked as **derivative** as a result. *Skyfall* however, goes much further than the **homage** and

they both apparently skydive into the Olympic Park using Union Jack parachutes, exactly as Roger Moore did in the opening moments of *The Spy Who Loved Me* (Gilbert UK/USA 1977).

Skyfall's **antagonist** Raoul Silva is given impact by the casting of Javier Bardem, a Spanish actor made famous by his turn as a psychopath in *No Country for Old Men* (Coen and Coen USA 2007). Silva is visually styled to reference earlier blonde Bond villains like Grant in *From Russia With Love* (Young US/UK 1963) and Zorin in *A View To A Kill* (Glen US/UK 1985). A connection is also made to Daniel Craig whose casting in *Casino Royale* (Campbell US/UK 2006) as the first 'Blonde Bond' was the subject of a hostile internet campaign (more on this point later). Silva's theatrical entrance, clicking his teeth over a story about rats in a barrel, references Hannibal Lecter as played by Anthony

intertextuality that provide its surface layer.

This new depth can be found in the relationships between the characters and represents a significant departure for the franchise. The *Skyfall* script references the story of **Oedipus, the Greek myth popularised by Freud to describe the mother-fixated child**. M has acted as a **metaphorical surrogate** mother to both Bond and the former agent Silva. Both had worked for MI6 and are blonde brothers beneath the skin, both apparently betrayed by M. She botches a critical decision in the opening sequence, leaving Bond shot and missing, presumed dead. Earlier, before the events of *Skyfall*, believing Silva to have gone dangerously renegade, M abandons him to face capture and torture by the Chinese. His attempted suicide by service-issue cyanide, led to his current physical

Bond's rebirths represent yet another reboot both for this franchise and for the character, as the Bond movie slate is wiped clean.

and mental disfigurement. 'Mommy's been very bad' comments Silva to Bond at their first meeting. Silva's scheme, the film's **Mcguffin**, is simply a means for the bad son to get to M and carry out his **matricidal** aim. Bond's own relationship with M becomes blurred, which he demonstrates during his word association test. To the letter (and name) M, his response is 'Bitch'. In true **Shakespearean** form, the good and bad son, like **Edmund and Edgar in** *King Lear*, must duel over the fate of the parent. Their connection is reinforced at their first meeting, as the camp Silva attempts a mocking seduction of Bond that deconstructs the agent's image as the ultimate heterosexual male. Tied down, with Silva's fingers caressing his legs and chest, Bond is put very much on the back foot as the film suggests a **subtext of**

another surrogate parent, this time a 'father', the gamekeeper Kincade (Albert Finney) who had raised Bond after his parents' death. Bond spends much of the film attempting to recapture the **patriarchal** position lost when he was shot, dropping from a bridge to plunge into the waters of the river below.

At the house, **birth imagery** abounds. M's role as 'mother' to hero and villain is reinforced in a moment of emotional vulnerability. 'I fucked up,' she says, referring to the literal mess of their predicament, and metaphorically to her responsibility for creating both Bond and Silva. M, Bond and Kincade escape Silva's attack via a secret tunnel. Bond, already symbolically reborn into the Scottish landscape of his childhood and now 'born again' from the tunnel, begins to recover his power, literally walking

Bond ends the film as a new creation, all baggage gone and ready for the adventures to come.

The Bond films have been regarded as pretty brainless, and, in fairness, many of them are. However, the masterstroke for the 50th anniversary film was the hiring of the **Oscar winner Sam Mendes**, an acclaimed director of depth and subtlety, and the involvement of the Oscar-nominated screenwriter John Logan to augment the usual writing team. Between them they have provided dramatic weight and subtlety to a franchise that really needed to go beyond the tired stunts and explosions of years gone by to give new meaning to the mayhem and fantasy of the Bond franchise.

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007

homosexual incest between the surrogate brothers. Bond's reply mocks his own image 'What makes you think it's my first time?' he responds to his tormentor.

'I fucked up'

With all these undercurrents, Silva's matricidal impulses are made overt, whilst Bond decides to defend M with both 'brothers' vying for the ownership and control of M as 'mother'. The Freudianism is reinforced by the location chosen for the confrontation: Bond takes M to Skyfall, the Bond family pile in the Scottish Highlands. Whilst little had been made of this in the earlier films, **Ian Fleming, the novelist** who created Bond, had characterised him as an orphan, like many heroes from Spiderman to Batman. The Skyfall name itself suggests a coming apocalypse and when Bond arrives there with M to await Silva, he meets

on water as he dashes across a frozen lake. Seconds later he undergoes a final rebirth. Plunged once more beneath the waters as he battles a henchman, Bond fires a flare to find the gap in the ice that represents the birth canal to his final re-emergence.

Once into his full powers, Bond stabs Silva to death, a penetration familiar to any horror film buff as a metaphor for rape and in the **homoerotic** subtext of their relationship, providing a final answer to the question of who's fucking who.

Bond's rebirths represent yet another **reboot** both for this franchise and for the character, as the Bond movie slate is wiped clean. Bond, a traumatised has-been early in the film, is reborn into his full potency by the end. M and Silva, his metaphorical (and possibly real?) mother and brother are both dead. Skyfall is destroyed along with the iconic Aston Martin and earlier on, MI6 HQ.

Follow it up:

Skyfall (film) (Mendes UK/USA 2012)

Burrell I., '*Skyfall's* Not The Limit' *The Independent* October 20th 2012 page 40.

Miller H., (review) *Sight and Sound*, December 2012, page 104.

Newman K., (review) *Empire*, January 2013, page 60.

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HOMƎLAND

24

JACK BAUER

HOMELAND and 24

Ideas about the War on Terror

One world-changing event, 10 years, two American presidencies, and two hugely popular and critically-acclaimed drama series. How have ideas about the so-called War on Terror changed over time, and how are their ideologies reflected in the narratives and representations of *24* and *Homeland*? **Jonathan Nunns** investigates.

'I support your war o**f** terror,' Sasha Baron Cohen's character Borat yells at the American audience at a wild-west rodeo. In the change of a letter (**n** became **f**) a visitor's supposedly mangled English became sharp criticism of what the war on terror had become. ***Borat*** (Charles US/UK 2006) was released five years after 9/11 and the rodeo audience, hearing what they wanted to hear, cheered what they thought was the visitor's support. Whilst they missed the joke, the audience for the film clearly got it – at the expense of America as a whole. Americans were, it suggested, gung-ho idiots.

The attack on New York's Twin Towers on September 11th 2001 was the defining moment of the last decade, and its influence profoundly reverberated through the presidencies of the Republican George W. Bush and the Democrat Barack Obama. The consequences are with us still; from the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan, which had been the original training ground and refuge for the **Ji-hadist Al-Qaeda** attackers, to the special-forces assassination of the terrorist leader Osama Bin Laden in Pakistan in 2011. Other consequences included the surreal American-led **war in Iraq** which toppled Saddam Hussein, who was a horrendous despot but who, despite his many crimes, seems in the end to have had nothing to do with 9/11. The decade was also punctuated by other Al-Qaeda attacks including bombings in Bali, Madrid, Mumbai and London. The ongoing obsession with security and fear of attack can be seen at any airport and in the G4S debacle at the London Olympics. In all these ways and more, 9/11 changed the course of history.

The media war

Other than the wall-to-wall news coverage at the time and the many documentaries since, the media has tended, in fiction at least, either to shy away from

or to botch this issue. There have been exceptions such as the excellent *United 93* (Greengrass USA 2006) and the well-intentioned *Green Zone* (Greengrass USA 2010). However, there have also been a string of unsuccessful films such as *The Kingdom* (Berg USA 2007) and *Rendition* (Hood USA 2007).

For its part, British TV produced *Spooks* (BBC/Kudos UK 2002-11), which was fun to watch but which, in its repeated use of Islamist terrorists as the bad guys, did much to raise the spectre of the remorseless and crazy religious fanatic determined to bring down Western civilisation. Along with the British tabloid press, *Spooks* did its bit in the creation of **Islamophobia**, creating a widely circulated impression that Islamic meant terrorist, and that to be one you had to be the other.

Only 24 hours to save the world

The key American response was *24* (Fox TV USA), the **espionage** drama that ran for eight seasons between 2001 and 2010. The show was produced by **Rupert Murdoch's Fox Television Network** and for better or worse, precisely reflected the **zeitgeist** of the time. America saw itself as in danger of further devastating attacks, perhaps many times worse than that of 9/11. In the show's **protagonist** Jack Bauer, *24* provided a hero for the times, whose outlook chimed precisely with that of the Bush era. America was represented as an ultimate force for good in the world, an ideal under extreme threat. The **ideologies** of **democracy, capitalism and individualism** were endangered, so America needed a hero who

> 24 provided a hero for the times, whose outlook chimed precisely with that of the Bush era. America was represented as an ultimate force for good in the world, an ideal under extreme threat.

would do whatever was required to save the day. Hence *24*'s Bauer, a traditional square-jawed hero in other respects, was able to do some very bad things because, argued the show, the ends – the defence of a greater good – justified the means.

24 posed this question: would you torture someone if they held the key to stopping another 9/11? The show's unequivocal response was yes. In Season Five, faced with a suspect he cannot break, Bauer shoots the man's innocent wife in order to get him to talk. In fairness, he shot her in the leg, and was gentleman enough to call an ambulance afterwards, but he would have done worse to her had her defeated husband not then given up his secrets.

Another example appears in Season Seven, when Bauer is about to plunge a pen into the eye of a tight-lipped suspect. Audiences might doubt whether Bauer has right on his side, were it not for some brazen **emotional manipulation**. The scene cuts to a **parallel-edited** sequence on a passenger jet above, where an **archetypal** American soccer mom and her moppet offspring are chatting happily. It is their plane that the terrorists aim to destroy. When we cut back to the interrogation, the audience is behind Bauer; only a monster

would want to see the mom and moppet crash. Go Jack! The bad guy concerned is a pug-ugly, morally-bankrupt sleazebag. Hollywood often has its villains wear their badness on the outside (see Bond and Batman) and Bauer looks like a paragon of virtue in contrast.

In *24*'s moral universe, **antagonists** were irredeemable, alien and 'other'. Usually foreign, they reflected the recent news: Bosnian war criminals, Columbian drug barons, renegade British spies, African warlords, the Communist Chinese (who at one point capture and torture Bauer) and a range of identikit Islamic fanatics. The villains were two-dimensional at best. They were evil because they were evil, with no justification other than envy, malevolence and hatred. They were impossible to identify with, and were fair game for anything Bauer might do to them.

This was much as the America of George W. Bush liked its real foes to be seen. Bin Laden and Saddam Hussein became supervillains, justifying any American action against them. This was not surprising, since Murdoch's **Fox News** was a forceful supporter of President Bush, the Republican Party and their political agenda, whilst *24* was produced by Murdoch's Fox TV. *Team America World Police* (Parker USA 2004) was the best satirical response to an American government that felt it should act as the world's moral guardian and impose its will by force.

They're going to kill us all!

24's villains included some Americans, generally hiss-able traitors from the intelligence services, armed forces and government. These characters were usually not ideological but were instead mercenaries, driven by profit. This representation reflected other aspects

of **right-wing** ideology. The current **Tea Party** movement, a sub group within the Republican party, reflects a suspicion that the American government may turn against its own people. *24*'s illustration is Season Five's 'first villain', President Logan, a corrupt character evidently based on the real life President Richard Nixon who was forced from office in disgrace during the 1970s. The ideology of *24* exhibited paranoia about threats external and internal. Hence Bauer is a lone wolf renegade, never fully part of, nor fully separate from, the American government.

Despite its **reactionary** politics, *24* had some progressive elements. It featured black presidents years before Barack Obama and had a female president as well, something the real USA has yet to achieve.

Where did it all go wrong?

The good and evil **binary opposition** of the Bush era had some major consequences. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq became endless and bloody, hugely costly to the Americans and their allies, and devastating to the Afghanis and Iraqis. Prisons like **Abu Ghraib** and **Guantanamo Bay** became shorthand for the loss of American moral authority; images of prisoners abused and tortured there by American forces appeared on front pages and news bulletins, and the term **water-boarding** entered the vocabulary. The real life war on terror proved stubbornly inconclusive. Unlike *24*, the **narrative** could not be neatly resolved and even the capture and death of Bin Laden and Saddam Hussein brought no **closure**.

'Why kill a man when you can kill an idea?'

If ever the title of a show summarised its substance this was it. Season One of

The show looks at what the notion of what a homeland might mean, where that home might be and how much it is worth defending.

Homeland (Fox TV USA) was produced in 2011. Its subject was the **self-doubt America was experiencing about its world role, future place and past behaviour**. The term 'homeland' evokes patriotism and idealism, and was widely used during the Bush years. By the Obama era, it was taking on a different meaning. The show looks at the notion of what a homeland might mean, where that home might be, and how much it is worth defending.

Based originally on the Israeli series *Hatufim* (Keshet Israel 2010), *Homeland* has a simple **premise**. An American Marine Sergeant, Nick Brody, is captured by Al-Qaeda in Iraq and is held prisoner for eight years before being rescued. Deemed a hero, he returns, traumatised, to his old life, to a world that has moved on and a family that thought him dead. CIA investigator Carrie Matheson, manic, medicated and potentially unstable, gets word that an American soldier has been 'turned' in Iraq, and is now an Al-Qaeda terrorist planning an attack on the USA. Could it be the newly returned hero Brody?

The similarities between *24* and *Homeland* are striking, but not that surprising, considering that the show was produced by **Alex Gansa** and **Howard Gordon**, two of the key creative figures on *24*. Also returning is **Fox TV as the production company** behind the show. What has radically changed though is the **zeitgeist** reflected by the series. Instead of the clear-cut moral certainty, shoot-outs and car chases that characterised *24*, these have been replaced by **uncertainty and moral ambiguity** in *Homeland*. For much of the series, it is not clear if Nick Brody is a misunderstood protagonist or a dangerous antagonist. Certainly he is damaged goods, angry and unstable,

unable to connect either physically or emotionally with a bewildered wife who took a lover whilst thinking him dead. As a potential antagonist, he is humanised by the substantial and sympathetic motives he is given for his actions and by making him a family man and husband. Played by the charismatic and attractive Damian Lewis, Brody is light years from the thinly characterised thugs and weasels of *24*.

Carrie Matheson, the more obvious protagonist, is also suitably complex. Doubt is cast on her emotional stability by revealing her **bipolar disorder**. Is she right to suspect Brody, or is she paranoid and hounding an innocent man?

The waters are muddied by Carrie's attraction to Brody, which leads to their brief mid-season affair. Brody and Carrie share a bond. Both damaged by conflict, they can be themselves with each other, because only they can truly 'get' each other. Carrie comes both to love and suspect Brody, and is consumed by doubt.

Carrie or Cassandra?

One of the show's twists is that whilst the terror plot is eventually stopped by Carrie, she has by then been discredited, and neither she, nor her CIA bosses (who have written her off as crazy), realise that she stopped the crime. By this stage she is having a breakdown, and Season One's final scene shows her laid low in a sequence directly reminiscent of the treatment/torture undergone by Jack Nicholson in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (Forman USA 1975).

Is Homeland better than 24?

The characters in *Homeland* are complex and adult in contrast to the super-heroics and brutality of Bauer. *24* has begun to

look dated now and was very much a product of its time. As a **reflection of the current zeitgeist**, one *Homeland* sub-plot illustrates the change of mood. Mid-Season One, Carrie's CIA mentor, Saul Berenson, collects a female terrorist, captured attempting to escape to Mexico. Instead of the nail-pulling which would have ensued were this *24*, he drives her the hundreds of miles back to CIA HQ. During this one-to-one time, he learns who she is, sees her motivations and builds a relationship. Eventually she talks. Attitudes really have changed when the producers of *24* can make something as subtle and sympathetic as this.

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Follow it up

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Thomson, D. 'Shock Around the Clock' *Sight and Sound*, August 2003

Ideas about terrorism in the Homeland title sequence

Images and ambiguities

Emma Calway offers a shot-by-shot analysis of the enigmatic title sequence of this thought-provoking series.

The modern-day Gothic fear is terrorism. This word conjures up images in our minds without us even thinking. Deeply infiltrated into contemporary Western culture, it colours the way we think. But ideas about terror in the media are usually black and white.

That's why *Homeland* has been such a fascinating TV drama series. Originally based on the Israeli series *Hatifun* (Prisoners of War) it challenges our assumptions about the nature of terrorism. I want to deconstruct the *Homeland* credits, to see how they forefront new techniques to champion a less didactic worldview.

The 1 minute 18 second credits are filled with elements that relate to the themes of the show – blink and you'll miss them. Throughout the sequence, the discordant wail of the music score ties images and ideas together. When making a TV drama series, the credit or title sequence is usually created once the series has been made, drawing on footage from within it; but here, because of the importance of the imagery and musical motifs in setting the complex and ambiguous scene of the narrative, it was constructed first.

Sean Callery, who composed the music for the series and the titles, had already started to compose some of the jazz themes which had been envisaged as 'part of the DNA component of the sound of the show'. He describes the difficulties of weaving them around

a stream of consciousness sequence of Carrie sleeping, while we're looking at all the extreme political terrorist activities that have happened in this country in the last 25 years.

He notes also that instead of focusing on a heavy portentous score to underline the images, the jazz composition actually works *against* the iconography in a battle between sound and image.

The **establishing shot** of the sequence is in black and white, with occasional flashes of colour, and shows a little girl, blonde and angelic, sleeping – with the words *Homeland* ingrained onto the screen. This title connotes home and safety, especially when juxtaposed with the child; but there is a sinister undercurrent here. The word *Homeland* seems problematic from the initial shot. It refers initially to Brody's homeland of the US; he is taken from it and on his return, his 'homeland' is made to seem alien, strange.

But ideas about Judaism are also foregrounded in the narrative; based on an original Israeli script, the series deals with a bigger picture than just the Brody story: **race and cultural identity** are repeatedly placed under the camera lens. The title may also reference the idea, from the original script, of the Jewish people as a race without a land they can call home. Another dimension is added in the form of the character Saul – who in an Arab Airport arrest is accused of being Jewish, and describes himself as 'American.' What is being said here? Is America the new Biblical Promised Land for the persecuted Jewish people? Does America's pro-Zionist, anti-Islamic foreign policy make it a kind of extended Israel? Or is Saul denying his Jewishness? Surely not; he is a sympathetic character who tries to balance his roots with his American nationality. Indeed, at the very end of Season Two, in the face of a massacre, he murmurs the Jewish prayer for the dead.

The **soundtrack** plays against the images from the start. The sound of a triangle evokes a lullaby – but it is creepy and sinister, and disconcertingly played against a newsreader's voice speaking about 'a number of strikes against America.' This places us in the shoes of Carrie. We see her as a little girl, asleep in front of TV – the camera goes in and out to reflect her breathing – and to suggest media saturation with terrorist images from a young age.

At nine seconds in, the jazz sounds drift in, to images of the child Carrie playing the trumpet – her character loves jazz – prefacing a trumpet motif which recurs throughout the series at hugely important moments. The jazz also reflects Carrie's bipolar disorder – erratic, sharp and unpredictable, it represents her whole being in just a few sounds. We cut to a TV shot of Louis Armstrong (perhaps suggesting he and Carrie are similar – they are both outsiders?), and introducing another dimension to the 'homeland' theme: once, black Americans were the original domestic ('home') threat; these days, it's Islam.
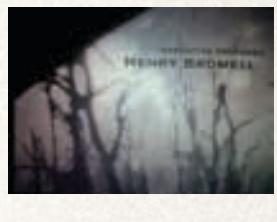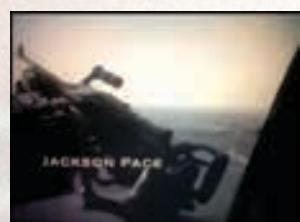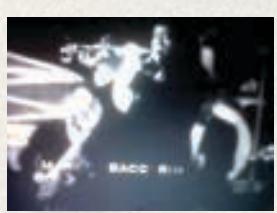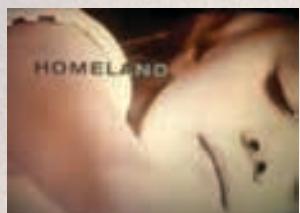
We cut to an overhead shot of a piano and then the images begin to dissolve into one another. George Bush Senior, US President in Carrie's childhood, blurs in with the little girl's face, almost suggesting they are the same – Americans uniting?

At twenty seconds in, President Bill Clinton appears, announcing 'this was an act of terrorism…' highlighting the acts of terrorism over the decades.

The most surreal image of the sequence then appears: a mid-shot of the young Carrie wearing a lion's mask in a formal maze; she is covered up, as if in a burka. It's very dream-like and unfamiliar. The shot flickers in and out so it's hard to focus. This image will be echoed later in the credits by a **close-up** of a group of veiled Muslim women whose dark clothing seems ominous.

Cut to a **high-angle shot** of Carrie in the maze, shot into direct sunlight so that the image is filtered and resonates like an over-exposed photograph.

An **extreme close-up** of Carrie's eyelid makes the viewer focus on the eyelashes, suggesting deep consciousness, obsession – or perhaps brainwashing – another theme which recurs throughout Seasons One and Two.

We cut again, to women fully covered with burkas, and then to former Secretary of State Colin Powell addressing the U.N. It's the unknown versus the familiar, the civilian versus the militia.

A **close-up** shot from inside an aircraft places the viewer directly in a warfare situation and at 31 seconds we hear Carrie again, sounding frightened: 'I'm just making sure we don't get hit again.' Cut to the stricken 9/11 towers, and panicked people running away. What is interesting here is this could also be Iraq or Afghanistan. The grainy, black and white shots mean we find the montage of images hard to categorise.

Composer Sean Callery draws attention to the deliberately constructed impact of the wailing trumpet, and observes that the very highest note in the sequence happens over the shot of the 9/11 towers:

It was a steady progression of all the terrible things that have happened, and that, God willing, is the worst, and that's really the highest point of the trumpet wailing, and then it just settles down at the end.

President Obama now appears on TV: 'We must, and we will, remain vigilant at all times.' A close-up of his face (upside down) is watched by viewer and child Carrie; perhaps the TV – and our consciousness – has not been tuned in properly?

Then we cut to a newsreader – the traditional ambassador of the **'truth'.**

The **high-angle shot** of a station – then again inverted – suggests vulnerability as

DIEGO KLATTENHOFF

DEVELOPED FOR AMERICAN TELEVISION BY HOWARD GORDON & ALEX GANSA

we look down on the commuters; shadows suggest the outsider threat.

Jump cut to a shot of the Brody family as seen on TV (emphasising that this family is largely a media creation), and then a close-up of Jess, playing the role of the devoted wife.

Brody – placed in the maze – stands to attention in his solder's uniform: the **messages and values** suggested here are those of the idealised American Dream.

At 56 seconds in, Carrie's voice is heard:
I missed something once before – I won't – I can't –
She is referring to a previous error of judgment that she is still punishing herself for. Saul replies:
That was ten years ago – everyone missed something that day.
She retorts, **'Well, everybody's not me'**, highlighting her 'otherness'.

Like Hamlet, Carrie's bipolar condition or 'madness' (for which she takes medication every day) allows her to see the truth and what's really going on, while others are blinded; it's as if she is operating on a different level. At times she struggles with her disorder so much so that it impacts on her job and her relationships. Carrie, like Brody, represents the 'alien'. Both of them are wolves in sheep's clothing – they look just like you and me but they have a lot to hide.

The recurring motif of the maze suggests there are many avenues – the narrative leads us down one way and then we realise it's the wrong route. As the viewer, we don't know whom to believe or trust. The inverted image of Brody and his wife confirms this, suggesting all is not what is seems.

The next image is hard to take in: Brody as filthy Taliban captive, totally at odds with the idealised images we've just seen. This shot dissolves into Carrie with her eyes shut tight – as if she doesn't want to believe

what Brody has had to go through, what he actually is. At this point, they are parallel but diagonal to each other in the maze; she reaches out to him but can't locate him.

The camera then cuts to a foreign land, with Carrie – wearing a hijab – looking back, looking directly into the camera and at the viewer. The recurring image of the eye opening wide in an **extreme close-up**.

Brody and Carrie's faces **dissolve** into each other. Brody's head is bowed and then held high, suggesting first shame, then pride. We see Brody smiling, looking directly at the White House, symbol of national pride. But perhaps this image is ambiguous, also connoting the threat from within. Is his smile of pride genuine – or is it sinister?

A **low-angle** shot of the helicopter flying over suggests danger, heightened by the **diegetic** sound here of police sirens and radio. The realism brings the danger right into our own living rooms and we can't escape it; we are ourselves a part of it.

Media propaganda is typically black and white, good versus evil, or as George W. puts it in the credits:
You're either with us or against us
But this complacency will be challenged throughout the series. Although terrorism is never condoned in *Homeland*, there are many points where the viewer sympathises with Brody and his actions, even though we are not sure where his true sympathies lie. At the end of Season One, the US government are not necessarily represented as 'the good guys' – there's a part of us that wants them to get blown up by Brody. By the end of Season Two – when it does happen – terrorism is seen as truly evil when hundreds of innocent victims are killed. But Brody, the apparent perpetrator, is not the actual assassin, and, like the 'abnormal' Carrie turned 'traitor' by her love for him, we want him to escape. This series – and this credit sequence – blows apart the assumption that the West is all good and the identified 'other' is always evil. There's always more to it than that.

Emma Calway is a Media graduate who now writes content for a website called My Big Fat Brighton Weekend.

Follow it up

There is a fascinating analysis of this sequence at cstonline.tv/main-titles-homeland

The ideology of Nolan's Batman trilogy

DARK KNIGHT, DARK IDEAS

Christopher Nolan's *Batman* trilogy has been critically acclaimed and a huge success at the box office. **Pete Turner** evaluates its exploration of dark themes, and considers accusations of a reactionary ideology.

'You have to become an idea'

After **Joel Schumacher's *Batman and Robin*** was a day-glo disaster in 1997, anyone would think the director had killed off comic book icon Batman for good. But only eight years later, **British director Christopher Nolan** resurrected the dark knight, losing the sidekick, neon lights and rubber nipples in favour of **enhanced realism and contemporary relevance**.

Nolan's focus on Bruce Wayne, the

messed-up man behind the mask, had a number of consequences for the supposedly 'fun' franchise. Leaving the batsuit out of much of the trilogy and setting it in a Gotham City so highly recognisable that it might as well have been called New York, the director seems to have been inviting critics to make **comparisons between the films' events and their contemporary socio-political context**.

Nolan stated in a *Rolling Stone* interview that 'the films genuinely aren't intended to be political' but many have argued otherwise, enforcing their own interpretations on the ideas of the trilogy. Douthat (2012) even goes so far as to argue that

Christopher Nolan's *Batman* trilogy is notable for being much more explicitly right-wing than almost any Hollywood blockbuster of recent memory.

Are these accusations fair or are there some alternative interpretations of Batman's most recent reincarnation?
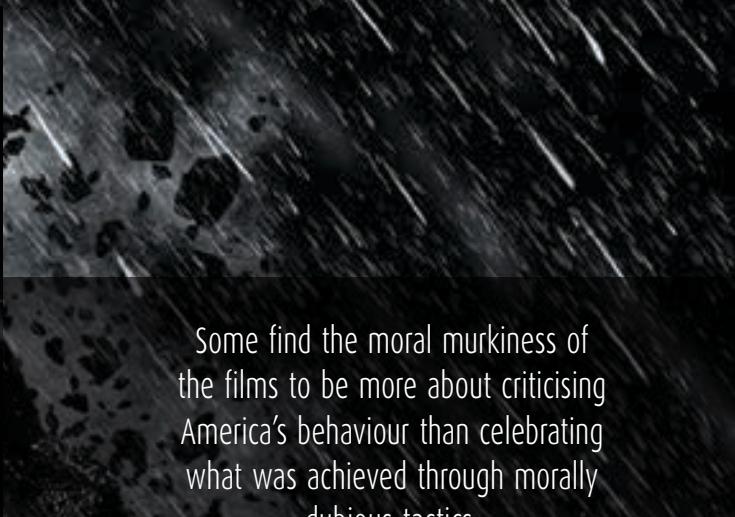
Some find the moral murkiness of the films to be more about criticising America's behaviour than celebrating what was achieved through morally dubious tactics.

He is a force for 'good' who fights criminals by putting on a mask, attacking them in the dark and dishing out his own vigilante justice, uninhibited by the laws, restrictions and corruption that the local police deal with.

Vigilantism, justice and vengeance

The Dark Knight trilogy has led to continued debates that have long existed about Batman as **a symbol of vigilantism, justice, vengeance and even fascism**. He is a force for 'good' who fights criminals by putting on a mask, attacking them in the dark and dishing out his own vigilante justice, uninhibited by the laws, restrictions and corruption that the local police deal with. Bruce Wayne is a character who begins by wanting to take vengeance on the murderer of his parents by attempting to assassinate the criminal. He then joins what some critics have called a 'terrorist training camp' in the mountains, where he is trained to fight his enemies when he returns home. Some see Wayne's Batman as a terrorist who trains with a shadowy league, only to spurn their harsher methods before they finally show up on his doorstep for a 'blowback' that many have seen as reflecting America's involvement with the Taliban before September 11th 2001.

Others have argued that:

just as *The Dark Knight* was a touching tribute to an embattled George W. Bush, who chose to be seen as a villain in order to be the hero, *Rises* is a love letter to an imperfect America that in the end always does the right thing.

Nolte, 2012

In this reading, because Batman takes responsibility for Two-Face's murders at the end of *The Dark Knight*, he is comparable with George W. Bush, who was willing to do America's dirty work in a time of war. **America is the vigilante** that has to free itself of the shackles of international laws in order to fight evil wherever it finds it, and mete out its own brand of **justice and revenge for the 9/11 attacks**.

There are many who believe that the American political and military elite hoped for such an attack, as it would give them the will of the people on their side in order to start more wars and assert more American dominance over the rest of the world. Comic book characters like Batman similarly need an enemy to fight against.

Without an enemy, the virtuous warrior will lose his virile strength; without an uprising, the repressive capacity of the state will grow idle, and sterile.

Bady, 2012

Batman needs disorder, chaos and enemies to attack. He serves the status quo, protecting the **dominant hegemony** of his society. Superheroes, particularly Bruce Wayne with his abundant wealth, benefit from maintaining social structures as they are, or as Meggs (2009, p.4) argues of superheroes:

protecting the status quo gives them countless opportunities to defend it from attack.

By any means necessary – the tactics of Batman

Considering the tactics of Batman over the whole trilogy also sheds light on some cause for concern over this darkest of knights. While Batman is not a killer and certainly not as cheerfully fascist as Judge Dredd's executioner, he is on the other hand 'forced' into some pretty abhorrent acts over the course of the trilogy. In *The Dark Knight*, his interrogation of the Joker becomes brutal, like the torture so eagerly justified by stopping acts of terrorism in real life. Batman then uses a scarily sophisticated and completely illegal surveillance

Batman needs disorder, chaos and enemies to attack. He serves the status quo, protecting the dominant hegemony of his society.

THE DARK KNIGHT RISES

technique in order to track down his nemesis. As Bady (2012) states:

Bruce Wayne became the terrorist and Batman became both torturer and operator of a mass surveillance system; it was exactly the point that in fighting the villain, he became the villain.

Some read this as an attack on the behaviour of America while others, Marcotte (2012) included, argued that *The Dark Knight* 'ended with a seeming endorsement of authoritarianism'.

Interrogations that stray into brutality and violating privacy laws are justified in the film by the semi-positive outcomes. The Joker is captured, though there are two major victims of his chaos, and good and evil become such murky concepts that it is no wonder so much of what occurs in *The Dark Knight* looms ominously over the events of *The Dark Knight Rises*. The truth of Harvey Dent's turn to the dark side is eventually used against those who plotted to deceive the masses.

Marcotte even suggests that:

by violating human rights to deal with crime, Gotham opened the door for Bane's extremist reaction.

This suggests a rather more progressive argument than many have given these recent *Batman* films credit for. Some find the moral murkiness of the films to be more about criticising America's behaviour than celebrating what was achieved through morally dubious tactics. Bady argues that the films show that:

America has become what it says it fights in the process of fighting it – and made it impossible to distinguish good from evil.

Inequality in Gotham

Gotham, although much improved between *Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight Rises*, simmers constantly with **class tension**. Bruce Wayne is the notable representative of upper class aristocracy,

RISE

THE DARK KNIGHT RISES

THE LEGEND ENDS
COMING SOON

a playboy millionaire who inherited his wealth from his parents and who knows nothing of the poverty of the ordinary people of Gotham until he willingly and deliberately throws his wallet away to get a taste of what it is like to feel hunger. The people of Gotham are poor, struggling and desperate. The first real contact with them that Wayne has is when a criminal robs, then kills his parents for their expensive belongings. Douthat (2012) argues that:

the *Batman* movies pretty consistently portray Gotham as corrupt, chaotic, unequal and unjust.

Those at the top **dupe, intimidate and control the masses**. It is no wonder that many join Bane's army by the finale to fight against inequality in their society. Marcotte (2012) argues that:

watching the super-rich be pulled out of their homes and murdered can be read as a slam against the left, but it felt more like the ugly result of allowing the rich to gobble up too much of the pie in the first place.

While the trilogy shows life for ordinary

Batman does not fight inequality or any of the other factors that might cause increases in criminality.

Gothamites improving over the course of the three films, with less corruption, poverty and organised crime, they also **lack any real suggestion that such fundamental inequalities in wealth are in any way wrong**. Wayne may lose his fortune by Bane's deeds, but his wealth and access to technology is never criticised, even as they talk of the army lacking funds to buy Wayne Enterprises' hardware, or the police not having the resources to catch criminals. Only Bruce Wayne can afford a batsuit, a batmobile and a batplane. The army and the police, funded by tax dollars, will have to do without; but Bruce Wayne, vigilante millionaire, can carry on being the saviour. The films have no 'notion of a structural crisis in capitalism' (Bady, 2012). In *The Dark Knight Rises'* nuclear bomb,

the movie allows Bruce Wayne to invent a technological solution to poverty ... and then discard it.

Bady, 2012

Though the reactor could have been used as a source of unlimited cheap energy, in the wrong hands (i.e. anyone not as wealthy, noble and wonderful as Bruce Wayne) it is turned into a bomb and therefore must be destroyed. Bady goes so far as to argue that

this decision to not end poverty because you might release a weapon into the public sphere – demonstrates the real driving force for the movie's morality, sense of history, and its understanding of civic virtue: the violence within, which must be contained.

Bady, 2012

Batman is a comic book hero and his job is not to battle inequality but to fight evil villains. The cause of crime is left to his alter-ego Bruce Wayne to occasionally tackle in charitable donations to orphanages and the like. Batman has a **reactionary role**, fighting the bad guys while ignoring the social ailments that cause criminality. In this way he can choose to ignore

more liberal, systemic changes that might have broader effects and challenge dominant institutions and ideology.

Meggs, 2009

Throughout the trilogy, Nolan is showing that Gotham is split along class divisions; and while he acknowledges the injustices of the ruling elite, he is also

suggesting that both the revolutionary and anarchic alternatives would be much, much worse.

Douthat, 2012
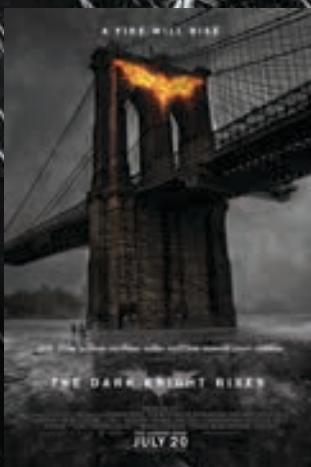
> Gotham's people are seen as docile, useless and incapable of achieving anything worthwhile.

The masses

Karl Marx believed the workers of the world would unite and when they achieved class consciousness, they would revolt against those who had exploited them for too long. However Nolan's films have less faith in the masses. Aside from *The Dark Knight*'s climax, Gotham's people are seen as docile, useless and incapable of achieving anything worthwhile. *The Dark Knight* is interesting in that

> the film's ideological conflict seems to center around the fundamental worth of humanity, whether it is truly as corruptible as the Joker thinks it is or if it has an essential nobility as Bruce Wayne believes.
>
> Meggs, 2009

Fortunately at the end of the film, Wayne is proved right: neither the prisoners nor the ordinary people of Gotham choose to blow up each other's bomb-laced ferries as The Joker had hoped they would.

However the masses are more often portrayed as 'a populace content to wait for Batman to save it without doing anything – good or evil – on its own behalf' (Bady,

2012), particularly in the final film. The people of Gotham are nowhere to be seen during the occupation of Gotham. It is left for Batman to release the police force and for them to then fight the uprising of prisoners and disgruntled poor young men who joined Bane. Many see parallels with the **Occupy Wall Street movement** but Bane has no peaceful or noble intentions of fighting for the redistribution of wealth to the 99%. Instead he is simply a puppet of a criminal organisation that wants to watch the world burn. Nolan has addressed the similarities, arguing that he is not critical of Occupy Wall Street but claiming

> if the populist movement is manipulated by somebody who is evil; that surely is a criticism of the evil person. You could also say the conditions the evil person is exploiting are problematic and should be addressed.

So though the masses only play a very minor role in their own destiny, the films suggest that there is some inherent decency in the people of Gotham City.

Conclusion: order vs chaos

The Dark Knight trilogy is many things to many people. It throws **post-9/11 concerns about terrorism, justice and retribution** into the decidedly less comic-book-like setting of a very modern and recognisable Gotham City. Some consider it wilfully right-wing, even more than the idea of a wealthy vigilante ever formerly suggested. Others consider it more **balanced in its ideology**, arguing that its approaches to crime and capitalism are far from simplistic. Nolte (2012) praises the final film for being

> mostly about a rousing defence of an America under siege by a demagogue disguising his nihilistic rage and thirst for revenge and power as a noble quest for equality.

Marcotte (2012) argues that

> there are no easy dichotomies. By the end of the third film, a clear argument for balance between authoritarianism in the name of order and an anarchist view of people power emerges.

It all ultimately comes back to Batman

and his villains: **agents of chaos versus an agent of order**. Batman does not fight inequality or any of the other factors that might cause increases in criminality. Bruce Wayne is a privileged playboy who can do as he pleases, but chooses not to change the system for the good of the people. At the end of the day,

> by not seeking to create a radically new system of government or social structure, he ensures that he will always be needed.
>
> Meggs, 2009

And with a reboot expected in 2017, you can bet he always will be.

Pete Turner is undertaking a PhD at Oxford Brookes University, writes a film blog at http://ilovethatfilm. blogspot.com/ and is currently writing a book on *The Blair Witch Project*.

Follow it up

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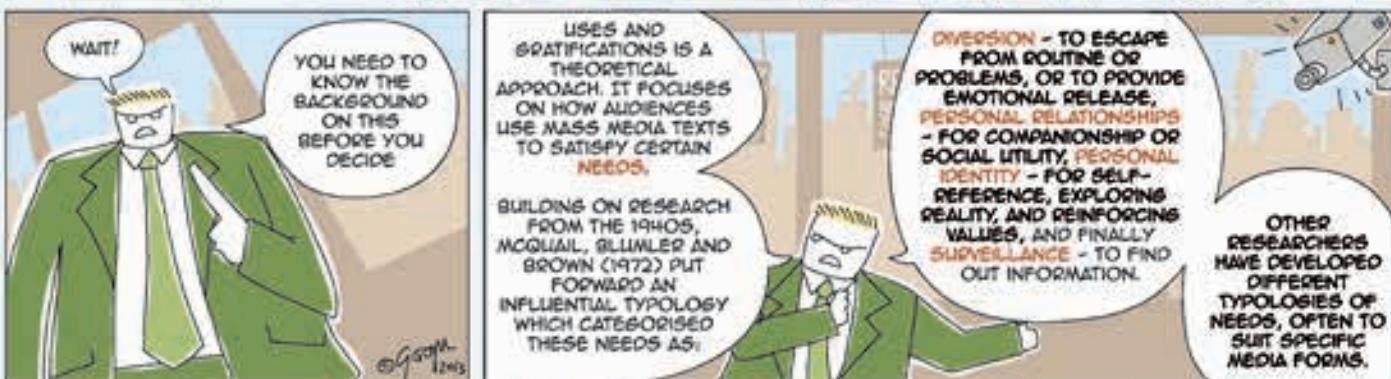
NEW IDEAS ABOUT
THE DEAD

Revitalising the Zombie Console Game

With the forthcoming release of *Dead Island: Riptide* (Techland, 2013) and the hype steadily generating around Robert Bowling's debut game *Human Element* (Robotoki, slated 2015), the zombie console game continues to thrive. But aren't these games all really just the same? **James Rose** examines the ideas behind some of the most recent and compelling zombie survival horror games to see what makes them all so different.

Since the significant success of *Resident Evil* (Capcom, 1996) and its subsequent highly successful sequels and spin-offs, the sub-genre of **zombie survival horror** has dominated the console game market. With each release, publicity materials tend to place emphasis on **the realism of the game** – predominantly through high-quality graphics and the game's survival mechanic – and **the subsequent horror this creates within the gamer.**

Such occurrences are to be expected because, after all, that is why these games are played: to enjoyably experience fear. However, such marketing often works to shroud the fact that virtually all zombie survival horror games are, in essence, *the same*. This is not a criticism, more an observation about the **consumer's genre expectations** of such games. As a lone figure, the gamer must gather supplies and ammunition and complete various missions, of increasing difficulty, in order to survive the teeming hordes of zombies that populate the game's environments, all in an effort to escape to a sustained space of safety.

Such a **genre template** is in evidence

from early significant releases such as *Resident Evil 2* (Capcom 1998) through to more contemporary examples such as *Cold Fear* (Darkworks 2005), the *Dead Rising series* (Capcom/Studio 1 2006 onwards) and the *Left 4 Dead* series (Turtle Rock Studios/Valve Corporation 2008 onwards).

Despite this potential similarity across the range of games, game developers have worked hard to make *their* zombie survival horror game unique and, to do so, have taken advantage of developments within **programming** and **game engine design** as well as progressions in **online co-operative game play**. These three significant elements have allowed the zombie game to become a rich and diverse gaming experience as elements such as the emergence of the Open World environment, experience-based game-play, character and weapon customisation, weapon fragility, Escort Missions, fixed-time game-play, and intensified co-operative play have all been successfully integrated into the genre template.

To explore these creative approaches to this format, I'm going to explore three contemporary games. By examining their **unique** qualities – the very creative ideas that make them so different – I hope to make obvious the shifts that have recently occurred in the genre, and indicate that these games, for all their violence and gore, are far more complex and reflective than first imagined.

The Walking Dead (Telltale Games, 2012)

Based on the popular comic and television series, *The Walking Dead* takes the format of downloadable episodes which are released each month. While clearly set within the established *Walking Dead* universe, Telltale Games opted to create a version of a **point and click adventure** where the emphasis was not on killing

zombies, but on resolving the challenges and differences that arise within the small group of survivors in which the gamer finds themselves.

This quality is exaggerated in a further two ways. Firstly, **the gamer's avatar** is Lee Everett, a former university professor who has been convicted of the murder of his wife's lover. With this status as a murderer, fellow survivors are suspicious of him and his motivations, making decision-making and game-play increasingly problematic. Added to this is Everett's role as protector/father figure to a nine-year-old girl, Clementine, who he rescues at the start of the game. With this relationship forming a strong emotional centre to the game, *The Walking Dead* pushes **the idea of characters and their interrelationship** even further by basing the game *not* upon puzzle-solving (which is the norm for point and click adventures) but **the consequence of the choices** the gamer makes. The gamer has to choose both dialogue and action in their interactions; each has an immediate effect on the current situation, and can result in the shift in disposition of certain characters, their alliance with (or against) you and, in some events, the death of particular characters. The latter is one of the most **emotionally complex elements of the game**: certain sequences make the gamer choose between which characters to save while leaving others to die or, in

The game asks the gamer some pertinent questions about their strengths, weaknesses and, perhaps more importantly, their morality: should a survival situation occur, what would you do? How would you survive?

one particular scene, whether to hand over a gun to enable infected survivors to kill themselves. While this makes for both a dark and engrossing game-play, the *idea* **of choices** has further and far wider consequences, as the game's engine remembers the gamer's choices and carries them over into subsequent episodes in order to make increasingly complex social and emotional relationships between surviving characters.

DayZ (Bohemia Interactive, 2012)

A recent trend in gaming is **Modding**. This is a process by which **a gamer adapts the code of an existing game in order to create new levels or, as in more recent cases, entirely new games.** *DayZ* is a **Mod MMORPG** (Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game) of *ARMA 2: Operation Arrowhead* by Dean Hall.

Taking place in the fictional Soviet state of Chernarus, gamers must survive the zombie apocalypse through scavenging for food, water, supplies and medicine while all the time avoiding being killed by either zombies or other gamers. The game's central *idea* then is its **approach to realism**: alongside the ever-present threat of zombies and the violent intentions of other survivors, the gamer must contend with the real world and, as a consequence, can be injured or receive bone fractures if they fall, go into shock from the elements or from ambush, or become infected with disease. **Body temperature, thirst and hunger** must all be dealt with as it would in a real life survival situation. In *DayZ* then, the world has become a harsh environment, an open-world where just about everything is working against you and your survival. The gamer must navigate through it, endure it and, ultimately, survive it if they are to make it to safety.

ZombiU (Ubisoft Montpellier, 2012)

One of the **flagship launch games** used to promote **Nintendo's recently released Wii U** console, *ZombiU* takes place in a zombie-infested London. While the game follows the standard format of exploring, looting, surviving and killing zombies, *ZombiU* deploys a key idea to make the game unique: if the player's character is bitten and killed by a zombie then they die. This occurrence, as in life, is permanent and so elevates the game's sense of realism, for in *ZombiU* **death is death, permanent and**

The contemporary games of the genre have actually become about survival, about choices and decisions, acts of bravery or acts of cowardice, to co-operate or remain in isolated autonomy.

irrevocable. Such an approach obviously contrasts with the standard representation of death in console games: the majority (if not virtually all) depict the death of the gamer's avatar as only temporary – although they may be killed, the game engine brings the gamer's avatar back to life by returning them to a defined checkpoint and so allowing them to continue the game as the same person.

ZombiU inverts this tradition; it allows gamers to continue to play by **respawning them as an entirely new character/avatar**. As this new avatar, the gamer must then go out and find their former self/avatar, kill *that* zombie and so recover all their previously gathered items. This issue is compounded by a lack of equipment for protection and, if **Miiverse (Nintendo's social network system)** is enabled, then it is possible that other players can steal the items and so leave the gamer – playing as their new avatar – with no equipment, tools or weapons to protect themselves.

This element has a further consequence, undermining the idea of online co-operative play: instead of instigating a situation in which coherent co-operation is vital to survival, *ZombiU* (like *DayZ*) instead encourages a condition of **self-preservation**, of game-play that revolves around the survival of the fittest. This element of the gaming experience is reinforced by the Wii U's control system, in which the game pad becomes a **touch-sensitive screen**, meaning that the player has to work between the control pad screen and television screen in order to move, explore, pick up objects, and survive. By doing this, **the player's *vulnerability* is amplified** and this creates a more complex, realistic and frightening game play experience.

In the end, it's really all about the gamer

Through these brief case study examinations, it can be seen that the three games can be unified by the central *idea* of attempting to **place the game play in a real world scenario**. By doing this, the game asks the gamer some pertinent questions about their strengths, weaknesses and, perhaps more importantly, their **morality**: should a survival situation occur, what would you do? How would you survive? Would you seek out others or survive alone? Would you help others? Would you willingly hand over your dwindling supplies to help those in need?

These qualities are exemplified and taken even further in the forthcoming *Human Element* where the game is based upon the central premise that extreme survival situations make people undertake unreasonable acts in order to sustain their own survival. This condition is described by the games designer, Robert Bowling through the central question, **'What is the greatest threat in a zombie apocalypse?'**

If you're conditioned with the entire zombie culture it's the infection, it's the zombies. But in reality, they're the walking dead. They're weak. They're really not a physical threat to you in a lot of ways. Their greatest strength is the fear that they instil in us, the survivors. They lead us to do unreasonable things to survive. By that logic, the greatest strength in a zombie apocalypse is the human element. The other survivors who are smart enough to kill you and take what they want and to threaten you and to do things like that.

With such an approach, *Human Element* will shift its focus from the zombies to the survivors, and so provide a range of characters to play as: solo adult, partnered adult, or an adult with a child. Bowling sees this choice as one of the most pertinent ideas in the game, describing it as the point in which the gamer chooses 'to start in the world' and so determines how they will 'engage and impact in the scenarios' that they will be 'presented with on a physical and moral level.'

In the end then, zombie survival horror has **evolved**, shifting from a game of mindless killing and collection of objects to something far more complex and reflective. The contemporary games of the genre have actually become about survival, **about choices and decisions, acts of bravery or acts of cowardice, to co-operate or remain in isolated autonomy**. By doing this, the games examine the gamer's motivations and behaviours in a world of crisis and hostility. **Just as the zombies were once us, the games now reflect us**. They can, in some way, positively comment upon humanity's desire to survive and endure, but also to ask just what the cost of that may be.

James Rose is a freelance writer who specialises in horror in film, television and console games. His third book *The Devil's Advocate: The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* has just been published by Auteur Publishing.

Follow it up

Taking on the Human Element: An Interview with Robert Bowling

Reilly J., *Game Informer*, Issue 231. Available online at: http://www.gameinformer.com/b/news/archive/2012/07/09/taking-on-the-human-element.aspx [Accessed 10/02/13]

MARKETING MIDDLE-EARTH
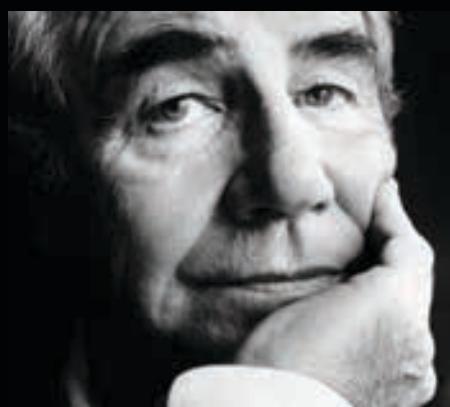
Getting to Grips with Baudrillard

Sara Mills bites the bullet and tackles hyper-reality and the ideas of the French theorist Baudrillard. He's not easy – but help comes from surprising sources: *The Matrix* and *The Hobbit*.

It's a bit like The Matrix

I've tended to avoid **Baudrillard**. I'm not fond of theorists whose names I can't pronounce. And I'd never even got past the title of his key text *Simulacra and Simulation* – if I couldn't understand the title, what hope had I got for the rest of it? If a student ever asked me about Baudrillard or his theories (and to be honest, that's only ever happened once) I fobbed them off with a 'well, it's a bit like *The Matrix*... why don't you watch that and then get back to me' – a classic diversionary tactic! But, inspired by a recent creeping suspicion that I might actually living in a simulacrum, I decided it was time to really try and get to grips with 'Bo' and his theories, so here it is: **Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulation, for absolute beginners...**

Is this Middle-earth?

So I'm at the airport, ready to fly to Wellington, New Zealand, and find myself making my own 'unexpected journey.'

First I see the plane itself is wrapped in a huge decal, a flying billboard, advertising *The Hobbit*. Then the in-flight safety announcement, 'An Unexpected Briefing' is delivered by an elf, and features Gollum, Peter Jackson and various hobbits and orcs. I get off the plane and my luggage emerges from a baggage carousel that has been wrapped to look like a hobbit hole, and my cases do a quick tour of the shires before I grab them and wheel them through into the arrivals hall. I look up, and there's Gollum, a huge 13 metre-long creation suspended in the air above me. Billboards proclaim that I have arrived in the Middle of Middle-earth.

In the city, a procession of four-metre high dwarves march along the outside of a building, and an enormous Gandalf stands guard at the cinema. There are elves and hobbits on the stamps, and even coins with Martin Freeman's face on them. Signs point to Rivendell, Dunharrow, and the shire. Maps show The Pelennor Fields, The Misty Mountains, Hobbiton and Mordor. Is this New Zealand? Or is this Middle-earth?

Making fantasy a reality

On the one hand it's all just 'marketing as usual.' Part of the deal for being able to film both *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy and *The Hobbit* trilogy in New Zealand was allowing the Ministry of Tourism to gain 'leverage' from the films to attract visitors and their all-important spending. The New Zealand tourist board campaign centres around the slogan: **'100% Middle-earth, 100% pure New Zealand'** (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=64qx95Ckrwc) and the main theme is to **'make fantasy a reality'**, suggesting that what you see in *The Hobbit* films, you can actually experience in real life. The website (http://www.newzealand.com/int/) invites you to 'Take a journey through Middle-earth,' and Kevin Bowler, Chief Executive of Tourism New Zealand said:

> **People can... see for themselves how the cinematic fantasy of Middle-earth is in fact the reality of New Zealand – and that there is a whole world of experiences to be had and people to meet within the movie-scene style landscapes.**

We have lost contact with the real, unmediated world: modern media is so pervasive, that we only experience a simulacrum – 'a copy without an original'.

Gandalf says 'The world is not in your book and maps. It's out there!'

This approach to marketing seems to be selling New Zealand not as New Zealand, but as Middle-earth, to suggest that visitors will experience Middle-earth rather than New Zealand. While the country itself hasn't turned into a Disney-style theme park, existing places have become something else – the broad expanse of fields with mountains in the distance is no longer the empty back-country in South Island, it's the Pelennor Fields, with bus-loads of tourists taking photos of what's essentially empty space. So what are they seeing? Are they seeing New Zealand, or are they seeing Middle-earth, or, as the tourist board seems to want, having the two come together so we can't really experience one without the other?

This is where ideas like **Baudrillard's simulacrum** come in useful. Even though Gandalf says to Bilbo 'The world is not in your book and maps. It's out there!', in Baudrillard's theories, there isn't any 'out

there' any more. We have lost contact with the real, unmediated world: modern media are so pervasive, that we only experience a **simulacrum** – 'a copy without an original' (Baudrillard).

New Zealand, unmediated, is no longer there

This idea of a copy without an original means that what we see and experience has meaning only in relation to other signs, other representations, rather than having meaning in relation to reality.

For example, the concept of the Fields of Pelennor only has meaning in relation another 'sign', a *Lord of the Rings* film, which itself has meaning in relation to other *Lord of the Rings* films, to *The Hobbit* films, to Jackson's other work, and to the whole genre of fantasy films. The films gain much of their meaning in relation to Tolkein's books, themselves 'signs,' depictions of a world that never existed. So the fields themselves only have meaning in relation to a representation in a film, which is in turn representing a book... which is in turn describing a fantasy world. In this respect the fields certainly are a 'copy without an original'. If we stand and look over the landscape, is it the hills of New Zealand we see, or is that experience not accessible anymore? Has it been so overwritten by *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* experiences that New Zealand, unmediated, is no longer there? This suggests the 'precession of simulacra' – Baudrillard's idea that **in hyper-reality, the simulacra, or the mediated version actually comes before, is more important than, and 'takes over' from, the actual version**:

The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory – precession of simulacra – that engenders the territory.

Baudrillard

So when tourists visit the wide-open spaces they see the landscape **through**, and **because of**, the Fields of Pelennor. Their reason for being there, their selection, framing and understanding of this piece of landscape are preceded, and caused by the *Hobbit*/*Lord of the Rings* experience. Reality (the unmediated landscape) is not hidden by the simulacrum (the idea of the Fields of Pelennor); the simulacrum *replaces* any reality that might exist:

The simulacrum is never that which conceals the truth – it is the truth which conceals that there is none. The simulacrum is true.

Baudrillard.

Then all of our lives have no meaning!

This idea goes a lot further than the usual theories of representation, which consider how true or how biased representations of reality are. It suggests that the simulacrum has become so dominant, partly because of media technology, that we don't experience 'reality' at all anymore, but live in a world of signs which only have meaning in relation to other signs and not in relation to any pre-existing 'reality.'

It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real

Baudrillard

Narrative is the term we use to encompass the forward (or backward) progression of key moments in the lives of characters in a work of art.

This is the world of **hyper-reality** where nothing is unmediated, and where these mediations are our only reality. Take this example, for instance. In *The Big Bang Theory*, Leonard is trying to buy a *Game of Thrones* prop replica sword from Stuart:

Leonard: 210, and you throw in the Iron Man helmet.

Stuart: Are you crazy? That helmet's signed by Robert Downey jr.

Leonard: So?

Stuart: Okay, if you're gonna question the importance of an actor's signature on a plastic helmet from a movie based on a comic book, then all of our lives have no meaning!

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0898266/?ref_=sr_1

Summary

To summarise, we live in such a media-saturated world that nothing we think, feel, do or experience is 'real.' Instead, we live in hyper-reality, where the simulacrum, the mediated world, both precedes and displaces 'reality.'

Is this a useful theory?

So is this a useful theory? It can contribute to your understanding of media debates, especially those around representations, reality TV (which should perhaps be known as 'hyper-reality TV'), and the impact of new technologies in helping to make these simulacra ubiquitous and pervasive (everywhere and in everything). These debates run throughout the AQA and other AS and A2 specifications.

More specifically, when you approach **AQA's MEST3**, an understanding of simulacra, simulation and hyper-reality will contribute to your work, whether you select the topic of **Representation** or the topic of **New/Digital Media**.

For **Representation**, Baudrillard's theories are important to understanding representations of both groups of people (the hyper-real world presented in celebrity magazines, for example) and of places, as discussed here in this case study of advertising which deliberately seeks to 'make fantasy a reality'.

For **New/Digital Media**, there is the hyper-real world people construct and exist in on **Facebook** and other **social media** sites.

Similarly, these theories will prove useful for **WJEC's MS1 on Representations**, and again if you focus on Representations for **MS3**. In **MS4**, as in the AQA specification, these theories contribute to an understanding of the relation between audience and text and how the diffuseness of mediation has blurred the distinctions between text and reality and come to dominate our world.

Happy days!

More than anything, however, once you begin to grasp Baudrillard's theories – and can pronounce both them and his name – you can throw them into any conversation and sound extremely intelligent, or pretentious, depending on your point of view. Either way, you can explain to the less well-informed how *The Matrix* was influenced by Baudrillard's ideas, and have a knowing and superior laugh when Neo hides his cash and discs inside a copy of Baudrillard's book *Simulacra and Simulation*, pointing out the irony of the book itself being a simulation of a real book, within the simulacrum that is the Matrix, which you are watching within your own simulacrum. Happy days indeed!

Glossary

Baudrillard: French philosopher, 1929-2007. Pronounced 'Bo-dree-aah.' *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981) – one his most influential books.

Simulacra (plural) and **Simulacrum** (singular): the 'copies without originals' which make up the unreal world that exists instead of 'reality.'

Simulation: the process of generating copies without originals, of moving towards a simulacrum.

Hyper-reality: the heavily mediated world of simulacra that we live in, which we accept as our only reality.

Sara Mills taught Media Studies at Helston Community College, Cornwall, and is an A Level examiner. She is currently travelling with her family in New Zealand.

Baudrillard i la societat simulacre

We live in such a media-saturated world that nothing we think, feel, do or experience is 'real.' Instead, we live in hyper-reality, where the simulacrum, the mediated world, both precedes and displaces 'reality.'

INFLUENCE AND IDEAS IN THE CINEMA OF

PAUL THOMAS ANDERSON

Michael Ewins turns the spotlight on Paul Thomas Anderson, innovative director of *The Master*, *Magnolia* and *There Will Be Blood*, and shows how his ideas about narrative construction have changed in the course of his career.

With *Hard Eight* (1996), *Boogie Nights* (1997) and *Magnolia* (1999), Paul Thomas Anderson constructed one of the most assertive, daring and acclaimed stylistic trilogies of the late 1990s, assimilating the stylistic templates of his influences, which range from Max Ophüls to Robert Downey, Sr. and reshaping them around the organic themes of his own stories, most notably **failed and surrogate fathers**. In the following years, beginning with 2002's *Punch-Drunk Love* and extending through *There Will Be Blood* (2007) and *The Master* (2012), he broke from the established rhythm of these earlier films, deconstructing and brazenly experimenting within the formal framework that had come to define him as an auteur. This article aims to identify the **key ideas of visual and scripted narrative** in Anderson's cinema in what I see as two distinctive stylistic trilogies.

First, it is worth defining what is meant by **narrative** in a filmic sense. Most simply described in Bordwell and Thompson's *Film Art*, narrative is:

a chain of events in cause-effect relationship occurring in time and space.

In other words, narrative is the term we use to encompass the forward (or backward) progression of key moments in the lives of characters in a work of art. It is the job of the screenwriter and/or director to construct a narrative which communicates the interior concerns of these characters in relation to the overarching plot.

In the beginning, there were three films...

In many ways, Anderson's first three films present a clear-eyed view of what film narrative – in its purest sense – should be. Together, these films illustrate the idea that his narratives exhibit **'a clear insulated logic of cause/effect and action/reaction'**. (Landon Palmer, *Film School Rejects*). In these films, the motives of each principal character are apparent from the start, and Anderson seeks to include the audience in their dilemmas. The characters in his later three films, by contrast, are opaque and bullish, and their psychology basically impenetrable.

Characters drift through the space, talking and talking and talking, but communicating only microscopic details of their lives.

PHILIP BAKER HALL   JOHN C. REILLY   GWYNETH PALTROW

HARD EIGHT

WHEN GOOD LUCK IS A LONG SHOT, YOU HAVE TO HEDGE YOUR BETS.
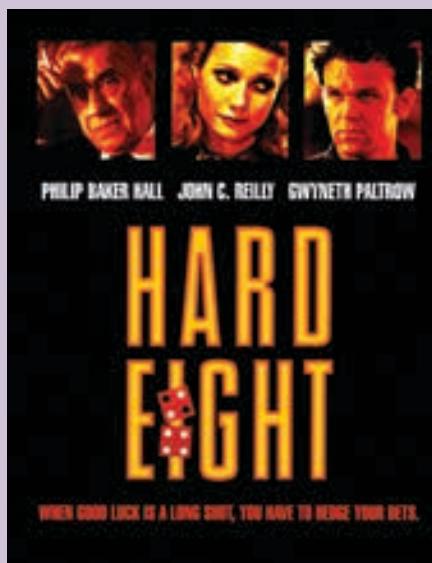
Hard Eight

Hard Eight, strongly influenced by Jean-Pierre Melville's *Bob le Flambeur* (1956), is inarguably the least **auteurist** of the director's films, though it does establish his most recurrent theme **(surrogate fathers)** and some key stylistic obsessions. These notably include **symmetrical two-shots** (of which there are seven) and **tracking shots** (of which there is only one, though it is significant, and we will return to it). *Hard Eight* (originally titled *Sydney*) finds characters abandoned, hopeless and scared in a landscape which seems unwilling to accommodate them. Sydney (Philip Baker Hall) is an enigmatic gambler, seemingly

drifting through life without a permanent residence or any lasting friendships, when one day he happens upon John (John C. Reilly), a man desperate to raise $6,000 for his mother's funeral. Later in the film we discover that their meeting was not by chance (yet another recurring theme; *Magnolia*'s prologue sets up the entire narrative as a fable of chance vs. fate) and Sydney is responsible for the death of John's real father. Like all of Anderson's fathers – from *Magnolia*'s Jimmy Gator (Philip Baker Hall) to Daniel Plainview (Daniel Day-Lewis) in *There Will be Blood* – he carries a dark secret, and his sins will be revisited on the son.

Anderson's idea here, and to a greater extent in both *Boogie Nights* and *Magnolia*, is that **narrative should be propulsive and forward-thinking**. *Hard Eight* is much tighter than the films which followed it, with only four principal characters, five plot-integral locations, a length of 102 minutes and a genre template which, true to his admiration for Melville, is closest to **film noir**. The structure of the film accommodates the notion that **action = reaction**. The first three or four scenes establish an imminent 'domino collapse' of events which, however bleak, signal an inevitable conclusion. Considering the film in terms of Anderson's influences, *Hard Eight* perhaps shares the most DNA with the cinema of Martin Scorsese, especially in the tracking shot mentioned above, which

follows Sydney from the back of a casino, right through to the craps table on the other side. The shot is clean and smooth, largely uninterrupted by surrounding commotion. And this brings us around to *Boogie Nights*…

Boogie Nights

Anderson's first masterpiece – set in the Valley's throbbing, thriving porn industry of the 1970s – has the same pop sensibility of **Scorsese's *Goodfellas***, and critics at the time noted a clear similarity between the continuous tracking shot which opens *Boogie Nights* – where the camera enters and tours the Hot Traxx nightclub – and the similar shot in *Goodfellas* where Henry Hill (Ray Liotta) takes his date to the Copacabana, and again the camera takes us all the way from the street to the interior of the club.

Though the Hot Traxx tracking shot is more ambitious than the one in *Hard Eight*, the casino shot displays a neater symmetry with *Goodfellas* in its meaning. In his *Sight & Sound* video essay 'The Career Of Paul Thomas Anderson In Five Shots', critic Kevin B. Lee argues that the tracking shot in *Hard Eight* functions by allowing us **'a glimpse into Sydney's subjective experience; the thrill of walking the casino floor.'** This mirrors Scorsese's camera; in both cases, the shots communicate a view of the character's world **from *their* perspective**, deepening our understanding of their psychology

in one fluid technical motion. It could be argued that, by abandoning conventional narrative, this is what Anderson's later trilogy is attempting to achieve in its full body.

Magnolia

In *Magnolia*, a film most often compared to **Robert Altman's 1993 epic** *Short Cuts*, the ideas behind *Hard Eight* and *Boogie Nights* are expanded onto a much wider canvas, taking emerging visual traits – whip-pans, iris-in/iris-out effects – and the use of an intense, expressive score (composed by Jon Brion and Aimee Mann) and solidifying them into a meaningful narrative structure. Within that structure, Anderson stages a symmetrical line of drama, with two dying fathers acting as the catalyst for the tangled lives of nine lonely souls, including their abandoned children: Frank (Tom Cruise) and Claudia (Melora Walters). In these terms, *Magnolia* can be considered the definitive statement of Anderson's career up to this point. And already we can see the director referencing his own movies: the fictional brand of cigarettes from *Hard Eight* reappears in *Magnolia*, and a character only mentioned in that film – Jimmy Gator – is here played by Philip Baker Hall. Of course, *Short Cuts'* intertwining stories, sprawling vision of L.A. and large ensemble cast may seem to have directly influenced Anderson, but Altman's languid pacing, fluid narrative connections and overall cynicism differ in tone from *Magnolia*, which is always in forward momentum, structurally messy and unusually sentimental for a film set in the City Of Angels.

Altman looms large over any critical evaluation of Anderson's work, but his cinema is slow and muted, while Anderson's is all brio and fury. In *Short Cuts*, Altman allows a relaxed time frame of twenty-five minutes to introduce all of his principal characters. *Magnolia* does this in a single five-minute sequence, employing whip-pans to shatter the three-dimensional space, moving through walls to defy any internal spatial logic. Altman's camerawork exists to be seamless and invisible, but in *Magnolia* camera movement is emotive in and of itself: it's a physical representation of Anderson's idea of cause/effect narrative, in which each whip of the camera is like a domino falling, delivering another dramatic blow, another consequence.

## And then there were three more films...

In discussing Anderson's first three films we find **interlocking narratives, emotive camerawork, classic rock music, recurring stylistic motifs** and an overall

structure which is classically rounded, albeit impulsive and wild. But in *Punch-Drunk Love* we find Anderson abandoning nearly all of these instincts, and finding **an entirely new approach to visual narrative**. The film has two principal characters, chokingly close camerawork and long takes, an eclectic, driving score, and absolutely *no* whip pans. Something which does follow through, however, is **symmetry**, combined with elements of **isolation** and vast **framing** of an almost Kubrickian depth. One shot, in which our hero Barry Egan (Adam Sandler) runs through the labyrinth-like corridors of Lena's apartment building, is framed from within the interior space, each doorway acting like a smaller frame inside yet another smaller frame – much the same technique as Kubrick used to frame spaces in *The Shining*'s (1980) Overlook Hotel.

Here, and in *There Will Be Blood* and *The Master*, there is little to no dramatic reaction, for there is little to no action. Characters drift through the space, talking and talking and talking, but communicating only microscopic details of their lives. They exist simply to exist, simply to find a connection, with each action a means to its own end. *The Master* takes this idea very literally, framing a push-pull narrative around two men who live on instinct alone, losing themselves in the throes of a strange, quasi-erotic, father-son/beast-tamer relationship. **'Above all I am a man. A hopelessly inquisitive man just like you,'** says Dodd to Freddie Quell (Joaquin Phoenix), the bemused war veteran whose ravaged psychological state drives the jagged, elliptical narrative of *The Master*. But **curiosity** has been the driving force behind all of Anderson's male characters.

The difference lies only in Anderson's approach to this curiosity. His first three films include the audience in the drama in the sense of pure storytelling; characters
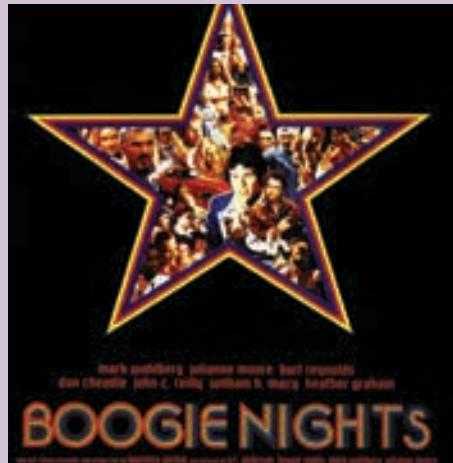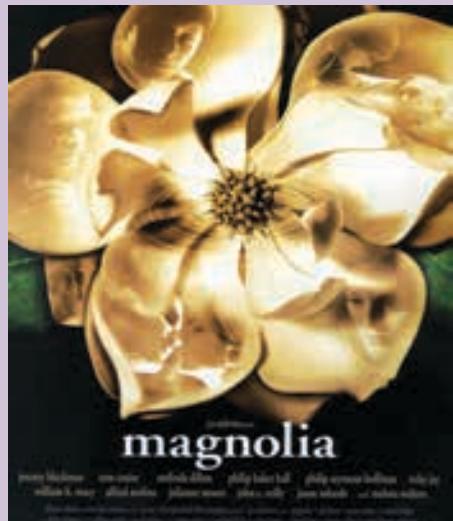
discuss and explain their emotional state *to each other*, and Anderson's camera stands at a distance, observing their communication in their natural environment. His later three films – especially the lucid, deeply Kubrickian *There Will Be Blood* – are quite the opposite; their narratives are **psychological** in their construction. Here Anderson acknowledges **dream, memory, fantasy and deception** as devices *inside* the storytelling. Here it is not the camerawork which suggests a character's perspective, as in the casino shot in *Hard Eight* – now perspective lies in the use of **editing, music and performance**.

Anderson's framing regularly contradicts the established order, with gentle shifts in perspective altering our perception of a character's influence, and in turn reversing the nature of the film's central power play. Consider the scene after Dodd's (Philip Seymour Hoffman) first seminar, where he sits furiously typing in the corner of his

quarters. Is Peggy (Amy Adams) dictating to him, or just letting off steam about the evening's conflict? The staging is so subtle, and the camera and cutting so ambivalent, that it's near impossible to tell – but this tiny detail could change the entire meaning of the film.

While characters keep their emotions coiled up, Anderson uses the tricks of the cinematic magician to communicate their deepest thoughts and emotional states. Their motivations may be the same, but the men of Anderson's two trilogies are clearly separated by the **director's ideas of narrative construction**. These are the themes which will recur in whichever frame he chooses.

You can take the auteur out of the man, it seems, but never the man out of the auteur...

**Michael Ewins is a freelance film critic.**

Definitions

Auteur: Translated from the French to mean author, the term auteur is used to describe a filmmaker – typically a writer/director – whose authorial voice and visual style is so distinctive that they can be understood as the film's principal creative body.

Iris-in/Iris-out: An optical effect used classically in the silent period for scene transitions. The Iris-in concentrates a circle of light around a particular focus in the picture, gradually opening out to fill the entire screen. The Iris-out is this effect in reverse, with a black frame diminishing in size around a focus in the picture, until eventually no light remains.

Tracking Shot: This is an unbroken camera motion – achieved by mounting the camera on a dolly – which traces the movement of an object or character within the frame.

Whip Pan: Also known as a 'zip' or 'swish' pan, this effect – used for dramatic transition – describes the rapid movement of a camera on its vertical axis from one point to another, creating a blurred sensation in the motion.

IDEAS ABOUT STORYTELLING

The narrative structure of computer games in Grand Theft Auto: Vice City and L.A. Noire

In recent years, there has been much debate over the narrative structure of computer games. As a contemporary media form, research into this area is in relatively early stages compared to other media forms, and this provides an interesting basis for conducting an investigation into computer game narratives and how far they can be compared to other storytelling mediums. Student **Danielle Billings** shares with us her A2 Research Investigation, with reference to *GTA: Vice City*, and *LA Noire*.

The computer games medium was introduced in the early 1960s, with games such as *Spacewar!* (MIT 1962) and *Pong* (Atari 1973) being amongst the first developed. Designed to be played on arcade machines rather than on computers and consoles, the structure of the games were short and simple. The Computer History Museum states that Spacewar! consisted of two players, each in command of spaceships, trying to destroy each other.

There has long been a disagreement between **ludologists** (**games theorists**) and **narratologists** as to where games fit in terms of narrative. Are the mechanics of the game more important, or should games be considered similar to traditional storytelling media? Older games tend to be

simple graphic games that do not lend themselves very well to narrative exposition' but modern games can use story (content) and discourse (how the story is told) to build a narrative that is interactive and playable as opposed to being passively observed, and could be defined as 'interactive cinema'.

Veale, 2012

Games theorist Jesper Juul states that there are significant arguments both for and against computer games having narratives (Juul, 2001). For one, he argues that a majority of games feature narrative introductions and back-stories, and thus there are clearly some comparisons to be made between games and narratives. On the other hand, he suggests that games cannot be defined as narrative because they do not coincide with the discourse created by traditional media forms, so the relationship between the viewer and story is hard to translate to the connection between the player and the game. As Juul points out, defining narrative in games is problematic, but these arguments can be used as a basis for analysing texts to see whether games

can be labelled **'interactive cinema'** or if they should be considered within an entirely different paradigm.

As primary research, I conducted textual analysis on *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* (Rockstar Games 2002) and *L.A. Noire* (Team Bondi/Rockstar Games 2011). *GTA: Vice City* is the fourth major title in the globally acclaimed *Grand Theft Auto* series. It is a 'crime action/adventure' game where the player takes on the role of a criminal who wants to take over the city, described by the publisher as something that combines **'non-linear game-play with a character driven narrative.'** Players progress through the game by completing missions, but also have the option to roam freely without attempting the actual story, which raises questions about the prevalence of the narrative.

L.A. Noire is also a 'crime thriller adventure', but, unlike the previous title, the narrative is constructed from the law-enforcement's perspective rather than that of a criminal. It was also the first game to be shown at a film festival, which suggests that it could possibly be seen as 'interactive cinema'.

Meta-narrative & back story

The back-stories in both *Vice City* and *L.A. Noire* give the player the context of the narrative and a larger story to play in, thus confirming Juul's argument that games have narrative. This can also be referred to as the **meta-narrative – 'an over-arching story'**. In the opening cutscenes of *Vice City*, the player is introduced to the back-story through a conversation between the **Forelli Mafia family**, which briefly describes the meaning behind the game's events, and signifies a narrative hook as the full story is not explained until the climax. To keep the player's interest, the
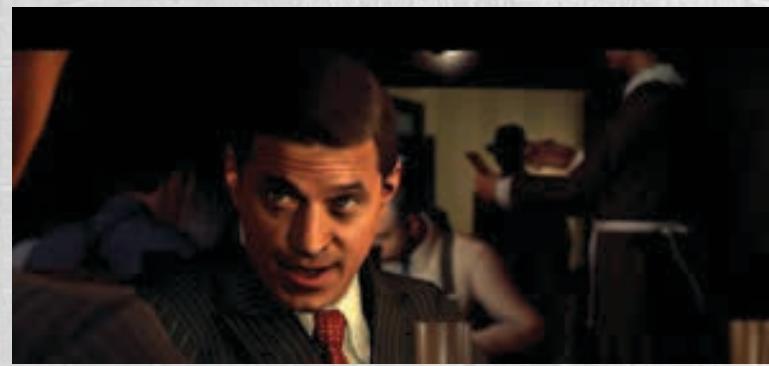
protagonist (leading character), Tommy, receives several phone calls from the Mafia at different stages of the narrative to remind him (and us) of the conflict and inevitable climax.

On the other hand, in *L.A. Noire* the game is more hesitant to reveal the meta-narrative, opting at certain points to give the player little pieces of it in the form of **flashbacks**, a technical code often used in film. This shows the use of the **hermeneutic code**, a narrative device which creates an enigma and gives the audience a puzzle to solve, and thus supports the idea that games are an effective storytelling device, as narratives are primarily told through the hermeneutic code and making the reader solve clues (O'Neill, 1996). In the case of *L.A. Noire*, this device is central to the entire narrative, **as the game revolves around solving crimes**, whereas in *Vice City* it is used more to **maintain player interest in the narrative** rather than game-play, suggesting the former is a better storyteller. As *L.A. Noire* is a relatively recent game, this seems to confirm that narrative in gaming is progressing and becoming more complex.

Crime genre – conventions

To reinforce the argument that **game narrative is becoming more filmic**, there are several examples of film conventions seen in the games I've deconstructed. Both games have an element of the crime genre; as a consequence, both share signifiers that are conventional and sometimes iconographical of this, such as **characters and key narrative features**.

In *Vice City*, protagonist Tommy Vercetti fits into a character type often seen in the crime genre: the **anti-hero** who lacks ideal morals and blurs the line between 'hero' and 'villain'. Many of the events in the game through which the player has to navigate from Tommy's perspective are **key elements of crime narrative**: for example, a drug deal Tommy is sent to overlook gets ambushed by local druglord Diaz in the opening scenes, and several missions later in 'Rub Out', Tommy gets revenge on him by killing him and taking over his empire. Events like this must take place so that the player can recognise the crime genre in the narrative. Tommy's determination to take over the criminal underworld propels the narrative. This is often seen in crime films such as *Scarface* (Brian De Palma 1983) – which shows someone of low status rising to the top and becoming powerful through violence and crime. There are hints that suggest *Scarface* was an influence on *Vice City* – for example, Tommy's mansion is an almost exact replica of Tony Montana's in the film. This **intertextuality** adds context to the narrative, making it more complex.

L.A. Noire takes a different perspective on the crime genre. Here the protagonist is a detective solving crimes, rather than the criminal committing them. This perspective is a convention of **film noir**, the genre to which this game pays homage. Both characters and narrative are therefore recognisable when compared to films of this classic era such as *The Third Man* (Carol Reed 1949) and *The Asphalt Jungle* (John Huston 1950). The

game recycles plotlines from several films as part of its narrative; for example, the player has to solve one case named **'The Set Up'**, a clear reference to Robert Wise's 1949 boxing drama of the same name. Both narratives include the same scenario: a fixed boxing match in which one of the boxers wins, despite having been bribed to lose. As a result many people lose money, and the boxer's life is put in jeopardy. The intertextuality acts as a device to propel the narrative, as it relies on the player's knowledge of the film noir genre for them successfully to solve the case. If players know film noir, they will know that the **femme fatale** character is trouble, and that they should doubt her. As a protagonist, Cole Phelps is conventional in terms of film noir, but unusual in crime action games due to his apparently clean-cut nature; this is disrupted by his affair with Elsa Lichtmann, the central femme fatale character in the narrative, which leads to his downfall.

This contrasts with *Vice City*'s narrative, as the lead character ends up in a worse position than at the start of the narrative –in Cole's case, dead. The fact that the game makes use of a complex leading character supports the idea that **strong narratives are created by strong characters**, thus further arguing that games can be good storytellers.

Agency – the active player

Despite all this, Juul argues that **'you cannot have interactivity and narration at the same time'**. In some ways, he is

correct. A pivotal part of game-play is the **'agency'** – **'the satisfying power to take meaningful action and see the results of our results and choices'**. Agency often has a negative effect on the narrative in games, which is why it is argued that games and narrative are dissimilar. This negative effect is most prominent in *Vice City*, as the desired narrative structure may fail to be realised by the player if she or he lacks the ability to complete missions. For example, in the final mission 'Keep Your Friends Close…' the player, as Tommy, has to defeat the Forelli Mafia by killing his old boss Sonny and Lance Vance, the business partner who has betrayed Tommy, in order to complete the assignment. In other storytelling media, if Tommy was killed in the conflict, that would be the end of the character – there would be no chance to redeem himself. In this game, if Tommy is killed, the players are free to go back and retry the mission again until they succeed. This is very problematic for game narrative; if players can simply go back and edit the narrative, or give up in the middle of it, it could be argued that game narrative cannot be compared too closely with cinema (King and Krzywinska, 2002).

However, in *L.A. Noire*, the agency becomes vital for the narrative to work. As Cole, players have to conduct interrogations on suspects and witnesses. They have to decide whether to accept their words as truth, doubt them, or accuse them of lying by looking at their facial expressions and body language. If they make the right decision, they can open up further lines of enquiry, broadening the narrative, but if they choose the wrong answer, parts of the story may be left unresolved.

For example, in the case entitled 'The Driver's Seat', if the player chooses to believe the suspect's story that he knows nothing about the 'death' of his friend, the vital information to solve the case is withheld. If the player chooses to challenge him, the suspect reveals that his friend faked his own death and is hiding at his apartment, thus giving new leads to follow. Despite this, it is still impossible for the player to fail – even if they answered incorrectly, the game still presents another scenario for the player to find the truth (by following the suspect home).

Conclusions

The two games I have studied are similar in genre, but differ in the way they apply conventions into both the narrative and game-play, resulting in different experiences. The older game, *Vice City*, begins to use narrative to give game-play

wider meaning and increase audience interest; the more recent *L.A. Noire* combines specific film conventions with the interactivity of games to create a text which actively engages the audience with its story. Computer game narrative has obviously progressed since the medium began. Narratives are becoming more complex, led by strong lead characters and stories that actively engage the player. There may be differences to other storytelling media, but as technology expands further, it appears as though games are increasingly more like 'interactive cinema' as the years go on.

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MediaMagExtras

See MediaMagExtras to download Danielle's extensive list of references and a research report by Dr Julian McDougall on *Digital Transformation Games as (Authorless) Literature?* This explores the use of *L.A. Noire* as a literary text, focusing on concepts of genre, theme, setting, representation and character.

THE GENDER POLITICS OF SURVIVAL IN

THE WALKING DEAD

AND
THE HUNGER GAMES

Fantasy fiction provides an imagined landscape in which to deconstruct conventional ideas about gender, yet the fight for survival in dystopian narrative often seems to bring about a return to more traditional gender roles. **Sophie Stringfellow** explores constructions of masculinity and femininity in *The Walking Dead*, a continuing TV series, in comparison with Suzanne Collins' more hopeful gender perspective on the other side of the dystopian revolution represented in *The Hunger Games*.

Could the fight for gender equality be maintained if people were required to fight for survival? I am going to consider this question as I look at the presentation of gender in two different types of **survival narrative**.

Post-apocalyptic and dystopian literature, film and television have become particularly popular over the past couple of years, with the zombie genre making a notable comeback. *The Walking Dead*, a series of graphic novels and an acclaimed TV show, is located firmly within the zombie cannon. It is **post-apocalyptic** in the sense that it concerns the collapse of society during and after an outbreak of plague. The television adaptation of *The Walking Dead* can usefully be compared alongside another successful literary adaptation, *The Hunger Games* film. *The Hunger Games* is unmistakably **dystopian** in its vision of a future society which, in aiming to prevent disaster, ends up becoming the primary threat to many of its citizens. Both Robert Kirkman and Suzanne Collins have rewritten our reality within a fantastical framework; yet gender is constructed very differently in the survival situations that they depict.

Constructing gender – contrasting ideas

From the first episode of *The Walking Dead*, **gender** is flagged up as a central concern. As Rick navigates his way through his new alien environment, he sees what he presumes is a living child, and calls out to her: 'Little girl? I'm a policeman. Don't be afraid'. This patronising form of address, and the gendered reference to his job title are rendered ridiculous when the camera

focuses on the 'little girl' and we discover that she is in fact a 'walker' – a predator for whom human beings are nothing more than food. The director has thus chosen to begin the series with the important lesson that simplistic assessments and assumptions based on previous experience are useless now that their frame of reference has been destroyed.

With Rick's worldview thoroughly shaken, we cut straight to a flashback of the period immediately before the plague outbreak. A misogynistic exchange takes place between cops Shane and Rick in their patrol car, which sets up a backdrop of macho camaraderie. The symbols of their status as police officers also create a link between masculine authority and sexism. Shane begins with the rhetorical question, 'What's the difference between men and women?' and goes on to rant about women's carelessness. We hope for a more enlightened attitude from Rick, yet he demonstrates an old-fashioned sexism of his own by claiming that the difference lies in women's cruelty. As the director juxtaposes the conversation in the police car with the 'little girl' scene in which Rick's masculine privilege is undermined, we are made to consider the possibility that **gender roles are constructs** rather than essential truths, **contingent upon culture and subject to change**.

In contrast to the machismo on display in the first episode of *The Walking Dead*, *The Hunger Games* gives us an **all-female domestic scene** in which Katniss comforts her sister who has woken from a nightmare. The director quickly establishes **multiple personas** for our protagonist through facial expressions, costume and her varied interactions with Prim, Gale and the family cat. From early on in the film, it is possible to discuss her **heroism**, a stereotypically masculine quality, as she volunteers to take her sister's place at the reaping. Characters move between roles and responsibilities fluidly, without suggesting that any transgressions are based on their gender.

Peeta is another complex character whose contrasting skills in the arena are brute strength, and the ability to camouflage himself effectively using cake-decorating techniques. We discover that

Peeta is uncomfortable with the idea of losing his identity in the arena, whether to protect or to survive, and prefers to use cunning to create some distance between Katniss and the career tributes. Unlike many of the hyper-masculine characters in *The Walking Dead*, Peeta also demonstrates a clear sense of self-preservation. We see this towards the end, when he is gravely injured and hides himself, instead of attempting any feats of bravery. Characters in *The Hunger Games* have access to **a spectrum of 'ways of being'** and any restrictions on their behaviour come solely from the particular rules of the dystopian society, rather than expectations based on gender.

In *The Walking Dead*, however, the characters' opportunities to take on diverse identities are severely limited by gender. After hearing Rick on the radio, Lori wants to make a contribution by erecting a sign to warn people away from the city, and begs 'just give me a vehicle'. As Shane refuses Lori's request on the grounds of safety, her frustration is palpable and the audience wonders why she has to ask permission to act. Furthermore, a car would symbolise freedom of movement, but this is something she does not have. Later we learn that the women are relegated to domestic tasks regardless of their skillsets or previous careers. Jacqui draws our attention to the unequal division of labour as she asks 'How did we get stuck doing all the Hattie McDaniel work?' and Amy replies 'The world ended. Didn't you get the memo?' It is clear that in *The Walking Dead*, survival means a return to traditional roles and the end of equal opportunity. After Andrea learns how to shoot, she suggests that she would be more useful performing watch duty than domestic tasks, but Lori attacks her for overstepping her boundaries. Unlike Katniss, whose shooting prowess is celebrated, Andrea is viewed as self-serving for wanting to use her skills. The fact that female characters in *The Walking Dead* are pressured into 'keeping house', even when they are capable of protecting the camp, shows that the stereotypical gender roles fiercely championed by the characters are rooted in ideology, rather than what is necessary for survival.

Protection issues – care or control?

The representation of protection in *The Walking Dead* and *The Hunger Games* demonstrates a contrasting approach to gender roles. In *The Hunger Games*, love and protection are bound up in the symbol of the Mockingjay pin, which is passed between Katniss and Prim 'to protect you'. The powerful sisterly bond represented by

the pin drives the plot and helps to spark a revolution, as we will see in the next two films in the tetralogy. The relationship between the two sisters is also mirrored in the arena with Katniss and Rue, whose poignant interactions show girls who are capable of looking after each other. This is not to say that Katniss receives no help from Gale or Peeta. Indeed, Gale supports Katniss' family in her absence, and Peeta helps her to create an appealing public persona. In *The Hunger Games*, protection between male and female characters is based on **mutual care** which never calls the strength or capabilities of the women into question.

In *The Walking Dead*, however, **protection is inseparable from control**, and this control is almost entirely one-sided. As we have already seen, Shane restricts Lori's movements, saying 'I'm not putting you in danger'. He also attempts to extend his protective arm further by proving his menace to the rest of the camp. In a disturbing scene of domestic violence, Carol is attacked by her husband Ed while the women do laundry. The other women's complaints are completely ineffectual, and the entire group is presented as being weaker than one abusive man. They are left floundering – until Shane uses extreme violence upon Ed. Although Shane appears to break the cycle of abuse between Ed and Carol, his heavy-handed approach ensures that he is seen as the Alpha male without

whom the women would not be able to survive.

The influence of genre

We are given two strikingly different presentations of gender in these disaster narratives; I would argue that the **writers' uses of genre** lies at the heart of the contrasts I have observed. As a zombie story, *The Walking Dead* takes social fears and makes them real, physical and deadly. Right from the beginning, the series places gender at the forefront of the viewers' minds and goes on to problematise the relationships between men and women living at crisis point throughout. Although the presentation of sexism makes for uncomfortable viewing, the **post-apocalyptic genre** is at its most effective when it takes a convincing version of our own society and plays with the horrors of what could be.

The **dystopia** of *The Hunger Games*, on the other hand, allows more flexibility for the writer to change the rules and focus on personal primary concerns. In an interview for Scholastic, Suzanne Collins tells us why she chose to write science fiction:

Telling a story in a futuristic world gives you this freedom to explore things that bother you in contemporary times. So, in the case of *The Hunger Games*, issues like the vast discrepancy of wealth, the power of television and how it's used to influence our

lives, the possibility that the government could use hunger as a weapon, and then first and foremost to me, the issue of war.

Collins has used *The Hunger Games* as a vehicle to explore certain social problems – but gender relations is not one of them. Both *The Walking Dead* and *The Hunger Games* provide a compelling vision of a crumbling society. But whilst Collins gives men and women a level playing field upon which to tackle wider social concerns, Kirkman warns us that prejudice which may appear innocuous in a stable society can soon become domination when transposed to a society in chaos.

Sophie Stringfellow is a Post-16 Librarian at Cotham School, Bristol.

Follow it up

The Hunger Games (2012)

The Walking Dead Season 1 (2011) and Season 2 (2012)

Scholastic interview with Suzanne Collins: http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/article/qa-hunger-games-author-suzanne-collins

www.mediamagazine.org.uk

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YOU WILL REMEMBER THIS
IDEAS FOR LEARNING

We've never had more exciting resources available for student research and independent study – so why is it still so hard for Media students? **Nick Lacey** explores how technology can change, support and develop the ways we learn, through active approaches, apps, and collaboration.

The internet has disappeared! You have research coursework to complete and the deadline's looming. What do you do? Suddenly the library, full of books, becomes a 'must-visit' venue. But instead of being able to use 'key words' to search the web, and the websites themselves, you have to rely upon the contents and index pages of books; you need to skim read to find vital information quickly. You may also discover that 25 years ago there was a vital article in a newspaper, so you have to arrange a trip to a big central library to look at their archives; these are probably stored on microfiche…

…. and then you wake up.

Let's face it there's never been a better time to do research. So why doesn't it feel 'good' to learn these days, despite the massive advances in technology over the past 20 years, which have made studying a much easier task?

One of the answers might be that standards have improved because so much information is readily available at a keystroke, meaning our **expectations are also higher**. It might also be that the **overwhelming amount of information** available makes it difficult to offer a **clear focus** on the task. Another explanation might be, with the rise of new media, students have more **distractions** in their lives: Facebook, MSN

and so on. The average number of hours watching television hasn't declined during the last 20 years but the availability of video games, for example, both on and offline, has increased enormously. Or is it that students have been **'tested to death'** so any excitement involved in the pursuit has ossified into a chore?

There is another possibility, which takes the 'blame' off the student: that your teachers, all of whom were born before the advent of the internet as a mass medium, haven't adapted to the new, and have taught you to learn based on 'old ways' of thinking. This might explain why, despite the enormous amount of change during the last 20 years, students' studying techniques have evolved little. And one thing that certainly hasn't changed is the way lessons are timetabled, with up to four different lessons, at AS Level, in one day. Many students still

struggle to remember what was covered in class yesterday, which has become mixed up in their memory with all the other lessons* and so they often end up relying upon cramming before the exam to succeed. The problem with cramming, of course, is that it only works in the short term; and it is often the case that what's learned at AS is forgotten by September when the A2 begins.

This article won't offer advice on learning or research itself, but considers some ideas about using **new ways to succeed in studies.** Since the arrival of the iPhone, particularly, there have been further developments in technology that can hone students' study skills. And students brave enough to change their way of working can find more efficient and successful ways of studying. Of course this is not to say that many aren't already doing so – but I suspect most are not!
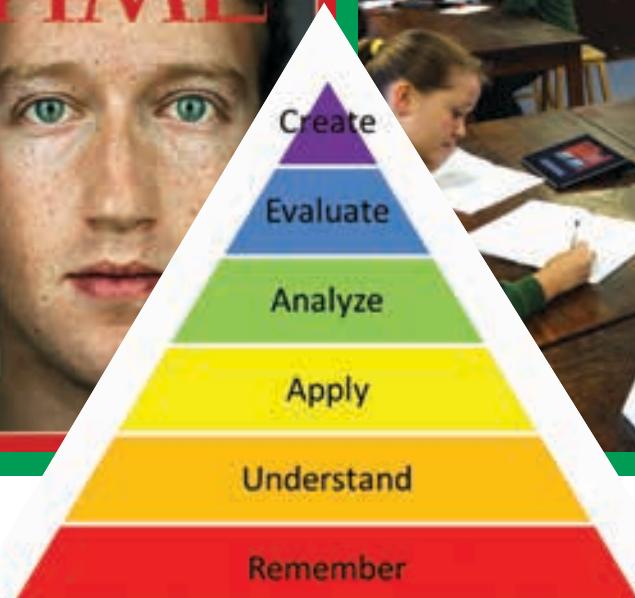
Revised Bloom's Taxonomy

One of the most oft-quoted tools of teaching (pedagogy) is **Bloom's taxonomy**, which was updated by Anderson and Krahwohl (2001) to include, from the bottom up of a pyramid: remembering; understanding; applying; analysing; evaluating; creating. It isn't the intention of this article to examine the taxonomy but to suggest that apps (applications) that fit into these categories, can help with our studying.

Active apps for memory

Like the 'lazy student' who hopes someone has done the work already, I was delighted to find Kathy Schrock's brilliant resource: http://www.schrockguide.net/bloomin-apps.html.

Of course not everyone is lucky enough to have a smart phone or a tablet, which will run such apps; indeed it's arguable that a phone's screen is too small to do any detailed work. However, with the aid of a search engine, it is possible to find browser-based equivalents for most if not all of them. For example **flashcards** can be created at http://www.flashcardexchange.com/ as well as other websites.

The advantage of such revision resources as flashcards is obvious. In fact much of their benefit is in the creation of the cards rather than the testing. Active learning always beats passive, so it is best to create your own, around the texts you are revising.

Of course apps like this, and open sourceware such as mind maps, merely replace paper and pencil versions and are hardly a 'paradigm shift' in learning. However a number of them encourage **collaboration**, and I believe that if students embraced

working with others then there would be a revolutionary change in how we learn.

The joys of collaboration

Mark Zuckerberg, he of Facebook, has described how he was on the verge of failing his art course at Harvard (he was too busy becoming a billionaire):

> Zuckerberg didn't have time to attend a single class or to study… The final exam was a week away and he was in a panic… [so he] did what comes naturally to a native of the web. He went to the internet and downloaded images of all the pieces of art he know would be covered in the exam. He put them on a web page and added blank boxes underneath. Then he emailed the address of this page to his classmates, telling them he'd just put up a study guide.

Jarvis 2009: 49

His classmates duly filled it in and he 'aced the exam'. The 'lazy student' might be getting excited about this and be already considering setting up a revision blog and letting everyone else do the work. Clever, and unfair, of Zuckerberg? Maybe, but back at Harvard:

> The professor said the class as a whole got better grades than usual. They captured the wisdom of their crowd and helped each other.

ibid

In my classes we try and capture this 'wisdom' **by assigning one student to blog each lesson**, and encourage the others to add information and resources that might have been missed in the original posting. Working with others is more effective, and more fun, than working alone. This isn't

about plagiarism, for anyone who merely copies learns nothing and, if it's coursework, may end up being disqualified from everything.

Group work, in classes, has been a staple of education for many years. But **group work online** can be much more powerful particularly if the motivation for it comes from the students, rather than the teacher.

Virtually all students want to get the best grade possible. Some students want to do this with the bare minimum of work, which of course is not possible, especially in Media Studies. However there is nothing wrong in wanting to 'cut corners' in your studying, in other words, working more efficiently. Lumberjacks won't waste their time chopping down trees with blunt axes, the first thing they do is sharpen the blade. Isn't it about time you sharpened your learning tools? The good news is that they are already out there waiting to be utilised.

Nick Lacey is Head of Media Studies at Benton Park School Technology College, Leeds.

P.S. My daughter, Kate, who completed her A Levels last year, says *SQA: My Study Plan* was a brilliant app for organising revision.

Follow it up

Anderson, Lorrie W. and David Krathwohl (eds.). 2001. *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*. (New York: Longman)

Jarvis, J. 2009. *What Would Google Do?* (New York: Collins Business)

*a good way to avoid this is to review your lesson notes daily.