

DECEMBER 2012: **ISSUES**

Media Magazine

english and media centre issue 42 | december 2012

WHO DECIDES WHAT'S A
**MEDIA
ISSUE?**

HOST CHIPS & MEMES
PUBLIC SERVICE
BROADCASTING

POWER & POLITICS:
#KONY2012

REPRESENTATIONS OF
**BLACK
BRITISHNESS**

REPRESENTING THE
OTHER

CONTEMPORARY
HIP-HOP



MM

English & Media Centre

MediaMagazine is published by the English and Media Centre, a non-profit making organisation. The Centre publishes a wide range of classroom materials and runs courses for teachers. If you're studying English at A Level, look out for *emagazine*, also published by the Centre.

The English and Media Centre
18 Compton Terrace
London N1 2UN
Telephone: 020 7359 8080
Fax: 020 7354 0133

Email for subscription enquiries:
admin@englishandmedia.co.uk

Managing Editor: Michael Simons

Editor: Jenny Grahame

Editorial assistant/admin:
Zelda McKay

Design: Sparkloop
Print: S&G Group

Cover: Rapper Devlin courtesy of
Corin Hardy and Academy Films

ISSN: 1478-8616



Seasonal greetings to all *MediaMag* readers!

This is our **Issues** issue. Issues: a term defined by the *Oxford Dictionary* as 'an important topic or problem for debate and discussion', and by the *Urban Dictionary* as 'A fancy and elegant way to say "problems". But what do we really mean when we talk about "having issues" with something? Why are some things defined by the media as social issues, and others not? Who decides, and why – and how do the media construct such 'issues'? Our lead article, by David Buckingham, considers these difficult questions, and applies them to a particularly topical moral panic: the so-called 'sexualisation of children'. He argues that the way this particular issue has been framed, spoken about, and circulated within the media and public debates, is typical of a larger process which goes on to influence our cultural and social assumptions, and ultimately, government policy agendas.

Many of the articles in this edition feature case studies which address questions of representation – problematising omissions, challenging interpretations or considering alternatives to conventional representation of gender, race and class, in genres as diverse as chick flicks, constructed reality shows, music culture and video games. Others focus more directly on specific debates about aspects of the media themselves: the potential role of social media in driving social change, as documented in Carly Sandy's piece on the **Invisible Children/Kony 2012** phenomenon, and James Middleditch's analysis of the power of media technologies represented in the dystopian TV trilogy **Black Mirror**. These issues can often get lost in the race to fulfil examination requirements; we hope you'll take the opportunity to put them on the agenda for discussion in class.

Online later in December for web subscribers, our **Images, Icons and Issues Extra** supplement will include: a really topical catch-up on the issues facing the BBC in its current crisis; articles on the changing images of Lara Croft; representations of youth (**Skins**) and of terror (bin Laden and **Four Lions**).

Plenty of issues to get your teeth into, then – but there's still time to deconstruct all that festive iconography, Christmas 'event' television, and the inevitable retrospectives of 2012's glorious moments.

Enjoy the holidays!

Jenny Grahame

This magazine is not to be photocopied. Why not subscribe to our web package which includes a downloadable and printable PDF of the current issue or encourage your students to take out their own £12 subscription?

contents

04

06

10

14

21

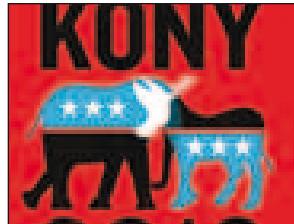
Front Page News Latest news and views.

Got Issues with That?

How do some events, ideas or behaviours come to be regarded as social issues, or indeed as social problems? Professor David Buckingham raises some big questions about the ways public debates about social problems are constructed.

Kony 2012 – Power, Politics and the #Generation

Carly Sandy looks at the issues posed by one of the most talked about online campaigns ever.



Black Mirror – The Reflection in the Screen

Charlie Brooker's larger-than-life satire dramatises some of the recurrent debates about 21st-century media culture in an online age: celebrity, surveillance, privacy, regulation and the dangers and democratic potential of technology.



We're All in this Together: – Structured Reality TV and Social Class

Steph Hendry explores the social, economic and historical contexts of the representations of class in structured reality TV shows.



26

30

34

36

42

47

Public Service Advertising – Ghost Chips and Memes Sara Mills

explores a public information campaign which uses social media to raise awareness and change public behaviour around a recurrent social issue.



Gypsies, Tramps and Thieves? An Exploration of the Media's Ongoing Fascination with Gypsies

How and why do some groups become characterised as social problems – and how do the media perpetuate particular types of stereotypes?

Cartoon by Goom



Killer Ideas, Hat-tricks, and Making Watchtower

Director Corin Hardy shares the excitement and tension of the creative process behind making a killer music video.

Best of British How is Britain seen by other nations? Who holds the power now and what does the media have to say about that? Ex-pat Maggie Miranda investigates the ways the great British celebrations of 2012 have been constructed and represented by the rest of the world.

Odd Future, Stranger Past – Issues of Representation in Contemporary Hip-Hop

The hip-hop genre is primarily dominated by representations of young black men; Phil Dyas focuses on the issues posed by the stereotypes used in the portrayal of this group.

51

56

60

64

Is it Cos I is British?! Issues Around Black Britishness

What does it mean to be black British, and why has it taken so long for us to see representations of and by black British artists, producers and creatives as more than just 'issues'? Jennifer G Robinson wonders how far the Olympic Opening Ceremony reflects the media's role in constructing black British identity.



(Not so) Pretty in Pink

Boldly going where no chick flick has gone before? A closer look at issues surrounding the hugely popular 'women behaving badly' film *Bridesmaids*.



Does Pink Matter? Early socialisation into gender roles has long been an issue for debate, often epitomised by the gendering of products and the associations of the colour pink. Nick Lacey investigates, and finds that the humble biro has become a symbolic battleground for debates around sexism.

Representing the 'Other' – The Virtual Middle East in Computer Games

Sean Richardson explores the ideas of Edward Said and Jean Baudrillard in an analysis of the representations of the Middle East in video games.

Front Page News

It's Beginning to Feel a Lot Like Christmas ...

Nothing, but nothing, escapes textual analysis if you are a discerning Media student – not even Christmas.

You used to be able to tell Christmas was coming when the deluxe M&S ad premiered with Mylene, Twiggy, celebs and all. Recently, the ads have arrived earlier, and family has overtaken celebrity as flavour of the holidays. Last year John Lewis won the plaudits, and 4.32 million hits on YouTube, with its adorable kid unable to contain his impatience – to give, rather than to receive his Christmas presents.

In this year of recession, they're all at it – and some are under fire on social media too. Asda's stressed-out mum doing it all herself suggests that Christmas joy is all down to mum, whose real place is in the kitchen. It recruited 1000 complaints for its sexism on mumsnet in the first 24 hours, incurred the wrath of single fathers, and thanks to Fathers 4 Justice, is now being investigated by the Advertising Standards Authority. Morrison's slightly wittier version seems to have escaped the critics – so far. Debenhams has a fashionista returning to the bosom of the family from the glitz of London; Matalan goes with 'quality time with the people we love the most'.



Meanwhile, bucking the trend this year are M&S, which has reverted to sleepwear and disco, and John Lewis's 'The Journey', its snowman ad (also available online as a knitting pattern, and parodied by Ann Summers, which gleefully subverts same with a vibrator).

John Lewis's partner Waitrose has gone for a low-budget ad, with Heston Blumenthal and Delia Smith cheerfully waiving their fees, while an extra £1 million is donated to community charities.

This rather pious stance is somewhat undermined, however, by the £6 million price tag attached to John Lewis's 'The Journey'.

At a time when massive chains such as Comet are folding and laying off thousands of employees, it all feels a bit uncomfortable. As Hadley Freeman observes in *The Guardian*:

Christmas adverts have as much to do with Christmas as reality TV has to do with reality.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/nov/14/christmas-tv-adverts-awful-john-lewis>

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/9661518/Forget-the-Christmas-TV-shows-what-are-the-ads-like.html>

Meanwhile, Coca-Cola remains supremely oblivious to the recession. Frequently but erroneously credited with creating the traditional image of Santa Claus, it has recycled its 'Holidays Are Coming' parade of illuminated trucks – if it ain't broke, why fix it? However, as *MediaMag's* Christmas gift to you, here's a rather wonderful anti-ad for Coca-Cola.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wmYhy-tE3VM>

comment is free

To celebrate the centenary of *The Guardian* newspaper in 1921, its long-serving editor CP Scott wrote, 'Comment is free, but facts are sacred.' 'Comment is free' is now *The Guardian* and *Observer* forum for comment and debate, a site for publishing discussions which include a range of voices, perspectives and opinions.

So how does valuing freedom of speech relate to the anti-social behaviour of internet 'trolls', who deliberately intend to offend or provoke anger, through their comments online? A number of high profile cases have seen offenders in court: Matthew Woods was jailed for 12 weeks for his 'despicable' comments about missing children April Jones and Madeleine McCann, and Azhar Ahmed was given a sentence of community service for posting 'derogatory, disrespectful and inflammatory' remarks on Facebook

following the deaths of three soldiers in action.

However, it is reassuring to know that condemnation of such behaviour is widely supported, not only through the criminal justice system, but also through social media, which is ironically so often accused of creating the 'troll' phenomenon. Take, for example, the public response to Jason Manford's attack on internet trolls in defence of Gary Barlow. The term 'trolls and Gary Barlow' trended all day on Twitter when he posted his blog. Comedian Isabel Fay's mock musical tribute to trolls, 'Thank you Hater,' went viral on YouTube.

'Comment is Free' can also be used to address the distinction between freedom of speech and writing which causes offence. When Hannah Pool used Comment is Free to write her article, 'Disagree with me – but

... but facts are sacred
Guardian editor CP Scott, 1921

not because I am a black woman,' she compared her experiences of writing as herself and as a white, male alter-ego, Harry Pond. She found that, although their opinions were the same, 'Harry' received no insults: 'Is this what it's like to be a white man? Having people accept your right to a difference of opinion?' Pool's articles in her own name, on the other hand, generate a very different reaction: 'I could post my shopping list and I'm pretty sure the thread beneath would include some variants of 'go back to Africa'. So what's the solution?

Paul Lewis, *The Guardian Special Projects Editor*, will discuss social media at our *MediaMag* conference on December 13th. It will be interesting to know whether he thinks that tougher moderation could be the answer, or whether a change in legislation is needed.

BBC Breakdown?

The ongoing scandal surrounding Jimmy Savile is a must-study for any media student. First, the news coverage itself: a story broken by ITV, but rejected by BBC's *Newsnight*, who subsequently ran a *Panorama* documentary questioning itself on why this decision had been made. Second, the political implications of the scandal, and the opportunities it poses for Conservative and Fleet Street Beeb-bashing. Alongside television, there's plenty to analyse in the press – and not just in the tabloids:

It is the chattering classes, the educated elite, broadsheet newspapers, which, echoing yesteryear's Penny Dreadfuls, describe Savile as the 'devil', a'blood-curdling child catcher' whose story is 'darker than even the bleakest, most pessimistic minds could have imagined.

Brendan O'Neill, Spiked

As allegations continue to be made by victims, the BBC is in near meltdown, its senior staff decimated, and public confidence in its integrity at an all-time low. There is clearly much to learn here about the

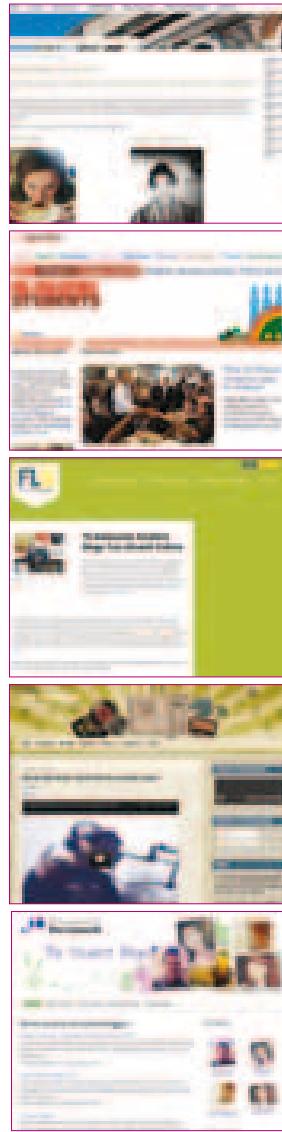
culture of the media industries in previous decades, and in what ways inquiries such as Savile and Leveson can impact on their practices today. The big fear, however, is that the moral panics generated by these events will not only cloud the far greater issues of justice for victims, but also undermine and restrict the operations of what is arguably the world's greatest broadcaster in the interests of a political agenda.

This is a complex but essential issue. Pete's Media Blog summarises the background to the events. A more detailed analysis by Rona Murray will also be available on the **MediaMag** website as part of our **Images, Independence and Issues Extra**. As is so often the case, the most extensive the press coverage is from *The Guardian* – <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/jimmy-savile> – and the most salacious and hypocritical BBC-bashing comes from the **Mail Online**: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2227586/Jimmy-Savile-demanded-young-girls-stay-tent-return-charity-appearance.htm>

Are you an aspiring journalist? Why not start a blog?

Many **MediaMag** readers will by now be well aware of the value of a group blog and its role in documenting and sharing production work and research. But in the wake of debates about the relevance of university journalism courses (see Roy Greenslade's article: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/greenslade/2012/nov/13/journalism-education-editors?CMP=EMCMEDEM665>), the use of blogging and online forums can offer new approaches to the newspaper industry. **Jake Wallis Simons**, now a features editor for *The Telegraph*, offers some tips for blogging as one way into writing for a national newspaper, no matter how early in your career you might be:

Blogging is a great place for an aspiring journalist to start. Unlike a physical paper, the Internet has unlimited space and the more unique content appears, the more powerful the site. So blog editors tend to be more open to suggestion than print editors. If your blog is popular, that may become apparent almost immediately. The Telegraph has a constant live counter which monitors the popularity of each of its stories in terms of 'hits' generated. There are also counters of shares on social media, and comments, of course. Blogging does not need to be as rigorously implemented as most print pieces, as it is primarily a forum for opinion. If it is provocative and generates a reaction, this is generally seen as a good thing, as it raises the profile of the website and enhances its SEO (Search Engine Optimisation) power. On that note, one of the features of a newspaper's blog site is that it is intended to host a range of different voices, from journalists to musicians to the clergy. For example, one A Level student who recently did work experience at The Telegraph started blogging while she was there. Her contributions were seen as a breath of fresh air, adding colour to the overall mix; she continues to blog now that she has gone back to school. It would be far harder for her to justify her place on the pages of a print paper at this stage, but if she continues to blog successfully, she will be well placed to make that transition in the future.



Coming to a screen near you this Christmas:

Literature-lovers and film buffs will be spoilt over the Christmas holidays, with three film adaptations of famous novels making their way to the big screen.

December 14th: The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey



Peter Jackson's long-awaited adaptation of the children's classic is finally here. Who can resist the charming tale of Bilbo Baggins, the unlikely hobbit hero unexpectedly launched on the quest of stealing treasure from a dragon? With a little guidance from Gandalf the Grey (Ian McKellen) and a memorable contest of Riddles in the Dark with the devious and self-pitying Gollum, the little hobbit sets in motion the adventures of Middle Earth. There will be more in **MediaMag** on this film soon.

December 20th: Life of Pi



Equally fantastical and delightful is Ang Lee's adaptation of Yann Martel's **Life of Pi**. After a shipwreck in which he loses all his family, Pi Patel is found floating on a 26-foot lifeboat with a zebra, a hyena, an orangutan and a Bengal tiger called Richard Parker. Its magic and exoticism is the perfect antidote to cold and dark wintry days.

December 26th: Midnight's Children

For generations, being able to complete Salman Rushdie's 'Booker of Bookers' novel has been considered a badge of honour. Even director Deepa Mehta describes adapting **Midnight's Children** to film as 'pretty scary.' But here it is, Salman Rushdie's 'love letter to India' neatly packaged into 2½ hours of film, showing at your local cinema from Boxing Day.



got issues with that?



How do some events, ideas or behaviours come to be regarded as social issues, or, indeed, as social problems? Who defines what's an issue, why do they do it, and how? And what role do the media play in the social construction of 'issues'?

Professor David Buckingham raises some big questions about the ways public debates about social problems are constructed, focusing on debates about the sexualisation of young people.

When we say that someone 'has issues' we tend to mean that there is something that annoys or provokes them personally. The problem might be to do with the annoyance itself, but it can also be to do with the person. If I 'have issues' with people talking loudly on their mobile phones on the bus, it might be because this is their problem, but it could equally be

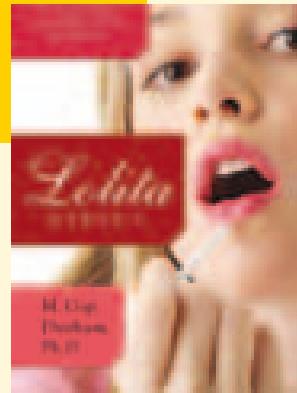




seen as my problem – that I have an old-fashioned belief in personal privacy, or an unreasonable desire for peace and quiet.

The 'issues' we're looking at here are **social issues**, rather than **psychological ones**. But in either case, it's reasonable to ask why some things are seen as issues in the first place, and others aren't. 'Issues' aren't just out there in the world: they are not natural events, like the weather. Things have to be defined or socially constructed as issues. So how do things come to be regarded as social issues, or indeed as social problems? Why do some things become issues, and others don't? Who does the defining, why do they do it, and how? And what role do the media play in the social construction of 'issues'?

I want to explore this in relation to a specific example, the issue of **sexualisation** – and particularly **the sexualisation of children**. This is a term that has only come to public attention in the UK in the last five years but it has very quickly become the focus of books, newspaper articles, TV programmes, campaigns and even government reports. It may well be true that the sexualisation of children is a real and growing problem; but we still need to ask how the issue came to be **identified** in the first place, how it is **defined**, and who gets to speak about it. And, as Media Studies students, we particularly need to look at how the media represent this issue, because it's in the media that much of this social construction of issues takes place.



Constructing Issues

There's a body of research – mainly conducted in the US – that has looked at the whole question of 'social problems' and how they are constructed. This approach gives us some useful tools with which we can analyse public controversies. Three ideas are particularly useful here:

1. **Framing** is about how particular issues are identified and defined. Putting something (like a picture) into a frame draws it to our attention; but the frame also excludes certain things. So we can begin by asking what's in the frame and what isn't in the frame, and what the consequences of this might be.

2. Secondly, we can look at how particular individuals or organisations claim **ownership** of a given issue. Which people claim to be the '**experts**' on the issue, what are their motivations or interests, and how do they try to establish their authority to speak about it? Which people are not heard or consulted?

3. The third issue is **rhetoric** – that is, **persuasive language**. How do people use language to persuade us of their own definition of the issue, to appeal for our support, and to restrict what it's possible to say about it? Of course, this can involve looking at visual 'language' (the use of dramatic or authoritative images, for example), as well as verbal language.

The **sociologist Joel Best** has used this approach to look at a wide range of social issues, from obesity to gay marriage, and from identity theft to climate change. Best

How do things come to be regarded as social issues, or indeed as social problems? Why do some things become issues, and others don't? Who does the defining, why do they do it, and how? And what role do the media play in the social construction of 'issues'?

describes a '**social problems marketplace**', in which different parties – campaigners, experts, professional interest groups – compete for control over how the issue is framed and understood. Best pays particular attention to how people try to justify their claims, for instance by appealing to scientific evidence, providing dramatic examples, and pressing emotional 'buttons'.

These ideas can be used to analyse how an issue like 'sexualisation' is constructed:

- How did it come to be identified in the first place?
- How is evidence about it compiled and presented, how are opinions about it asserted, circulated and marketed?
- How do people claim the authority to speak about it?

The Story of 'Sexualisation'

In 2009, the UK Home Office appointed the **child psychologist Dr. Linda Papadopoulos** to produce an official report on the 'sexualisation of young people'. The report was part of a broader Home Office review of domestic violence against women, instigated by the then **Labour Home Secretary Jacqui Smith**. Smith did not stay in office long enough to see its publication, however: she was obliged to resign when it emerged that her husband had been watching soft porn movies on pay-TV, and that she had put the charges for this on her parliamentary expenses claim. This is just the first of several ironies that characterised the whole debate.

In thinking about the origins of the Home Office report, we need to consider the **connection between the victimisation of adult women and the sexualisation of girls**. It seems to imply that if women become the victims of violence, this is because they present themselves in ways that invite violence: they dress or behave in inappropriately 'sexy' ways, and they learn to do this from the media. In this respect, the framing of the issue seems to reflect a '**blame the victim**' approach, in which women are somehow seen as being responsible for their own victimisation.

The term had rarely been used before the



performance on *The X Factor*, calling on Ofcom to ban such material, while simultaneously including several images of the said performance on its website.

Ask Dr. Linda

Linda Papadopoulos (left), the author of the Home Office report, is a clinical psychologist who is also employed at the University of North London. Her own research has been mainly in the field of dermatology. However, she is also a glamorous celebrity: she has appeared as the resident psychologist on *Big Brother*, and is regularly used as an 'expert' on breakfast television. She has also featured on programmes such as

Celebrity Mastermind and *Celebrity Fit Club*. 'Dr. Linda' (as she prefers to be known in these contexts) also runs a private beauty consultancy for women, which markets its own range of beauty products.

Papadopoulos's report was published in February 2010, shortly before the general election, but the issue was quickly taken up by the incoming Coalition Government. A further review was commissioned to suggest ways of putting her recommendations into practice. The author was the **Chief Executive of the Christian charity the Mother's Union, Reg Bailey** (not himself a mother, we can assume). Bailey's report, *Letting Children Be Children*, was published last summer: it recommended a range of restrictions on media and marketing that are currently being followed through.

In terms of **ownership**, we can see how certain people have attempted to take charge of the public definition of the issue; and we can ask about their motivations for doing so, and the kind of knowledge or expertise they possess. The story of how sexualisation became an 'issue' illustrates the ways in which public debates are now frequently tied up with the operations of the media and celebrity culture. It also indicates many of the contradictions – and indeed, the many forms of hypocrisy – that are often entailed.

Reading the Evidence

Papadopoulos's report is dominated by **psychological theories of media effects**, of the kind that are often used in research about media violence: media audiences are

seen here largely as **passive victims** of an all-powerful media influence. The media show us 'sexy' images, and we copy them. The report does not consider the many criticisms that have been made of this kind of research; nor does it consider alternative approaches from sociology or Media Studies.

Papadopoulos's statements to journalists tend to offer a very **one-dimensional view of media effects**, and of contemporary femininity:

It is a drip, drip effect. Look at porn stars, and look how an average girl now looks. It's seeped into every day: fake breasts, fuck-me shoes... We are hypersexualising girls, telling them that their desirability relies on being desired. They want to please at any cost.

The Guardian, 25th February 2011

As media students, you might ask whether this is an adequate account of how people (in this case, young women) understand and use the media. And as you study Dr. Linda's own media image, you might also wish to consider some of the contradictions in her apparently critical stance.

Numerous academics strongly challenged the report's approach. They questioned the way in which 'sexualisation' was defined – a definition so broad that it could potentially include almost any image of a human form. They questioned the validity of the evidence that was cited, much of which derived from psychological experiments conducted with American college students. And they challenged the social and cultural assumptions – for instance, about 'inappropriate' sexual behaviour – that seemed to inform the approach. The evidence was highly questionable, although many campaigners and media commentators seemed to accept it as scientific truth.

Framing Childhood, Framing Media

The idea of **childhood** is a powerful tool in the social problems marketplace. For campaigners, childhood provides an emotional **'hot button'**, a convenient symbol that helps to focus much broader **fears about social change**. It also helps to bring together people with quite different concerns: nobody wants to be accused of not caring about children.

Thus, the concern about sexualisation seems to unite two otherwise quite different groups. Traditional religious moralists see it as an index of the moral depravity of the modern world. Some feminists see it as part of the continuing oppression of women – although this is a view that other feminists would dispute. Both groups use the idea of

mid-2000s, but by the time of the Home Office report, 'sexualisation' was already well established as an issue in the United States – often regarded as a much more sexually puritanical country than the UK. **The American Psychological Association**, which is well known for its concerns about the allegedly harmful effects of media on children, had published a report on the issue in 2007; and several more popular books for parents, with titles like **Too Sexy Too Soon** and **The Lolita Effect**, had appeared towards the end of the decade. The UK had its own version of such books, in the form of **Where Has My Little Girl Gone?** by Tanith Carey (a journalist formerly known as the official biographer of Russell Brand). You might want to consider the verbal and visual rhetoric of these book titles and their covers.

For politicians, the issue of 'sexualisation' was clearly seen as a vote-winner, perhaps particularly in attracting women voters. In the run-up to the 2010 election, both Conservative leader David Cameron and Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg (now coalition partners) condemned the 'creepy sexualisation' of girls in music videos, fashion advertising, teenage magazines and other media.

For the media themselves, the issue provided a useful way of being seen to take the moral high ground, while at the same time featuring examples of the objectionable material. **The Sun**, for example, complained on its front page that 'It's Paedo Heaven On Our High Street', only a turn of the page away from one of its 'barely legal' topless Page 3 models. **The Daily Mail** condemned **Rihanna's** raunchy

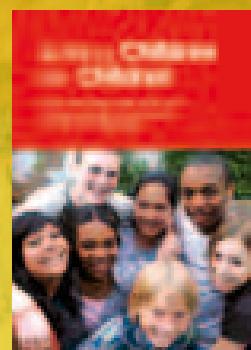
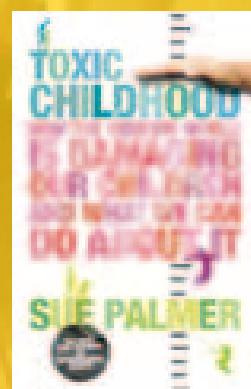
childhood as a focus for these much broader concerns yet, in doing so, they inevitably define children in sentimental terms, as **innocent** and **vulnerable**.

Sex, it would seem, is something children do not know about – or should not know about. Introducing children to sex is inevitably a matter of **moral or political corruption** – and the media are often represented in these debates as the source of corruption. There's little consideration of the possibility that children might make their own judgements about media, that they might interpret media in different ways, or that they might not simply copy what they see. As is always the case, children's voices are almost entirely **excluded** from the debate.

These particular ways of framing the issue lead to policies that verge on the absurd, as though we could isolate the bad elements and remove them, leaving only the good. For example, Reg Bailey's report includes the proposal for **100-metre exclusion zones around schools, from which sexualised imagery would be banned**. Such strategies would be hard to enforce – not least because advertisers and campaigners might well have very different views about what counts as 'sexualised'. They would also be very unlikely to reduce children's exposure to such imagery. Yet that may be beside the point: perhaps the main aim of such proposals is to enable politicians to look as though they are 'doing something', while enabling parents to feel better about it all.

The 'sexualisation of children' may or may not be a real social problem. I am not suggesting that there is nothing here to talk about, or even to worry about. Rather, I have tried to question **how** the issue is defined, **who** gets to speak about it, and **the ways in which they speak**. In this case, the debate has been framed in very narrow and moralistic ways, which actively prevent us from engaging with the broader issues that might be at stake. The story of 'sexualisation' is just one example of how social issues tend to be constructed. As you read further in the magazine, you might want to consider how these kinds of questions can be applied to other social issues.

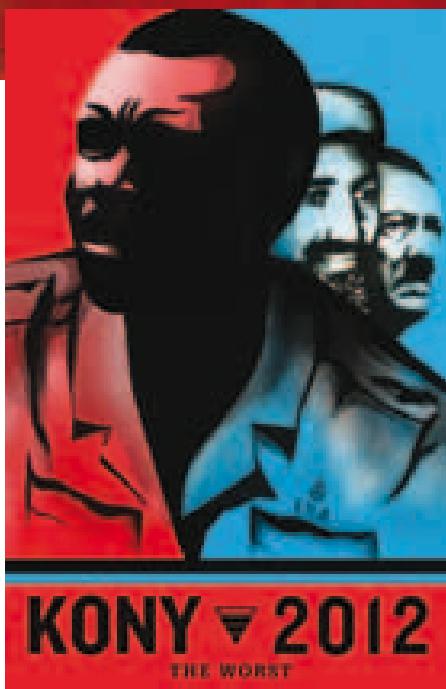
David Buckingham is Professor of Media and Communication at the University of Loughborough and an expert in children's and young people's interactions with electronic media. He has contributed to a number of major research projects about children and the media, and is the author of 25 books about aspects of media education.



KONY 2012

Power, Politics and the #Generation

It was one of the hugest social media stories of the year, billed as an 'experiment for social change', which has engaged millions of young people through a single YouTube video – but has also provoked accusations of naiveté, inaccuracy and manipulation. **Carly Sandy** explores the impact of Invisible Children's 'Kony 2012', and what it can teach us about the political role of social media.



The social networking site Facebook currently has a global community of 900 million users which is set to reach 1 billion by the end of 2012. Meanwhile, video-sharing website YouTube attracted over 1 trillion views in 2011. Far from being purely sites of entertainment, the last 18 months have seen the use and perception of these sites shift. They have the power to inform, inspire and politicise young people in large numbers and change the way we access news and information.

Putting it into Context

In 2011 the so-called '**Arab Spring**', a term used to describe the pro-democracy

activism across parts of the Arab world, was driven in part by the coming together of like-minded individuals via Facebook and Twitter. Much media coverage focused on the role of social media in attempting to give disaffected citizens a voice in an **attempt to re-distribute power** through an outlet not controlled by the state or an established media outlet. YouTube and its companion sites such as Vimeo, Facebook and Twitter operate beyond the realms of traditional '**gatekeepers**' who decide on the value of a potential story and how far it conforms to the '**news values**' (see Galtung and Ruge) or **political tone** of a publication. The advent of this technology and proliferation of these sites has heralded a move towards a more '**democratic**' **approach to news**, where, in essence, everybody is a journalist.

As well as the internet being a source for breaking news, in recent years it has also found itself very much making the news. Online videos are now seen as powerful tools of communication, particularly in their ability to attract and engage young people.

In March this year the **Kony 2012 viral campaign** became the latest online video to make the news. The 30-minute video was launched by the charity **Invisible Children**, to highlight the plight of children in Uganda who were abducted and forced to become child soldiers by the **Lord's Resistance Army** led by **Joseph Kony**.

'Nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come ... we have reached a crucial time in history where what we do or don't do right now will affect every generation to come.'

Kony 2012 narration

Although the **Kony 2012** viral focuses on Joseph Kony and the LRA, Unicef estimate that there are approximately **300,000 children involved in conflicts worldwide**. Many of the children are used as soldiers, messengers or sexual slaves by armed non-governmental groups, often fighting in countries where there is civil unrest. Although this is definitely not the type of video that traditionally attracts millions of YouTube hits, the film took the political power of social networking to another level. It became one of the fastest-spreading YouTube videos of all time using a potent mixture of slick **Hollywood-style story-telling, celebrity and an engaging, emotional narrative**.

Sending it Viral

The **Kony 2012** film opens with a bold statement:

nothing is more powerful than an idea...

and invites the viewer to become part of



an experiment. At this point in the video it is still unclear what the message of the film is, or what the audience has to do. The opening generates numerous **narrative enigmas** in the minds of the audience which encourages them to continue watching. The direct **mode of address** – **... in order for it to work you have to pay attention**

– connotes the seriousness of the message and engages the audience. **Peter Bradshaw**, film critic for *The Guardian*, suggests that the opening of the video '**looks like an ad for Nike or Adidas**' with the juxtaposition of nature and technology creating an instantly recognisable binary opposition and an inviting aesthetic, likely to appeal to a young audience. In fact, the whole video could be broken down into a series of binary oppositions, clearly **encoding a POV** and positioning the audience into the **preferred reading**.

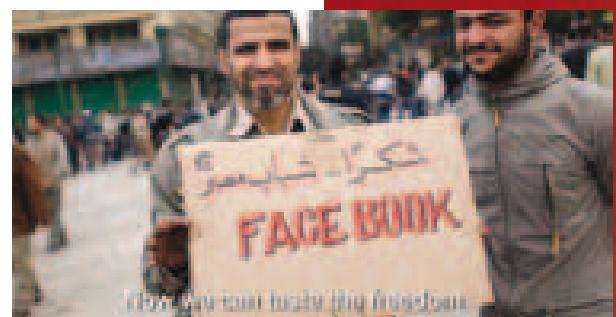
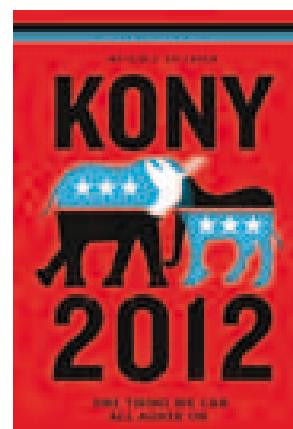
Good Guys and Bad Guys

The **Kony 2012** film clearly uses a highly personal story as the frame for the broader political issue of child soldiers. Many journalists and commentators have criticised the over-simplification of the issues involved. Russell's extensive involvement in the film, from the voiceover, references to his family and archive footage is reminiscent of **Michael Moore's** documentary film ***Bowling for Columbine*** which he wrote, produced, directed and starred in. Moore's film offered an investigation into gun culture in America, largely from his personal perspective. Although critically acclaimed, it offered little

in terms of balanced reportage and strongly encoded a preferred reading: that the availability of guns in the US underpinned a culture of violence. Both texts use carefully edited interviews to further their line of argument and help position the audience. In the Kony video Jason Russell appears to 'interview' his son Gavin, asking him a series of questions:

What do I do for a job?
You stop the bad guys from being mean...
Who are the bad guys?
Erm...Star Wars people....
Can I tell you the bad guys name...this is the
guy, Joseph Kony (shows picture).

The scene is carefully constructed to encode a simple preferred reading: that Joseph Kony is the bad guy, and through a simple **binary opposition** this makes Jason Russell the good guy because he is trying to fight him. This reading is **anchored** by the **over-the-shoulder shots and reaction shots of his son Gavin** and the juxtaposition of the now **iconographic** images of Joseph Kony and Jacob Acaye (a victim of the Kony regime). **Journalist John Vidal** offers an interesting reading of the campaign (www.guardian.co.uk) where he suggests that:





Kony 2012 is aimed at children, it is narrated by children, it involves the children of the filmmaker. It is a very persuasive, manipulative film; beautifully made to persuade young children to be on the side of good and join the campaign to bring this dreadful man to justice.

Vidal goes on to discuss the unique approach taken by **Invisible Children** and how this contrasts with the work of other humanitarian organisations such as Oxfam or Amnesty International, highlighting the simplistic nature of the video and its approach to its audience.

Reaching the Audience

In fairness, the **Kony 2012** film is clearly aimed at young people, a group who have not historically aligned themselves with global politics or a humanitarian crisis. YouTube statistics suggest, however, that the early success of the campaign was driven by its **popularity with young females aged 13-17**. Arguably there are several reasons for this. Firstly, the video is about young people and many teenagers would have identified with the supporters featured in the film and felt horrified by the treatment of the children in Kony's regime. Despite its serious content, the second half of the video has a largely **upbeat mode of address** and the shots of groups of young people uniting on behalf of the charity is accompanied by a **non-diegetic soundtrack of Jay-Z, Flux Pavilion and Mumford and Sons**, all music likely to draw upon the **cultural capital** of 15-24 year olds and further encode a 'youth' appeal.

The role of 'Opinion Leaders'

Perhaps the real masterstroke of the video is the involvement of **'20 culture makers and 12 policy makers'** identified in the film. The policy makers consist largely of US political figures (such as Condoleezza Rice and Bill Clinton), individuals who are able to exert governmental influence to keep the 100 advisors sent to Uganda by President Obama in place. But the

real power of the campaign lies with the 'culture makers' – celebrities who have the power, influence and channels of communication to shift opinion in large numbers. These individuals are referred to as **'opinion leaders'** by theorists **Katz and Lazarsfeld**. **Invisible Children's** list includes powerful global celebrities ranging from **Oprah Winfrey** and **Bono** to **Justin Bieber** and **Rihanna**, and between them they helped the campaign gather momentum. **Oprah Winfrey** tweeted to her **9.7 million followers** about the LRA using the #Kony2012 symbol, contributing to the **5 million tweets** the campaign attracted in the first week of broadcast. Perhaps more importantly for the young target audience, **Justin Bieber** tweeted **#STOPKONY to his 18.3 million Twitter fans** prompting an explosion of interest in the video and making **#STOPKONY a global trending topic**.

Part of the **Kony 2012** video invited viewers to **'Cover the Night'** on April 20th 2012, suggesting that groups should gather and blanket cities with posters and stickers in an attempt to **'make Kony famous'**. But by then the whole Kony frenzy had started to subside and, despite numerous **Facebook groups**, it failed to translate into any notable action. Rather, what followed were questions and criticisms, directed at both **Invisible Children** as a charity and Jason Russell as its spokesperson. Numerous stories emerged in the press about how the global fame Jason Russell was experiencing had affected him psychologically which ultimately resulted in him being hospitalised.

Where Next?

Despite the measured response to **Invisible Children's** pleas to 'cover the night', the **Kony 2012** campaign can be judged as a historic moment in terms of online campaigning. Before 5th March 2012 very few people had heard of Joseph Kony or the LRA, knew little of the atrocities he had committed, or that he was wanted by the International Criminal Court for war crimes. Joseph Kony is now a household name and the fight to bring Kony to justice continues. In August 2012 the BBC's **Panorama** ran a programme entitled **Kony: Hunt for the World's Most Wanted**, and attempted to answer many of the questions that critics of the **Invisible Children** film had posed. The documentary featured rare footage of Kony being interviewed in 2006, stating:

I am a freedom fighter who is fighting for freedom in Uganda, but I am not a terrorist.

Kony goes on to deny murdering civilians or abducting children but Ugandan Government Minister, Betty Bigombe



suggests that a psychological profile identified him as:

a psychopath with multiple personality disorder.

The programme outlines the issues of government corruption and lack of resources which have all hindered the hunt to capture Kony and the LRA, whose membership is now estimated to be in the region of 450 people. *Panorama* uses extracts from the *Kony 2012* film and clearly acknowledges how it started a **global protest movement** against Joseph Kony and gave **a renewed sense of momentum to his capture**, something that few would criticise.

But what lessons can be learned from the *Kony 2012* viral? Despite the criticisms, I think that the legacy of *Kony 2012* will be one of **showing the power of harnessing social media and celebrity to raise awareness** and capture the imagination of the audience.

Politicians, charities and other social institutions are now using social media in a way that commercial organisations have been doing for years. **President Obama** has an **official YouTube page** where his videos have now been viewed more than **200 million times** (his appearance on *The Ellen DeGeneres Show* is the most popular). On the site, the Obama administration is also keen to highlight his celebrity supporters. One of the short films, *The Road We've Traveled*, is narrated by **Tom Hanks** and directed by **Oscar winner David Guggenheim**. On the channel you will also find the TV advert *That Guy*, which features **Sarah Jessica Parker** offering viewers a chance to go to dinner at her house, alongside President Obama and Michelle:

but you have to go to www.joinobama.com for the chance to win.

Here in the UK, **David Cameron** has over **2 million followers on Twitter** and also an official **Number 10 YouTube channel**. The recent introduction of **e-petitions** means that people now have the power to set the agenda for what is debated in parliament. A petition needs to receive over 100,000 online signatures to be presented in parliament. Increasingly we are seeing people use their online 'voice', to form social groups with the aim of promoting political or social change. As we enter the era of 'personality politics' it seems ironic that it is internet technology offering a human face to campaigning, and the current trend for utilising social media shows little sign of abating.

Follow it up:

Kony 2012: John Vidal's analysis

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/video/2012/mar/08/kony-2012-video>

Kony 2012 review – Peter Bradshaw

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2012/mar/08/kony-2012-review>

Kony 2012: What's the real story?

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/reality-check-with-polly-curtis/2012/mar/08/kony-2012-what-s-the-story>

After Kony, could a viral video change the world?

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/mar/10/kony-viral-video-change-world?intcmp=239>

Kony 2012: the story behind the video which went viral

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/17478654>

Unicef factsheet about child soldiers

<http://www.unicef.org/emerg/files/childsoldiers.pdf>

Statistics relating to YouTube

http://www.youtube.com/t/press_statistics

Barack Obama's official YouTube channel with links to 'That Guy' and 'The Road We've Traveled'

http://www.youtube.com/user/barackobamadotcom?feature=results_main

Panorama

Kony: Hunt for the World's Most Wanted – broadcast BBC1 20/8/2012

Carly Sandy is a Media teacher at Wanstead High School.



The legacy of *Kony 2012* will be one of harnessing the power of social media and the currency of celebrity to raise awareness and capture the imagination of the audience.

BLACK MIRROR

The Reflection in the Screen





Issues of Media Technology in Black Mirror

In an issue devoted to 'issues' which may often seem abstract and theoretical, it's great to find a TV drama series that offers a 'big picture' overview of an issue at the heart of all Media Studies specifications: the debates around the impact of media in an online age. If you missed it first time around, Charlie Brooker's brilliant trilogy (available on 4oD and now on DVD) tackles a range of topics key to the A2 exams: the surveillance society, the power of social media, privacy, regulation, the meaning of celebrity, and much more. **James Middleditch** gives you a guided tour to a hugely entertaining but highly thought-provoking resource.

New Dystopias

Over the past century, dystopian novels have warned us of the dangers of the present by projecting them into frightening futures in the hope of averting their creation. **George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four** and **Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale** are two prime examples, both of which are made more terrifying by the rooting of their imaginary worlds closely in the reality of the day; so too, more recently, with **Suzanne Collins' Hunger Games** trilogy. This is the technique used by **Charlie Brooker** in his 2011 trilogy, **Black Mirror**. Each of the fifty-minute dramas, broadcast on Channel 4, feature familiar aspects of technology which are extrapolated to create their darkest possible outcomes. They show us the issues we face, forcing us to confront anxieties about our increasing dependence on technologies that we often don't have time to explore as we are, ironically, too immersed in them.

More than many such dramas, it is impossible to imagine them having been written even as recently as five years ago, before Twitter, Facebook and smartphones became an everyday presence in our lives. **Channel 4's Shane Allen** describes the series as a

look at where society and individuals could be headed, given the all-pervasive deluge of social media and technology.

So, what are these potential futures as presented in the series? What are the issues





The treasured concept of democracy itself is challenged, with a brave question: how much power should the people really have?

the stories warn us about, and how does the series present them in a narrative and textual way? What exactly is *The Black Mirror*, and what do we see when we look into it?

Episode 1 – The National Anthem

The first episode, broadcast 4th December 2011, written by Brooker himself, shocked audiences with its central premise: a Kate Middleton-esque princess is kidnapped, and will be killed unless the Prime Minister commits a sex act with a pig on live television. This bizarre narrative hides the true darkness of the story. Unable to prevent the story leaking out via YouTube, Twitter and Facebook, the Prime Minister's actions are determined by a constantly updated opinion poll and eventually viewed by a hungry public who gather to watch the horrific outcome.

It is easy to identify the recent events that have influenced Brooker and that are reflected in his dark mirror. **The threat to secrecy posed by Twitter** had been acknowledged earlier in the year when a particular footballer was named as taking out an injunction to prevent details of an extra-marital affair reaching the public. In ***The National Anthem***, despite a media black-out 'D-notice' being issued, the ransom demand video is said to have been 'downloaded, duplicated and spread'; this is plague imagery with a technological twist, playing on current fears of young people releasing sexualised images of themselves which become uncontrollably distributed. Even since the series was broadcast, these issues have been seen to unfold almost as Brooker predicted – for example, the controversy over compromising photographs of Prince Harry leaking onto the internet and printed in *The Sun*, which claimed that everyone had already seen

them anyway.

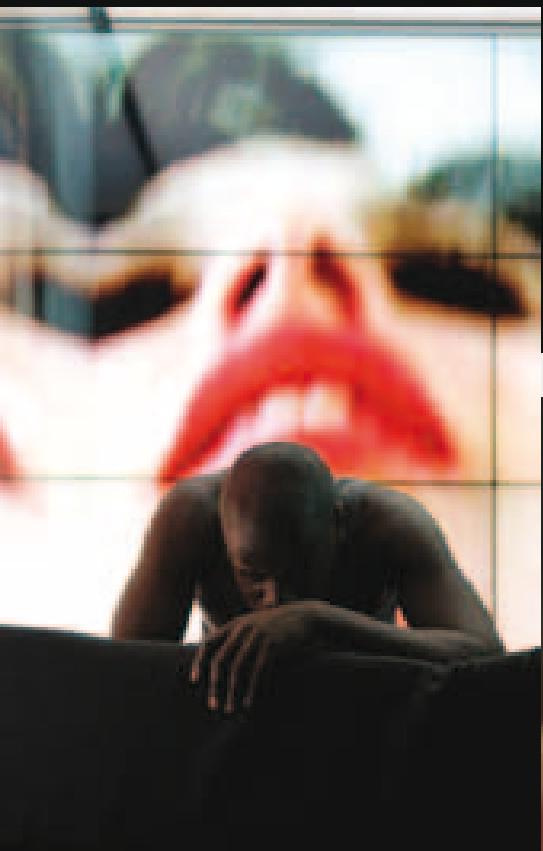
Our craving for 24-hour news, public opinion and live coverage of significant events is also taken to a frightening conclusion. News providers have recently acknowledged the integration of social networking and public involvement in their reporting, particularly since the riots of August 2011. *The Guardian's* impressive promotional video depicting an '**open journalism**' approach to the story of the ***Three Little Pigs*** is a celebration of the increased democratisation of the news; ***Black Mirror*** is its dark reflection. The ability of the public to determine the fate of individuals, evolved over the last decade to include voting on ***Big Brother*** and ***The X Factor***, is here used to force the Prime Minister into the unthinkable act. The treasured concept of democracy itself is challenged, with a brave question: how much power should the people really have?

Perhaps most chilling of all of the dystopian elements in this text is the construction of a 'mass', suggesting that we are more of a collective than a set of individuals, guided by a common urge. This potential step of our evolution, seen to have accelerated through social networking and mass media, is here shown to be eerie and potentially monstrous. The lone Prime Minister is often contrasted with shots containing many people, moving or standing together as one organic mass, enhanced particularly by the use of very slow motion shots used while crowds watch the 'spectacle'. Sound bridges of rolling news coverage are used to meld edits across diverse locations, while one character describes 'the online hive mind', suggesting that we are without individual will, and that technology and media instead bind us together and exaggerate our worst subconscious instincts.



LACK

BLACK MIRR



These judges become mouthpieces and chief abusers for the huge audience, reflecting *The X Factor's* move from closed auditions to stadium ones, arguably heightening the level of humiliation and shared mockery of contestants.



Episode 2 – 15 Million Merits

Written by Brooker and his wife **Konnie Huq** and broadcast on 11th December 2011, the second episode is the most traditionally dystopian of the trilogy. In Episode 1, all the technology put to dark use is already available; **15 Million Merits** shows us an advancement on our current technology, and the way it could be used to enslave us, if (metaphorically) it hasn't already.

The technology is clearly inspired by **Apple's iPod** and **iPad designs**, with smooth surfaces and minimal controls, while the characters use tapping and swiping actions inspired by **Wiis and touchscreens** to operate the systems. The development comes in the all-encompassing nature of these technologies; young people now live alone in rooms in which the walls and ceilings are screens, surrounding them entirely and bombarding them with constant media streams. **'Pop-ups'**, which have plagued internet users for years, are taken to their extreme, as the central character Bing is assaulted by **sexualised imagery**, which he has to pay to avoid. These characters live in a terrifying and literally cyclical world; they must ride bikes all day in order to power the screens that imprison them. The spinning wheel of their bikes echoes both the spinning of a DVD and the rotation of icons on computer screens as they process, buffer and stream.

The other issue presented by **15 Million Merits** is that of **television talent shows**,

and the episode satirises *The X Factor* in particular through textual parallelism in the set design, characters and scenarios as two characters attempt the only escape from the bikes – to impress three media mogul judges and win 'celebrity status' via the show. These judges become mouthpieces and chief abusers for the huge audience, reflecting *The X Factor's* move from closed auditions to stadium ones, arguably **heightening the level of humiliation and shared mockery of contestants**. In this version of the future, the audience is made of electronic avatars, or 'doppels'; people sit alone in their screen-lined cells, and are projected into a **virtual audience**, perhaps reflecting the mediated experience we ourselves feel watching these 'live' contests from our living rooms. Intriguingly, any sense of genuine emotion revealed in the body language of the human actors is translated into generic, stylised, homogenous movements on their computer-generated avatars, echoing our reliance on '**emoticons**' as simplified symbols for our own complex emotions when texting or instant messaging. Episode one's depiction of a '**group mentality**' is extended in this audience, and one of the judges asks, 'Who do you think is powering that spotlight?', making us question our own collective involvement in the potential travesties that occur as part of these types of programmes. Bing's cathartic speech to the judges ends with the collective damnation:

Fuck you for me, for us, for everyone!



Having identified the darkest element of the first episode, something similar can be found in the climax of Episode 2: **the absorption of rebellion into the system itself**. Bing's rebellious speech is not stopped, but becomes the very thing he hates – a source of viewers for the all-powerful media companies, as one of the judges offers him 'a slot on one of my streams'. We never discover whether his 'slot' fosters the rebellion we hope for, or whether he now simply contributes to the very system he opposes, thus making this media-obsessed regime unstoppable.

Episode 3 – The Entire History of You

The third episode, written by Jesse Armstrong and broadcast on 18th December 2011, blends the familiarity of the first episode with the extrapolated

born from the **dominant paranoias** of the turn of the decade. The wider, personal implication is the **abolition of lies**, creating a world in which honesty is enforced, and the untruths and avoidances we use to function in harmony are stripped away.

Again, the technology is presented textually as having evolved from the circular controls of an iPod; the small control used to re-watch and project memories is operated with a similar spinning motion of the fingers, and is obsessed over by the central character Liam, who even uses it during intimate moments with his wife, symbolising **the invasion of technology into our most private spaces**.

Another significant inspiration for this technology is **Facebook's 'Timeline'** development, and this name is used for the records kept in the 'grain'. In an interview for the series' DVD, Brooker names this



technology of the second. The scale is domestic, focusing on a central relationship between two people, with the twist that in this world, we can all record everything we see on a hard-drive implanted in our heads, for constant and total recall. Uses of this new form of recall, in which fallible human memory is replaced by the precision of digital, computer storage, include **airport security** and the **checking of babysitters** at the end of the night. These are clearly

evolution of Facebook as fuel for the story: it taps in to current fears that the social network is now acting as an indelible record of our lives, relationships, beliefs and mistakes. The implications of this on privacy are explored in an emotional way, and the constant recordings and re-watchings provoke jealousy, paranoia and self-destruction. Time itself is fractured: characters can observe the past precisely. This is cleverly indicated by the lighting

and colour schemes of the main character's grey, broken present, and his gold-tinted, nostalgic past, which are edited together otherwise seamlessly. Ironically, many viewers will have watched this episode using the hard-drives in their digiboxes, making the leap between hours of television stored for viewing and hours of memory stored for re-viewing seem much smaller, and giving credence to Brooker's comment that this is 'the way we might be living in 10 minutes' time if we're clumsy.'

Who's in the Mirror?

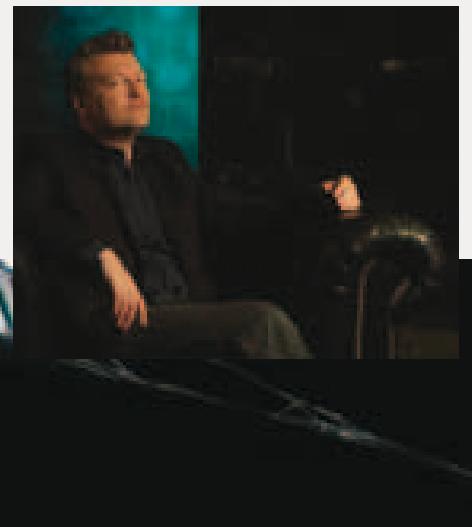
Appropriately, like a shattered piece of glass, the pieces of **Black Mirror** come together to form one unifying issue. We have seen how myriad fears over technology, social media, celebrity culture and privacy have spawned the dystopian worlds of the three episodes. The tales are intentionally different in style, tone and direction, and yet something binds them, which is the identity of the black mirror itself.

Brooker explains that the mirror is: **the one you'll find on every wall, on every desk, in the palm of every hand: the cold, shiny screen of a TV, a monitor, a smartphone.**

But the reflection in this mirror is even more frightening. When you next watch **Black Mirror**, look out for yourself, reflected in the screen, melting into the crowd while watching the Prime Minister paying his gruesome ransom, or joining the judges on the panel of the ultimate talent show, or as a figure recorded forever in someone else's memory. The screen is only the medium; the real issue, which determines what we see on that screen, is us.

James Middleditch teaches Media at Havant College in Hampshire.

The Black Mirror trilogy can be watched on 4oD and is available from Amazon from £7.82.





We're All in this Together

Structured Reality TV and Social Class

Steph Hendry explores the social, economic and historical contexts of the representations of class in structured reality TV shows, and wonders whether their entertainment values are distracting us from the realities of class inequality today.

British identity has long been built on a clear and easily defined class structure. Class is a political and economic issue that is central to media institutions and texts. Audiences are often perceived in class terms and representations of class play on long-held stereotypes and prejudices. Socially, issues around equality and social mobility have been brought into focus recently: unemployment figures have risen, the gap between the top 1% of earners and the 99% below them is getting larger, while rises in the costs of access to education and healthcare are impacting most on the poorer in society.

We live in an unequal society:
■ the majority of ministers in the British



Government are millionaires and most were educated at private schools (*The Guardian Data Blog*)

- 60% of acts in the music charts, 70% of barristers and 54% of top journalists are also identified as being privately educated (*The Observer/The Guardian*)
- only 7% of the population attend private school (*BBC*).

This could go some way to explaining the context of groups such as UK Uncut and Occupy (amongst others) who have made headlines protesting against social and financial inequality. Culturally, class seems to be less important to us in times of financial 'boom'. Since 2008 and the financial crisis it has become a major talking point again.

A Potted History of Class in the UK

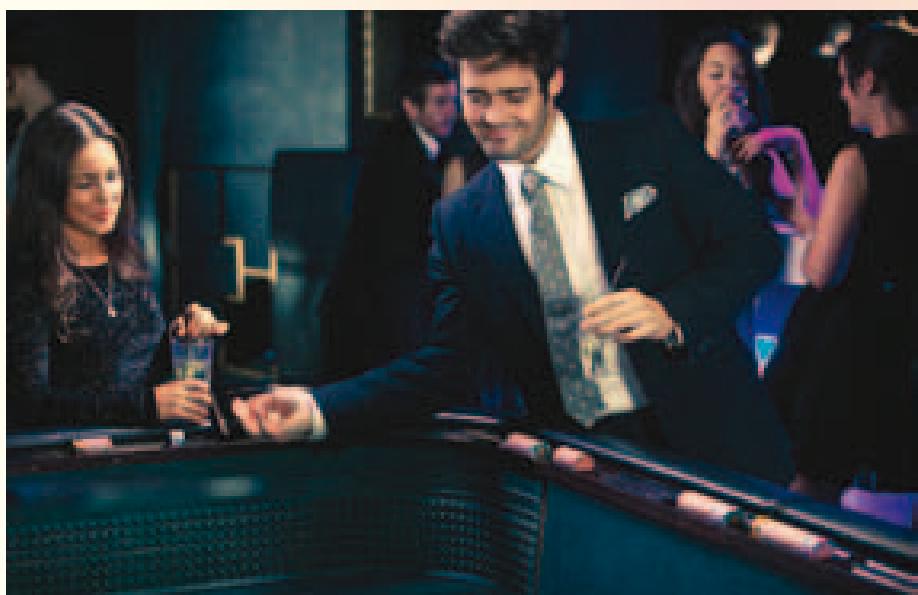
Conventionally we think of class as being a three-part division in society: the upper, lower and middle classes (see the image from *Monty Python* on page 21). The history of this division is more complex than it may first appear.

Before industrialisation, the aristocracy was the land owning class that provided jobs, homes and food for the 'peasant' class below. Things became slightly more complicated as merchants began to make money from trade and industry and a 'middle class' emerged. The middle class

made their own money and employed 'working class' people in their shops and factories. Marx would call this middle group **the bourgeois**. They are not the 'middle class' that we would recognise today, but a capitalist class who owned the 'means of production' and made profit from the labour of others. Above them remained the landed gentry whilst below them were those who had little education or money and who could only survive by selling their labour and their time.

In the twentieth century, all classes went through dramatic changes. After World War 2, social changes meant that more working-class people were able to 'move up' socially.

It is harder now for people to climb the social ladder than fifty years ago and our social mobility is amongst the 'lowest... in the developed world'.



Working-class people became healthier as a National Health Service was provided and they were educated to a higher standard by having access to free grammar schools. Some benefited from a university education – something that would once have been restricted to the upper classes. Working-class people found they could consider buying their own homes, they were able to borrow money to open businesses and generally enjoy a lifestyle far beyond anything that could have been imagined by previous generations from this background. These changes occurred slowly and there were many complex reasons for the restructuring of class including the dominance of a post-war idea that Britain should be a free and equal society where everyone, regardless of their social

Britain had many manufacturing industries which employed millions of working-class people. By the end of the decade, industries and factories had closed down leaving many people unemployed and a new service industry was being created. Service industry jobs include the restaurant and food industries, retail and administrative white-collar jobs – which demand different skills to the heavy labour often required in factories.

In 1987, the then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher famously claimed, 'There is no such thing as society'. Yet in 1990, her successor Conservative PM John Major declared the UK to be a 'classless' society; and later that decade the New Labour PM Tony Blair declared an intent to create a meritocratic society with people rewarded

mobility-data-charts#) amongst others, it is harder now for people to climb the social ladder than fifty years ago, and our social mobility is amongst the 'lowest... in the developed world'. Cuts in social spending, the increasing cost of higher education and youth unemployment have been identified as having a disproportional impact on those in lower and middle social spheres. In August 2011 riots in London, Manchester, Liverpool and other British cities highlighted the disenfranchisement felt by many who perceive themselves to be at the bottom of the social pile. Austerity policies put in place after the banking crisis in 2008 and as a response to the global economic crisis, mean that Major's idea of a classless society seems further away now than perhaps it did twenty years ago.



background, should have the opportunity to get on in the world. This was a period of unprecedented social mobility as the middle classes grew, becoming a broad class of homeowners, white-collar workers, business owners and professionals. The mid to late twentieth century can be seen as a time of 'embourgoisement' – the expansion of the middle class.

In truth, recent 'embourgoisement' of British society was not just an outcome of liberal social policies but part of the restructuring of society caused by economic decisions in the 1980s. In the late 1970s

for what they could do, rather than who their family is or where they went to school. The latter could be seen as being a little ironic as Tony Blair was the first prime minister since 1964 who was the beneficiary of an elite private school education.

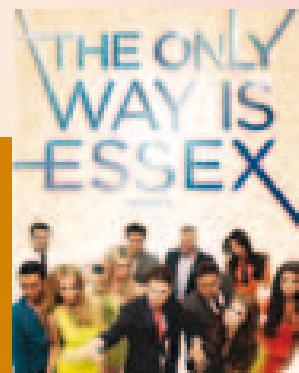
Despite the pronouncements of previous generations, and the observable rise in home ownership and university attendance, Britain currently has serious limitations on social mobility. According to research undertaken by The Kings Fund and the OECD (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2012/may/22/social->

Representations of Class in the Media: Structured Reality

One genre of programme that gives an insight into twenty-first century attitudes to class is structured reality – TV series such as *The Only Way is Essex* (ITV2: 2010-present), *Geordie Shore* (MTV: 2011-present), *Made in Chelsea* (C4: 2011-present) and the short-lived *Desperate Scousewives* (C4:2011). This genre also identifies a connection that is often made between class and regional identity. Each programme is set



Structured reality's primary function is to entertain audiences; but it is possible to see how the worlds they represent act to depoliticise the idea of social class just as class is, once again, becoming a relevant and important political issue in the reality we live in.



in a different region of the UK and focuses on an aspect of Britain's traditional class structure – *MiC* reflects the 'upper class', *Geordie Shore* the 'working class' and *TOWIE* and *Desperate Scousewives* reflect a relatively new version of the middle class (or upper working class?) where, although there is some wealth, the lifestyles reflect aspirations to the 'celebrity class'. This 'class' is the product of the tabloids' increasing focus on WAGs and reality TV stars at the turn of the century.

The North-South Divide

The further North the programmes are set, the more 'working class' the participants are. Geography, of course, does not determine class as all regions have residents who are barely able to make ends meet and others who have huge amounts of wealth and power. Nonetheless, certain stereotypes persist. The North is perceived as being working class and the South upper and/or middle class. These ideas are a remnant from our industrial history when many people in the North were employed in pits and factories and the wealthy in the North were often 'new money' – people who made their fortunes in manufacturing or trade linked to industrialisation. The South was where power was located: the power of the church (Canterbury) and the state and commerce (London). The education of the majority of the upper classes who would run these powerful institutions is located

in the South too with schools such as Eton and Harrow and Oxford and Cambridge Universities producing most of the people who would undertake powerful roles in society.

Of course, the landed gentry owned huge amounts of land in the North and the vast majority of Southerners were poor labourers; but the class divide is still often imagined as a geographical one. Some texts subvert this expectation, for example *EastEnders* (BBC: 1985-present) with its depiction of southern working-class life. But even a 'serious' documentary series that attempted to look at class in a new way like C4's *All in the Best Possible Taste* (2012) made very conventional assumptions; when it looked at working-class culture it visited Sunderland, the middle classes were explored in Tonbridge Wells and the upper class in the Cotswolds. Such choices, like those made by structured reality programmes, reinforce the idea that class is linked to location. However, while structured reality identifies class difference, these programmes also show similarities across the class/wealth divide.

Similarity and Difference in Structured Reality

Regardless of where they come from or how much money they have, the majority of participants in structured reality TV programmes are represented as focusing their energies on hedonistic leisure pursuits;

clubbing, drinking, womanising/man-chasing and generally having fun. Attitudes to work within the genre are interesting. Many of the Chelsea set have jobs gained via nepotism or have trust funds provided by their families (or both). They work in publishing, banking and fashion, often following a family tradition in terms of their chosen professions. Essex participants often have jobs linked in some way to celebrity/leisure culture: Amy Childs is the beauty therapist credited with introducing 'vajazzling' to a mainstream audience. Other participants are owners of lingerie shops and boutiques, or are club promoters and ex-glamour models. In these southern-based programmes there is plenty of money about, and both groups seem to make an art out of working very little but eating out and partying a lot. *Made in Chelsea* represents 'old money' with the participants being the children of industrialists, bankers and millionaires. The programme follows a tradition set by 'celebutantes' such as Paris Hilton, Nicole Ritchie, Peaches Geldof etc. where tabloid and gossip magazine interest is based on the fact that these young people have glamorous lifestyles because they were born into rich and successful families. Several of them have used the publicity provided by the show to launch businesses of their own – notably Chloe Green, the daughter of Top Shop owner Sir Phillip, raised her profile on *Made in Chelsea* before launching her shoe

collection in her father's stores.

Desperate Scousewives followed the Essex template so the 'celebrity lifestyle' was referenced throughout the show. Amongst the cast there was a DJ, a club promoter, a beautician, some models (including a former Miss Liverpool) and a couple of gossip columnists. Storylines were centred around relationships and socialising and each participant reflected a specific fashion-style; teeth were whitened and skin was spray-tanned. Fashion for women was glitzy and glamorous and reflected a style popularised by WAGs such as Colleen Rooney and Abbey Clancey (whose brother Sean appeared in **Desperate Scousewives**). The promotional material for the programme attempted to frame the women as being 'independent'

surface differences, this description could easily apply to any of the programmes in this genre.

Class in these shows is no longer identified with occupational choices and there seems to be little difference in the priorities, interests and activities of the participants. What does differ is the amount of money spent on having fun and there is an implicit difference in the way the audience is encouraged to respond. At the 'lower' end of the scale **Geordie Shore** is the most explicit, showing the working-class participants in various states of emotional disarray usually caused (or at least abetted) by copious amounts of alcohol. While this is often portrayed in a titillating way, the audience are also encouraged to focus on some of the more grotesque aspects of

in Chelsea, the middle in Essex and Liverpool and the lower in Newcastle – share a focus on wanting to look good, attract a partner and have a good time. These programmes reflect an idea that the celebrity class is the new aristocracy and each group lives a lifestyle that gets as close to this as their finances will allow. Whether you are drinking champagne in Cannes or 2-for-1 alco-pops in Magaluf, the lifestyles represented share a number of core ideological values. They all reflect a culture that values looks and glamour (however unnatural) and having as much fun as possible. In August 2012 Prince Harry's 'adventures' in Las Vegas would not have looked out of place in **Geordie Shore**, demonstrating the lack of distinction between the ruling class and 'us' when it comes to enjoying ourselves in today's



who 'work hard to achieve a dream' but the programme undermined this by showing the women's main interests as being their looks and snaring a man: one participant's online profile reads:

I think there's a lot of girls who will relate to me... I'm 30 and single and looking for Mr Right. All I really want in life is to fall in love and have a family.

Geordie Shore is different to the other three programmes in that it involves participants living together in a house provided by the production company. The aim of the programme is not to show the participants' 'real lives' but to create situations that encourage 'binge drinking, promiscuity and arguments' (*The Sun*, February 2012). The participants are given a 'job' to do by 'the boss' but it is a way to get them out of the house during the day and is used for comic effect. The programme shows work as a nuisance – something that has to be done to allow them access to the party lifestyle. **Geordie Shore** is promoted as a programme that 'follows nine 20-somethings in their quest to ensnare unsuspecting members of the opposite sex' (mtv.co.uk) and despite

hedonistic, binge-drinking culture; falling over, vomiting and emotional outbursts are all part of the normality of a night out in **Geordie Shore**. MTV's publicity declares Holly Hagan's personal qualities as being 'hammered', 'fake' and ending nights out with a 'scrap'. The parties in Liverpool and Essex are slightly more refined than in Newcastle. The clubs frequented are more exclusive and their leisure choices bear the trappings of an aspirational 'celebrity night out'. However, it is in Chelsea where these aspirations peak – clubs are exclusive and nights out are fuelled by expensive champagne. Whatever the economic class though, hedonism, fun and partying is presented as an ideal.

Democratisation or De-politicisation?

Perhaps this is the true face of 'embourgeoisement'. We live in a demonstrably unequal society where an individual person's future is more likely to be influenced by their parent's social and financial status than in any other generation since World War 2. But all classes – the upper

culture. The culture of binge drinking has become democratised and this appears to demonstrate how similar all classes have become. When it comes to having fun we can be seen to be 'all in this together'. However, focusing on these particular shared values could mean that the fundamental differences in opportunity experienced by people from different class backgrounds and the growing gap between the rich and the poor are less obvious. Structured reality's primary function is to entertain audiences; but it is possible to see how the worlds they represent act to depoliticise the idea of social class just as class is, once again, becoming a relevant and important political issue in the reality we live in.

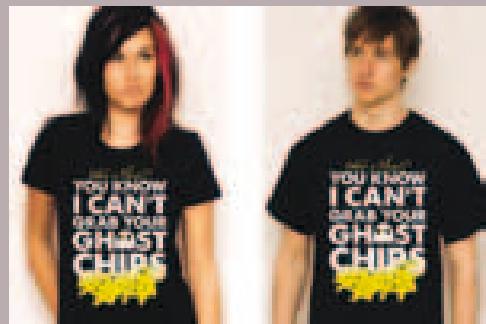
Steph Hendry is a Lecturer in Media Studies at Runshaw College, Lancashire. She is a Senior Examiner, freelance writer and trainer. You can follow her on Twitter @albionmill.

Public service advertising: ghost chips and memes

Public Service Advertisements are messages in the public interest circulated by the media free of charge, which aim to raise awareness, or change public attitudes and behaviour towards a social issue. We're surrounded by them daily – health campaigns, safe driving, drug and alcohol education – but how do they work, and how do different media platforms offer the potential to change behaviour with 'hard to reach' audiences? **Sara Mills** investigates from New Zealand.



Images courtesy of The Sweet Shop.



How can you really shock an 18-year-old who has grown up watching the *Saw* franchise movies and spends most of their leisure time trying to kill people in their online gaming world?

How do you persuade someone not to do something in a way that makes them listen? Public Service Advertising (PSA) has a particularly difficult job persuading viewers to change their behaviour – behaviour which viewers adopt, presumably, because they like it. PSAs provide an immediate insight into social contexts, addressing social issues head on, often trying to reach 'difficult' audiences. Drink-driving is a particularly common topic for PSAs. This suggests that drinking and driving is a real social problem in the UK, and one that is costly to the state in terms of police time and medical services. But can adverts really stop people from drink-driving?

Shockvertising

Shockvertising is one common approach, where grisly images of dead bodies and grieving families are meant to shock the viewer into changing his or her behaviour. Psychologist **Jib Fowles** has listed 15 common appeals of advertising: PSAs like the recent UK **Think!** campaign appeal to our '**need for safety**', showing us the terrible, painful things that can happen to us if we drink and drive. But does this work? It's often argued that today's young audience are **desensitised to violence**. How can you really shock an 18-year-old who has grown up watching the *Saw* franchise movies and spends most of their leisure time trying to kill people in their online gaming world?

In addition, such shockvertising might even have the opposite effect. Stuart Hall's theories of audience reception remind us that whatever the makers of any text may have intended, audiences may read the messages in quite unexpected ways. **Psychographics** (psychological profiling used in marketing to determine the target audience by their attitudes and behaviours) suggest that the subset of the youth demographic most likely to drink drive are **anti-authoritarian** and **thrill-seekers** who enjoy behaviours precisely because they

are against the law and carry a high level of **risk**. Having the government tell you not to drink-drive because it's dangerous is only likely to make it more appealing to these groups. So if you're not going to shock viewers into accepting your message, what can you do?

A New Zealand Case Study

New Zealand's Transport Association (NZTA) has scored an unlikely hit with its latest anti-drink-driving advert, aimed at young people, specifically at young Maori, a demographic considered both high-risk and hard to reach. Shockvertising was not an option here; in the social and cultural context of the Maori community, looking at the dead and dying is taboo. The advert had to take a different approach; yet it has had the sort of success other PSAs could only dream of, almost immediately going viral and entering the national consciousness.

The NZTA used a traditional above-the-line campaign with a short advert broadcast on TV, reinforced by billboard posters. Known officially as **Legend**, and unofficially as **Ghost Chips** its narrative is relatively simple: at a party, a young man realises his friend is drunk, and imagines what would happen if he drink-drives and is injured or dies, so he challenges his friend, who agrees not to drive. How did this become NZ's favourite advert, and reach that difficult demographic? First, give it a watch ('Legend' at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dIYvD9DI1ZA>).

So How Does Legend/Ghost Chips Appeal?

According to theorists **Blumler and Katz's Uses and Gratifications theory**, an effective advert should fulfil four needs of the audience; but these needs will vary according to the **social and cultural context of the group being targeted**. Shock tactics often fulfil only one of our needs: the **need for information**; they show us what will happen if we drink-drive.

However, the **Ghost Chips** advert addresses the need for information in a culturally appropriate way. Rather than focusing on the 'body horror' of a road crash, it explores the impact of injury or death on a key aspect of Maori life: **the extended family and social group**. Rather than dwell on the '**need for safety**', the advert focuses on the '**need for affiliation**' as part of a group, and on the '**need for prominence**': honour or prestige ('mana' in Maori) within the social group, providing an example of how to call someone who has more mana than you on their behaviour. The advert also fulfils the other needs effectively: **entertainment and diversion** is created through humour and through story-telling, **personal identity** where the audience can relate to and identify with the people in the advert, and even **personal relationships** where the audience can talk to others about the advert.

Representation is key to fulfilling the personal identity need and this is often the most difficult aspect to get right. An advertising agency, often made up of middle-aged people who have little in common with the target demographic, has to create a representation of teenagers that an audience of teens can believe in and relate to. While of course no representation is ever 'real', the NZ **Ghost Chips** advert works hard to construct representations of '**ordinary life**' for its target audience



of young Maori. The mise-en-scène is not glamorised: the houses, streets and interiors are not beautiful or idealised, with bare light bulbs and tatty furnishings. The minor characters encompass a range of body types and levels of attractiveness: it isn't a *Hollyoaks* world, where everyone could be a part-time model. Having said this, the two main protagonists, who are perhaps the better-looking of the actors in the advert, create an **aspirational element**: these are people the audience might aspire to be, or be friends with. However, the costumes chosen, even for the main actors, are certainly not high fashion. So the advert aims to reflect, if not real life, then a recognisable version of it. The **voiceover** which gives us the internal monologue of the main character further helps us to identify with him and his dilemma.

Entertainment and diversion needs are fulfilled by the humour and by the **narrative structure**: there is an initial **'problem'** (George is too drunk to drive), a series of **complicating actions** (the main character's fears about what will happen if he speaks out, or if George is injured or dies) followed by a neat resolution (when George agrees to 'just crash here').

Personal relationships are created when the text becomes a talking point for the audience, and this certainly happened with *Ghost Chips*. **Going viral** is the advertiser's dream comes true: rather than paying for advertising space and fighting to get noticed, the audience does all the agency's work for them, passing the message along to friends, colleagues, and peer groups, creating the kind of 'buzz' which no amount of money can buy.

This is similar to the **Two-Step Flow theory**, which argues that texts and ideas are taken up by influential people, or opinion leaders, who then pass these on to others. In other words, the

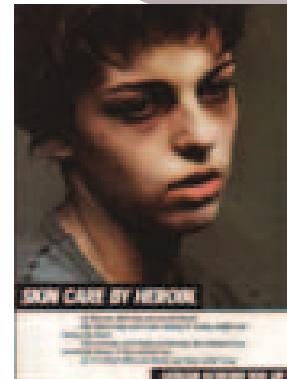
majority of people receive much of their information and are influenced by the media secondhand, through the personal influence of **opinion leaders**. While the reality may be more complex, with all of us acting as opinion leaders within our own peer groups, this kind of **diffused distribution**, made possible by the internet and mobile phones, is certainly effective: we are far more likely to engage with a text recommended to us by a friend or colleague, than one broadcast to any and everyone.

The NZ *Ghost Chips* advert went viral almost immediately. It had a huge number of YouTube hits, becoming the most watched video of the month; phrases from the advert entered the language; and 'ghost chips' were even advertised in Burger King. Watch the following case study for more info: '**NZTA Ghost Chips Awards Video by Clemenger BBDO**' at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O3FXwbY2Za4&feature=player_embedded

Phrases and ideas from the advert could be said to have become '**memes**'. The word was invented by **Richard Dawkins** to explain how, in the same way that **good or useful genes are passed on through natural selection, so good or useful ideas, phrases, thoughts and inventions are passed along through cultures and societies**. Advertisers often seek consciously to create memes (which can also be thought of as trends, fads or even buzzwords) as a form of cheap, internet-based 'mimetic' marketing, although it's often hard to predict what will take off and what will be ignored.

Guerilla Tactics in Romania

It's usually the more unusual, offbeat, advertising techniques that go viral. In Romania, for example, advertising company **Publicis Bucharest** took an



unusual approach to delivering the anti-drink driving message, using **guerrilla advertising techniques**, which, like the guerrilla **warfare techniques** after which they are named, are usually small-scale, but powerful because they are unconventional and unexpected. The agency staged a performance, akin to a flashmob but without the dancing, where a group of genuine professional funeral mourners (old women who sing and perform rites at every funeral) went from nightclub to nightclub mourning the dead and performing the 'departure from life' ritual. See the event here: 'Don't Drink and Drive Your Last Journey' at

<http://www.bestadsontv.com/ad/45240/Dont-Drink-Drive-Your-last-journey>

As well as the immediate impact on those who were likely to drive home under the influence, this event gained huge amounts of free publicity by appearing on the TV news, in the newspapers, and, most importantly, by going viral on YouTube and similar sites.

However, through its quirky humour and characters the audience could relate to, *Ghost Chips* appealed strongly enough to the youth market for them to send it viral. An earlier YouTube hit in NZ was the '**Beached Whale**' series of cartoons which affectionately mocked aspects of the way



Despite all the intentions of the people who produce the text, audiences can read and respond to it in often unexpected, and unwanted ways.

New Zealanders speak: 'Beached whale (original)' at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uYFsBkxK_H0 One oft-repeated phrase from this was 'wanna chip bro?' so the idea of 'I can't grab your ghost chips bro' was a development of this.

Oppositional Readings: Heroin Screws You Up

In addition to how hard it is to predict, or to consciously create a meme, advertisers cannot predict how their messages will be interpreted. Here again, **Stuart Hall's Audience Reception** model reminds us that despite all the intentions of the people who produce the text, audiences can read and respond to it in often unexpected, and unwanted ways.

A classic example of this unexpected reading is the '**Heroin Screws You Up'** campaign by the UK Government in the mid-1980s. Responding to rapid increase in heroin use among teenagers, the agency Yellowhammer developed a campaign to warn teens away from it. Sensibly, they chose to appeal to teens' sense of **vanity**, to their '**need for attention**' (Jib Fowles), to be looked at **positively**. See the original ads by searching for 'Skincare by Heroin' or at: http://drugtrain.net/drugs/heroin/heroin_screws_you_up.html

The ads were remarkably successful in one way, and did indeed become a meme – but not in the way the Government had intended. The advertisers intended to create an unappealing representation of heroin-users, but they were too out of touch with the cultural context to get their representations right. Many of the audience took an oppositional reading of the campaign; they saw the heroin-ravaged teen models on the posters as very attractive – so much so that many of the posters were stolen by teenage girls as pinups for their bedroom walls. The Government had been out of touch with cultural changes in society, unaware of the

effect of post-punk and a growing goth/emo culture that privileged the pale and thin. This look became a meme, known as 'heroin chic' and was prominent on the catwalks over the next few years. Far from making heroin use look unpleasant, the Government was accused of representing it as attractive and appealing to teens who wanted this gaunt, pale look. The Government ads had certainly started a meme, but one that worked in the opposite direction to their intentions. Like any meme, however, once it started, no one could stop it.

Lessons from Ghost Chips

Looking at the **Ghost Chips** advert shows how difficult it can be to create a successful text, especially when it is trying to deliver an **unwelcome message** to a **hard-to-reach audience group**. The advert has to adapt its 'appeals' to the social and cultural context of the intended audience, and it has to satisfy as many of the audience needs as possible, in ways that are again compatible with the social and cultural context. Key to it this is creating representations that are considered by the audience to be 'real' enough to relate to. And finally, if it is lucky, or clever enough, the advert might go viral and even become a meme, so the audience do the rest of its work themselves.

Public Service Advertising for AQA's MEST4

For MEST4, Public Service Advertising can be an interesting topic. Analysing PSAs draws attention to how representations are constructed to appeal to specific audience groups. Comparing PSAs from different countries, or even from different regions of the UK, can highlight the social, cultural, and political contexts which can sometimes be hard to see when looking only at adverts from your own culture.

Making a PSA can also be an interesting challenge. There are many issues to address

from drink and drug use to safe sex, from the benefits of exercise to the risks of junk food, and even safety advice about gap year travel, or the dangers of too much online gaming.

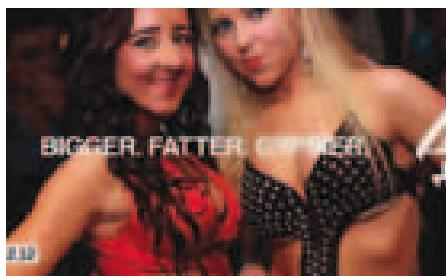
A PSA campaign is likely to involve several media platforms – TV, print and online broadcast – in the campaign. It might involve standard above the line techniques such as mass broadcast adverts on TV and radio, billboards and magazine adverts, or use guerrilla and mimetic advertising techniques.

Think carefully about your strategy: will '**shockvertising**' work for your target audience? Or might a more subtle approach be more effective? How will your audience engage with the text? Are they likely to ignore Government messages, preferring instead to receive advice from peers and friends? Does this mean a **guerrilla campaign, or a mimetic campaign** could be more effective? If you target a narrow social group, will this backfire? Relating the issue to the cultural constructs of the target audience means your campaign is much more likely to be effective; but would the same approach that **Ghost Chips** uses work in the UK? Or would a PSA that features only African-Caribbean or Asian youths, for example, be considered racist and as suggesting that the racial group itself is a problem? It's a complex issue, and although I've been internalising this really complicated situation in my head the answer isn't clear. Whatever you do, your target audience should engage with the text, and, with luck, should respond to your message.

Sara Mills is freelance writer and Media Studies teacher, currently in New Zealand.

An Exploration of the Media's Ongoing Fascination with Gypsies

Gypsies have been flavour of the month for some time. A source of fascination, a new 'otherness'. Audiences are apparently fascinated by both the fictionalised ones with their bare-knuckle prowess, and the 'real' ones with their outrageous weddings. Kate Moss, according to *Grazia* magazine, had a Big Fat Gypsy hen party, thus confirming their legitimate place in current popular culture. What's not to like about loving Pikeys? Teacher **Kerrie Lofthouse** investigates.



For those of us studying the media, the representation of Gypsies and Travellers is becoming increasingly complex and controversial. Only 300,000 Gypsies and Travellers live in Britain. Their representation in the media is disproportionate to the population, and mostly negative. Ideas about gender and racial stereotypes, institutional power, profit and ideology are all present in the texts I'll be analysing in this article. Media fascination with Gypsies also reveals something important about us, the UK audience, and our attitude to alternative cultures. Gypsies are a rich topic for a case study for **AQA A2 Media Studies Section B: Representation** but also useful for **OCR's A2 topic on Media and Collective Identity**.

Choosing Texts for Independent Study: Further Research

My three texts for this article are *Snatch* (2001, Guy Ritchie), *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* Series 5 (2012, Channel 4) and *The Traveller Times Online*. They cover different forms (TV, cinema and online), and have different audiences and producers. They also span over a decade, useful when

GYPSIES, TRAUMPS AND THIEVES?





considering how representations change over time. Ideally you should find your own texts for independent study; for example you could explore Cher Lloyd's traveller heritage revealed during *The X Factor*, available on the internet; Romany music videos uploaded on YouTube; news reports of the Dale House Lane eviction from BBC, Sky and Channel 4; spin-off series *Thelma's Traveller Girls* on Channel 4; the lyrics to Cher's 1980's song 'Gypsies, Tramps and Thieves', or newspaper articles about

The underlying ideological messages about Gypsies in *Snatch* are deeply negative, putting us, the audience, and the producers, in a superior position via camera angles, sound, editing and narrative.

Travellers in local papers or the *Daily Mail*. You should also research the myths and facts about Gypsies and Travellers. Mid-Bedfordshire County Council Website is useful, and is typical of information found on council websites who have a traveller community. *The Traveller Times Online* website has an excellent information pack for researching the history of the Romany people.

Establishing the Common Stereotype

Before Channel 4's *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding*, the representation of Gypsies in the media was predominantly male. *Snatch*, 2001, directed by Guy Ritchie is a highly comic and entertaining narrative based on the binary oppositions of race and culture, featuring very few women. 'We', the audience, are aligned with the white British East End protagonists. Other races and

cultures are represented as what Richard Dyer termed 'other' in his book *White*.

By closely analysing the sequence where Tommy (Stephen Graham) first meets One Punch Mickey (Brad Pitt) we can identify all the stereotypical characteristics usually associated with Gypsies in the media. Tommy and George visit a Gypsy camp to buy a caravan. Already, we (the audience) are aligned with Tommy and George ideologically.

We travel in the van with them, several point-of-view shots confirming a shared vision between 'us' (Tommy, George, the audience) and 'them' (the Gypsies outside the van).

Later in the sequence, George struggles to attach the purchased caravan to his car, as the gang of male Gypsies huddle together, watching (sub-text: *Gypsies help only each other*).

Later, the van breaks down (subtext: *Gypsies aren't to be trusted*).

A young boy demands a pound from Tommy (subtext: *all Gypsies are money grabbing*).

Panning past this, the mise-en-scène reveals piles of rubbish, dogs running free, an open fire in an old wheelbarrow (subtext: *Gypsy camps are squalid*) until the camera focuses on One Punch Mickey pulling up his trousers after squatting next to a caravan, to go to the toilet (subtext: *Gypsies behave like animals*).

The voice over states:

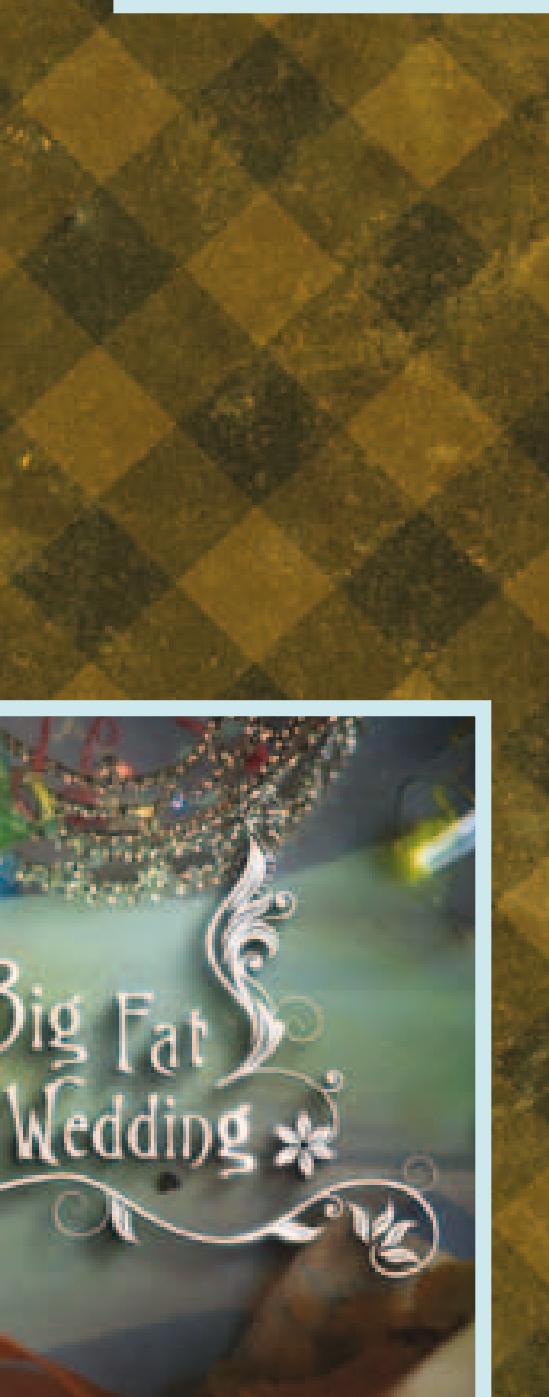
now...there is a problem with Pikeys or gypsies...you can't really understand what they are saying. It's not Irish...It's not English...it's just Pikey

and the joke about One Punch Mickey's incomprehensibility begins (subtext: *all Gypsies are uneducated and stupid*).

Later in the sequence, Mickey's Mum who is the only female, appears briefly to shout, and then is huddled back into her caravan. Later, we are told she's been killed in the caravan fire (subtext: *gypsy women exist only in domestic settings, or are absent*).

Media Stereotypes and 'Truth'

One might make the perfectly reasonable point that this film sequence is...erm... reasonable, actually. Many Gypsies *do* live in caravans. Many Gypsies *are* Irish. Many Gypsies *do* exclude outsiders. And this





is a comedy, so it is all exaggerated for laughs. Yet this is, of course, also an open and shut case of the media using a series of stereotypes. The dress and behaviour of a few characters within this film act as a short cut to represent the characteristics of a whole cultural group for entertainment purposes. But the underlying ideological messages about Gypsies in *Snatch* are deeply negative, putting us, the audience (and the producers), in a superior position via camera angles, sound, editing and narrative.

Theorist Tessa Perkins argued that stereotypical ideas are held about people who we don't actually know, and therefore it is useful to ask ourselves how many Gypsies we have actually ever met. Probably none, as their communities are traditionally very closed. So our perception of 'true' Gypsies is formed via the media, which is highly constructed and always mediated through the producer's point of view. If their agenda is simply to create entertainment, as with *Snatch*, then the comic stereotype is highly successful for the audience. But it is also reinforcing negative messages about a group who seldom get to represent themselves in the media – more of which later.

Channel 4 – Remit, Profits and Audiences

Moving forward eleven years to the popular Channel 4's *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* Series 5, which peaked with viewing figures of 6.4 million (February–March 2012) and not very much has changed about the representation of male Gypsies. However, females are now featured heavily, appealing to the Channel 4 mixed gender audience. Picking an episode – the opening 20-second title sequence called 'I Fought the Law' (broadcast 21.01.12) available on the Channel 4 website – and it all feels very similar to the male stereotypes in *Snatch*, as drunken, violent, law-breaking, Irish men race horse carts illegally. But there

are also women in abundance, and the representation focuses strongly on their bodies and their dress: little girls, gyrating in their hot pants, and teenage girls in tiny tight dresses. **Laura Mulvey's theory of the male gaze** could well be applied here: the camera encourages us to appraise Gypsy women in a sexualised way, using low angles, close-ups and zooms. Coupled with the jaunty Irish folk music, and the fast-paced editing, the opening twenty seconds are highly entertaining, promising drama, violence and sex – aggressively constructed to retain audiences who are increasingly fickle in the digital age.

My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding is highly lucrative for Channel 4; along with the advertising revenue it generates, there are books and spin-off series including a Christmas special. Channel 4's remit to 'represent the under-represented' is (at least technically) fulfilled with this documentary series about the closed community of Gypsies; but there is also profit generated from the programme and it has become increasingly outrageous, more exploitative and less balanced in its construction, as audiences and interest in the series have grown. The programme might appear to be a documentary in terms of form – a voiceover, hand-held camera, talking head interviews – but the voiceover aligns 'us' against 'them', while the editing constructs a highly selective point of view. There is little sense of 'balance'. For example, we don't see any Gypsies who have stayed in education, who have careers or who live in houses. The inclusion of criminal Travellers, or the most extreme examples of drunken weddings are selected for their drama and entertainment value. Both *Snatch* and *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* reinforce the stereotype of Gypsies as dirty, criminal and deviant, and construct a comparison with 'us' (the audience) as normal.

Both these texts seem to be an expression of 'our' beliefs and values as those dominant in society. The dominant view in our society

is that the travelling way of life is wrong, that these people should conform to 'our' way of life – education, living in houses and paying taxes.

It could be argued that *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* allows us to disapprove of a way of life we find threatening, and to ridicule a very small proportion of the population which has little or no control over their own representation in the media. In an age where immigration is a huge issue – in a survey in *The Guardian* on Saturday 11th August 2012, 68% of respondents felt concerned about the issue – perhaps *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* gives us permission to vent a collective anger and fear about 'our' British culture being under threat?

Racism and My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding

In February 2012, Channel 4 invested heavily in a billboard campaign across the UK to advertise Series 5 of *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding*. It featured a male traveller holding a horse, with the strap line 'Bigger. Fatter. Gypsier'. Three hundred and seventy complaints to the Advertising Standards Authority prompted an investigation, which was not upheld. But the case has now been referred for Independent Review after a further nine complaints from individuals who refused to accept the initial ruling, and who have branded the billboards as outrageously racist. In a letter to Channel 4 the London Gypsy and Traveller Unit asked:

We wonder if Channel 4 would have been so ready to use adverts with similarly compromising phrases for other ethnic groups. Jewisher? More Asian or blacker?

Channel 4 refutes the racism claim, saying the billboards and the series itself celebrate the Gypsy community. But what does Channel 4 mean by promising the series will be 'Gypsier'? Do they mean more outrageous? More to laugh at? More to disapprove of? The billboards offer another text for students to analyse, and we await the final ASA ruling with interest.

In early September 2012, Channel 4 announced that it was cancelling the *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* strand. Channel 4 Boss Jay Hunt said

We have quite naturally got to a point where we are thinking differently about the franchise. There will be more Gypsy Weddings next year; we are doing six specials, but not another series. Entirely for creative reasons, it's important to know when to draw the line and I think we're close to drawing it.

It is impossible to say how far the recent furore around the representation of Gypsies in the *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* series, has contributed to this decision. With six 'stand-alone' episodes planned, Channel 4 does not seem to be moving away from the

subject itself, but perhaps is moving away from the *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* format. Perhaps the recent controversies might have made it a less appealing strand for advertisers, and too high risk for Channel 4 to be associated with, particularly after the Shilpa Shetty/Jade Goody racism row?

The Internet – Democratisation of the Media?

It is hard to find an alternative representation of Gypsies and Travellers in the mainstream broadcast media, which generally hold the dominant ideological view of Gypsies and Travellers as deviant or comic. On the internet, hidden away, it is possible.

This is the website **Travellers Times Online**, which brings you the latest news, pictures, video, opinion and resources from within the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

<http://travellerstimes.remoteneutralmedia.co.uk/home.aspx?c=10c06632-20d5-481a-a5e7-125c683e7319>

The site was developed by the Rural Media Company and funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (now known as DfE), and launched on International Roma Day – 8th April 2009. The website's users are the Gypsy and Traveller communities, but for our purposes as media analysts, it offers an example of the democratisation of the media, where a small group is offered the opportunity to represent itself. The website came to the national media's attention when it published an open letter to Channel 4 criticising *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding*, written by a 16-year-old Gypsy called Pip. *The Guardian* and *The Independent* ran the story, which demonstrates the power of small niche websites in allowing self-representation to challenge mainstream media.

In the letter, Pip challenges every aspect of *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding*. For example Irish Travellers make up only 10% of the Traveller community, yet the series suggests they are the dominant group. The programme ignores the Romany Gypsy population, who originate from India. He accuses Channel 4 of confusing two distinct ethnic groups, by using the term 'Gypsy' in a programme predominantly about Irish Travellers. He ridicules the inclusion of dressmaker Thelma Madine, who he says is not known to any Traveller beyond the series, and refutes the practice of 'grabbing'. He also discusses his own place at college studying history and sociology, and how his sister went to university and is now a social worker. Pip's letter is what audience theorist David Morley would term an oppositional

The editing constructs a highly selective point of view, and there is little sense of 'balance'.

reading of the Channel 4 series. He totally rejects the preferred reading of the series, which the producers claim they intended to be factual, entertaining and educational. Instead Pip says it is offensive and legitimises racism. His alternative reading of the text is a powerful one.

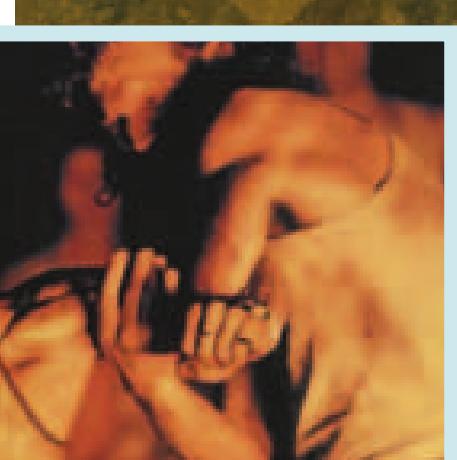
The media's fascination with Gypsies and Travellers continues, so as media analysts we have a rich example of representation evolving. I believe a negative representation is better than no representation at all and that new media offers the under-represented a chance to gain some power in the media landscape. Maybe Pip will get his own series soon!

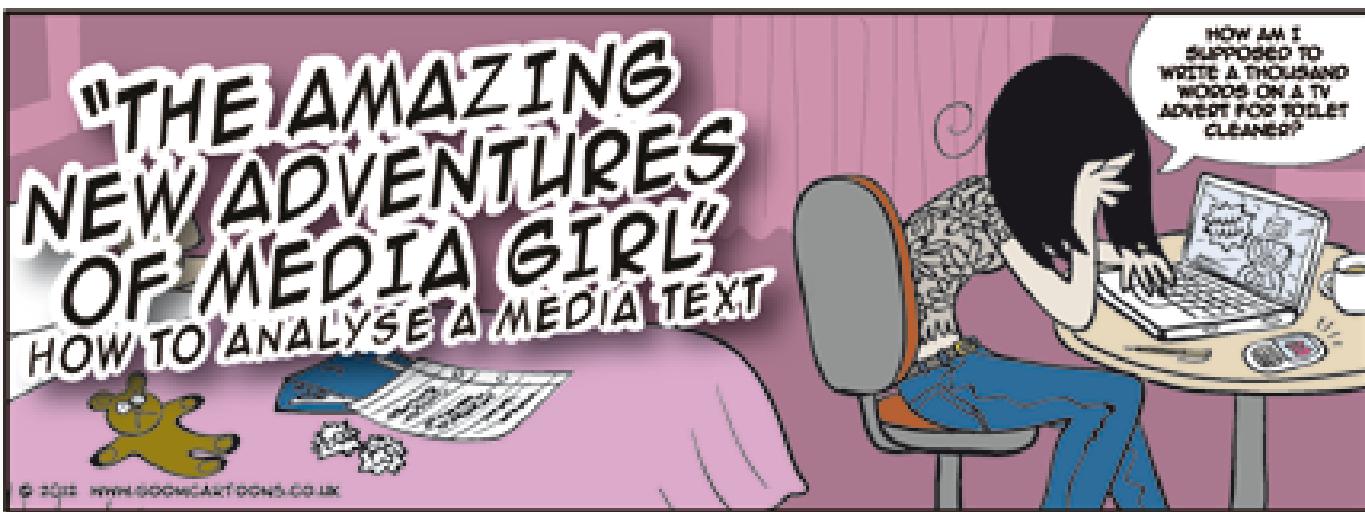
Read Pip's letter in full on his blog at <http://pipopotamus.blogspot.co.uk/2012/02/open-letter-to-channel-4.html>
Kerrie Lofthouse teaches Film Studies and Media Studies at Saint Brendan's Sixth Form College in Bristol.

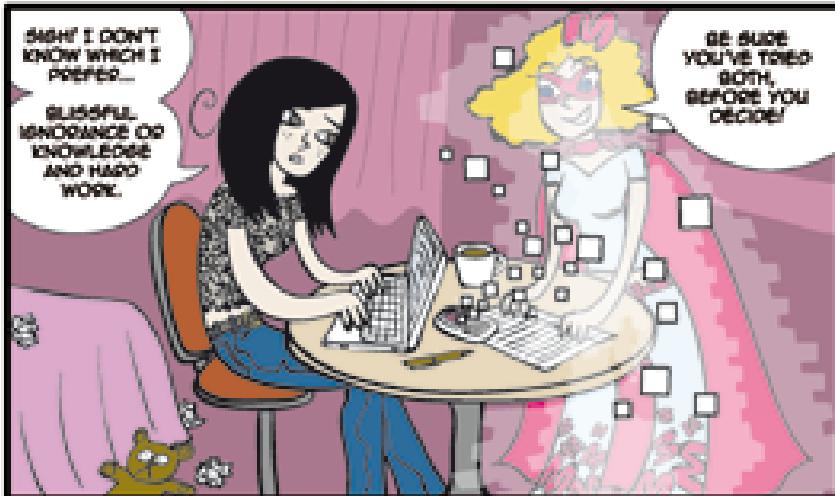
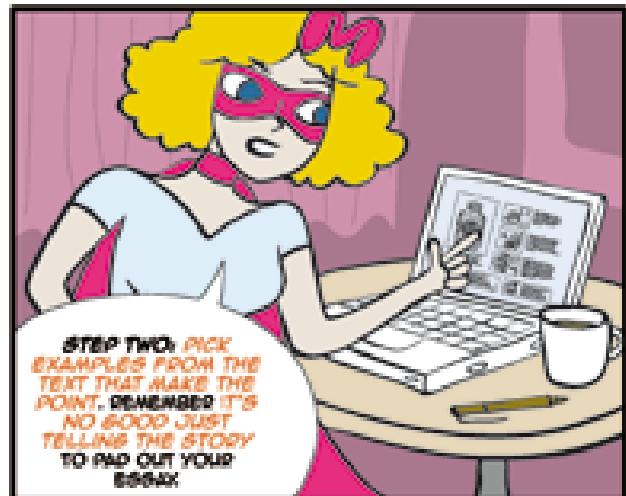
Follow it up:

Preparing for OCR's A2 topic on Media Regulation?

Here's the fallout from the most recent poster campaign for *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding*: From **Campaign Magazine** and **The Daily Mail**, respectively.
<http://www.campaignlive.co.uk/news/1152922/channel-4-gypsier-ads-banned/>
<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2212082/Channel-4-slammed-Big-Fat-Gypsy-Wedding-poster-showing-heavily-girl-15-wearing-bra.html>

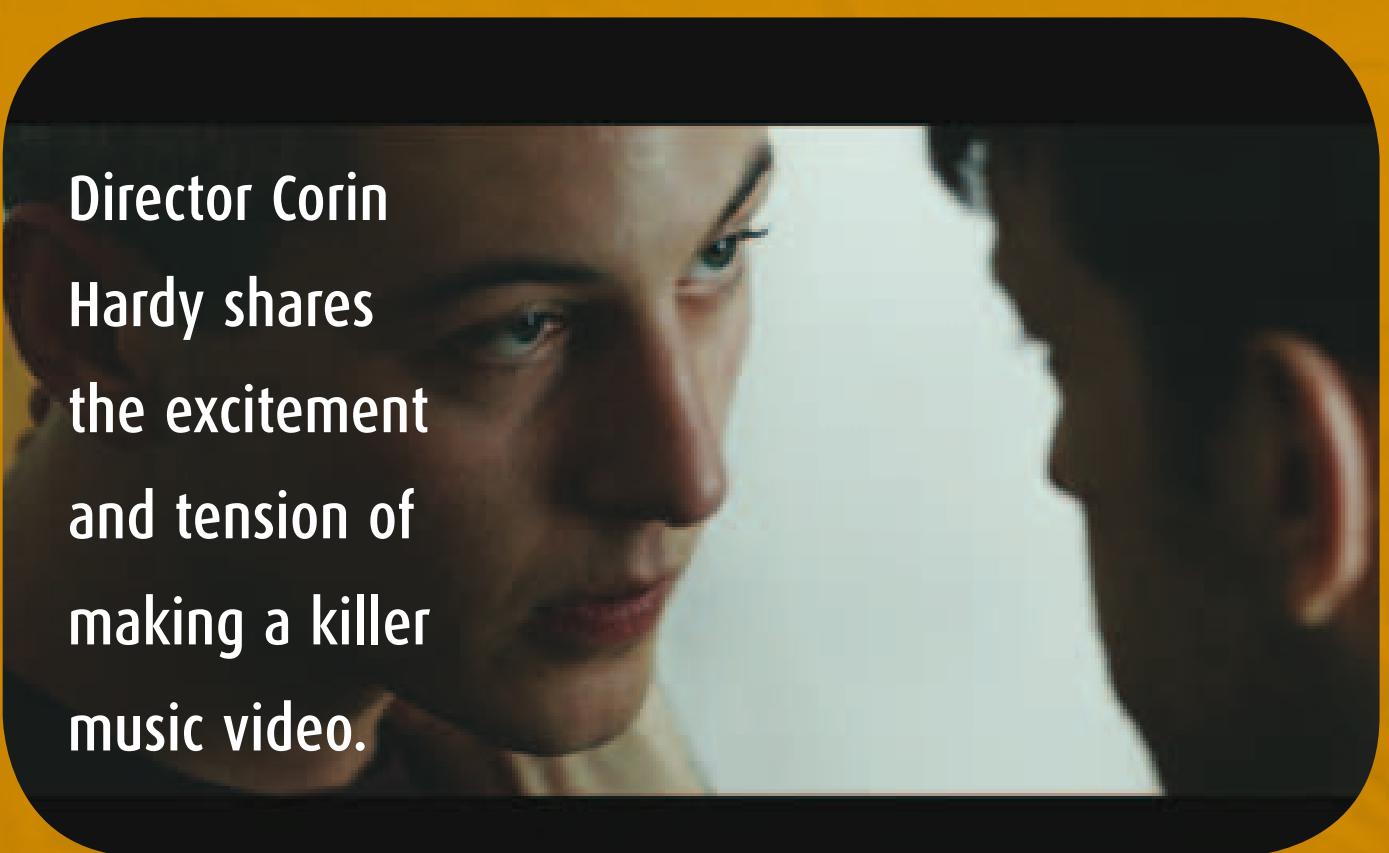






KILLER IDEAS, HAT-TRICKS, AND MAKING WATCHTOWER

Director Corin
Hardy shares
the excitement
and tension of
making a killer
music video.





Generating ideas on tap is an exciting and sometimes frustrating occupation. Executing them is a whole other kettle of fish.

The themes of this piece may be familiar to those making ads, developing and making shorts or feature films. But with specific regard to making music videos, the initial **idea** has first to be **conceived**, and then **selected** from the big dripping fish net of music video ideas that get submitted; and only then does its difficult journey commence forward through **execution** toward **completion** and eventual **release**. Meanwhile, you hope that your idea has stayed intact, and that it has indeed worked.

This process can make for an incredibly exciting, satisfying feeling that brings with it a great sense of relief. I imagine it to be akin to cruising down a sunny freeway on a Harley, on the way to the beach, with a disposable BBQ, cool bag full of cold beer, and a sexy companion. (N.B. I have not actually driven a Harley, but it works for me in this dream-scenario.)

On the one hand, it keeps the mind alive, constantly having to think imaginatively and creatively in order consistently to generate 'something new' to accompany a track and form a music video. On the other, it can be an intensely draining experience, not only in straining to create said 'new' idea, but also in coping when your brilliant vision *doesn't* get chosen from the fish net, *doesn't* commence or get off the ground,

and the 'exciting new idea' is relegated to the folder of rejected 'unmade ideas'.

That can make for incredible frustration that brings with it a sense of waste and anguish. When I think of this, the picture I get in my mind is of struggling to pedal up a steep cobbled street, riding an old bicycle with wonky-sized wheels and broken, rusty pedals. And you just don't reach the top of that hill.

But some day you will.

I don't want to dwell on the negative aspect of creating ideas because every once in a while you get to make one that you really, really want(ed) to see the light of day, and that makes all the hard work of the journey so far and the pain of getting there on all those wobbly-wheeled, up-hill cycle rides worthwhile. And, finally, you get to sit at the top, and look at the view and spark up that BBQ, and for a while it is a beautiful thing ...

And on the rare occasion when you manage to score a **hat-trick**, well things in music video land don't get much better.

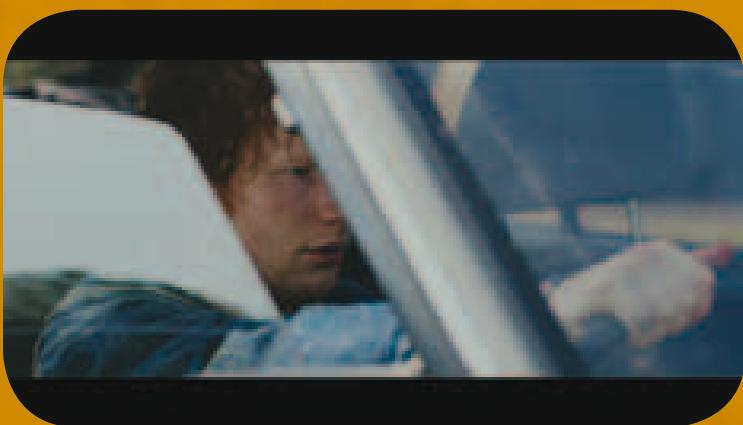
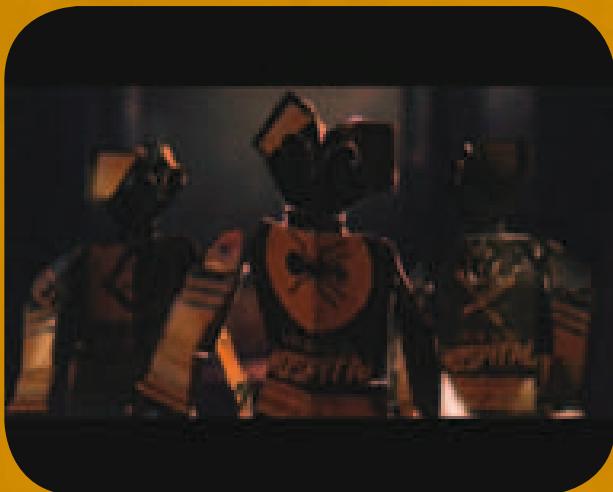
What do I mean score a hat-trick? Let's rewind a little.

The Process

I work as a Director, with a production company (**Academy Films**). I will be sent musical tracks from record labels, via their commissioners (the person who oversees the video for the label), normally with an artist brief and a budget.



It keeps the mind alive, constantly having to think imaginatively and creatively in order to consistently generate 'something new' to visually accompany a track and form a music video.



Regardless of how good the track or band is, it's your idea and your video that is going to help step you further up the music-video world ladder, and thus gain access to bigger and better opportunities.



Of course, there are a hell of a lot of bands out there, and even more tracks, all accompanied by different budget scales, from incredibly small to moderately decent. It therefore becomes a bit of a lottery in terms of what comes through; it might be a great big band, with a weak track and a lot of money, or an *amazing* track for a small, unknown band, with a micro-budget. So when I say score a hat-trick, I'm referring to that magical time when the planets align and you get the semblance of a balance of all three:

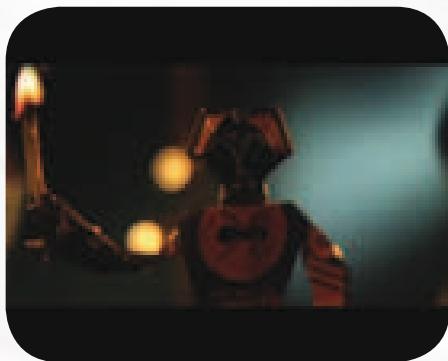
1. **A killer track** by a great band or artist
2. **A decent budget** (and appropriate brief/ deadline)
3. **Your killer idea.**

It's important to stress that you do not need all three to achieve artistic 'success'. Indeed there are many fantastic original works out there right now that may only feature one or two of these elements – so long as ultimately your video kicks original ass because you had that killer idea (and got to make it). Because regardless of how good the track or band is, it's *your* idea and *your* video that is going to help you step further up the music-video world ladder, and thus gain access to bigger and better opportunities. But ... if the artist and or track is as mind-blowing as your awesome idea and all three elements gel, then *this* is the hat-trick I'm talking about.

One thing I want to mention before I move on is the importance of getting to make the video. Because when you generate a killer idea that you carefully tailor and marry up to a specific piece of music, for a band you actually love, it's important to get to realise it, both for your own personal satisfaction and sanity and of course, for the lucky artist/label/management/fans who will benefit from all the coolness you created for them.

It can be truly heartbreakng to have those hat-trick opportunities slip through the fingers. That has happened to me on more than one occasion; I am forever doomed to spend the rest of my days, on hearing said killer track playing on the radio or from my collection, with the fantastic killer idea that I never got to make burned into the back of my sad and seething brain. I can think of a handful of tracks out there





that still stir up a strong sense of mourning for an idea that I never got to make. In this instance it is all about hit-ratio and perseverance. Keep cycling up that hill. Keep throwing idea fish in the net. One will get pulled out and then all you've gotta do is make the darn thing.

But in this article I'm discussing the ones that *did* get made. Those rare hat-tricks. The reasons to go on cycling up that hill, in pursuit of that beautiful view!

Scoring the Hat-trick

Here's an example of when one of those magical occasions happened to me from a couple of years ago.

INT. ACADEMY FILMS. MORNING

LIZ (MY MUSIC VIDEO REP & PRODUCER AT ACADEMY)

Corin, a track's in for you

ME

Who's it for?

LIZ

The Prodigy

ME

Tick. That's the first part of the hat-trick.

The Prodigy are awesome!

The track is called 'Warrior's Dance'. Good title I think; the title alone can sometimes help generate the bones of an idea. I play the track and it blows my mind. This is getting exciting. The budget is also pretty decent. This is *really* exciting.

What am I gonna do about it?

What is the killer idea?

How can I put this ball in the back of that music video net and guarantee that over everyone else, it's me that gets to make this video.

On this occasion, I had an idea that I felt was killer. It was something I'd wanted to do for many years, and indeed an idea that I had previously written for three different bands, for each one of whom I had hoped to make it. But in hindsight, none of them would have truly been totally right for the idea. Although it was depressing to have the idea rejected three times, I am thankful that none of them went for it – until The Prodigy did. Because they suited it best.

The bones of my idea:

Discarded 'Cigarette Packet Men' set up a party on a bar top, inviting the shelved cigarette packets down for a Warriors Dance,

as fiery mayhem and chaos ensues.

Making 'Warriors Dance' for the Prodigy was a crazy and rewarding experience and the video went on to win a few awards. A lot of people I meet seem to have liked the video.

It fills me with relief that I got to make *that* idea, for *that* band, for *that* song. A hat-trick!

Making 'Watchtower'

So now let's move on to a more recent example, for a video I made a couple of months back. As I write this, the song is at number 7 in the Top Ten chart and the video has around 2 million hits on YouTube, and I'm very proud of it. But a couple of months ago, it was just a track that I got sent that needed a killer idea.

It went something like this...

INT. ACADEMY FILMS. MORNING

LIZ

Corin, a track's in for you

ME

Who's it for?

LIZ

Devlin featuring Ed Sheeran

ME

Hmm. This could be the first part of the hat-trick.

Let's see. What's the track like?

The track is a cover of a well-known classic called 'All Along The Watchtower' – originally written and recorded by **Bob Dylan** and then famously covered by **Jimi Hendrix**. When I heard it, my first thoughts were: well I think Devlin and Ed Sheeran (who I recall had just cleaned up at a recent British music awards) have done a decent contemporary version, and I think it's going to be big.

On second listen I caught an instant mood of urgency and desperation going on in the song and in Devlin's newly revised lyrics. Hmm... Something narrative.

Filmic.

ME

Is there a brief?

LIZ

Something narrative, filmic.

ME

Budget?

LIZ

It's OK.

So I'm already wondering if this could be one of the good ones. You can see how quickly this could get exciting.

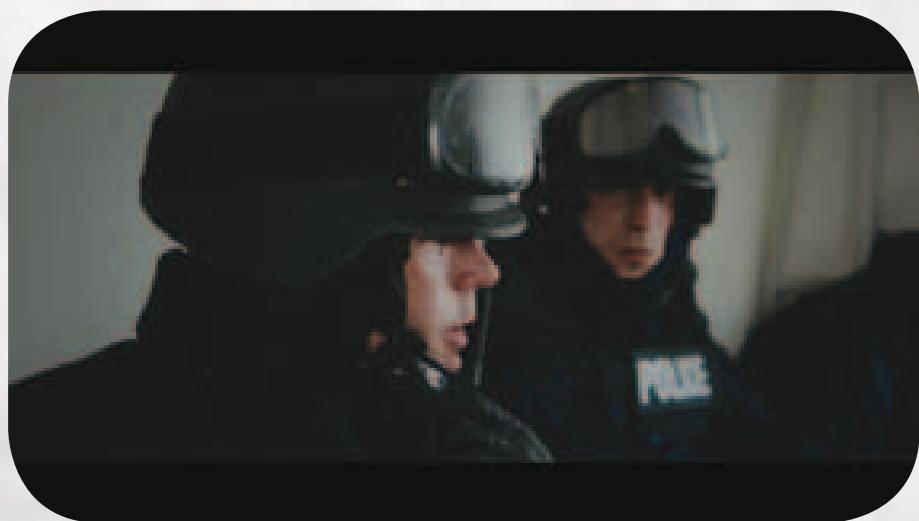
I generate my idea, careful to incorporate elements of the brief from the label concerning tone and performance. I'm increasingly aware that if I play my cards right this could be one of those hat-tricks. I throw myself at it narratively and write it up like a film script; like the end of a feature film, one that plays to the length of a short, scored like a music video. I fall in love with the idea and how it could work alongside the track.

I really hope this is going to be a Harley experience.

Thankfully the commissioner was very responsive and I'm asked into the record label at Universal to discuss the idea further with the artists' managers. Both because I genuinely love the concept and because of the work I have already put into creating the concept, writing the script and visualising it, I am able to back up my ideas with honesty and convincingly. I already know the answers to anything they might feel concerned about. Putting a lot of work into a project before getting confirmation is a bit of a gamble, as it could all lead back to that cobbled uphill road; but quite quickly after that meeting, I got the job to make *Watchtower*.

The Stars, the Crew, the Shoot ...

My ambitious, filmic narrative idea involved a serious bit of preparation in a short amount of time (as is the usual case with most music videos) and together with my **Producer Dom Thomas** and crack production staff at Academy Films we





began casting and crewing up and I began intensively storyboarding the whole video. I knew it would be critical to cast some great actors to surround the artists, who were less experienced in acting roles. We were incredibly lucky to secure a talented, solid cast including **Neil Maskell (Kill List/Football Factory)** **Jaime Winstone (Wild Bill/Donkey Punch)**, **Tilly Vosburgh (Atonement)** **George Russo** and **Paige Lee-Ditch**.

Before we knew it, we were shooting this crazy jigsaw of a schedule over a one-day shoot that incorporated our **5-strong cast** in amongst a **50-strong crew**, over a number of interior and exterior suburban locations, filmed on multiple cameras, incorporating sound recording, hair and make-up and art-department, a low-loader to carry the hero vehicle, police escorts and a fully 'armed' SWAT team – and all of this was unfolding under the hottest sun we'd had all year! Production-wise it certainly felt like we had the makings of a mini-epic.

And all because you hear a track and generate an idea that you hope and believe could be killer.

Following an intense and enjoyable shoot it's not long before I'm locked away editing the video, one of my favourite parts of the process. In this case, I produce three versions; a safe 'TV cut', a slightly longer, riskier 'online version' and an 8-minute 'short film' version which will appear on the album

itself as a special extra. To score this last version we used the 'stems' of the actual track and treated it as if we were scoring a short film. We also added a post-production hurricane and some movie-style credits to beef up the filmic appearance. And then pretty soon, it was done, and in another flash it's out there for all the world to see. So far it seems to have gone down pretty well.

To be able to work on a great track such as this, with these artists, and to be able to execute my own killer idea that remains intact and that I actually got to direct, makes for an incredibly exciting, satisfying feeling that brings with it a great sense of relief.

And that means I can check out the view and rev up the mind-Harley.

And that's one of the many reasons why I look forward to getting the call...

LIZ

Corin, a track's in for you

ME

Who's it for?

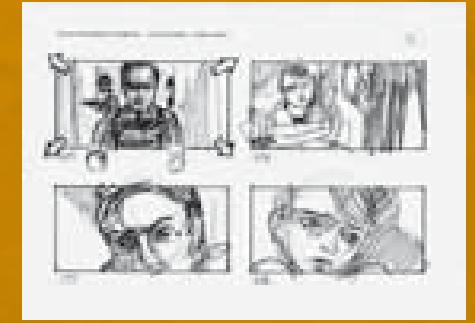
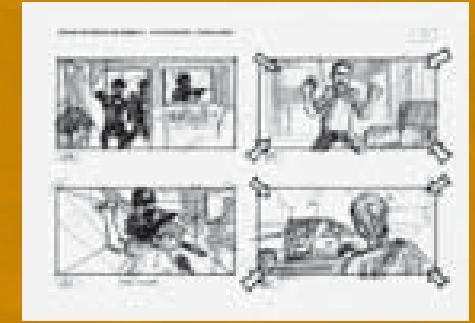
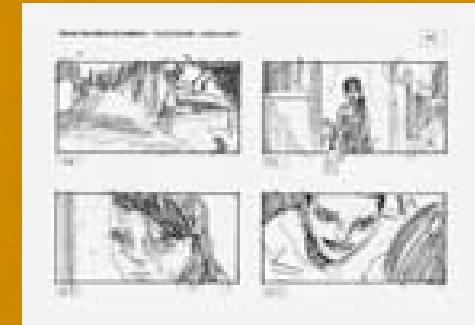
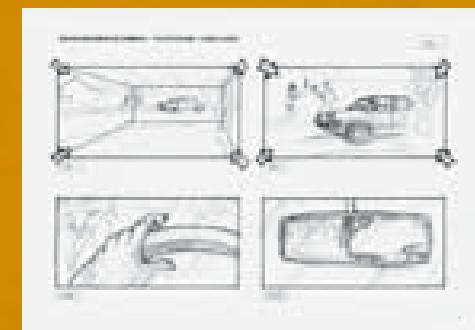
Corin Hardy is a filmmaker working mainly in music video and horror. He presented the 2012 *MediaMag* Production Competition Awards and will speak at the 2012 *MediaMag* Student Conference.

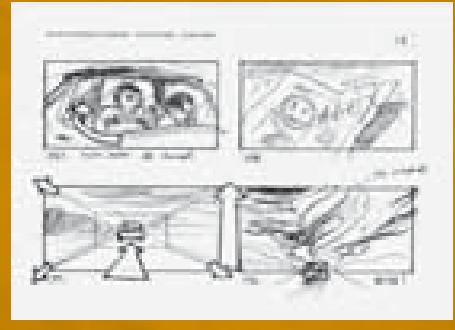
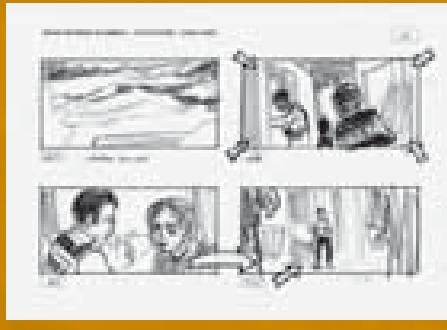
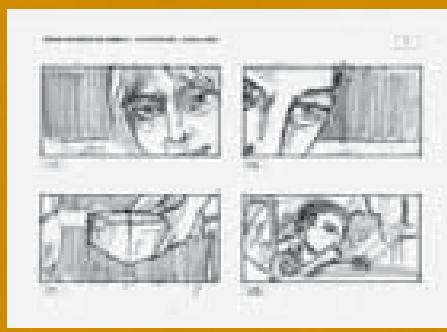
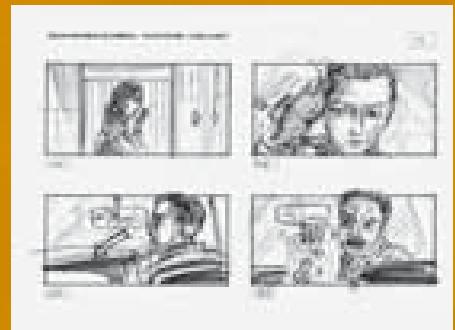
Follow it up:

View Corin's work at:

www.corinhardy.com

www.academy-plus.com





BEST of BRITISH

Rule Britannia!

Britannia rule the waves.

Britons never, never, never will be slaves.



But does Britannia rule the waves anymore? How is Britain seen by other nations? Who holds the power now and what does the media have to say about that? Ex-pat **Maggie Miranda investigates – a must read for A2 students studying Representation and Collective Identity and the Media.**



The British Empire and its colonial power is, of course, relegated to the history books and the world watches now as America loses its grip and countries such as India and China muster their economic and political strength. How does the rest of the world comment on Britain through its media? And what do people in the rest of the world think of Britain beyond the picture postcard images?

I remember flicking through a magazine around the time of the Queen's Jubilee, a glossy travel one with hot lists of 'where to go' and 'where to be seen'. There was a feature entitled 'Best of British' and I wondered, what does that phrase even mean now? The article talks of grade II-listed buildings, 'architectural gems', country houses, palaces and gardens... What is the Britain that is being referred to here? The 'classic' architecture may simply be evidence of a 'bygone era'. Has politeness and etiquette been eroded in our post-Thatcherite nation? Has the stiff upper lip has been replaced by Trisha and Jeremy Kyle? Fancy department stores in Knightsbridge are essentially frequented by a small section of British society and are primarily favourite tourist shopping spots. There are so many iconic British landmarks – Buckingham Palace, The Houses of Parliament, Nelson's Column and Westminster Abbey – but does the rest of the world think beyond these picture postcard images? Beyond English breakfasts, afternoon tea, aristocracy and Union Jack biscuit tins, what ideas of Britishness are exported now?

For most, the image of Britishness being sent overseas remains far from the truth. The vast majority of 'Brits' don't go to school at Eton or wear big expensive hats at the races. The stereotypical images of 'Britishness' are often as inaccurate as so many other stereotypes, and arguably don't truly represent the changing face of the nation.

Marigold Hotel

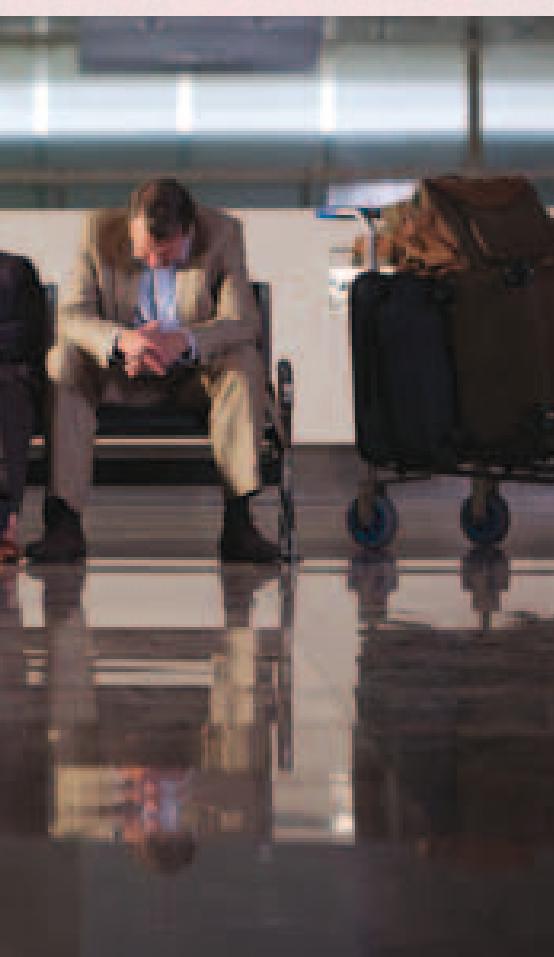
So where does one begin to explore some of this? ***The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*** (2011) seems like a good place to start. Directed by **John Madden** and written by Ol Parker it is adapted from Deborah Moggach's 2004 novel ***These Foolish Things***. It stars the 'Best of British' in terms of its acting talent, **Dame Judi Dench** as Mrs Evelyn Greenslade and **Dame Maggie Smith** as a wheelchair-bound Muriel Donnelly. **Tom Wilkinson** plays a High Court judge, revisiting the India of his past and **Bill Nighy** and **Penelope Wilton** are a married couple who can't afford to retire in the UK. **Celia Imrie** plays the flirtatious

gold-digger, while **Ronald Pickup** an aging bachelor desperate for companionship. With such a British cast, what better way of thinking about Britishness than this film?

It is set in India, a former British colony; but the Empire is no more and this encourages us as an audience (or a nation) to think about what has changed and what Britishness means today. I was happy to watch the film twice on two counts: as a British expat who has moved overseas several times, and as a keen traveller. Watching the film I felt some sense of pride to have a bit of both cultures running through my veins. India has come a long way since its independence and the positive qualities of the Brits abroad make them great ambassadors for England.

The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel (for the elderly and beautiful) can be described as 'a coming of old age' comedy. The film is the story of a group of retirees and one elderly lady waiting for a hip replacement, experiencing India through the eyes of Western tourists. How do we see 'the East', or the Indian subcontinent? The characters leave the UK with all the usual stereotypes of India running through their minds: heat, squalor, crowds, many colours and 'third world' poverty. Some are scared of what the experience may hold. Maggie Smith's character, Muriel, arrives at the airport with packets of PG tips, bottles of brown sauce, pickled eggs, pickled onions, and Hobnob biscuits to survive the 'travelling ordeal' that she expects. Bill Nighy's character Douglas anticipates that India will be '...like the Costa Brava...but with elephants'. Of course most of their stereotypical ideas are wrong and as Jean says on arrival: 'this country seems rather more civilised than one originally thought'. How often do we get it wrong when it comes to how we see other countries? Conversely, how often do other people get it wrong in their view of modern Britain?

On arrival in India the group form their first impressions. Dame Judy's Evelyn says 'can there be anywhere else in the world which is such an assault on the senses?' They eventually reach the hotel, which, though set in Bangalore, was actually shot in the lake-city of Udaipur and the city of Jaipur. The building is evidence of former grandeur – grand Indian palaces and impressive colonial railway buildings, many of the latter still standing today as relics of the British Empire. In the first shot of the hotel the camera pans the rooftop and reveals its fading splendour, with arches, turrets and balconies, 'an Indian palace with the sophistication of an English manor'. They are greeted by enthusiastic hotelier Sonny Kapoor (***Slumdog Millionaire's*** Dev



Patel) who tells his guests 'this is a building of the utmost character ... it can rise like a phoenix to its former state of glory'. He has a special meal prepared in their honour, 'roast dinner, a taste of Blighty, roast goat curry'. The guests settle in. Some are too anxious to leave the building. Others seem to embrace the differences and the newness of India and as Tom Wilkinson's Graham says, 'all of life is here'.

In the film, what do the local people in Bangalore think of its new arrivals? Dame Judi's character is employed by a nearby call centre as a 'cultural advisor', a job she got by talking to the call centre manager about 'builders' tea' and the 'dunking of biscuits' ('the blissful union of biscuits and tea combined'). The cultures cross over, as all cultures do – we all have more similarities than differences, of course. The characters are all busy 'keeping up appearances', never airing their 'dirty laundry' – very British traits, though less common in the UK now. Even the idea of arranged marriages is a custom that used to happen in England. Sonny's marriage to his girlfriend is banned

until an old man who has worked for the family for many years intervenes. He is the face of old India, the old values, colonial rule, old ways of doing things but life has changed and will continue to do so. At the end of the film Evelyn says 'All we know about the future is it will be different. We must celebrate the changes'.

Of all the characters, perhaps Dame Judi's Evelyn best epitomises the changes in British people with her 'stoicism meets modern day liberalism', her unique mix of common sense, assertiveness, sensitivity and graciousness. We feel almost instantly fond of her: 'The only real failure is the failure to try and the measure of success is how we cope with disappointments as we

The stereotypical images of 'Britishness' is often as inaccurate as so many other stereotypes, and arguably doesn't truly represent the changing face of the nation.

always must.' She maintains the 'stiff upper lip' and is utterly pragmatic: 'we do our best, nothing else matters'.

Comic relief is provided in the bachelor character of Norman Cousins whose loneliness opens him to experimenting with viagra and speed-dating! Outsourced call centres, speed dating and outsourced hospital care are all evidence of a changed Britain, arguably with post-Thatcherite values. Even the old people's home (disguised as a former palace) is outsourced, another sign of the times of a changed Britain. Have British values evolved or have they been eroded? How is this new Britain viewed elsewhere?

Other characters, such as Mrs Donnelly, change radically through the film. In the UK she is bigoted, racist and cantankerous but in India she slowly becomes more understanding and open to others. She too has worked as a cook and a cleaner and has cared for others as a maid and housekeeper; yet it takes this journey and experience for her to lose her British superiority and to recognise that she is similar in some ways



to the lower caste maid in front of her. The caste system is still very much alive in India but the class system in modern Britain is now largely viewed as outdated and judged by most as a form of snobbery.

The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel succeeds in quietly making valuable social comment. But what do people of other cultures really think of the British now? Do people still think of Britain as Great? Some 50 years after its independence India no longer looks to Britain for much at all. The country has one of the world's fastest growing economies and Bollywood remains the biggest film industry in the world. Hollywood produces 500 films per year on average and has a worldwide audience of 2.6 billion whereas Bollywood produces more than 1000 (not consistently) films every year and has a worldwide audience of 3 billion. In terms of viewership, Bollywood overtook Hollywood in 2004 and has been leading ever since. (Source: Bollywood vs Hollywood – The Complete Breakdown <http://mutiny.wordpress.com/2007/02/01/>

bollywood-vs-hollywood-the-complete-breakdown.)

And what about other countries? How does the rest of the world see Britain?

Views of 2012

Britain has enjoyed two major events this year, the Queen's jubilee and the London Olympics. Both events dominated the British media and were widely celebrated. In London laser projections illuminated Buckingham Palace to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee – only the second time that Britain has enjoyed a monarch's 60th year of rule. Queen Elizabeth has sent almost 540,000 telegrams, sat for 129 portraits, given out around 90,000 Christmas puddings to royal staff, continuing the custom of former British kings, and she has owned more than 30 corgis! There were street parties and festivities across the UK. But how were these events celebrated and reported elsewhere?

The View from United Arab Emirates

At the time of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, I was in the United Arab Emirates. I witnessed Queen Elizabeth's Diamond Jubilee celebrations far from England,

sitting in the Middle East where the 40 degree heat dried out our cucumber sandwiches! In this part of the world Her Majesty is synonymous with Polo. Groups of expats gathered to celebrate, Union Jack bunting was hung up, we feasted on afternoon tea, played pass the parcel and even played 'pin the tail on the corgi! We toasted Queen Elizabeth and acknowledged her 60 years of sovereignty; after all it is no mean feat for anyone to stay in the same job for 60 years! But what did the people in UAE know about the Jubilee celebrations? Apparently several hundred beacons were lit across the commonwealth countries around the world but no-one seemed to know about anything like this happening in either the capital, Abu Dhabi or in Dubai, both emirates with sizeable British ex-pat populations. There was little mention of the Jubilee in the national press either, though it was front page news when Queen Elizabeth met with the ruling sheik, Sheik Mohammed Al Maktoum. This is an example of media proximity: the focus in UAE's national press is primarily on its ruling Sheik and coverage of the Queen is of secondary importance. Of course, local businesses seized the opportunity to commercialise the event and charged over the odds for Jubilee high teas and celebration dinners.

Wimbledon, in South Africa

My travels took me to South Africa in the Wimbledon tennis fortnight. I watched the All England Lawn Tennis Championship final in a sports bar but no-one seemed particularly interested in Andy Murray or his quest to make British tennis history. During the Wimbledon final the South African sports channel aired 'Visit Britain, you're invited' adverts. These adverts attempted to encapsulate Britishness. I wondered what these adverts really say about Britain? How do these adverts represent Britain? What ideas of Britishness do these adverts 'export' to the rest of the world?

South Africa is a big sporting nation. Many people are fanatical about rugby, football and cricket. As with the Golden Jubilee a few weeks earlier, however, there was very little media interest in the All England Lawn Tennis Championships at Wimbledon. (The Golden Jubilee had prompted only local new stories about fundraising dinners and golf club celebrations.) Crowds who did watch the event were mostly supporting Roger Federer in the final, in part because his mother is South African. *The Cape Times* did run the story about the Queen shaking hands with the former Irish Republican Army (IRA) commander Martin McGuinness but the story only made page 2.





Images courtesy of image.net.

There certainly seemed to be a lot of interest in the Olympics. But on closer investigation the national media were focusing on its nation's heroes, South African athletes who would be competing at the games. There was regular media coverage of athletes travelling to the Olympics in the general build up. When I spoke with people about the Olympics they did express excitement but said that they would be watching regardless of where the games were taking place.

The Olympics from Down Under

By the time the Olympics started, I was in Australia. Here again I paid particular attention to the national media and observed how the events were being shown, and how Britain and team GB were represented. The opening ceremony was televised in full and the Australian media generally applauded the event as spectacular. Oscar winning director Danny Boyle's multi-million pound extravaganza celebrated different aspects of British life and culture, from Mary Poppins and a 15m high Voldemort to hundreds of jitterbugging NHS nurses and an English country village. Some comments dismissed the event as eccentric and weird but most coverage was positive. *The Courier Mail* ran the comment:

Boyle made it clear that in the lead up to the event that his inspiration had been the irreverent, fun filled crowd-pleasing extravaganza that opened the Sydney

Olympics...12 years on, the Brits have raised the bar in terms of imagination and wizardry.

Britain certainly showed the world audience that it can still do spectacular pageantry and ceremony in abundance. Basketball star Lauren Jackson was the flag bearer for Australia at the opening ceremony and this was front page news. The Australian flag itself is a reminder of the British Empire and its Commonwealth nations.

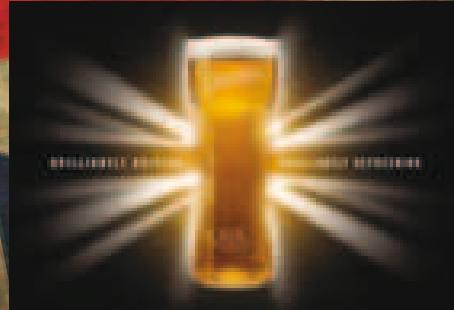
Over time, the Australian media of course focused on its own athletes such as James Magnussen ('The Missile') and an overall disappointing medal count. But they did not shy away from commenting on Britain's successes. The national television channel, ABC, ran a feature on the day that *The Sun* newspaper ran the headline 'United Blingdom'. And the Australian media coverage of the epic closing ceremony was no less celebratory. Everyone seemed to enjoy the 'Brit-tastic' array of talent, the dynamic performances of British music from across the decades, Damien Hirst's intriguing John Lennon sculpture and the colourful closing fireworks. A national newspaper ran an article with the headline 'Well done Britain, you did it right' congratulating Britain on hosting a successful Olympics and a glittering closing celebration. The Australian media uniformly praised Britain and team GB.

Britishness means many things to many people. It may no longer represent power, colonial rule or rule Britannia. But Britain still offers something that many in the world 'value'

So What Does Britishness Mean Now?

How does the world's media comment on Britain? Does Britannia still rule the waves? Maybe sometimes the media outside of Britain revert to an inaccurate stereotype. Sometimes the British media may even perpetuate those stereotypical ideas. It seems to me that Britishness means many things to many people. It may no longer represent power, colonial rule or rule Britannia. But Britain still offers something that many in the world 'value' – like standards in British education, especially in our universities. Respecting the law, doing 'the right thing', resilience, diplomacy, speaking out against injustice, discretion, tolerance and compassion are all essentially British traits that we can be rightly proud of. As the recent billboard ad campaign by Carling declares 'It's a great time to be British'.

Maggie Miranda is a freelance contributor to *MediaMagazine*. She currently teaches in Dubai International Academy, UAE.



ODD FUTURE, STRANGER PAST



Issues of Representation in Contemporary Hip-Hop

The landscape of contemporary music is changing. The use of the internet as a tool for both distribution and marketing has resulted in an explosion of new artists, fragmenting audiences and causing shifts in every aspect of the industry, from genre to production to image construction. **Phil Dyas** suggests that the issues and examples relating to representation explored here would be applicable to research in Music Video for A2 Media Studies Advanced Production, GCSE Media Studies Coursework Assignment 3, or even the GCSE Music Press Exam in Summer 2013.



Whichever topics you are working on, **representation** is certain to be central to your response, and being able to write **convincingly and with sophistication** about how an artist's image utilises existing stereotypes and how technical codes and *mise-en-scène* contribute to this construction will have a huge impact on your grade. The way hip-hop videos portray women is certainly a contentious issue, as representations rely heavily on **sexual objectification** largely through clothing and close-ups of the body. Nevertheless the hip-hop genre is primarily dominated by **representations of young black men**, and this article will focus on the issues posed by the stereotypes used in the portrayal of this group.

A Very Brief History

Though hip-hop is now a dominant force within mainstream youth culture, with artists such as **Jay-Z** or the British **Plan B** finding success far beyond traditional rap/



r'n'b audiences, the stereotypical 'rapper' exists in a largely fixed form in the public consciousness. Rap's early pioneers existed in a surprising range of representations and 'types'; often celebrating the 'intelligence' of using rhyme to give an irreverent commentary on society. As the popularity of the genre grew, however, there also rose a dominant stereotype among hip-hop artists, and by association of young black males; traditionally masculine, unemotional, aggressive, violent and often misogynistic.

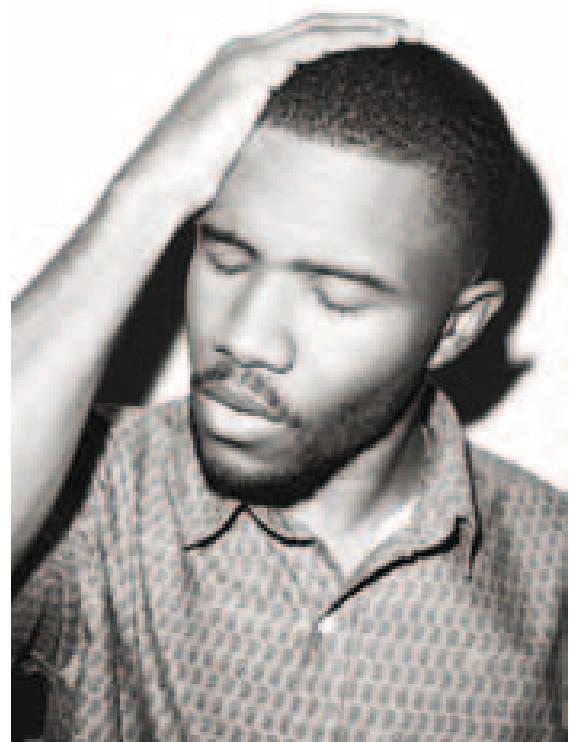
This stereotype grew from the rise of gangster rap in the late 1980s, most notably through artists such as **N.W.A.** (the group which launched the careers of **Ice Cube** and **Dr. Dre**) and **Ice-T**, both of

whom flaunted their criminal backgrounds and took a confrontational approach to authority, along with their aggressive posturing. It should be noted, however, that similar coding can be found within the performances of **Public Enemy**, even though that group focused on racial inequality and promoting black culture as a way of life, and showed little interest in criminality and 'gang' culture.

This representation remained the dominant stereotype throughout the 1990s and 2000s, as artists like **Jay-Z**, **Snoop Dogg** and **50 Cent** both adhered to the same stereotype and were portrayed using much of the same language. Common conventions of hip-hop videos and publicity images for the period include:

- a fixation on **money and wealth**, shown through diamond jewellery, expensive cars and flaunted cash
- **male sexual dominance**, with **women framed as objects** and denied any agency or their own gaze
- **images of crime and violence**, referenced in lyrics, video narratives and shown through mise-en-scène
- **self-aggrandisement**, shown through body language and reinforced with low-angle shots and close-ups

With almost no exceptions, the rap stars of this period eschew emotionality, vulnerability and intellectualism. The values of rap videos during the period portray young black men as aspiring to wealth,



Freaks and Geeks

Childish Gambino



rather than professional or intellectual success; arguably the genre exploits extremely **negative stereotypes of young black men**, reinforcing archaic ideas about inner-city youth and discouraging the audience – also largely young black men – from aspiring to realistic professional goals and in particular encouraging unhealthy attitudes towards women.

The Changing Game

However, this trend appears to be shifting, or at least becoming more complex, in the modern era. This could be due to the success of **Kanye West**; admittedly a polarising figure notorious for his own self-aggrandisement, arrogance and lack of self-awareness, but often vulnerable, emotional and conflicted in his lyrics. His early albums dealt with his experiences at university, his Christianity, his interest in fashion and his difficulties in reconciling these experiences with what was expected of him within the black community, particularly as a hip-hop artist and producer. Later work deals explicitly (albeit not exclusively) with his own failed relationships and concerns about public perception of his behaviour and attitude.

If West is the forerunner, however, a number of new artists seem to be going much further in reinventing and challenging the paradigm. Artists such as **Drake**, **Childish Gambino**, **Odd Future** **Wolf Gang Kill Them All** (often referred to by the acronym **OWFGKTA**, or just **Odd Future**) and **Frank Ocean** (not strictly a 'rapper' but definitely a significant figure in contemporary hip-hop and r'n'b – and also loosely affiliated with Odd Future himself).

Starting with the most 'cultish' of the artists, **Childish Gambino** (the rap alter-ego of actor, writer and stand-up comedian **Donald Glover**) very specifically rejects the common visual codes associated with hip-hop artists. Rather than ostentatious jewellery, tank-tops displaying muscularity or fashions referencing gang culture such as the 'do-rag', he is almost exclusively pictured dressed in casual jeans, hoodies and t-shirts,

often paired with thick-rimmed glasses, with the result that he more obviously resembles an indie/alternative performer than a hip-hop artist.

It is also worth noting that Gambino's full-length debut album, **Camp**, was released not by **Def Jam**, **Bad Boy Records** or any other institution associated with the genre and the traditional audience of hip-hop, but on **Glassnote Records**, whose other major acts are all indie/alternative bands; among them **Phoenix**, **The Temper Trap**, and **Mumford and Sons**. This non-traditional approach is also evident in his appearance 'as himself' in **Image Comics The Li'l Depressed Boy** – an excellent illustration of cross-media convergence.

This subversion of stereotypes continues through Gambino's lyrics; he often references artists and music from other genres, classic literature, video games and more; his songs include references to poet **E.E. Cummings**, psychedelic folk-pop artist **Ariel Pink** and the cancelled cult TV sitcom **Freaks and Geeks**. He is still prone to the sexual boasts common in the genre, but seems more concerned with the issues he sees as prevalent within hip-hop and the wider black community; 'these black kids want something new, I swear it/something they want to say but couldn't, 'cause they embarrassed.' In his lyrics Childish Gambino thus addresses the issue of stereotyping and cultural hegemony directly, most obviously through appropriating the codes and conventions of the indie genre. He comments on the 'gangster' or 'thug' qualities valued within hip-hop and the lack of diverse role models offered to black children.

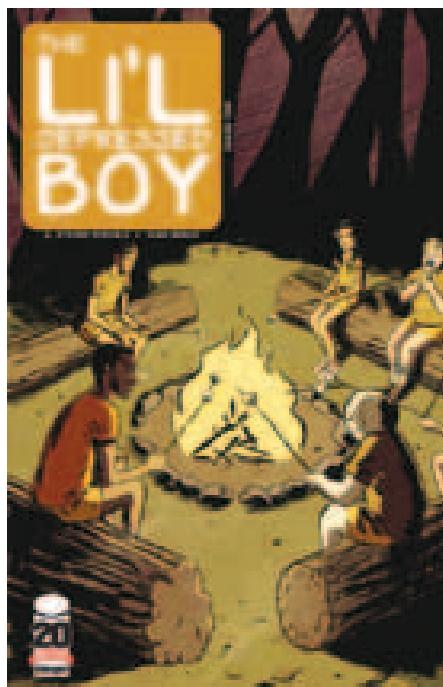
Childish Gambino rejects the violence and gang associations of hip-hop culture,

demonstrating a social progressiveness and willingness to challenge conventional models of masculinity. Also, although his lyrics still reference sex, the media language of his videos is far more gender-neutral, eschewing the hordes of 'faceless' women common in the past. By contrast, Odd Future (and the side projects the members of the group engage in) are equally 'different', but far more confrontational and aggressive in the construction of their image.

Odd Future ...

Most of the press coverage surrounding the group has focused on the deliberately shocking nature of their lyrics, with graphic violence, homophobia, misogyny and references to suicide and rape. There is a confrontational feel to the group's approach that has a lot in common with the **Punk movement** of the mid-1970s. Much of this has to do with the **institutional background** of the group which was originally formed entirely of teenagers with no links to established record labels. Early mixtapes were released online, for free.

Though their lyrics are deliberately provocative, one of the most interesting things about the construction of Odd Future's image is the degree to which it sits **outside of rap's mainstream**, which has now become inextricably linked to **privilege and extreme wealth**, with long-established stars like Jay-Z being portrayed as millionaire moguls rather than the 'angry young men' they once were. What Odd Future do is push the violence and aggression common in hip-hop's representations of young black men to its logical conclusion. Even then they could be seen as using the stereotypical violence of





the lyrics as a **window to an introspection and vulnerability** similar to that seen in the work of Childish Gambino.

In his solo work, **Tyler, the Creator** hints at honest psychological wounds. Lines such as

let's buy guns and kill kids with dads and mom, and nice homes with 401Ks and nice-ass lawns

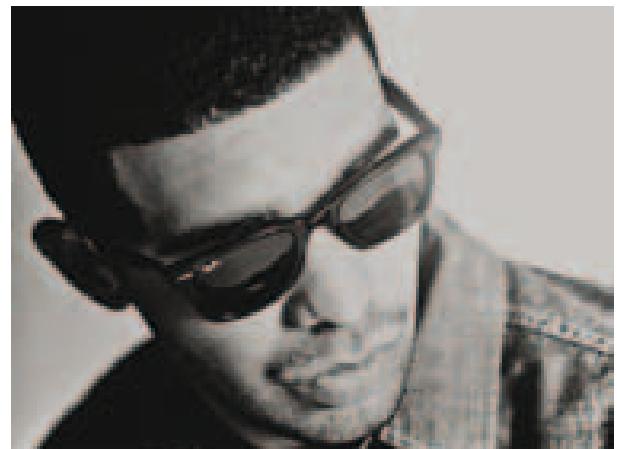
express real hurt, venting the jealousy of an alienated kid still stinging from the rejection of an absentee father. Even the violence shown within their music videos is turned inward. The video for 'Yonkers', shot in black and white entirely in one take (a far cry from the glamour common in most hip-hop videos) concludes with Tyler hanging himself. All of Odd Future's controversial lyrics can be traced not to the hip-hop tradition of 'thuggishness', but to an intense self-loathing and introspection more common within alternative genres.

The Introspection of Frank Ocean

No discussion of hip-hop representations would be complete, however, without addressing **Frank Ocean**, himself an intensely introspective artist. Though technically an r'n'b singer rather than a rapper, the similarity between images of male artists across both genres is great enough to warrant his inclusion here; moreover his association with Odd Future makes him almost a rap star 'by association'.

One of the greatest problems within the hip-hop genre (outside of its ingrained misogyny) is its treatment of **homosexuality**. With most artists still relying heavily on old-fashioned notions

An era in which a Hip-Hop artist can be pictured wearing glasses and a cardigan is a definite step in a new direction.



of masculinity, hip-hop has remained one of the few arenas in which **homophobia remains a relatively acceptable prejudice**. Indeed, Tyler, the Creator has himself drawn criticism for using gay slurs in his lyrics. Frank Ocean, then, is a unique figure: possibly the first hip-hop/r'n'b artist to openly come out as '**non-heterosexual**'.

Ocean has avoided words like 'gay' or 'bisexual' in his comments on the subject, instead telling the story of his falling in love with another man, a straight friend unable to reciprocate, when he was 19. Nevertheless Ocean's statement opened questions about the nature of masculinity within hip-hop, and how sexuality is addressed within the genre in a new age. It is also worth noting the Tyler, the Creator, instantly tweeted his support of Ocean, complicating the apparent homophobia he himself had expressed in his lyrics.

Perhaps the dominant trend amongst contemporary hip-hop artists, then is the tendency toward **melancholia** and **introspection**, and away from representing

outward shows of masculinity reliant on **wealth, physical strength and sexual dominance**. This shift can also be seen in artists such as **Lupe Fiasco** and **Drake**, both of whom dabble in traditional stereotypes but who seem ready to step away from them in order to explore more personal stories. The extent to which this trend will continue and spread across the mainstream is questionable; but an era in which a hip-hop artist can be pictured wearing glasses and a cardigan is a definite step in a new direction.

Phil Dyas teaches Media Studies at Dunraven School, South London.

Is it cos I is British?!



Images courtesy of image.net.



Issues Around Black Britishness

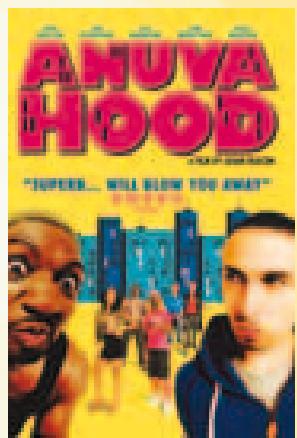
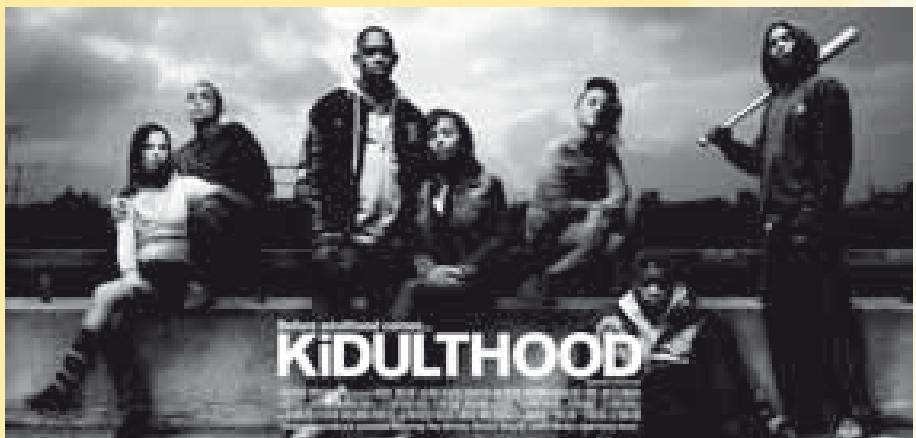
What does it mean to be Black British? Why has it taken so long for us to see representations of and by black British artists, producers and creatives as more than just 'issues'? **Jennifer G Robinson** explores the diversity and range of the Olympic Opening Ceremony, and wonders how far it reflects the media's role in constructing black British identity.

...Some people think I'm bonkers/but I jus' think I'm free/man, I'm jus' livin' my life/ there's nothin' crazy 'bout me...

Clad in baseball jacket, snapbacks and jeans, **Dizzee Rascal's** nonchalant lyrics fall over the opening ceremony of the London 2012 Olympics. Dizzee's lines could be seen to symbolise the ease with which black culture has been integrated into the mainstream, if stereotypically so.

Part of the problem when analysing black culture in the UK today arises from our **dependence upon American popular culture** as a model for critiquing representational issues.

June 1948's Empire Windrush descendants have established themselves to have a body of expression which greatly diverges from African American 'norms'. Whilst Rascal's heritage hails from Ghana and Nigeria, his music genre contributes to a wealth of cultural expression in British life.





We often assume that the complexity of cultures and nationalities is commonplace across these isles; it is not.



From actor **Kenneth Branagh's representation of Isambard Kingdom Brunel** in the Industrial Revolution to the lighting of the Olympic torch, the ceremony offered us a view of Britain's diversity to which we have not been often treated.

One particular segment, featuring Great Ormond Street Hospital, gave a pat-on-the-back to the NHS and its architects. Here many black faces were featured, acknowledging the well-documented evidence that the arrival of the Windrush was motivated by the request by the then Labour Government for Caribbean people to help rebuild the 'mother country' after the war. As well as British Rail and the bus network, many of the 'arrivants' worked in the NHS.

Later in the ceremony, the boy-meets-girl narrative between 'Frankie and June', observed and epitomised the blending of families across 'race', culture and generation, against the backdrop representing the digital age and the growth of British popular culture. And, as if to underscore the point, Scotland's mixed heritage **Emeli Sandé** sang the Christian hymn 'Abide With Me' against **Akram Khan's** visceral tribute to the London 7/7 bombing victims, in a sombre movement of the Olympic orchestration.

While it's safe to say Danny Boyle constructed a magnificent and moving montage, the personnel who supported him in part explains why the ceremony depicted a particularly contemporary and diverse view of British life. Boyle's Associate Director was **Paulette Randall**, a legendary director of black and multicultural theatre and television. **Sutirat Anne Larlab** was costume designer on Boyle's films **Slumdog Millionaire** (2008) and **Sunshine** (2007),

whilst choreography of the 'Frankie and June' segment was directed by **Kenrick 'H2O' Sandy**, at the forefront of hip-hop nu-style street dance.

A pertinent observation here is the 'bubble' that Londoners inhabit. We often assume that the complexity of cultures and nationalities is commonplace across these isles; it is not. Not even in cities such as Birmingham, Bristol or Manchester can such multiculturalism be found, and beyond this, diversity is pretty much found only in...the media!

Not everyone was enthralled by the Olympic spectacle; one notable critic was Tory MP Aidan Burley. Poetically, using the immediacy of twenty-first century digital technology, he tweeted his displeasure of the proceedings describing it as '...leftie multicultural crap...' Of course he back-pedalled, claiming that he meant nothing derogatory about that unquantifiable entity called 'multiculturalism'. Too late!

Some Recent Black British Texts

So how well do these Olympic images match contemporary depictions in the media? On the face of things black British representation is sound. **Actor/director Noel Clarke** is doing well out of his **Kidulthood** (2006), **Adulthood** (2008) foray. With roles in iconic television series **Dr Who**, Clarke is even reported to be in the second outing of the **Star Trek** (2013) reboot. And he's also been a poster boy for **Creative Skillset**, the media industries' lead training provider, hand-picked to recruit a more diverse range of young people into UK creative jobs.

It could be argued that the success of **Saul Dibb's Bullet Boy** (2004) heralded a season of British 'hood' dramas. Enter **Anuvahood** (2011) and of course the other '...hoods'. Amongst them are **Rollin' With The Nines** (2006), **Attack The Block** (2011), **Sket** (2011) and **Shank** (2012) with **Plan B's III Manors** (2012) as the latest of the batch.

Channel 4's **Top Boy** featuring charismatic **Ashley Walters** came with critical acclaim. But it's the BBC which has a practised hand with **crime drama featuring 'tortured' black men at the helm**. Enter **Don Gilet** in **55 Degrees North** (2004) and **Luther** (2010) starring **Idris Elba**. Most recently **Lennie James** attempted a similarly-wrought role in **Line of Duty** (2012).

However, comedy has fared less well. Historically there have been some notable attempts to represent the black British experience. **The Kumars at No. 42** (2001) and **Goodness Gracious Me** (1998) attempted a hearty look at Asian airs and graces within British culture; **Citizen Khan** is



The problem with much black representation is that it is continually anchored in 'race' or 'issues'.

continuing the process. African Caribbean sketch show *The Real McCoy* (1991) was in similar vein. *Hackney Empire's 291 Club* (1991) was a British adaptation of the USA's 78-year-old event, *Amateur Night at the Apollo*. Meanwhile, BBC3's *3 Non-Blondes* (2003), starred Ninja Benjamin, Jocelyn Jee Esien and Tameka Empson, currently an *EastEnders*' favourite as the character 'Kim Fox'. However, the very troubled text *The Crouches* (2003) was the last African/Caribbean sitcom on mainstream British TV – which might explain the continued enjoyment and repeated rescheduling of actor Will Smith's vehicle *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air* (1990) despite little reflection of the socio-economic condition of black British audiences.

Otherness, Problems and Prejudice

Adaptations of work from British authors **Zadie Smith**, **Andrea Levy** and **Monica Ali** are interesting. *White Teeth* (2002), *Brick Lane* (2007) and *Small Island* (2009) all discuss these writers' experiences through immigration, inter-racial love and racism. However, these adaptations still posit a representation of '**otherness**' which must continually explain itself. It is anchored in pain, struggle for identity and a **demand for acknowledgement of presence**. These adaptations appear as updated versions of earlier 'race' films such as *Borderline*

(1930), *Sapphire* (1959) and *Flame in the Streets* (1961). With all the other narratives documenting black and Asian life, which mirror universal human experiences, why are these narratives chosen for mainstream production? The problem with much black representation is that it is continually anchored in 'race' or 'issues'. Some explanation lies in media ownership and who is allowed to 'tell the story' in mainstream media.

Is it Just about Numbers?

Long running BBC drama *Casualty* is an obvious choice in comparison to the Olympic representation of the NHS; and yes, there is a good proportion of black actors within the programme. Yet to what extent does it deal with the real life issues that black staff can face at all levels? On arrival in Britain, Windrush 'arrivants' found they were just 'tolerated' within the 'mother country'. Although they were highly qualified in their field of work, many in the NHS were reduced to little more than auxiliary staff, finding it difficult to work their way up professional ranks. So is it enough simply to show black faces on TV to fully represent the diversity of the nation? There are 'racist' incidents within *Casualty*, but these tend to be low-level name-calling and, perhaps stereotypically, violence from working-class thugs.



Online Visibility

Creativity and the need to express it is a universal human trait – as is the need for recognition and acclaim. Testimony to this are texts which could be investigated in the context of **audience reception** – if anyone knew they were there. The following texts are, perhaps unsurprisingly, available only via the internet. *Brothers With No Game* features a series of comedy sketches based around relationships viewed from a male perspective whilst *Venus vs Mars* is another relationship series from a female perspective. *The Ryan Sisters* is written and produced by veteran comedian/writer Angie Le Mar; *All About The McKenzies* joins the sitcom genre as does *Meet the Adebanjos*, unusually about a British Nigerian family. Online productions are able to bypass many of the **restrictive production and media ownership issues** affecting mainstream broadcast media.

They therefore often have a greater level of **authenticity**. This was utterly lacking in a text such as *The Crouches*. It erroneously mixed actors of African and Caribbean descent and asked us to believe that they were one genetically related family!

Diverse Identities and Media Ownership

One key area of investigation in Media Studies is that of **identity**. With an intersection of gender, class, nationality and 'race', how do the generations of descendants of the immigrants who arrived between 1948 and 1965 reconcile themselves in Britain? It's essential to establish that in terms of 'race', people classified here do not form a homogenous group. According to ONS figures that people classified as 'mixed race' are the fastest growing section of British society.

Many of the texts discussed so far have

been victims of **the inequalities of media ownership**, another contentious field. Some nationalities are forging their own means of production, distribution and exhibition: Indian cinema and Bollywood is a long-standing and prime example. But another, **Nigerian film and Nollywood**, is also gaining momentum. Actor **Genevieve Nnaji** is a rising star through films such as *The Mirror Boy* (2011). Making history, this film was the first of African origin to have a general cinema release in the UK. **OHTV** and **iROKOTv** are other outlets for Nollywood.

There remains a particular anomaly: that of **African Caribbean representation**. What has happened to representations of those who arrived at Tilbury docks in 1948, as so lovingly acknowledged in the Olympic ceremony? In the wake of inner-city riots and the perceived marginalisation of ethnic minorities, the 1980s saw a great flowering of 'alternative' political and avant-garde documentaries, shorts and feature films funded by Channel 4 and other creative agencies, and made by African Caribbeans for African Caribbeans. To take one example, in 1983 the **Sankofa Film and Video Collective** was created. Today, just one surviving heir remains: the **director Isaac Julien**, who is now an installation artist/filmmaker not operating within the mainstream. An analysis of the politics, economics and texts of the 80s would be a good place to start an investigation into this area, particularly through the study of **industry/media ownership**.

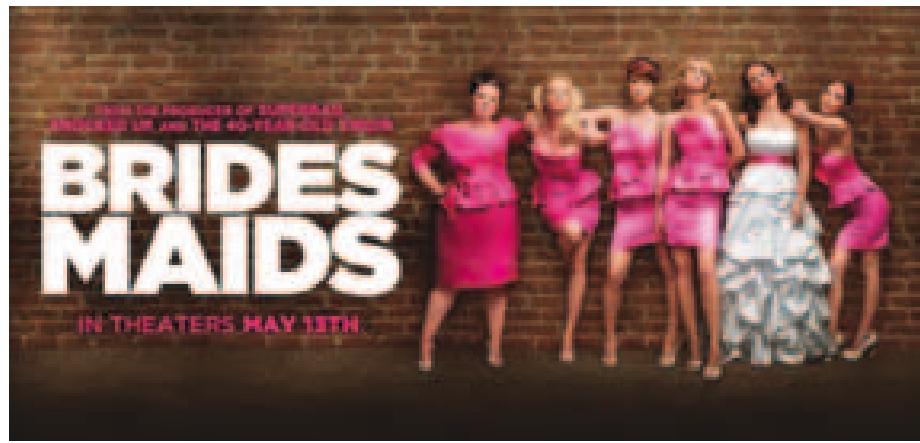
What we begin see with these 'alternatives' is the accomplishment of the descendants of the Asian, African and Caribbean diaspora, directing their narratives unapologetically, without the need for explanation of 'self', the occupation of 'space' or positioning as 'other'. Dizzee Rascal's lyrics neither want nor feel the need to explain. He reminds us '...there's nothin' crazy 'bout me...'.

Jennifer G. Robinson is a freelance journalist/writer in film and media.

(NOT SO) PRETTY IN PINK



Images courtesy of image.net.



Boldly going where no chick flick has gone before? A closer look at issues surrounding the film *Bridesmaids* (Paul Feig, 2011).

The term 'chick flick' is frequently used to describe a female-targeted romance film, often criticised for its lightweight themes, formulaic plot-lines and repetitive use of predictable and somewhat exhausted clichés. The assumption that female-targeted films are essentially bad, lower budget and perform poorly at the box office continues to exist, in what is still perceived as an inherently male-centred film industry.

However, recent developments within the genre would suggest that the boundaries of the 'chick flick' are changing with surprise box office hit *Bridesmaids* (2011, Feig) hailed as a turning point for the genre. The film destabilises gender conventions, upsets generic rules and challenges audiences, providing a rich source of media debate in its search for new ground.

Hailed as a '**feminist milestone**' and a '**benchmark for female comedy**', *Bridesmaids* is currently **the highest grossing female comedy in history**. It is not only written by women (Kristen Wiig and Annie Mumolo), but features a **predominantly female cast of relative unknowns**.

The film is produced by unlikely feminist hero, Judd Apatow (*40 Year Old Virgin*, *Knocked Up*, *Superbad*) – a seasoned pioneer of what Jeffers McDonald terms the 'homme-com', also known as **the romantic comedy for men**. In an unconventional move away from these male-driven

The characters break free from preconceived ideals of femininity by engaging in what may be commonly described as male behaviour, from crude sexual banter to overactive bodily functions.

adventures, Apatow presents *Bridesmaids* as a breakthrough film about the lesser-documented female rites of passage, which celebrates friendships between women and explores the complexities of female adulthood.

The Narrative

The film centres around protagonist Annie whose life is on a downward spiral following the collapse of her business and floundering love life – a thankless cycle of unsatisfying booty calls with the sleazy Ted (Jon Hamm). Her situation is magnified when best friend Lillian announces her engagement to Doug. Annie becomes her unlikely maid of honour, provoking a series of unfortunate events as Annie comes to terms with the thought of losing her best friend.

Bridesmaids could be considered a re-imagining of the commonly known **sub-genre of the wedding film**. The film itself operates in a **wholly feminine context** from its title to the classic scenario of the blushing bride-to-be, seen frequently in other, more traditional rom-coms such as *Bride Wars*, *My Best Friend's Wedding* or *The Wedding Planner*; but it offers a revolutionary twist on generic expectations.

The film has a fairly conventional narrative, with the two key female characters ultimately finding love and a re-equilibrium that sees Annie united with love interest Rhodes (Chris O'Dowd) signalling a 'happy ever after' for our heroine. The feminine theme of romance exists within the film, as does the desire to find happiness with 'the one'. The film traditionally uses a relationship as its central focus, but it is the alliance between Annie and Lillian that takes precedence over a romantic partnership in an examination of **female camaraderie**. In what could be considered a move forward for the genre, Annie's anxiety comes from the anticipated loss or deterioration of her friendship with Lillian once she marries Doug, as opposed to the clichéd female fear of being 'left on the shelf'.

Challenging Expectations

The film challenges expectations of female behaviour through the type of comedy used, in what has been described as '**The Hangover in heels**'. Dargis accuses the film of going 'where no typical chick flick does: the gutter'. Its use of **physical gross-out moments** and **sex-orientated, bawdy humour** breaks away from the comedy conventions of the rom-com, where harmless verbal jokes and comic misunderstandings are used to generate laughs. The characters break free from





preconceived ideals of femininity by engaging in what may be commonly described as **male behaviour, from crude sexual banter to overactive bodily functions.**

Women Behaving Badly?

Men behaving badly are a staple element of the 'homme-com', with vivid and outrageous gross-out comedy a frequent feature within the films, assuming a predominantly male interest in this type of humour. *Bridesmaids*, however, shows that women can do physical comedy and witty one-liners just as well as their male counterparts, with female audiences enjoying a welcome break from the relentless slew of male-centred comedy, proving that **funny female characters can do better business at the box office.**

The larger-than-life character of **Megan (Melissa McCarthy)** uses her physicality to generate many visual gags within the film, most notably the film's most famous gross-out scene which sees all of the bridesmaids suffering from food poisoning during a bridal fitting, culminating in Megan using the sink as a toilet. Megan could be described as the '**buffoon**' character – a common comedy archetype who is usually male (Zach Galifianakis in *The Hangover*, Jonah Hill in *Superbad*). She is both assertive and self-confident, displaying what may be considered traditionally masculine personality traits, from her lewd sexual comments to her extreme boisterousness. Humour arises from the fact that Megan defies expectations of female behaviour to

Women can be as funny as men, but are they just copying male behaviour? And is this a comedy style designed by men with a male audience in mind?

the point of shocking the audience.

The character has divided critical opinion, with one view suggesting that comedy arises from Megan's butch sexuality and unattractiveness, which leads to many appearance-related jokes within the film. Cox states that the film is a '**landmark in misogyny – sisters are doing it for themselves**', through the performance of this type of humiliating, guy-pleasing humour. Critics suggest that these scenes act solely to attract the *Hangover* market, with vivid gross-out set pieces included to draw in male viewers, rather than to showcase gender equality within cinematic comedy.

Challenging the Stereotypes

Bridesmaids illustrates a contextual shift in gender roles by presenting an array of progressive female character types. Traditionally, the chick flick has played host to the development of a number of **passive female types**, most notably the one-dimensional '**girl next door**' – a character who, by definition, is settled, content, uncomplicated and attainable. Played convincingly to type by a string of typecast female stars such as **Meg Ryan, Jennifer**



Aniston and more recently **Katherine Heigl** and **Amy Adams**, the girl next door presents an **idealised view of femininity** and is most often blonde, blue-eyed and slender in appearance with a vulnerable, sensitive, yet ultimately humourless demeanour. In an attempt to persuade Hollywood that multi-dimensional women exist, *Bridesmaids* offers an alternative selection of witty women, none of them recognisable stars, in an attempt to increase both realism and the degree to which people relate to it.

Bride-to-be Lillian (Maya Rudolph) is something of an 'Everywoman' and is both funny and easy to relate to. Her fiancé Doug is given very little screen time; the film charts her journey and anxieties as she prepares to settle down. As the film progresses, Lillian turns into the **recently established stereotype of Bridezilla**, becoming a hysterical diva as her wedding plans spiral out of control in the hands of perfectionist wedding planner Helen (Rose Byrne).

Director Paul Feig attributes the film's success to audience's response to the relatable character of the main protagonist

Annie (Kristen Wiig), stating:

Yes, you had the comic set pieces, but if you didn't have this really relatable woman in the middle of it, it wouldn't have worked.

Annie is presented as a sharp, attractive 30-something and warm, devoted friend to Lillian, though her own story arc may not be viewed as a particularly empowering one. She is introduced as a **failed businesswoman** in the conventionally 'female' industry of cookery, who, as the narrative progresses, reaches rock bottom, alienating her friends, losing her job and moving back home. Annie does not live up to feminine expectations and instead **performs a version of femininity** whilst feeling the strain of her Maid of Honour duties.

Annie's arch-nemesis is Helen – a vision of idealised femininity – beautiful, well organised and, on the surface, picture perfect. The constant competitive one-upmanship demonstrated by Annie and Helen generates much comedy within the film, though pitting the two women against each other as bitter rivals could arguably be viewed as **a promotion of assumed 'female' traits of bitchiness, jealousy and**

the resentment of other women. However, in this case it is Lillian who is the object of the women's affections, as opposed to a male love interest. Helen's façade drops towards the end of the film as she reveals her insecurities and the loneliness of married life, masked by a need to keep up appearances. The character of Rita – a feisty, outspoken mother of three – also questions the idea of happily ever after in her frequent rants about the pitfalls of marriage. This is a move away from the ideologies promoted in the traditional rom-com where fairy tale romances culminate in problem-free wedded bliss.

Challenging or Conformist?

One could argue that the film is ultimately conformist as Annie 'gets the guy' and ultimately a new lease of life. Rhodes could therefore be seen as Annie's saviour, though he lacks the masculine prowess and self-assurance of the traditional knight in shining armour, presenting an offbeat, nervy yet sweet performance, not a world away from O'Dowd's most famous character, Roy from *The IT Crowd*. He is gentle and insecure, illustrating a shift towards a

more sensitive depiction of cinematic masculinity, though his profession as a cop signifies traditional male authority and power. Unconventionally, it is Annie who does wrong by Rhodes, not calling him after their one-night-stand. In an uncharacteristic **role reversal**, it is Rhodes who sulks and does not answer Annie's calls. The '**grand gesture**' is a narrative device commonly used within most rom-coms and is usually carried out by the male character in a bid to redeem himself and win back the girl. Here it is Annie who, in a bid to salvage Rhodes' affection, bakes him a cake and leaves it outside his house with an apology note.

In summary, *Bridesmaids* presents a number of issues up for debate. Women can be as funny as men, but are they just copying male behaviour? And is this a comedy style designed by men with a male audience in mind? Is the presentation of gross-out humour really a victory for gender equality – or a bid to maximise box office profits by opening up the chick flick to both male and female audiences? While *Bridesmaids* challenges the generic codes and gender conventions of the rom-com genre, its traditional narrative pattern suggests that although the film is both dynamic and adventurous, perhaps it is ultimately conventional.

Becky Ellis teaches Film and Media Studies at Wakefield College.

Follow it up:

- The **wedding genre** is not confined to film. TV shows such as *Don't Tell the Bride*, *Bridezillas* and *Four Weddings* are full of interesting issues for analysis, from both a genre and representation stand point.
- Look at other films featuring non-conformist female characters such as *Bad Teacher* (2011), *Young Adult* (2011) and *Take this Waltz* (2011). These films depict a female viewpoint and present an unconventional look at female adulthood.
- The success of *Bridesmaids* has resulted in a renewed interest in the **wedding film sub-genre**. Take a look at recent releases such as *Best Men* (2012) or *Wedding Video* (2012).
- Jeffers McDonald: 'The View from the Man Cave: Comedy in the 'Homme-com' Cycle' <http://kar.kent.ac.uk>



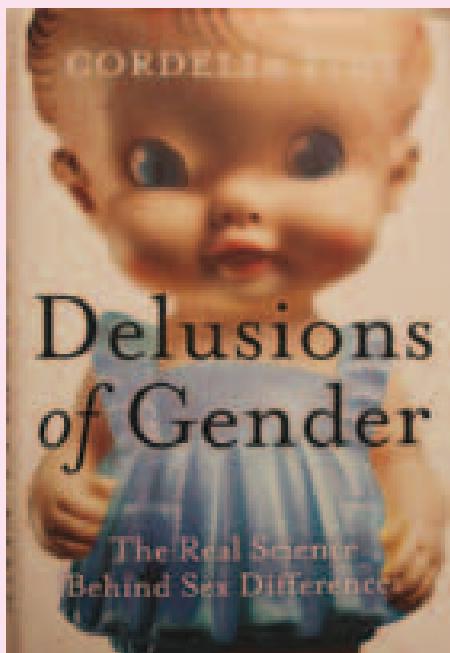
Does pink matter?!

Early socialisation into gender roles has long been an issue for debate, often epitomised by the gendering of products and the associations of the colour pink. **Nick Lacey** investigates, and finds that the humble biro has become a symbolic battleground for debates around sexism.



challenge and reverse this growing trend. We also promote media literacy, self-esteem, positive body image and female role models for kids.

<http://www.pinkstinks.co.uk/>

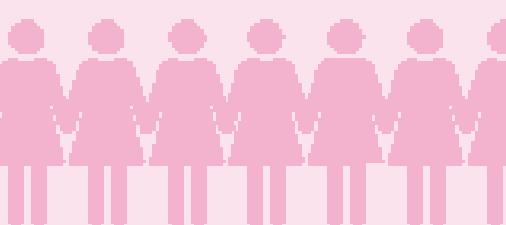
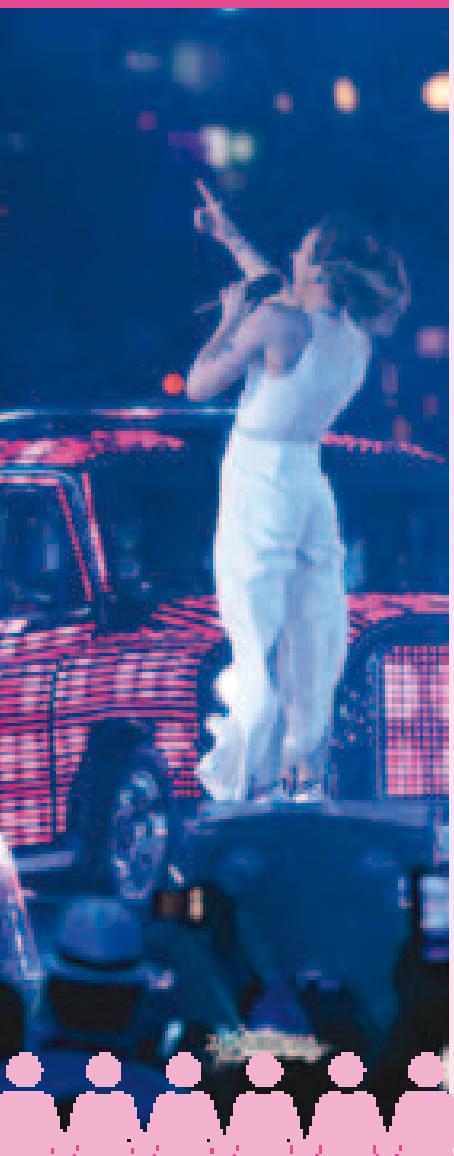


A few months ago, when I should have been writing an article for this magazine, I was staring out of my window and I saw two young boys playing football while a girl, probably about four years of age, was 'busy' pushing a pink pushchair around the road. As anecdotal evidence this proves nothing; but I did wonder how much fun the little girl got from pushing around the pushchair, which probably contained a dolly baby, compared to the lads who were kicking the ball. Remember the nursery rhyme?

**What are little boys made of?
'Snips and snails, and puppy dogs tails
That's what little boys are made of!'
What are little girls made of?
'Sugar and spice and all things nice
That's what little girls are made of!'**

Young children are taught gender roles from a very young age; and whilst you probably don't pay any mind to nursery rhymes nowadays, it is possible that they had an impact upon you then ... and therefore continue to have an impact on you now, whether you are conscious of it or not. The **Pinkstinks** website thinks that gendering of roles at a young age does matter and, in particular, the prevalence of toys that are aimed specifically at girls or boys:

Pinkstinks is a campaign that targets the products, media and marketing that prescribe heavily stereotyped and limiting roles to young girls. We believe that all children – girls and boys – are affected by the 'pinkification' of girlhood. Our aim is to



'**Pinkification**' here refers to the prevalence of gender colour-coding, as well as to the fact that boys' toys are more adventurous whilst, for girls, the emphasis is upon the domestic world. Unsurprisingly **The Daily Telegraph** doesn't think pink is a problem; in a leading article (in which the newspaper's opinion is stated directly) it said:

It really is difficult to think of a sillier or more patronising cause, worthy of the trendy 'Modern Parents' who inflict misery on their children in the pages of *Viz* magazine. Little girls like pink; it is part of their innocent charm, not an indication that they plan to waste their lives in 'pretty-pretty jobs', whatever they might be.

7 December, 2009; available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/telegraph-view/6748825/Pinkstinks-is-a-dour-and-humourless-campaign.html>, accessed September 2012

'Unsurprising' because **The Telegraph** is a right-wing, conservative newspaper that is likely to take the view that **traditional gender roles, 'man as breadwinner, woman as nurturer'**, are best.

One way of testing for gender bias is through a '**commutation test**', where one sign in a text is replaced by another belonging to the same 'group'; in this case **gender**. If you replace 'girl' with 'boy', to read: 'Little boys like pink, it is part of their innocent charm...'. It's likely that this sentence will strike you as strange; the test emphasises the **ideological basis** of the newspaper's argument.

'Little boys', of course, are *meant* to like blue (and why is thinking of them as 'innocent' strange?) but that preference cannot be in our genes and so is a **social construct**. Incidentally, originally the colour coding was the other way around! Ideas about gender are not immutable but will evolve as society changes.

In her book ***Delusions of Gender*** (2010), arguably an indispensable read for Media students, the Australian academic, psychologist and writer **Cordelia Fine** writes about an eighteenth-century bestseller called ***An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex*** by **Thomas Gisborne**.



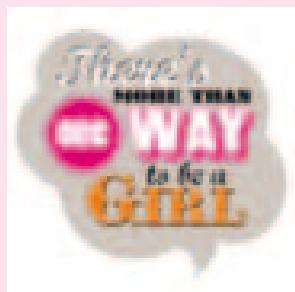
It seems that the desire to define women as better at relationships and men better at 'running things' remains as strong as it was in the past.

As you might expect, at a time long before women were allowed to vote, Gisborne's view of women's intellectual capacity was extremely **sexist**. He couched his argument in '**scientific discourse**' stating he 'draws his conclusions from forces of nature and truth' (1801: 15). Of course, these days everything is different: women have the vote, there's even been a female Prime Minister in Britain, and it has been illegal to discriminate on the basis of sex since 1975... However, despite this, it is clear that there is a long way to go before there is true equality between the sexes. As I mentioned in *MediaMagazine* issue 34, in 2010 ('Engendering Change'):

A report published last August concluded, at the current rate of progress, women won't get paid the same as men until 2067; 92 years after the Equal Pay Act become law!

<http://www.managers.org.uk/news/gender-equality-57-years-away>

This abstract expression of discrimination obviously has practical consequences. For example, **director Susanna White**, whose most recent production was **Parade's End** (UK, 2012) shown on BBC last August and September, found her gender a disadvantage: despite winning a [highly



prestigious] Fulbright scholarship to study film at UCLA after graduating from Oxford University, she failed to win a place on a BBC training scheme and was turned down for a BBC drama director trainee course in 1999 after 12 years spent making well-received documentaries for BBC2:

I remember someone on the selection panel saying, 'What makes you think you can control 100 people?'

The implication is that the question was asked because she is female; there is an assumption that men 'naturally' have authority whereas women do not.

In her book, **Cordelia Fine** argues that there is no evidence to support the myth that the human brain is hard-wired for gender, and goes on to show that 'science' (such as MRI scans) is still used to justify sexism, as it was in 1801 by Gisborne. It seems that the desire to define women as better at relationships and men better at 'running things' remains as strong as it was in the past. Fine quotes Cambridge University psychologist **Simon Baron-Cohen** as stating:

The female brain is predominantly hard-wired for empathy. The male brain is predominantly hard-wired for understanding and building systems.

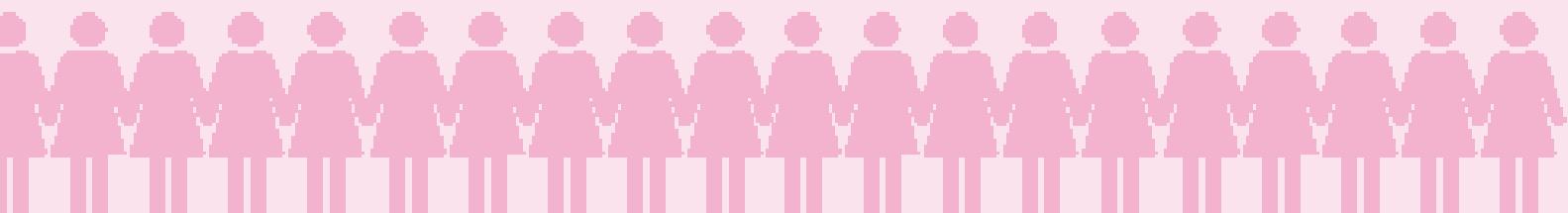
Fine 2010

Australia has its first female Prime Minister and conservative commentators find this very upsetting. In September a well-known Australian DJ

announced on his show that women in positions of power were 'destroying the joint.'

Rourke, 2012

This has taken us some way from the 'pink' that **The Telegraph** argues is a harmless colour. For many older readers who remember the **second wave of feminism** that ran from the **1960s to the 1990s** and was responsible for such legislation as the **Sex Discrimination Act 1975**, it does seem that society is taking retrograde steps in the battle for equality. The growing availability of **gendered products** is symptomatic of this trend. It's also possible that **traditional gender roles have become enmeshed with 'celebrity culture'** where women, in particular, are valued for their looks, and offer passive female role models. Contrast the celeb performers in the Olympic ceremonies – Rihanna, The Spice Girls – with the brilliance



of the Olympians themselves, such as Jessica Ennis and Ellie Simmons!

Apparently confirming the view that the progress made in gender equality is under threat, **Bic**, of ballpoint pen fame, has seen fit to market a biro aimed at women: **The BIC For Her Amber Medium Ballpoint Pen**, which has an 'attractive barrel design available in pink and purple'. A search on Amazon for 'BIC for Him' reveals there are no pens specifically designed for men. The 'normal' pen, therefore, is for the male sex. Advertisers like traditional gender roles as it makes selling their products easier.

Maybe, like **The Telegraph**, you find this unimportant – and, of course, as audience/consumers, we can resist anything that tries to restrict our worldview. At the time of writing, the 'BIC for her' had amassed an amazing 459 customer reviews, many of which (maybe all, I couldn't find a genuinely positive one in a quick perusal) poke fun at the stupidity of the concept. Here's 'jonny', who gave the product five stars:

Revolutionary Article – Must Buy!, 20 Aug 2012

This pen is great. I bought it for all my female friends and relatives. It enabled them, finally, to write things (although they may not yet know to do so on paper; but you can only expect so much, really). I thought they were just a bit slow.

My mother, a hard-working woman who raised twelve kids single-handedly whilst doing all the ironing (as nature intended), was furtively abashed by her illiteracy. Long would she gaze upon her husband and sons' scrawlings and would dedicate five minutes a day (which she really should have spent making sandwiches) to pray that one day she would be granted the ability to create such scribbles of her own. She's still a little slow on the uptake, but this product has definitely helped start the ball rolling. We tried to give her men's pens but she used to rip the cartridges out and drink the ink. Typical woman.

Anyway, it's good that BIC are finally doing something to aid the plight of women.

Hopefully a range of 'for her' paperclips is on the horizon – my wife has an awful time keeping her recipes together.

But the last word must surely go to Mr J Stevens who on 28th August 2012 wrote that:

Normally I only use pens designed and created for real men, in colours appropriate

to such instruments of masculinity – black like my chest hair or blue like the steely glint of my eyes, or the metallic paintwork of my convertible Mustang sportscar. Imagine then the situation I found myself in when, upon taking delivery of another shipment of motorbike parts and footballs, I reached for and grasped not my normal BIC pen, but a 'BIC for Her Amber Medium Ballpoint Pen' (evidently ordered by my well-meaning, but ill-informed girlfriend whilst my back was turned). I knew something was wrong when I had to physically restrain my hands, gnarled and worn from a lifetime of rock-climbing and shark wrestling, from crushing the fragile implement like a Faberge egg. Things only went downhill from there.

Normally my hand writing is defined and strong, as if chiselled in granite by the Greek gods themselves, however upon signing my name I noticed that my signature was uncharacteristically meandering and looping. More worryingly the dots above the I's manifested themselves as hearts, and I found myself finishing off the signature with a smiley face and kisses. Obviously I had no choice but to challenge the delivery man to a gun fight on the rim of an erupting volcano in order to reassert my dominance. Had I not won this honourable duel this particular mistake might have resulted in a situation that no amount of expensive single malt whiskey and Cuban cigars could banish. I leave this review here as a warning to all men about the dangers of using this particular device, and suffice-it-to-say will return to signing my name with a nail gun as normal.

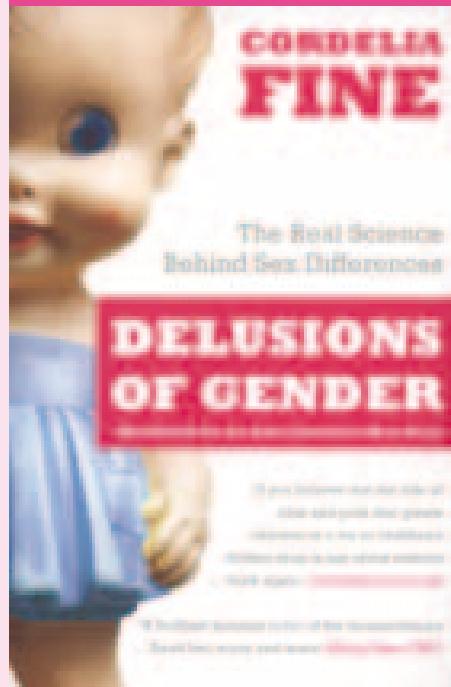
Nick Lacey teaches Film and Media at Benton Park School near Leeds.

http://www.amazon.co.uk/product-reviews/B004FTGJUW/ref=dp_top_cm_cr_acr_txt?ie=UTF8&showViewpoints=1

Cordelia Fine (2010) *Delusions of Gender: The Real Science Behind Sex Differences*

Thomas Gisborne (5th edition, 1801) *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (available at: http://openlibrary.org/books/OL23379855M/An_enquiry_into_the_duties_of_the_female_sex., accessed September 2012)

Alison Rourke 'Australia: sexual equality debate rages after DJ Alan Jones's outburst' *The Observer*, 9 September, available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/sep/09/sexual-equality-debate-rages-australia?newsfeed=true>, accessed September 2012



REPRESENTING THE 'OTHER'

The Virtual Middle East in Computer Games

Sean Richardson explores the ideas of Edward Said and Jean Baudrillard in an analysis of the representations of the Middle East in video games.



Did you know that **85% of characters in computer games are white, heterosexual Caucasian males?** This means that we assume this dominant identity for the majority of our game playing.

This shocking statistic reveals the problematic representation issues that are becoming increasingly important as we continue to play more and more computer games in ever more realistic ways. Terrorists, militia, murderers and violent thugs are often the 'enemy' or villain in the narratives of computer games, particularly **action games set in a virtual 'Middle East'.**

Consider the plot of the popular PS3/Xbox game, **Battlefield 3**, set in 2014. Here, a 'Sgt. Blackburn' leads a five-man squad on a mission to find and safely return a US squad investigating a possible IED (Improvised Explosive Device aka terrorist bomb) in Sulaymaniyah, Iraq, whose last known position was a market controlled by a hostile militia called the 'PLR'.

The game has been accused of promoting racism and violence with an unrealistic Middle Eastern worldview, which does not reflect the reality in Iraq at all. The representations exploit stereotypical generalisations and clichés. In the digital age, computer games are a very powerful form of mainstream media that shapes our comprehension and understanding of the world by constructing powerful iconic representations. **Arab columnist Aijaz Zaka Syed**, suggested that games like **Battlefield 3** are dangerous:

Predictably, the US and coalition soldiers are



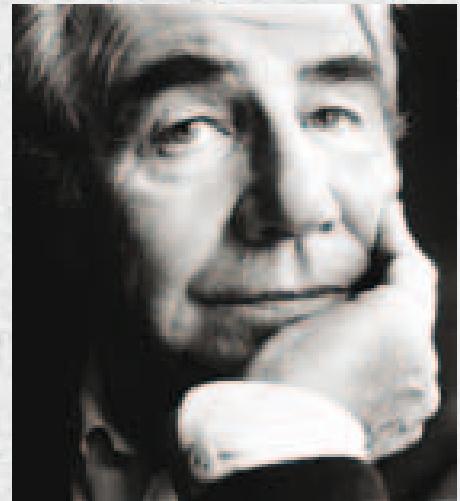
a collective paragon of virtue and humanised with names to help the gamer identify with the 'good guys.' And the enemy is a faceless, collectivised monster, often described as terrorist groups, insurgents and militants.

Orientalism and the 'Other'

A distorted view of the Middle East and Arabs and Muslims has been a historical phenomenon, marginalising the representation of 'ordinary' Arabs/ Muslims. The influential and controversial literary critic **Edward Said** discusses this issue in his classic book **Orientalism**, published in 1978. He has said:

So far as the United States seems to be concerned ... Muslims and Arabs are essentially seen as either oil suppliers or potential terrorists.

Said argues that the Middle East and its people are presented as 'other', in a realm of 'desert, camels, Bedouins and caliphs'. This concept of **Orientalism and the Other** is an excellent way of approaching representation issues for examination and coursework essays.

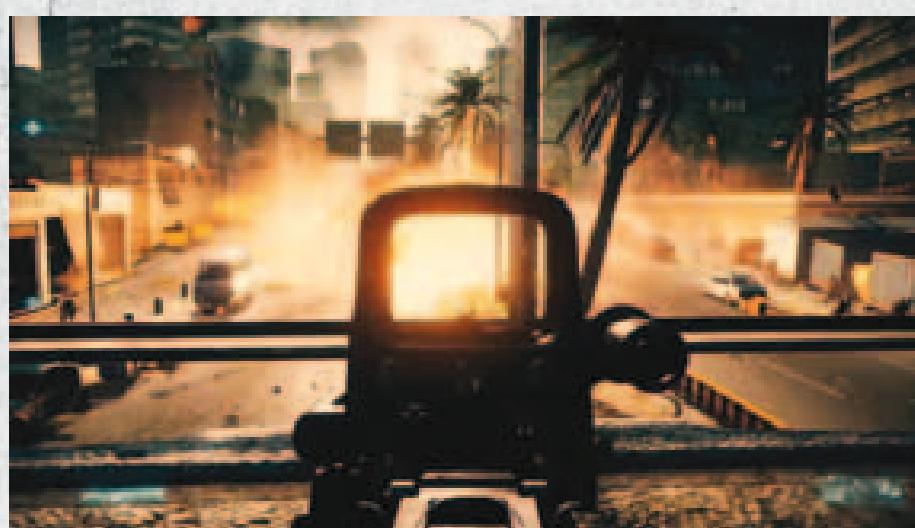


Simulacra and the 'Other'

The issue of **simulacra** is key here as the virtual world seeps into the real world. **Baudrillard**, a key theorist in this area, suggested that reality as we know it is 'dead' and we are in a virtual reality, a **simulacra**. In late capitalist postmodern society, the distinction between reality and representation is often blurred, so attacking, killing and demonising Middle Eastern militiamen in games like **Call of Duty, America's Army** and **Battlefield 3**, becomes problematic. When TV news such as CNN broadcast shots of drones bombing Middle Eastern locations, the footage appears very much like a game, with no real sense of the consequences, the damage or the human casualties. Baudrillard has argued controversially that the hyper-reality we are now experiencing means that to all intents and purposes, the Gulf War did not take place but was a television/gaming spectacle. This is about the power of images and sensory experiences, where demonising a race, the Arab 'other', in gaming, means we are all implicated.

In the majority of action based computer games (especially the first person shooter genre), the goal of the game is to eliminate/kill **'others'** who typically belong to the category **'one of them'** (Dahlberg 2005). The key question, then, is how the 'others' are constructed by the game through graphics, narrative and gameplay.

The enemy dress codes usually include head cover, loose clothes, dark skin colour. In many cases the in-game narrative links these signifiers to international terrorism





and/or Islamist extremism. The real-time tactics game *Full Spectrum Warrior* is set in a fictional but explicitly Muslim country of Tazikhstan, described in the game's blurb as 'a haven for terrorists and extremists'. Another game, *Command & Conquer: Generals* allows the player to choose to play as part of the 'Arab 'Global Liberation Army' a militia who comprise of:

terrorists with car bombs and truck bombs, suicide bombers with explosives strapped to their bodies, anthrax and biotoxin delivery systems and angry mobs of Arabs wielding AK-47s.

Gaming Post-9/11

Since 9/11 such games have become more extreme in their ideological positioning. A clear example of this is the game *America's Army*, which is a US-sanctioned propaganda tool for recruitment for the US army. *America's Army* has status as an official US Army communication tool, with a bold, post 9/11 worldview. In a Special Forces mission on the game, the player is given the following 'intelligence' before storming a village:

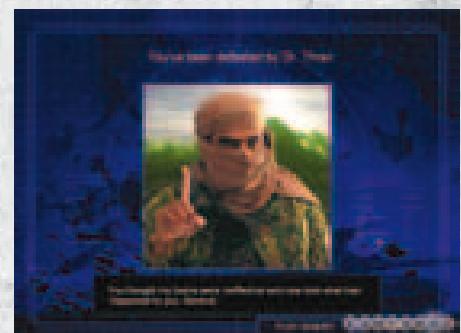
Intelligence has identified this village as a hotbed for hostile activity and the likely source of IEDs used in recent attacks. The local population is a mix of insurgents, sympathisers and pro-democracy civilians.

This is a significant **militarisation** of digital gaming, drawing on the classic **Levi-Strauss binary of the good Self versus the evil Other**. The prevalent 'Orientalist' mode of representation becomes an issue when **there is a clear lack of positive images or messages about a race or group of people**.

America's Army was originally released as a global public relations initiative to help with recruitment, but it raised controversy when it became evident that the game was financed by the US Government and distributed by **free download** like a **propaganda drop from World War 2**. The game has been described as an extension of the military entertainment complex with the disturbing criticism that it is contributing to the militarisation of society.

Battlefield 3 Narrative

Battlefield 3, as described previously, is a game that is played on the PS3 and Xbox consoles, which have a fantastic ability to recreate a 'reality' through technological advances in graphics and gameplay. The very problematic 'Orientalist' representations described above become ever more powerful when the **narrative and structure** of the game play combine with the **realism** created by the graphics technology.



Virtual Terrorists

Within the narrative of *Battlefield 3*, the so-called PLR is a fictional Iranian paramilitary insurgent group based somewhere in the 'Middle East' and led by (the fictional) Faruk Al-Bashir. The PLR work closely with the Islamic Republic of Iran armed forces in the game. They successfully detonated a portable nuclear weapon in Paris, which implicated Russia, creating global war. The geo-political representations are mapped out with the Jihad-seeking PLR represented as scheming terrorists hell-bent on mass destruction.

Sgt Blackburn, the protagonist, has a key objective in the narrative when he and his team learn that the PLR have acquired Russian portable nuclear devices, and that

two of the three devices are missing, thus linking Iranian extremists to the threat of violent world destruction. This **intertextual signification** and **implied reference to 9/11** is not a subtle point; the game's **PLR** sounds all-too-similar to the **PLO** – the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, a real entity and the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, long recognised by the United Nations. In the game, the **PLR's** extreme violence and quest for mass destruction seeps into reality as gamers throughout the world play *against* the Arab organisation.

It's worth noting that games that actually take place in the historical land of Palestine and are based on real events, such as *Age of*



Empires 2, Stronghold Crusader (Gathering 2002), **Civilization 3: Conquests** (Atari 2003) or **Assassin's Creed** (Ubisoft 2007) are significantly less common, and almost exclusively exploit the more historically distant topic of the Crusades.

Why do we Play?

In this postmodern world, gamers flee from the **'desert of the real'** for the escape and safety of hyper-reality and simulacra, where they can be agents attacking the terrorists. The gamer can be **the agent of revenge** and justice, attacking the PLR, or 'Other'. The virtual terrorists are central protagonists, and very problematic as they are so unrepresentative of the realities of life in the Middle East. The viewer may be powerless when witnessing news atrocities, but can become empowered by the gameplay, in which they can virtually seek to become the warrior who destroys the PLR.

The immense power of the virtual gaming experience to influence the mind and ideas on representations is a growing area in game theory. Undoubtedly, the **uses and gratifications** of games like **Battlefield 3** lie in the opportunities to become the agent who can stop terrorism and bring justice. With first person shooter thrills and violence, the mix becomes a potent propaganda tool and its ideology very anti-Middle Eastern. Unlike film or other audiovisual media, video games are interactive, so the active

audience engagement in any propaganda or ideological positioning is very high. 9/11, the Gulf War and Afghanistan are all conflicts experienced by television audiences in a passive, powerless position. The gamer experiences these events in a televisual virtual and high-tech dimension, very much like a game. So attacking the 'Other', the 'terrorist', in a gaming world is very empowering and addictive, where the power to avenge is intrinsic to the game. Consider the ending of **Battlefield 3**, where the gamer can 'become' the heroic protagonist 'Blackburn':

However, just seconds before Solomon detonates the nuke, Blackburn trips Solomon and beats him to death with a brick. Blackburn then finds the nuke, and disables it, putting an end to the nuclear threat.

The irony will probably be lost on the casual gamer that the threat is ended only through extreme violence; but the serious Media Studies student will no doubt explore these crucial representation issues and the impact they have on the world.

Sean Richardson is Head of Film and Media at Penistone Grammar School, Penistone.

Attacking the 'Other', the 'terrorist', in a gaming world is very empowering and addictive, where the power to avenge is intrinsic to the game.

BE A CUT ABOVE THE REST



Study Communication and Media Studies at Loughborough University

Our 2011 graduates have gone on to a number of exciting media and communications careers worldwide including:

- BSkyB, TV Productions Junior
- Casual Films, Production Assistant
- At Home Magazine, Online Editor
- Vodafone, Graduate Intern
- BBC, Press Office Runner
- Phase 37 MarComms, Marketing Executive

10th THE COMPLETE
UNIVERSITY
GUIDE 2013

*Unistats

95% of our GRADUATES
are in employment
or further study*

12th THE TIMES GOOD
UNIVERSITY
GUIDE 2013

www.lboro.ac.uk/socialsci

 Loughborough
University