

DECEMBER 2010: **THE CHANGE ISSUE**

# MMediaMagazine

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**The Concept of Change in Media Studies**  
**Evolving Technologies**  
**Music Industry: from Labels to Laptops**  
**The Rise of American Quality Television**  
**Context and the City: New York**  
**The Cinematic Scare in Transition**  
**Twitter and the Changing Face of Stardom**

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# 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.

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Welcome to *MediaMagazine*.

You might wonder why we have chosen the theme of 'change' for this edition of *MediaMag*. After all, it's not one of those essential key concepts which pops up



throughout your AS or A2 spec, neither is it a set topic, research option or critical perspective in its own right. And yet, whatever aspect of Media Studies you're investigating, ideas about **change** are never far from the surface. Theories and case studies which explain or illustrate changes in the media landscape; changes in the media texts we consume and in the ways we consume them; changes in technology and in production processes; changes in the ways events, issues and social groups are represented; changes

in media institutions, ownership, and influence ... Looking back over the changes in the way you yourself have used, accessed, and created media in your own lifetime, you might recognise that this is perhaps a theme worth investigating.

So in this issue we're looking at change from a number of different perspectives.

**Roy Stafford** kicks off with a view of Media Studies itself as a potential force for change, explores whether it has lost its original revolutionary edge, and suggests some approaches and challenging questions which might reverse the process.

Meanwhile, there's lots here to guide you through your own particular specification. If you're studying **Media Regulation**, whatever your specification, our in-depth study of changing values at the BBFC will provide you with useful case studies. For OCR AS students preparing for G323, Carly Sandy's account of the way American quality drama is transforming **British TV drama** is an essential read **Genre-wise**, read Rob McInnes's article on the way the film industry exploits change by continual re-tellings of the same stories, and Rebecca Ellis's view of the role of gender in changes in the Romantic Comedy movie. And horror fans should be intrigued by Matt Freeman's interview with the great **John Carpenter** on the genre changes he has seen in his long career.

If you're focusing on **Representation** for AQA A2, there are articles on evolving representations of the monarchy, of New York, and gender. To support your study of **new media technologies**, you'll find a variety of accounts of technological change and the online world, ranging from the effects of online comment on the news media and the digitisation of the **magazine industry** to the impact of Facebook and Twitter on social interaction and celebrity. If you're studying the music industry for OCR's AS G323, or WJEC's MS4, see Chris Budd's survey of the democratising effects of technological change, and Mike Hobbs' industry interviews with the producers and artists in the front line of change. And there's much more in our online 'Change' supplement for web subscribers.

We're still interested in your views and proposals for our April issue, on the theme of **Collaboration**. As always, mail your proposals to [jenny@englishandmedia.co.uk](mailto:jenny@englishandmedia.co.uk). The deadline for final articles is **10th January 2011**.

*Jenny Grahame*

## Online this issue

30 more pages of change, including **James Rose** on changes in the **Body Horror** genre; the impact of **downloading** on the music industry; Sean Richardson on **Kick-Ass**; articles on the political impact of the newest genre of '**real-person**' **fanfiction**; **representations** of **school** over time; **women in music video**; the changing personas of **Lady Gaga**; the evolution of the **Boy Band**; and the change likely to follow the demise of the **UK Film Council**.

## Coming soon to MediaMag Online

New **MediaMagClips** from the *MediaMag* student conference, featuring three creative media producers discussing their work: Lindy Heyman, video and feature film director; Ed Stern, videogame developer and writer; and sports photographer Paul Harding.



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# Front Page News

## Phone-hacking scandal investigated



The Metropolitan police are investigating a scandal at the *News of the World*, where journalists obtained information on public figures by illegally hacking into their voicemails.

The revelations began in 2007, when the paper's then royal correspondent and a private investigator were both jailed for phone hacking. At the time it was treated as an isolated incident,

but last year *the Guardian* revealed new evidence that the practice was widespread at the paper. Victims included celebrities such as Sienna Miller, Heather Mills, Steve Coogan and Chris Tarrant, as well as politicians such as John Prescott, and MPs George Galloway and Chris Bryant.

This has led to calls for the resignation of Andy Coulson, David Cameron's chief spin-doctor, who was the editor of the *News of the World* at the time of the hacking. He has always denied knowing anything about what his staff were involved in, but recently there have been a series of allegations to the contrary.

One former *News of the World* journalist told *the Guardian* that the activity was so widespread that the editor must have known about it, while a special *New York Times* report featured an interview with another who said Coulson had

'actively encouraged' him to engage in phone hacking.

A Channel 4 *Dispatches* programme went even further, speaking to an anonymous journalist who claimed that the editor was personally involved and listened to the intercepted messages himself. The journalist told the programme:

**Andy was a very good editor. He was very conscientious and he wouldn't let stories pass unless he was sure they were correct [...] So, if the evidence that a reporter had was a recorded phone message, that would be what Andy would know about.**

To read the somewhat defensive perspective of the Society of editors, visit: [www.allmediascotland.com/press-news/27854](http://www.allmediascotland.com/press-news/27854)



## Stephen King hits out at 'soft-focus' vampires

Renowned horror writer Stephen King has criticised modern representations of vampires, saying that the trend for humanising them means that they are no longer scary enough.

In the introduction to his new comic, *American Vampire*, he complains that the genre has been 'hijacked by a lot of soft-focus romance', arguing that vampires should be terrifying, evil monsters and not

**pallid detectives who drink Bloody Marys and work only at night; lovelorn southern gentlemen; anorexic teenage girls; boy-toys with big dewy eyes.**

Presumably, he is referring to the likes of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *True Blood* and the *Twilight* series, where vampires are tortured by their consciences, fall in love with humans and try to resist the urge to drink blood.

So are modern vampires really all just sissies? After all, the vampire myth has always been used as a way to symbolise the darker side of human nature. Perhaps the idea of creatures caught between their humanity and their baser impulses appeals to us for that very reason?

[www.slashfilm.com/tag/american-vampire/](http://www.slashfilm.com/tag/american-vampire/)

## Best media blogs

Looking for a fresh perspective on the media? Blogs can offer a great alternative to the mainstream media, but there are so many out there that it can be hard to know where to start looking for the good ones. Here are a few you might find useful.

### • The Media Blog:

<http://themediablog.typepad.com>

A good general media blog covering everything from press to broadcasting to digital.

### • Tabloid Watch:

<http://tabloid-watch.blogspot.com>

Dedicated to highlighting bad journalism, this blog is particularly valuable for its careful fact-checking of some of the tabloids' more outlandish claims.

### • Angry Mob:

[www.butireaditinthepaper.co.uk](http://www.butireaditinthepaper.co.uk)

Similar to Tabloid Watch, but with a particular focus on the *Daily Mail*.

### • Sociological Images:

<http://thesocietypages.org/socimages>

Excellent blog that analyses how the media helps to construct our ideas about things like race, gender and sexuality. Very accessible – no prior knowledge of sociology required.

### • Bad Science:

[www.badsience.net](http://www.badsience.net)

The blog of Dr Ben Goldacre, writer and medical doctor, is based on his *Guardian* column of the same name. It covers the misrepresentation of science and statistics in the media.

Plus, don't forget *MediaMag's* very own Pete Fraser: <http://petesmediablog.blogspot.com> – the best of the lot!





# The X Factor and the music industry

Will the winner of *The X Factor* be Christmas no. 1 this year? Last year, a social media campaign successfully kept winner Joe McElderry off the top spot by persuading even more people to download Rage Against the Machine's 'Killing in the Name'.

This ended four years of consecutive Christmas no.1s for *The X Factor*, and was seen by many as evidence of people power hitting back at the mass-produced commercial fare that Simon Cowell was trying to foist on us. After all, Rage's song is a rant against capitalism, and the band reinforced this stance by donating the profits to charity. However, some people protested that getting a 17-year-old song to no. 1 was hardly the best way to encourage original musical talent.

In any case, the campaign highlighted some of the ways in which the internet is

changing the music industry, possibly even reducing the power of the big labels by offering artists the chance to promote and distribute their own work.

For the moment, Cowell remains an immensely powerful figure in the music industry. As Dr Julian McDougall explained at the recent *MediaMag* Conference, the interactive element of a show like *The X Factor* gives the impression of greater power for the consumer, but Cowell has a lot of power over what people buy – and little accountability.

As for the chances of a repeat of last year's campaign – there are a number of songs being proposed as alternative Christmas no. 1s, with one notable suggestion being '4.33' by John Cage, an experimental track famously consisting of four minutes and 33 seconds of silence!

## Crackdown on free council-run newspapers

New rules are being proposed to cut down the amount that local councils are allowed to spend on their free newspapers, in order to prevent them from competing unfairly with independent local papers.

The fear is that the council freesheets, which are funded with public money, are nothing more than PR material, presented in the format of a newspaper. They draw readers away from paid-for local papers, which have greater independence and are able to report negative stories about the council if need be.

The planned restrictions, announced by Communities and Local Government Secretary Eric Pickles, would limit council publications to four issues a year, and restrict their content to factual material only, with no editorial commentary. Pickles

told the BBC:

**The rules around council publicity have been too weak for too long, allowing public money to be spent on frivolous town hall propaganda papers that have left many local newspapers looking over the abyss.**

However, it is unlikely that these moves will solve all the problems facing the local press, which has been one of the media sectors worst-hit by the recession. Many local papers are owned by big groups such as Trinity Mirror or Archant, which are making serious staff cutbacks, or forcing papers in the same region to share offices or production staff. The lack of reporters is damaging their ability to cover council proceedings – leaving a gap in the market wide open for council freesheets to fill.

## Coming soon on the big screen

### December

#### • *Sin City 2*

The sequel to 2005's comic book noir uses more storylines from Frank Miller's original graphic novels and, with director Robert Rodriguez back on board, it promises to boast the same stylised violence and trademark black and white visuals with splashes of colour. Stars Clive Owen (*Duplicity*), Jessica Alba (*The Killer Inside Me*) and Rosario Dawson (*Seven Pounds*) return.

#### • *Tangled*

Disney's take on the Rapunzel fairytale will be a 3D CG animation, featuring the voices of Mandy Moore (*Saved!*) and Zachary Levi (US TV series *Chuck*). The traditional heroine has been given a new twist – in this version her extra-long hair has magic powers and can be used as a weapon!

### January

#### • *127 Hours*

Director Danny Boyle (*Slumdog Millionaire*) tells the grim true story of a mountain climber (James Franco, *Pineapple Express*) who finds himself trapped by a fallen boulder with no food or drink and no hope of rescue. His only hope of escape is to perform an amateur amputation on himself. This scene has apparently been tackled with a realism that is not for the faint-hearted – at its debut screening at the Toronto Film Festival, three people fainted, and others left the cinema.

#### • *The Next Three Days*

A thriller starring Russell Crowe (*Robin Hood*) as an ordinary family man whose wife (Elizabeth Banks, *W*) is convicted of murder. Having exhausted all the legal options for proving her innocence, he enlists the help of a shady ex-convict (Liam Neeson, *The A Team* film) to help break her out of prison.

#### • *The Green Hornet*

Seth Rogan, famous for playing chubby losers in films such as *Knocked Up* and *Pineapple Express*, might not be the first actor you'd expect to me playing a masked vigilante crime-fighter, but this is set to be a light-hearted take on the superhero genre. Based on a comic book character, who also featured in a 1960s television series, the Green Hornet is a millionaire newspaper publisher by day. His martial artist sidekick Kato will be played by Taiwanese pop star Jay Chou.

#### • *True Grit*

Brothers Joel and Ethan Coen (*A Serious Man*) write and direct this remake of the 1969 classic Western. Jeff Bridges (*Crazy Heart*) stars as a one-eyed lawman who helps a 14-year-old farm girl track down the outlaw who murdered her father. Also stars Matt Damon (*Invictus*) and Josh Brolin (*Jonah Hex*).



# DO WE HAVE TO LIVE LIKE THIS?

## THE CONCEPT OF CHANGE IN MEDIA STUDIES

Roy Stafford ponders the importance of 'change' in the Media Studies curriculum – and whether closer attention to it might help media studies become the revolutionary force it was once hailed as.



### The point is not merely to understand the world, but to change it.

Media Studies is popular with students but still mistrusted by journalists, media owners, politicians and various social commentators. Why does it worry them so much? I like to think it's because media studies has grown out of **a desire for change**.

The quote at the start of this piece is from a famous 19th-Century philosopher, a polymath of his time who influenced many subsequent thinkers and whose ideas have been instrumental in helping to define what media studies might attempt to do. Can you guess who it is yet? You can Google the quote to find out.

'Change' is a concept that is fundamental to all aspects of media studies – so much so that it is almost impossible to stand back and recognise how it is woven through the theory and practice of the field of study. I've carefully not referred to the 'subject' of Media Studies – moving away from defined subject boundaries is one of the first changes that the early proponents of media studies wanted to achieve. They hoped that creating a new kind of scholarly activity that drew upon several different existing subject disciplines would be **a progressive force in education** –

literally changing the ways in which we might understand the world around us.

Take just one example. Imagine someone who trained exclusively as a modern historian, studying a specialist area such as European history between 1914 and 1945. They would learn about historical methods and how to use archives and different forms of historical records, perhaps including the press, radio and early television, as well as cinema and personal and professional diary entries and observations. But how much richer could that historical understanding become if our historian had also been open to film studies and media studies and perhaps to literature studies, sociology and economics as well? I'm not referring here to a preparation for academic life that routinely includes a mixture of different subjects – what used to be called a 'liberal education'. Instead, I'm arguing for an academic project that **moves across subject boundaries**, undermining the safety of thinking in particular ways and becoming open to the possible synthesis of different forms of enquiry.

With your experience of preparing for an A Level Media Studies exam or Controlled Assessment you may well decide that my hopes for media studies as a new kind of academic enquiry have failed to materialise. Perhaps you

feel that A Level Media Studies, as we know it in schools and colleges, is a 'subject' just like History, Geography or Physics. It requires a written specification detailing what you will study, how your work will be assessed and what you will have to do to demonstrate your knowledge and understanding in order to 'pass'. And you would be right: the current system of qualifications does not really allow media studies to develop as its educational pioneers might have hoped.

### Keeping change alive

'Change' is literally revolutionary; but revolutions are inevitably followed by *counter-revolutions*. The only way to keep changing is to remain in a state of 'permanent revolution'. But that is far too wearing, and no society could sustain it. So the best we can hope for is **'managed change'** and that may well describe how media studies has evolved over the fifty years or so in which it has inhabited curricular spaces in schools, colleges and universities. The A Level examiners do their best to keep the concept of change alive within the confines of the specification, and to agitate for bigger changes in what the area of study might become in the future – the move from media studies 1.0 to 2.0 and perhaps to 3.0 in the next few years?



Billy Idol in *John Schlesinger* (1963) Courtesy of BFI Picture Library

*This Is England '86* (d. Shaun Meadows) Courtesy of Channel 4's Extranet Press site

Ewan McGregor in *Trainspotting* (dir. Fanny Boyle, 1996) Credit: Ewan McGregor / The Kobal Collection



So what kind of changes has media studies brought about? Have they been worthwhile? Are they really changes? The title of this piece is a clue to what motivated many teachers and students to embrace a new area of study in the 1960s and 1970s.

Media studies promised to help to change the world by exposing the ways in which 'reality' was constructed through mediated representations of people and events. **It recognised that society was fundamentally unequal and that the media maintained these inequalities through the repeated circulation of images of 'normalised' unequal power relationships between individuals and groups in the press, cinema and broadcasting media.** Media education (i.e. the broad application of new media studies thinking) in this period often focused on **sexism and racism and class politics**. It attracted many people who sought to change both the unequal representations in the media and the participation rates of marginalised groups in producing their own media texts as a corrective.

In many ways, this aspect of media studies could be said to have 'helped change the world'. But, as we've noted, change is not an easy concept to handle, and the **'personal politics' of identity and social interaction** provide a perfect case study. What do you think causes most grief for older teachers of media studies? What makes them angry (or perhaps resigned and despondent) in the classroom? For many, it is the frustration they feel when they see students effectively repeating the same kinds of responses to media images that they encountered twenty or thirty years previously in struggles over sexist or racist imagery. The **capitalist media institutions** of our contemporary world are very good at **'absorbing' change** and **'recuperating' the power and control** that they might have lost

through radical interventions by creative artists – and academics. It's always ironic to hear that one-time cry of rebellion 'Won't Get Fooled Again' as the theme song for part of the **CSI** franchise on US TV. We seem to get fooled quite often.

## An historical perspective

The issue here is that there have been social changes over time. The necessary struggles over representation and identity issues faced by feminists and anti-racists in 1980 or 1990 were not the same as they are in 2010.

A further difference now is that teachers have experienced the process of change – whereas students have experienced only the changed conditions. This raises the question of whether in studying the media and the production of media texts we can ever really understand what's going on if we only focus on the 'now' of contemporary texts. Don't we also need a sense of a historical perspective so that we can trace those changes and pick out the moments when something significant happened?

Media Studies as an examined subject has struggled with this sense of history – possibly more so than Film Studies which has always involved 'film history' within the specification. A few years ago when A Level Media teachers were surveyed on what kinds of texts they thought were appropriate to teach, it was apparent that there was a split between those who saw media studies as being very much about **the contemporary media world**, and those who believed that the best way to learn the skills of textual analysis in particular was to study **acknowledged classic texts which might be thirty or forty years old**. Both views are important and have something to recommend them. But a middle road is preferable – even if it raises further questions.

## Text and context

Media studies is about text and context, and it's **the context** that makes the historical perspective problematic. Consider two contrasting challenges.

If you're asked to comment on the very rapidly-developing world of digital media technologies, you might find it difficult to respond immediately because the changes are being so easily absorbed in the process of our media use. Most of us haven't even noticed, never mind reflected on, **the rapid 'obsolescence' of our mobile phones**. In 2006 the *Media Student's Book* (4th edition) included a case study on 'Researching Mobile Phone Technologies' (free to download from: [www.mediastudentsbook.com/content/researching-mobile-phone-technologies](http://www.mediastudentsbook.com/content/researching-mobile-phone-technologies)). Written in 2005, it now reads quite strangely since it attempts to offer guidance on how to use Google! But if that seems odd, the kinds of research questions it asks remain relatively timeless. If you are going to discuss current technologies 'in context' it is essential to have **a structured approach** that will provide you with useful lines of enquiry. Responses to debates about 'New Media' and 'Web 2.0', for instance, are often trapped in either a celebration of changes so profound that they overturn everything; or the obverse – a refusal to admit that there has been any change of consequence. We can see these as **optimistic** and **pessimistic** approaches, both of which have useful observations to make; and by first recognising them in this way we can move on to analyse what has changed and what has stayed the same in a structured manner.

A second challenge is to undertake **a contextual study** of a media text. In some ways this is even more difficult, partly because it is more **subjective** (i.e. how do you *feel* about what happens in a film or TV programme and how does it relate to your experience?), but also because it requires you to find out so much about the period when the text was produced – or about the period when the events that are represented actually took place.

## An example: Billy Liar

In Leeds a few weeks ago there was a revival of the play *Billy Liar*, first performed in 1960. Beginning as a novel and then at various times adapted as a play, a film, a musical and a TV series, *Billy Liar* has been seen as not only an extremely popular story, but also as a kind of **cultural marker**, a signifier of all the changes in British social life that took place in the early 1960s. Its hero is a young man (played in the film by **Tom Courtenay**) who lives in a fantasy world and who is offered the chance to leave his mundane job in Yorkshire and travel to London to become a scriptwriter – and to 'win' the beautiful girl. His inability to take the chances offered makes the story a comic tragedy. It also suggests quite a lot about young working-class men in the North at the beginning of a period of massive social change. The 1963 film version, featuring a young **Julie Christie** as the smart confident girl who proves to be 'too much' for Billy, seemed to herald a new gender type in British Cinema.

In the late 1990s, one of the A Level Media specifications included a topic on **1960s British**







**Cinema**, and *Billy Liar* proved a popular text for some teachers – albeit one that some students found puzzling because of the class and gender issues, and their unfamiliarity with the stars and the film's style. The best way to approach this form of **conjectural study** seemed to be to compare British films of the 60s to their 1990s counterparts such as *Trainspotting* (1996), which some argued were similar in marking cultural changes. In more recent years, as specifications have changed, the potential benefits of this kind of exercise have to some extent been lost, with more focus on contemporary texts. However, some contemporary texts do revive the possibilities through their attempts to create 'retro' narratives.

## Excavating recent history

In the two recent TV series *Life on Mars* and *Ashes to Ashes*, popular audiences were invited to consider the differences, especially in attitudes towards race and gender, between 'now' and the 1970s and then between 'now' and the 1980s. This was framed in the context of **the 'police procedural' or crime genre, and science fiction** and, in the case of *Ashes to Ashes*, was played with tongues firmly placed in cheeks.

In 2009, *Red Riding* used historical events from roughly the same period, again in the form of a police procedural/crime series, but this time much more 'seriously'. Although in all these shows there are clearly interesting questions about how the writers, directors and other creative personnel have constructed images from 25-30 years earlier and thereby represented social change, the address to younger audiences has been couched within the framework of a familiar genre that doesn't give a central focus to the identity question, 'What was it like to be 17 in 1977?'

In 2010, two significant British film-makers have attempted to make much more personal statements, indeed quasi-autobiographical statements, about young people and how they reacted to the changes in British society during the 1970s and 1980s. In April 2010 **Ricky Gervais (with Stephen Merchant)** released *Cemetery Junction* set in a small town in southern England in the early 1970s. Similar in some ways to the early 1960s films like *Billy Liar*, the film did not get the large audience it deserved, though that might come with the DVD release. It makes an interesting pairing with Shane Meadows' *This is England* (2006), a 'smaller' film in distribution terms, but creating much more impact. Now Meadows has turned to television and produced a four-part series for Channel 4, set in 1986, three years after the film.

## This is England '86

At the time of writing it's too early to say whether **Meadows and his collaborators (writer Jack Thorne and director Tom Harper)** have managed to transform the intensity of a 100-minute single narrative into a compelling series of more than 200 minutes. Still, almost 3 million viewers watched the first episode, including **nearly a third of the 16-34-year-olds** watching TV at the time of the broadcasts. (That's about ten times more than saw the film in its entire cinema run.) The original film version began with a memorable montage sequence that brilliantly represented the world of 1983 as seen by UK TV viewers, with shots of Falklands battles, Thatcher as prime minister, video-games and Roland Rat, fitness videos, protests, street riots and the National Front. The promotional material for the TV series suggests that it will be **more personal and less 'political'** as the now 16-year-

old Shaun leaves school to face the future. On the Channel 4 website Shane Meadows finishes his introduction to the series like this:

**Not only did I want to take the story of the gang broader and deeper, I also saw in the experiences of the young in 1986 many resonances to now – recession, lack of jobs, sense of the world at a turning point. Whereas the film told part of the story, the TV serial will tell the rest.**

<http://www.channel4.com/explore/this-is-england-86/#/about/three-years-on>

Meadows is directly challenging us to think about 'change'. He isn't offering us a history lesson or a political tract. He's offering a human story about a gang of marginalised people who live literally on the edge of an unnamed community. Here's a working-class estate somewhere between South Yorkshire and the East Midlands. Nobody cares about the residents but they care for each other (albeit in sometimes unconventional ways). The interwoven family stories will read very differently for those who are in their 40s (i.e. in their late teens in 1986) and those who are teenagers today. To give just one example, for some older people the landscapes in the series might act as an awful reminder of **the 1984 miner's struggles** to save their communities from a Tory government's attempts to destroy them – the consequences of which are still felt today.

Yet the antics of the gang members have attracted many younger fans and Meadows recognises that he is also offering a chance to explore **the terrible ways in which history repeats itself**. Youth unemployment, especially in the Midlands and the North of England is forecast to rise dramatically as the coalition's spending cuts devastate the economy. As **The**



# DO WE HAVE TO LIVE LIKE THIS?



*Guardian's* letter page headline had it 'This is now a war against the North' (14/9/2010). Most of the characters in *This is England '86* are on the dole and starting to learn about the 'joys' of wasting time. The only one in a job, gang leader Woody, in his first junior management role, faces the task of sacking people.

Media studies should provide us with some critical tools to make sense of how these attempts to explore the past and represent 'change' actually work. If *This is England '86* proves popular, we will need to understand its success and evaluate what audiences might or might not have learned. To do that we might need to look at similar TV series about contemporary life (for example, *Shameless*) and also at film and television from the 1980s to explore what they chose to represent. Interestingly, the mid-1980s was the lowest ever point for British film production, and there wasn't much about Northern working-class life being produced. The two best films, *Letter to Brezhnev* (1985) and *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (1986) both focused on young women – perhaps that alone says something about the period? Television is more problematic, as the most useful text would no doubt be *Brookside*, Channel 4's groundbreaking soap opera which died a decade ago; but Mike Leigh's 1983 television film *Meantime* focusing on unemployed youth in London might also be worth a look.

If the important thing is to change the world, media studies should *aim* to equip us with the tools **to understand how representations are constructed in context**. If we simply accept each new film or television programme as



mere 'entertainment' and don't recognise how they work as social statements (consciously or unconsciously) in a particular context, we will be forced to keep repeating our own social and political narratives. To paraphrase our 19th-Century philosopher once again, 'History repeats itself, first as tragedy then as farce'; and:

**Men [sic] make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.**

**Marx from The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon, 1852**

Perhaps we should think about 'change' a bit more? The current round of spending cuts is presented in most of the UK media as necessary and inevitable. The opposing view – that

economic history proves them to be unnecessary and indefensible – has been largely excluded and it could be argued that media users are effectively conniving in their own misery. Media studies has 'failed' to change the world in some respects but it has had one significant victory – **it is now possible to study popular culture like *This is England* within the formal education system**. All we have to do now is to make that study meaningful in the context of learning more about **how to change the world in the future**.

Roy Stafford is a freelance lecturer and writer and co-author with Gill Branston of *The Media Student's Book*, now in its 5th edition. You can read his film blog at The Case for Global Film at <http://itpworld.wordpress.com>



# AGENT OF CHANGE

The documentaries of Michael Moore

Politically-active film-makers are thin on the ground in times of recession; but one notable exception is radical US documentary-maker Michael Moore, whose films are motivated by the desire for social and political change. Pete Turner evaluates his controversial career, larger-than-life persona, and often-criticised techniques.

**I want to see change in my lifetime**

**Michael Moore:** <http://www.morphizm.com/recommends/interviews/mikecolumbine.html>

Does film-maker **Michael Moore** want to change America for the good of working people or is he more interested in changing his bank balance? Do his noble intentions justify his often dubious techniques? An analysis of Moore's documentaries reveals he always has a clear purpose and aims to have a huge impact... even if he does resort to using some creative techniques in his 'non-fiction' films.

With five major releases since 1989, Moore has persuaded more people to see documentary films at the cinema than



Images of Michael Moore's *Sicko*, *Roger and Me*, *Capitalism: A Love Story*, all courtesy of [image.net](http://image.net)

any other film-maker. He has always been a controversial figure, from his early career in print journalism to his most recent feature film. Muck-raking enemy of the corporate and political elite, Moore has made his media all about changing America into a fairer place to live. His career has included being editor of *Mother Jones* magazine, creator and star of two television programmes, *TV Nation* and *The Awful Truth*, and directing music videos for bands R.E.M. and Rage Against The Machine. The shoot for RATM's 'Sleep Now in the Fire' famously ended with Moore being detained by police, and the New York Stock Exchange having to close its doors for the day.

Many have criticised Moore for his 'creative' editing, his heavy-handed use of music, his star persona and his distortion of timelines and facts in his films. However, many others champion his fight against the Bush regime, the Fox Network and other corporations and their endless brainwashing of the public.

### Roger and Me (1989)

The purpose of *Roger and Me* is to show viewers the economic devastation that was caused to the city of Flint, Michigan when General Motors (GM) closed its factories in the city in order to cut costs. Much of Flint's population relied on their jobs in the GM factory and the unemployment that was a result of the closure led to a serious economic decline for the city.

Moore explores this in the film by attempting to secure an interview with then CEO of GM, Roger Smith. Jim Musselman who worked on the audio on *Roger and Me* said:

**Things happened in the movie that never took place. And things that actually took place in Flint didn't happen in the movie. When the film was done, it didn't look like anyone was mad at Roger Smith except Michael Moore.**

#### Rapoport, 2007

Despite Moore interviewing Roger Smith on three separate occasions, the film does not show this. Moore instead creates a picture of himself as 'the little guy' who could not reach the Goliath of GM. He tells the story of the people of Flint whose lives have been affected by losing their jobs at GM. In the final scene he intercuts a family being evicted from their home on the day before Christmas Eve with a speech from Roger Smith about how wonderful Christmas is; Christmas carols can be heard on the soundtrack.

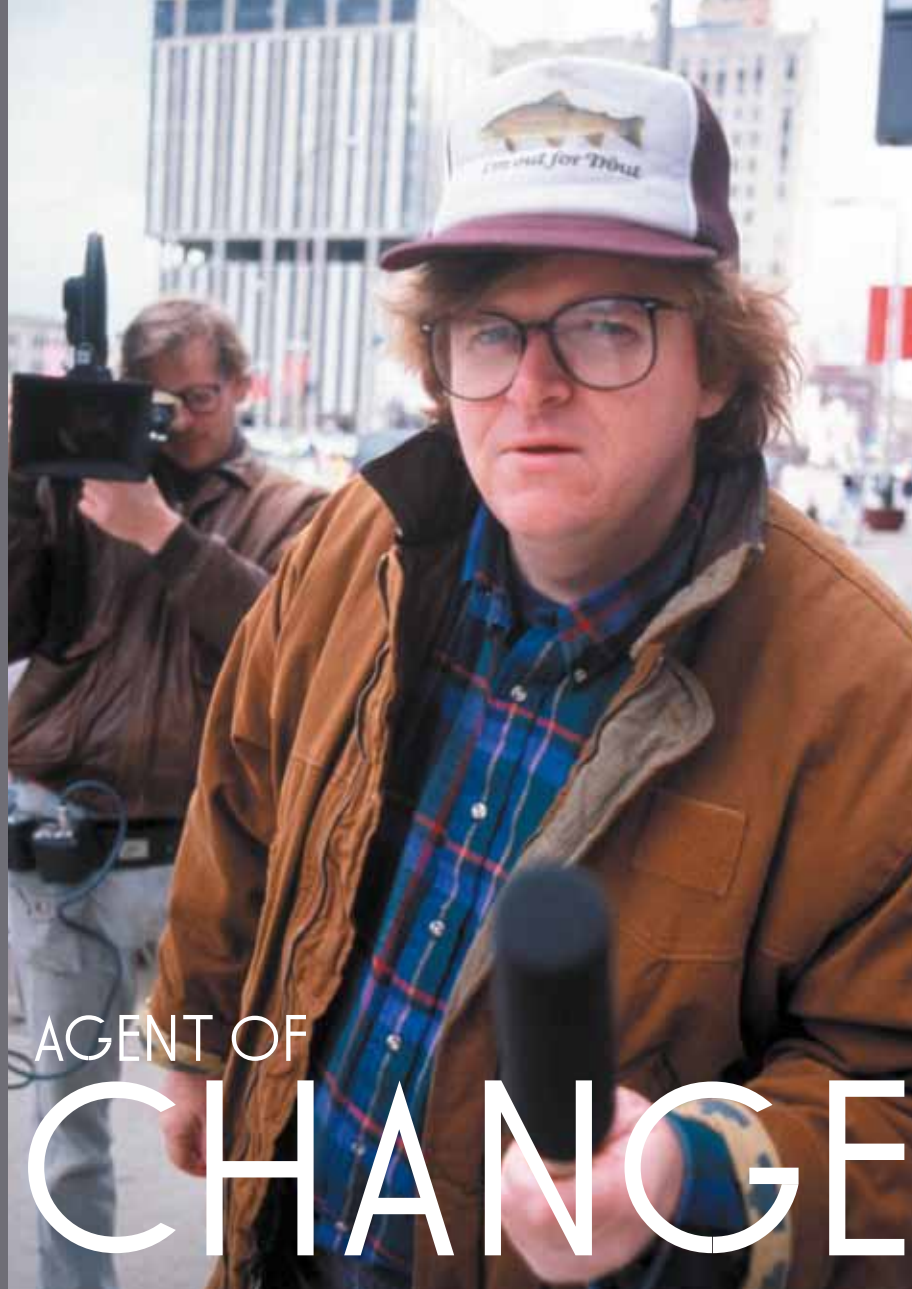
The impact of this film is hard to gauge in social and political terms, but it certainly changed Moore's career. He went on to work on two television programmes before returning to feature-length documentary films.

### Bowling for Columbine (2002)

**A documentary in which the viewer is fed vague theories and misled by half-truths**

**Hardy and Clarke, 2004**

The purpose of Moore's next major film release is to investigate America's gun culture and explore the reasons for the Columbine High School shootings in 1999. Moore attempts to change attitudes to gun control and considers



many different reasons for the gun crime rate in America, including gun ownership figures, media fear-mongering and the history of racism in America.

Moore uses many interesting techniques in the film. He specifically targets Charlton Heston, a prominent figure in the National Rifle Association (NRA) for being insensitive to the victims of gun crimes. This culminates in an interview with Heston that has been criticised for appearing to bully a fragile old man and former civil rights activist into appearing as racist. Moore's use of Heston's speeches has also been criticised. Hardy and Clarke argue that Moore:

**can take a speech and turn it into whatever he desires, skilfully using images and other footage to hide the cuts**

**Hardy and Clarke**

Their analysis of Moore's tricks in their book *Michael Moore is a Big Fat Stupid White Man* is quite unsettling, even to a Moore fan.

However, Moore raises many interesting issues in the film, interviewing shock-rocker Marilyn Manson, and questioning the media's tendency to blame rock stars for the behaviour of students who shoot up their schools. He draws links between America's bombing

of Kosovo (and mass murder of civilians throughout recent history) with the shootings in the schools, and explores the fears white Americans have of African Americans due to the abolition of slavery and media spotlight on their crimes.

The film's impact was not huge. There were no changes to America's gun laws; but one of Moore's stunts did have an immediate impact. After he took two Columbine survivors to return the bullets lodged in their bodies to K-Mart, the chain agreed to stop selling guns and ammo. The film also won an Oscar and led to a controversial acceptance speech from Moore that drew both cheers and boos from the Hollywood elite.

### Fahrenheit 9/11 (2004)

Moore went on to make the highest-grossing documentary of all time, making \$119,114,517 at the box office. Hardy and Clarke:

**the longest, most expensive, and most legally questionable campaign commercial ever produced specifically to unseat an incumbent president**

The purpose is ambitious: to change American's voting habits, and stop them voting for another four years of George Bush Jr. as President.



Beginning by arguing that Bush rigged the previous election and therefore was not actually democratically elected, Moore claims that Bush failed to stop the terrorist attacks of 9/11, which he already knew were imminent. The documentary ridicules Bush for the number of holidays he takes with a montage of Bush having fun, playing golf and walking on his ranch. It criticises his response to the attacks (seven minutes of sitting in a classroom, fishing, blaming Saddam Hussein) and investigates the political links of the companies that stand to make millions in profit from going to war.

**Moore believed that the Bush administration had made it impossible for the American public to hear and see the truth.**

His theme of media fear-mongering is continued from *Bowling...* into this film, and from the outset he suggests that the Fox network is Bush's mouth piece, spreading lies, fear and propaganda.

Moore won the Palme D'Or at the Cannes Film Festival for the documentary but failed to stop the American people from voting in Bush for a second term as President. However, it

could be argued that Moore's film sowed seeds of doubt in the minds of the American public: doubt over the morality of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan... and doubt in the leadership of the Republican Party. These doubts may have influenced the election as President of Democrat Barack Obama in 2008.

## Sicko (2007)

The purpose of Moore's next film is to change the health care system in America. Taking a less confrontational approach than in his previous films, he himself is not the centre of attention in this film. There are still some typical Moore stunts, particularly the scenes in which he takes 9/11 rescue workers to Guantanamo Bay to highlight the fact that prisoners are getting better health care than American heroes. Moore then takes his heroes to Cuba to show how much better other poorer countries' health care systems are. He considers the systems of European countries (including our own NHS) and tells many heartbreaking stories of ordinary Americans being 'screwed' by their insurance companies and the pharmaceutical

companies that make huge profits out of their sickness. This film could be seen to have had some impact as only three years later President Obama passed a bill to reform American health care, although this is yet another issue that divides Americans and was opposed not only by every Republican in the Senate but by a significant proportion of the general population.

## Capitalism: A Love Story (2009)

Moore finally comes out of the closet and admits to being a socialist – a dirty word in America synonymous with Communism, oppression and invading body snatchers. He attempts to change people's views on the capitalist economic system. He uses religion by interviewing a priest who argues that Jesus would have considered capitalism evil. He tapes up Wall Street like a crime scene and exposes the companies that have taken out 'dead peasant' insurance policies on their employees, whereby, if an employee dies, the company gets a massive pay out. The film is not likely to turn America into a socialist country any time soon; but Moore states that his purpose was to turn America back into a democracy, ruled by people, not by money.

Former Moore employee Dan Kildee states: **Michael... motivates people to do something... the first thing a messenger like Michael has to do is to get people to realise something is wrong**

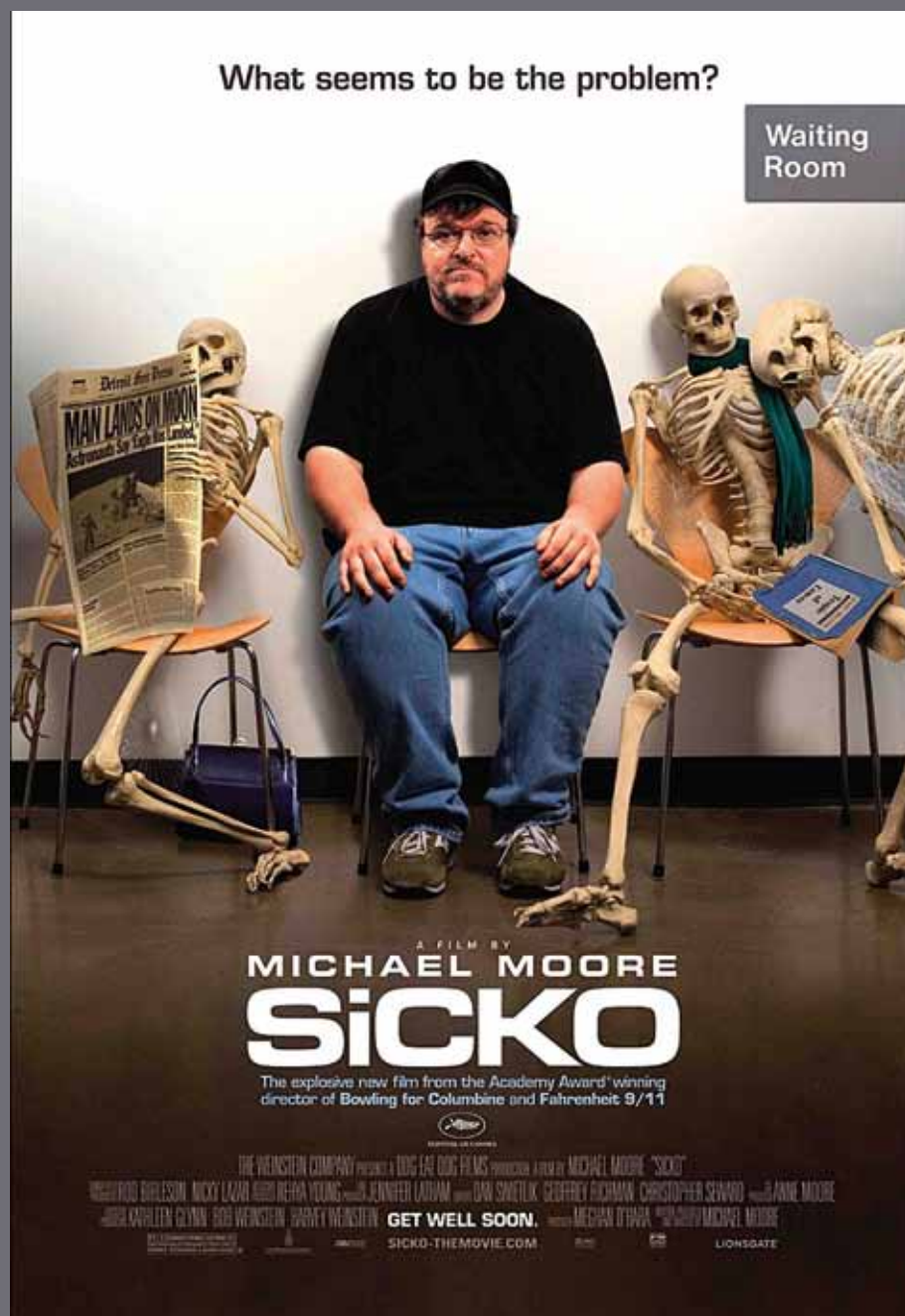
**Rapoport, 2007**

In an era of subjective, biased news reporting, and a time where we have a man who's sending us to war for fictitious reasons (paraphrased quote from Moore's Oscar acceptance speech), Moore plays the media outlets at their own game. However, the problem with being so famous and wanting to change things is, as former assistant editor of *Moore's Weekly* Andrew Morehouse says: **his followers are believers so he is not really converting anyone to his position. He is preaching to the converted**

**Rapoport, 2007**

Moore is often criticised for being narcissistic and for manipulating the minds of his viewers. Moore haters will always argue that he is a manipulative socialist who hates America. But I would argue that with a strong point of view and a clear purpose to change people's minds on an issue, Moore always has the people's interests at heart.

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# BARBARITY & THE BEAST

The **bbfc** In Modern Britain

The British Board of Film Classification is responsible for the classification of film in the UK, and a key player in any discussion of changing media regulation. Michael Ewins took some searching questions to Lucy Brett, its Deputy Education Officer, to see just how the BBFC has responded to changing public attitudes to screen sex, violence, taste and decency, and the suitability of controversial material for children.

The **BBFC (British Board of Film Classification)** have been the regulatory body for film in the UK since 1912. Originally called the '**British Board of Film Censors**' it changed its name in 1984 to reflect the belief that **classification** of film – allowing people to choose for themselves by providing them with graded information about content and appropriateness – should play a larger part than censorship; people must be allowed to choose for themselves. The same year, Parliament passed **The Video Recordings Act 1984**, an Act that required that any home video available for sale or hire within the UK must carry **an age certificate designated by the BBFC**. This led to the so-called 'video-nasties' (a list of films deemed morally corruptive, including **Cannibal Holocaust**, Ruggero Deodato, 1980 and **The Evil Dead**, Sam Raimi, 1981), a list of films that could now be prosecuted for obscenity in a court of law.

In July 2010 I interviewed Lucy Brett, Deputy Education Officer of the BBFC, about the importance and relevance of the BBFC, and questioned her on a few key decisions of the past decade.

**Q: For readers who are unaware of the BBFC and its role in the film industry, could you outline what it does and what purpose it serves? Why is it important?**

**LUCY BRETT:** The BBFC's main function is to classify films, DVDs, trailers and ads for cinema or DVD release, giving them the age ratings you see. We classify DVD products under the Video Recordings Act. We also have a contract with the

public, basing our decisions on regularly updated guidelines, **protecting viewers (especially the vulnerable, such as young children) from harmful or illegal content, and offering a clear guide to the suitability of a work for a particular audience.** We have the power to **cut** works, and on rare occasions to **reject** them. We are committed to making open and accountable decisions and write **Consumer Advice** and **detailed Extended Classification Information** (including specialised advice for parents) for all cinema releases in the UK.

The Extended Classification Information can be accessed by anyone on the official BBFC website by simply typing in the name of the release they wish to examine (bearing in mind there will be plot spoilers).

## Case study: sex and violence

This response comes at a particularly interesting time; currently nobody in the UK will be able to see **A Serbian Film (Srdjan Spasojevic, 2010)** until 3 minutes and 49 seconds of cuts have been made. David Cooke, director of the BBFC stated that:

**there are cases where the Board will intervene, even at '18', where material or treatment appears to the BBFC to pose a credible potential harm risk to individuals or, through their behaviour, to society, and in particular where portrayals of sexual or sexualised violence might eroticise or endorse sexual assault or where children are portrayed in a sexualised content.**

Although the film does not break the **Protection Of Children Act 1978**, the material

has been thoroughly questioned by the BBFC, who have formed a careful and well-intentioned argument for the cuts. But it also begs the question: why can't we choose for ourselves?

**Q: Over the past decade there has been a change in attitude by the BBFC towards the classification of films. Back in the 1980s it seems censorship was tough in Britain. But in 2009 the BBFC passed *Antichrist* (Lars Von Trier, 2009), a hugely controversial work which would seem inappropriate for an audience, '18' uncut. Is this more liberal approach specific BBFC policy, or is it just a reaction to the attitudes you already feel are present in society?**

**LUCY BRETT:** Classification has changed over the years, just as society has changed. All our decisions now are based on **published Guidelines which in turn are based on public opinion and law.** It is important that our decisions reflect the view of the British public and their concerns. There have been shifts, some of which might appear more liberal, for example **an increasingly strong belief that adults should be free to watch what they like within the law**, and others, which reflect increased societal concerns (for example about **racist language, or language and behaviour which might be discriminatory against minority or vulnerable groups**). Additionally, the Human Rights Act made it important for us to be proportionate and justify any intervention, which means **we avoid cutting or rejecting anything simply because**



BBFC logos courtesy of the BBFC

Willem Dafoe and Charlotte Gainsbourg in *Antichrist*. ©Artificial Eye, courtesy of image.net

Images from *Kick-Ass*, courtesy of image.net

*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, 1974, 2003



it's tasteless and offensive, as opposed to harmful.

The key sentence in this response, 'an increasingly strong belief that adults should be free to watch what they like within the law' may immediately appear at odds with the adjudication on *A Serbian Film*. But the last sentence, about carefully judging rather than automatically dismissing a tasteless or offensive work, in some ways shows us how far the BBFC has come since the time of the 'video nasties', and proves how seriously they are taking *A Serbian Film* (as yet, still unseen).

### Case study: context

**Q: How much does context feature in your decisions? For example, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, 1974) was rejected by censors until 1999. Watching the film today it's clear that not only is there little explicit violence, with most of the terror initiated through what is not shown, but also that there is a vein of dark comedy running through the film. Do genre and tone affect certification?**

**LUCY BRETT:** We never offered cuts to *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. The problem was the film's tone and atmosphere, which are difficult to



address with cuts. However, 25 years after it was made the film looked increasingly dated and the public were more media-aware and able to cope with it. **Context is paramount when making classification decisions.** It would be impossible to classify in a vacuum, and it wouldn't reflect the needs of the public or treat film-makers fairly. There is a whole section in our new guidelines outlining the sort of considerations we think about when looking at context and how this could mitigate issues such as sex, violence and gore and in what specific circumstances context could prove aggravating. In some situations a work which trivialised violence, gore or sadism may be considered more worrying, and thus require a more restrictive category.

Lucy went on to say that 'it would be disingenuous to pretend people don't go to

horror films to be entertained, grossed out, frightened etc'. She understands, of course, that this is what many horror fans specifically seek out for their entertainment.

### Case study: harm and exploitation

**Q: As an example of a more liberal BBFC: *Antichrist*, a cerebral horror film with intense and graphic scenes of sex, violence and mutilation. Could you talk me through the justification of the '18' rating and why you felt this content, in its context, was suitable for an audience?**

**LUCY BRETT:** Yes, *Antichrist* is clearly an adult work covering harrowing and distressing themes, and using graphic and intense images to do this. It features real, unsimulated sexual acts and strong scenes of violence, sex, sexual violence and genital mutilation. However, the work's thesis is fairly clear and there was **no credible harm risk to adults who might choose to watch a strong film like this.**

Lucy also provided me with the BBFC's official decision rationale. This can be accessed by anyone on the BBFC website by searching *Antichrist*. The rationale clearly shows an

# BALEFUNKY & THE BEAST



understanding of the film's themes and ideas, stating that it is 'not a sex work' nor does the violence become harmful.

**Q: Just two months after the *Antichrist* classification, Japanese horror *Grotesque* (Koji Shiraishi, 2009) was rejected by the BBFC. I would imagine its content would have to be quite extreme and/or potentially harmful for it to be rejected by this more liberal board. Can you explain why the film was rejected?**

In response, Lucy directed me to the thoughtful Adjudication Press Release, which can be found online. It includes the following rationale:

*Grotesque* is a feature that focuses for the majority of its running time on the sexual assault, humiliation and extreme torture of a male and female victim. The central character abducts, restrains, strips and masturbates both the man and the woman. After this he inflicts grave injuries on the restrained couple, including amputation, eye gouging, castration and evisceration. It seems clear that there is no real narrative to the work, and instead the film provides an 'unrelenting and escalating scenario of humiliation, brutality and sadism' (David Cooke).

It would seem that cuts alone cannot address the central problem the film faces: its unashamed exploitation of audience values (the same problem as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* encountered, raising the possibility that we could see *Grotesque* fully uncut in 30 years time).

## Real sex on screen

**Q: The last decade has seen a controversial movement of 'real sex' films including *9 Songs* (Michael Winterbottom, 2004), *Anatomy Of Hell* (Catherine Breillat, 2004) and *Shortbus* (John Cameron Mitchell, 2006). These films featured unsimulated and graphic scenes of sex. What did the BBFC deem appropriate about this content, and why was it passed without cuts?**

**LUCY BRETT:** In each of the examples you give the real sex was considered in terms of: a) whether the work was **pornography** (in each of these cases it clearly isn't pornography, as it isn't designed to stimulate or arouse, but is rather a work containing sex which is being used as part of a narrative construction in a non-porn work) and b) **whether the more explicit moments were justified by their context.** Real sex [onscreen] was passed as far back as 1971 in *WR – Mysteries Of The Organism*, and there have been a number of such cases since, most notably *In The Realm Of The Senses* passed in 1991, which contains more explicit sex than some of the more modern examples we're talking about. Back then, as now, the question was **what purpose the sex served** – and whether it served a purpose other than arousal.

*In The Realm Of The Senses* (Nagisa Ôshima, 1976) is a brilliant, ahead-of-its-time example of sex in cinema. It does owe much to the **Japanese New Wave** and films like *Funeral Parade Of Roses* (Toshio Matsumoto, 1969) – itself an avant-garde exposure of gay/transsexual subculture – but Ôshima's film is actually *about* sex – and

the natures of addiction and obsession. In fact, *In The Realm Of The Senses* is unique in that the (graphic and unsimulated) sex scenes form the narrative. Characters develop through their actions, therefore the actors had to perform with their bodies. The film is disturbing and shocking but, crucially, not a sex work.

## The question of violence

**Q: Violence has, arguably, always been the most difficult subject in cinema. Recent films such as *Martyrs* (Pascal Laugier, 2008) are incredibly graphic and bloody, and some of the latter scenes are difficult to watch. However the film also has an intelligent theme and is not exploitative. What went into the rating of this film, and why was its extreme content deemed appropriate for audiences 18 and over?**

**LUCY BRETT:** *Martyrs* arrived at the BBFC with no category request from the distributors. It had been initially awarded an 18+ rating in its home country, although this was revised downwards on appeal. It was only submitted on DVD here. It was awarded an '18' for sustained strong bloody violence and horror, and it was noted that the viewing experience was potentially disturbing and distressing.

Lucy described key scenes in the film and how they stay within the boundaries of an '18' certificate, clearly addressing how seriously the BBFC take the issue of violence. *Martyrs* belongs to a wave of brutal cinema labelled **The New French Extremity**. Film-makers such as **Gaspar No  (Irr versible, 2002)** and **Bruno Dumont**





(*Twenty-nine Palms*, 2003) are pushing the boundaries of what is acceptable in cinema, with films like *Baise-Moi* (Virginie Despentes, Coralie Trinh Thi, 2000) assaulting the viewer with hard-core pornography and senseless violence. However there are films in the movement, like *Martyrs*, that reach a level of artistry and intelligence that affects our perception of the violence. Affects context. *Inside* (Julien Maury, Alexandre Bustillo, 2007) is a 'home invasion' movie and although unrelentingly bloody and brutal, it is also a brave – and finally *beautiful* – piece of radical cinema.

## Kick-Ass and This is England

**Q: My final example, *Kick-Ass* (Matthew Vaughn, 2010), was recently criticised for the casting of a child as young as Chloe Moretz as Hit-Girl, using obscene language and taking part in violent set-pieces in a film with an '18' rating – which was then passed '15' uncut. Meanwhile a film like '18'-rated *This is England* (Shane Meadows, 2006) may have obscene and racist language as well as scenes of violence, but these are portrayed in an honest way as a historical document to show how this kind of lifestyle is damaging. Meadows himself wrote an outraged article for *The Guardian* saying that because of the '18' rating the people who needed to see it most wouldn't be able to. Why was *This is England* treated with such rigour, and does the BBFC stand by its decision in a world where *Kick-Ass* was passed '15'? Was context appropriate here? Did controversy and public concern affect your decision in any way?**

**LUCY BRETT:** There was some negative coverage of *Kick-Ass* and our decision. There was an especially damning review of the film from Christopher Tookey which highlighted in particular the perceived 'sexualisation' of Hit-Girl and her use of strong language. We have had about 20 complaints about it, some highlighting the same issues, although many reviewers took a different line to Tookey seeing the film's humour and creativity and supporting our '15' classification. *This is England* and *Kick-Ass* were each classified under different Guidelines (the 2003 ones, and the 2009 ones respectively) though I would say both decisions were made after a great degree of discussion and reflection (neither was more rigorous). They are very different films, so it is hard to compare them without bearing in mind broader ideas about context.

The BBFC's decision rationale for *Kick-Ass* and also a fascinating Case Study for *This is England*, can be found on their students website, [sbbfc.co.uk](http://sbbfc.co.uk). Again, **context** is the issue. Within the worlds of the films themselves it seems the BBFC made the right choices – but can we limit censorship to the worlds of the films alone? Lucy acknowledged that the BBFC Guidelines change depending upon public opinion and law. *This is England*, whether suitable or not, is an important film for the 15-year-olds of today to see. Perhaps in the years to come the BBFC will reappraise their decision according to ever-shifting public opinions and sensibilities, and, if only for schools, certify *This is England* '15' uncut. But would this be the right decision?

**Q: Many people are still unaware of the board and their decisions. Are the BBFC more important now than ever? and what do you think is your impact on society as a whole?**

**LUCY BRETT:** It is a priority for us that our decisions are accountable and accessible and that there is plenty of information for the public and for those in the film, DVD and video games industries about how decisions are made and how we work. We publish extended information about all films and video games released in the UK on our website, outlining our decision-making process and the key issues in a film.

We also publish specially tailored advice for parents of younger children on PBBFC ([pbbfc.co.uk](http://pbbfc.co.uk)) where we discuss the decision and highlight scenes and issues which might be of particular concern to those in charge of younger children's viewing (e.g. scenes of smoking, dangerous behaviour which might be copied, themes such as bereavement and divorce). In addition we have a thriving education department, and go into schools and colleges, work with partners like Film Education and the BFI and run websites for younger viewers.

Michael Ewins studied Film Studies at Stratford-upon-Avon College.

**Read an extended analysis of *Kick-Ass* by Sean Richardson in the special online Change supplement on the *MediaMagazine* website.**



CHANGE AIN'T

WHAT

IT USED TO BE

REMAKE REVISION

REVITALISE REVAMP

REIMAGINE RENOVATE REFOOT

REWORK REBRAND

REFOOT RELAUNCH REV

RELABEL REBOOT

## mysteries of the reboot!

Rob McInnes explores the ways in which media products are continually reinvented, recycled, and re-purposed in the interests of 'change' – and why producers use so many terms beginning with 're'.

There's an old saying that goes **'the more things change the more they stay the same'**. People who've been media-watching for many years may experience the nagging feeling that they've seen it all before. On the other hand, there are some very persuasive arguments that suggest that the media are one of the most significant transformational forces in our lives. I'm not about to argue that this isn't true – but I would like to plant the seed of doubt that I experience every time somebody tries to persuade me that *'this thing'* or *'that thing'* is better, newer and utterly and completely different to *'that older other thing'*.

For example, if you've come across terms such as **'Web 2.0'** and **'We Media'** you'll be familiar with the notion that the media is undergoing a **period of unprecedented change**. The gist of both of these concepts rests on the idea that **the power of large media corporations is being challenged by the ever-increasing participatory power of individual members of the public**. **'Web 2.0'** has been used to support the argument that the internet has shifted from primarily an information delivery system towards a participatory information exchange network, a distinction its founder (and director of W3C – the world wide web consortium) **Tim Berners-Lee** has described as largely superficial. He says he had always envisaged the internet as an essentially **democratic and interactive medium**. Proponents of Web 2.0 cite the rapid expansion of social networking sites such as **Facebook** and **MySpace** as exemplifying a revolution in communication, an advance from that of the internet itself. Equally, **'We Media'** describes a revolution in journalism in which individual members of the public – via websites and weblogs (blogs) – are able to report events

free from the traditional restrictions imposed upon national media.

Both **Web 2.0** and **We Media** are concepts that ascribe revolutionary change to the technologies and institutions of the mass media – but 'revolutionary change' is claimed often – by politicians, business leaders, bankers, educators and not least media producers and advertisers. And to describe such change they employ a variety of terms – more often than not involving the prefix **'re'**. You'll probably find you use these terms yourself as a Media student being asked to analyse and comment on media texts. However, it's worth considering the meaning and power of terms such as **'rebrand'** and **'reboot'** as they are never neutral concepts – their meanings constantly shift and their usage may well differ radically from one user group to the next. This is part of my attempt to make sense of some of those terms.

### remake

Once upon a time there was a perfectly good term to describe the process of remaking a media text, which was, er... **'remake'**. In the film industry, the concept of the remake worked extremely well for the major studios of the classical Hollywood system who, having purchased the rights to film a story, discovered that they could happily produce a fresh version a few years later with a new star and a new set of actors, perhaps upgrading a black and white film to colour or introducing a new sub-plot. The logic behind remakes was fairly sound to studio heads. If the story was a strong one it would almost inevitably bear multiple remakes. This worked for literary adaptations such as **Anna Karenina**, **Little Women**, **Frankenstein** and **Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde**. If the original version was forgettable, yet

the story still perceived to be good, then there was always the opportunity to 'improve' it.

Some directors even remade their own films. **Cecil B. DeMille** remade **The Ten Commandments** in 1956, over thirty years after his first (silent) version; in the same year **Alfred Hitchcock** remade **The Man Who Knew Too Much** in America, over twenty years after his UK original. In those instances the director's instincts might be said to have been proved correct, in that their remakes were the same story but employing better technology and slicker presentation. The original versions are rarely screened today whereas the remakes still turn up on television occasionally. And while many of you will have heard of stars like **James**





Strictly Come Dancing: BBC and image.net

Dr Who, courtesy of image.net

Casino Royale courtesy of image.net

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**Stewart and Doris Day**, far fewer of you will be familiar with **Leslie Banks and Edna Best**, the stars of Hitchcock's 1934 original. Sometimes the remake can arrive pretty close to the original, particularly when there is a change of language. In 2005, **Hideo Nakata** was hired to direct *Ring 2* the American sequel to the American version of *The Ring*, after directing the first two Japanese versions in 1998 and 1999, although he did not direct the first remake, *The Ring* (directed by Gore Verbinski).



## rework

Rather than remake a property, quite often the story could be **reworked**, changing some of its key elements. **Hitchcock's 1939 film version of John Buchan's novel The Thirty-Nine Steps** added a love interest for the story's hero, Richard Hannay. Most subsequent remakes of the tale followed suit, introducing more female characters, as Hitchcock had, to reflect modern expectations of gender representation. In 2006 a theatrical adaptation opened in London and later off Broadway, which reworked the original Hitchcock film in its 1930s setting but as a comedy. As for **Hitchcock**, the mistaken identity/man-on-the-run plot of *The 39 Steps* would feature several more times in his own later films, such as *Saboteur* and *North by Northwest*.

**Shakespeare's** plays (most of which borrow plots and stories from other sources) proved extraordinarily resilient to reworking. *Romeo and Juliet* became a musical about the ethnic tensions of youth gangs of New York in *West Side Story* and *Macbeth* became variously **Kurosawa's 1957 Throne of Blood** set amongst the warlords of 16th-Century Japan, or *Joe Macbeth* set amongst American gangsters – just two of the many dozens of versions of the story made around the world. Like *West Side Story* and the *1968 Oliver!*, many other stories acquired song and dance and transformed into musicals. The original *A Star is Born* was directed by **William Wellman** as a straight drama about an ageing actor who sees his protégé become more famous than him. But most people know either the **1954 George Cukor** version with Judy Garland or the **1976 Barbra Streisand** version – both of which added songs styled to their times and their female stars. A rumoured 2012 production is set to star Beyoncé alongside Russell Crowe!

## reimagine

In the 2000s, marketing departments appeared to become wise to the received wisdom that remakes were often less successful than the original versions. Remakes of classic British films such as *The Wicker Man*, *Get Carter* and *The Italian Job* all seemed to prove that you really shouldn't mess with a culturally-specific classic original. So with the 2000s ushering in a slew of horror remakes, marketing departments

looked for new words to use. **Tim Burton's** version of *Planet of the Apes* therefore became a '**re-imagining**', a term that perhaps also seems to suggest that the original film adaptation of Pierre Boulle's novel is somehow more *authentic*, even though both adaptations depart significantly from their literary source material.

## retool

The term '**retool**' comes from an industrial context where it refers to the re-equipping of machines in factory production lines. From there, like all of the terms discussed here, it came to take on a more figurative use, principally through the ways industrial managers would talk about retooling whole product lines, rather than simply the machines themselves. Outside of industry the term came to be used by advertising and marketing organisations as a way of conveying to the public that a company wasn't merely changing its image. Rather than simply participating in a **re-branding** exercise, a company could be completely **retooled** – demonstrating its readiness to deal with the complexity of the new media environment. The term entered the jargon of many other areas of business such as training and education, where managers began to talk about providing learners with '**toolkits**' to help them understand more clearly the skills they were developing.

## revamp

The term '**revamp**' can be used in many contexts, where it works in a number of ways to suggest refreshing or revitalizing something that is seen to be tired or old. Thus advertising agencies may be hired to **revamp the image of a product or company**. A significant example of a revamp in recent years can be seen in the

way in which both BBC and ITV have rescued their Saturday night schedules as a flagship for family and communal viewing. Programmes like *Strictly Come Dancing*, *Merlin*, *The X-Factor*, *Britain's Got Talent* and *Doctor Who* have all been deployed in an effort to reclaim audiences long thought permanently lost through shifts in demographics. The term revamp is fitting (pun intended, see origin just below) because virtually all of the programmes that form part of the current Saturday night schedule are essentially **new versions of pre-existing or older formats**. In its earlier incarnation *Come Dancing* was actually one of the BBC's longest-running programmes having begun, believe it or not, in 1949. The original series ended in 1998 but its 2005 revival allowed it to acquire the 'strictly' (a nod to **Baz Luhrmann's 1992 film Strictly Ballroom** in which youthful dancers challenge the established order of dancing competitions). *Doctor Who* – which the BBC also revived in 2005 after a ten year hiatus – was also presented as 'new' by discarding the older programme's reputation for second-rate acting, impoverished mise-en-scène, over-used quarry-pit locations and poor special effects, and by bringing in an A-list actor in **Christopher Eccleston**, and **Russell T. Davies** – one of television's most successful producer/writers – as joint producer and script editor.

Although the Simon Cowell-produced shows are presented as offering a new format, the idea of talent-style contests featuring members of the public was presented for years by ITV in *Opportunity Knocks*. One of ITV's flagship television shows from 1964 until 1978, *Opportunity Knocks*, made the '**audience vote**' a major feature and central component of the programme's appeal, just as talent shows do today.

The term **revamp** itself originates from the **renewal of footwear** (a 'vamp' being the front part of a shoe or boot). By the mid-19th Century had come to be used figuratively to suggest any act of renewal. Which by coincidence ...





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## reboot

...sounds like it might be similar to the original meaning of the word **'reboot'** – which apparently referred to the practice of **kicking horses in the rear in order to get them going**. However, like many words, more than one origin can be traced, and in the early days of computing, the process of loading the source code required to start up a computer came to be known as **'bootstrapping'**. This in turn came from the phrase **'to pull oneself up by the bootstraps'** which in turn (again) came from the 19th-Century practice of using the straps to pull the boot on to the foot. The phrase was shortened to **'booting-up'** which to the lay person simply meant that twiddly-finger wait you had after switching the computer on. A further meaning of the word 'boot' (from old English 'bot' and middle English 'bote') meaning **a remedy or benefit derived from an act of repair** also seems to feed into the current use of 'reboot'.

**Rebooting** in the world of the media suggests that much of what has gone before can be discarded. For the owners of the major media franchises, this is important because it means that you can **reinvigorate** and **reinvent** (here we go again – see how difficult it is to avoid using all these 're' prefixes?) a series that might be perceived to be tired and old. And the problem for so many of the major franchises is their sheer age. The comics industry has found its own way of dealing with flagging titles – some of which have been knocking about for simply decades; **DC Comics' Superman** and **Batman** are products of the 1930s, while **Spider-man**, **the X-Men**, **Iron-Man**, **the Incredible Hulk** and most of the Marvel characters originated from the 1960s. This has always presented their publishers with

a very particular challenge – how to make the characters seem permanently contemporary and not products of their time?

In **television soap operas**, the problem is a different one: the characters age as the actors who play them age, so despite the numerous bodies under patios, airliners crashing, disastrous weddings and exploding pubs, **the continuous drama serial** (as soaps are officially known) can attempt at least some semblance of realism. More difficult for Peter Parker who has been a teenager struggling in poverty for most of his almost fifty years and for Bruce Wayne who would be about 110 years old today, had he not undergone numerous 'reboots'.

To **reboot** a franchise therefore means to **throw away the old narrative continuities and start afresh, yet keeping the 'essence' of the franchise by retaining most of its iconography and central characters**. This has important economic as well as creative implications for the Big Media like **Time Warner**, **Disney** and **Sony** who collectively own pretty much all of the major franchises. During the last few years **Warners** very effectively allowed director **Christopher Nolan** the creative freedom to 'reboot' the **Batman** franchise, giving audiences a fresh 'Joker' to replace the Jack Nicholson 1989 interpretation, and a grittier filmed-on-location-in-Chicago Gotham City to replace the ludicrously camp Gotham of Joel Schumacher's 1997 **Batman and Robin**. MGM/Sony did a similar job with the Bond franchise, having recently acquired the rights to Fleming's first novel **Casino Royale** (which itself had been filmed as a 'wacky anarchic' comedy in the 1960s due to separately-held rights). They recast Bond with a critically-acclaimed actor (much as the BBC had done with **Doctor Who** –



rebooted or retooled? – you decide) and ditched many of the series' familiar tropes. Both **Casino Royale** and its 2008 sequel were among the most successful Bond films ever, but the irony is that with MGM suffering severe financial difficulties, audiences may be denied a new film in the series for some time.

It just goes to show that rebooting sometimes isn't enough – you simply need to find the money for new shoes.

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# EVOLVING TECHNOLOGIES

## Changes in Audiences and Consumption

How have advances in technology brought about changes in audience trends? Holly Taylor investigates changes in TV viewing habits.

The advent of the television as a popular domestic medium in the second-half of the 20th Century brought together the family as one audience. This novel technology offered a new world of entertainment that was exciting for people of all ages. From programmes such as *Coronation Street*, launched in 1960, through to *EastEnders*, first screened in 1985, the

family would be brought together to watch the characters live out their lives on screen.

It could be argued that these programmes would offer the audience a reflection of their own society, revealing a set of morals and lifestyle choices that the audience would identify as the norm and most likely choose to follow. Therefore, **television was a method of constructing a form of collective identity for the viewers** as the storylines highlighted family values, friendships and respect for elders; yet the drama and plot twists were simple in comparison with today's episodes.

Changes in the style of soaps is arguably due to **a change in audience behaviour**. Upon the release of these soaps the audience was restricted as to how and when they could watch their favourite; most houses would only have one television, and limited channels would mean fixed scheduling of the programmes. The family would need to be together at the same time to watch their soaps as there was only one viewing opportunity.

Due to technological and media development this began to change. Not only did the **number of channels** increase, offering chances for repeat scheduling, but the **number of televisions in the home** also increased. Family members could now watch soaps at different times and in different rooms; the audience had become fragmented. Entertainment no longer brought the family together.

### Going online

Consumption was steadily changing, and this was spurred on by further technological developments such as **online media**. The internet offered a new platform for television to reach its audience; with the launch of media services such as the **BBC iPlayer** in 2007, audiences could now choose to watch episodes of *EastEnders* anytime up to seven days after its first play on BBC. Audiences no longer needed to be at home to consume their favourite show;





5 On Demand courtesy of 5's Press Office



they could now **create their own scheduling** as restrictions lessened.

By 2009, the **iPlayer** had become extremely successful with over **5 million unique streams** per week. 86% of these stream requests came from desktop users. Clearly, much of the television audience was no longer in front of a television.

Although these new technologies have increased audience choice and enabled the channels to reach wider audiences, it could be argued that this has resulted in programmes such as **EastEnders** losing the ability to bring together a family and to provide rounded entertainment. As the audience has become more fragmented so have the storylines; no longer focused exclusively on the everyday lives of the characters, the programme has become more thrilling and intense, with characters spanning and reflecting the different groups and ages now consuming the programme in different locations at different times. The audience has become more diverse and no longer satisfied with what was once a novelty, and the soaps reflect this.

## The impact of convergence

Over recent years media development has been rapid and **convergence** has become the centre of modern life. With products such as the **iPhone** offering multiple devices in one, the audience has come to expect ease and accessibility. Modern audiences are used to having all their desired technology at their fingertips in one product, and this has greatly affected audience consumption. Audience demand has now been met. Now we not only choose **when** but also **where** we consume our entertainment; this has been made possible through **portability**, arguably the most important advance in technology over recent years, as consumers can have a phone, camera, television, and internet connection all in their pocket. Television companies have recognised this essential development, and have adapted to this change in consumption. This is confirmed by

a comment made by Eric Huggers, the Director of Future Media and Technology at the BBC:

**Whether it is watching *EastEnders* in your lunch break, listening to *Desert Island Discs* on the bus or watching *Mock the Week* in bed, viewing patterns change depending on the time and location of the audience**

**WebUser, 2009**

The iPlayer is available over multiple platforms, including internet-enabled televisions, iPhones and games consoles. Other channels have also followed the trend of **audience-led scheduling**; there is now an online service for all of the terrestrial channels and several of the Sky channels. Although these are not yet as successful as the iPlayer they recognise the importance of meeting audience demand:

**we want to make our content available when and where consumers want it as stated by ITV (MSN News, 2010)**

The iPlayer has gone from strength to strength, leading the way in television internet services. **In January 2010 there were 120 million unique streams**, the most popular programmes proving to be **Top Gear** and **Dr Who** (WorldTVPC, 2010).

## Changing behaviour

These changes in online media technology have successfully met the demands of audience consumption; however, it is also important to consider the possible impact of this on **audience behaviour**. Over-accessibility may change why the audience chooses to consume in the first place; where once there was a desire to see something that was a novelty and share it with friends and family members, the audience now constantly demands something new, and often watches it in isolation. Our views are no longer shared there and then, but exchanged over social networking sites, or via feedback left on the website forums associated with said programme. **The audience is fragmented at every point:** on hearing about the potential programme, whilst viewing it, and finally reflecting upon it. It may also be that we no longer seek out programmes

as entertainment, but simply as time-passing activities. The excitement of viewing the peak episode of **EastEnders** on a Friday night has faded as the audience knows they have several chances to view it, using the experience as an opportunity to fill a gap in our working day or kill time on a journey as we watch on our iPhone. **So are we now watching simply because we can, rather than because we want to?**

The argument that television has lost its entertainment value can be challenged by further recent changes in audience behaviour. The internet has enabled audiences to become involved in media production, with websites allowing them not only to leave feedback and suggestions, but in some cases actually create the content. It could be argued that for some, advances in media have enabled previously impossible opportunities for interaction with the industry. Looking at current consumer trends it appears that the internet is at the forefront and the television may become obsolete.

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# CHANGES IN THE MUSIC INDUSTRY



## From Labels to Laptops

Christopher Budd surveys the democratising effects of technological change on the music industry, and concludes that there's never been a better time to launch a career as an unsigned artist.

In the last decade the music industry has faced the most complex set of changes in its history. The conventional industry models have been challenged, largely due to **the emergence of new technologies and new ways for music lovers to listen to, and own, the music they love**. The industry is still struggling to deal with how these changes have affected their balance sheets, and the pace of change doesn't look like

slowing yet, but for those who wish to pursue a career in music, it's important to see how many of these new developments can be used to your advantage.

### Back in the day...

In the old days, working musicians would hope (ultimately) to be signed to **a record label**. A variety of different types of deal could be struck,

but generally the deal would protect the label. The record company would pay the artist a sum of money as an 'advance', to record some material, and specify how much the artist would have to sell before that advance would be paid off – then the artist would start to get a cut of the profits (usually about 15%). The label would have the records and CDs physically manufactured, and use its distribution and marketing network to



get the product into record shops, and to get promotion via radio, TV, magazines and so on. In the meantime, the label would arrange tours, with all the accompanying **merchandising**, as another revenue stream, and the publishing arm of the label (or an independent publisher) would collect **royalties** from all the airplay and other usage of the artist's materials, taking a cut themselves.

In this complex, old-fashioned model, the artist brings the talent, and the label provides everything else that only a large corporation can provide – expensive recording facilities, plants to bulk-manufacture records, the network to distribute the recordings widely to shops, a large fund to market the work via traditional media, the logistical expertise to mount a proper tour, the business acumen to collect royalties. In the modern digital world, much of this can actually be done on a smaller scale and we may even be able to circumvent the record companies entirely.

## Recording

One obvious area where we can exclude the record company is in the recording and production of the music itself. It's only in recent years that a semi-professional 'project studio' setup powerful enough to produce commercially releasable results has been within the financial reach of many musicians. Of course, **the genre of music** is important here – it's easier to record electronica on a laptop using software synths and plug-ins than it is to record a 5-piece heavy metal band. Additionally, many semi-pro setups suffer from being in a spare room or even the corner of a bedroom, with questionable acoustics (although acoustic products designed to minimise these issues are becoming ever cheaper). A professional studio certainly offers more in the way of recording environment, and especially microphones (although cheaper modern microphones can produce some great results if used properly); but with some perseverance and judicious scrounging of equipment, a bedroom studio can produce good results in all genres. Certainly those musicians lucky enough to have access to college recording equipment (and the proper training in using it) have a good headstart in this area, and should avail themselves of every opportunity to get their hands dirty. Internet forums can also provide a wealth of support and advice in all aspects of recording.

## Promotion and distribution

With the emergence of **Napster and other file-sharing sites** more than ten years ago, it became obvious that the internet offers a perfect way for artists to distribute music. While Napster made it easy for users to share other people's music, it wasn't a massive leap to imagine that artists could use the same technology to **promote and distribute** their own music, thus cutting out two of the important functions of a record company. In this new world, there would be no place for physical records; instead music would live as data on people's computers. The advent of **the iPod** and its followers cemented this new paradigm. If, in the future, the distribution of music no longer requires anything to have a physical form at all, then its distribution

could be virtually free. And, in fact, that has come true: the music rights organisation PRS for Music reported this year that **CD and DVD revenues fell by £8.7 million in 2009, but digital revenues grew by £12.8 million**.

The ubiquitous **MySpace** emerged as (among other things) a platform for artists to host, promote and distribute music. The site has famously launched careers, including that of **Lily Allen**. Allen was actually signed to a record label at the time her massive popularity on MySpace broke. However, as the first high-profile artist successfully to promote themselves via the site, she highlighted the importance of the medium. Allen's story is a good example of **how early-adopters** can use the free technology available at their fingertips.

One very recent development is the arrival (in beta form) of **Midge Ure's new venture Tunited** (<http://www.tunited.com/>), a new website and online community designed to help new unsigned artists get valuable exposure and make some sales. The site is funded by advertising so artists can sell music downloads via the site and keep all the proceeds themselves. For music lovers, the site involves making recommendations (for which they get 'rewards'), and will shortly feature a widget to use on social networking sites. By combining elements of social networking with music downloads, the site is maximising the impact of a variety of Web 2.0 technologies, and this **combined model of ad-funded distribution and networking** might be one to watch as it develops.

Of course the **corporate model** is catching up; the **iTunes music store** and similar models now do business in the modern environment but in a more traditional fashion, involving traditional record labels in exploiting their back catalogue and new releases for profit. Sites like **Spotify** satiate music lovers who want to listen to, then purchase, music – their **4 million song database** is available to any listener who doesn't mind putting up with occasional adverts, and it's this advertising revenue that funds the venture. However, it doesn't necessarily offer an avenue for new music to be heard.

## Funding

Two other web-based organisations have recently emerged that give music fans the opportunity to change the fortunes of unsigned artists. **SellaBand** (<http://www.sellaband.com/>) is an online platform where music fans can financially support the recording, touring or promotional activities of their favourite artists. Fans or 'believers' are then eligible for all sorts of 'rewards' from the artists when they reach their funding targets. **Slicethepie** (<http://www.slicethepie.com/>) offers a slightly more complex model, where the fans are paid a modest fee to listen to and review uploaded music. The best artists are then eligible for financing in the same way as those on SellaBand, except that profits (when they exist) are distributed in a more structured way between artist, supporters and the site themselves.

This model has its supporters – **Public Enemy** are using SellaBand to finance their next album – but it's not an entirely new idea. The band

**Marillion** used a similar model in 2001 when they asked fans to pre-order their new album directly from them. The 12,000 orders were enough to fund entirely the recording process.

The advantages of this sort of system to everyone concerned are clear – the system is a **meritocracy**: artists with **talent, a big enough fan base and a good demo** can get funding



without contracting to record companies, and music lovers can share in that success. Only the democratic nature of the internet has made that possible on such a grand scale.

All things considered, **unsigned artists have a lot more going for them than ever before**. No longer do you need labels to provide recording, promotion, production or distribution, and there are even new ways to raise money towards your recordings and other activities. All of this has been made possible by technical innovations in the last decade, so artists have no excuse not to embrace the change and take ownership of their own careers.

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## 360 degree deals

One way that the industry has tried to recoup money from falling sales of CDs is to try and establish '360 degree' deals with artists. Under these deals, the record company also takes a cut from merchandising and touring revenues, and from publishing the music (often a dedicated publisher used to exploit commercial possibilities for your music, for a cut). **Madonna** and **U2** have made similar deals with **Live Nation** in the last few years. Obviously for new bands this kind of deal won't be available; but it does illustrate how labels are increasingly attempting to capitalise on every area of an artist's success. By avoiding them you can potentially keep more of your earnings for yourself.

Another important aspect of not signing with a record company is that you get to **own your own 'masters'** (usually they become the property of the label). This means that you keep the rights to all your recordings, and all the revenue that you can generate from them in future.

# From ‘The Unforgettable Fire’ to Arcade Fire

25 Years Of Change In The Music Business 1985 – 2010



In the first part of a two-part article, music fan Mike Hobbs offers an overview of changes in the music industry over the last 25 years – from the perspective of the artists and producers who lived through them.

It was so much simpler in the old days. First, you picked up your guitar (or lute, dulcimer, mandolin or banjo – delete, according to period and preference) and played. Other people listened, and learned. This was **the oral tradition**: you didn't even need an instrument to pass on a song, just a voice. This lasted for, well, millennia.

Next came the era of **sheet music**. As more people were taught how to read music, in the late 19th Century, the great age of the piano and music hall, entrepreneurs realised there was a market for people to learn the new songs in their own time, without having the burden

of seeing the performers in person (often they were in different towns, cities, states, countries or continents). The presses rolled.

This was followed in the early 20th Century by the burgeoning mass production of **record discs**, first on hard yet brittle shellac, and then on the more resilient vinyl. Once this method of hearing music by favourite artists had caught on, the day of the record companies soon dawned. It proved a long one, reaching high noon with the Beatles in the 1960s, and continuing to dominate until its twilight in the mid 80s.





## Part 1 – The Starmakers

Mott the Hoople's Ian Hunter expressed it succinctly in *All the Way from Memphis* in 1973:

**Well, it's a mighty long way down rock and roll,**

**From the Liverpool Docks to the Hollywood Bowl...**

**And you look like a star but you're still on the dole –**

**All the way from Memphis.**

By 1985, the year of Live Aid, where top acts such as **U2**, **Paul McCartney**, **David Bowie**, **Queen**, **The Who** and **Bob Dylan**, **Madonna** and **Tom Petty** combined (under **Bob Geldof's**

aegis) to inspire famine relief in Ethiopia, these shining and thoroughly worthwhile examples cast a long shadow on the music world. It was still a straightforward equation. Although some bands and artists deliberately operated outside the mainstream, that mainstream held sway. To earn success, you needed to **play live, build up an audience and sell masses of records**. To fund the touring and the recording, you needed cash. The record companies provided that cash. Lots of it, in some cases.

Take **U2**, whose album 'The Unforgettable Fire', produced by **Brian Eno** and marking a sea-change in their style from strident to sweeping, had just been released. Or try **Madonna**, **Prince** and **Michael Jackson** across the Atlantic. The four biggest music names for the last quarter-century were just getting into their stride (although Jackson, of course, had been a star since childhood). All of them received substantial support on the path to global superstardom. That's not to say it isn't still being done, just that the companies can't afford to do it in nearly such profusion. How many stellar acts have exploded onto the scene in the last decade? Lady Gaga? Er...? (Muse, Coldplay and Green Day built their followings the old-fashioned way with extensive gigging, tours and several albums.)

**Hugh Cornwell**, now a hugely respected singer/songwriter, was **lead guitarist, singer**

**and main songwriter** with **The Stranglers**, who charged to the top in 1977's punk explosion (despite their musicianship – something likely to be viewed with great suspicion at the time!). The band was still enjoying hits in the mid-1980s:

**Unless you were far outside the mainstream, there wasn't any other way to set about things. You touted yourselves around and got signed.**

Everyone concurs. In the mid 1980s, **Charlie Barrett** had just left his gig as **bass guitarist** with **The Fixx**, minor figures in the UK but massive in the USA (their album *Reach The Beach* had stormed to no.3 on Billboard's chart in 1983 and stayed there for ages). Now the owner and managing director of **Terminal 24 Rehearsal Studios** in Bermondsey, South London, Charlie says:

**Getting a record deal with a major record company was the Holy Grail in those days. The bigger advance you negotiated on your royalties, the more cute you were supposed to have been and the more everyone envied you.**

But there are always exceptions to every rule. **Mark Vernon** was a struggling musician who did everything for himself in the late 80s:

**I didn't really have the time to go chasing a deal with a major. I was a bit naïve, and so I just assumed that I could use my experience**



## 25 Years Of Change In The Music Business 1985 – 2010



in business, where I'd been doing a day job as a sales executive, to get together a plan to put out my records. Amazingly enough, it worked, and I had the great fortune to have John Cale, later a client, produce my first album.

These days, Mark is a manager, and his **Firebrand Management Company** handles artists from **B.J. Cole** to **Bobby Valentino** – and has also handled **P.J. Harvey** and **Gorky's ZygotiC Mynci**. And these days, there are many musicians who follow Mark's lead.

In short, music is rapidly becoming **a series of cottage industries**, with few survivors of the great houses. But what caused the palaces to come tumbling down?

### Like a virgin? The rise, decline and fall of UK record company

**Virgin Records** was emblematic of a new breed of record company. Originally a mail order company, and then a stall in Portobello Market, **Richard Branson's** entrepreneurial spirit enabled it to make the transition from retailer to record label in the early 1970s (funded in part by the extraordinary success of **Mike Oldfield's Tubular Bells**). By 1985 it was at the very top of the tree.

**Ed Scarr** was **Head of Production at Virgin Records** from 1988 to 2002:

**It was great fun to be there, but we did work hard as well, and kept our focus. I remember that the Managing Director stuck up a notice saying: Cassettes sell more than Vinyl. Amazing but true. Then vinyl was relegated to a niche product by the onset of CDs, and cassettes were phased out altogether.**

The prevailing culture in the company then was somewhat unorthodox by current standards. Stories of excess at the company awaydays and weekends were legion. Senior management was certainly not above high jinks. Tales abound of executives removing the underwear of female pool players with their teeth for bets. And the suppliers of services to the industry were equally, if not more, free with their largesse.

Although Branson never fell out of love with his music-box toy, another even more seductive mistress now had him in thrall – **Virgin Airlines**. And the old flame had to be sacrificed to keep the new one alive: the record company was sold. 'Everything changed once we were sold to EMI,' says **Iggy Severa**, who had joined in 1989 when there was no sign of the writing on the wall:

**We lost control of many aspects of production, and although there were still some perks, they weren't as frequent or as lavish as before.**

As the company became ever more absorbed into EMI, so the spirit started to die. Yet the scale of the final downward plunge was not guessed at until one fateful evening. Scarr recalls:

**One of the IT guys came into our office flourishing an MP3 player and announced with nervous pride: 'The nerds are taking over the asylum.' We didn't know it then but he was dead right.**

It was the beginning of the end, and Scarr left soon afterwards. Severa stayed on, becoming Head of International Services, EMI Music Group until 2006:

**It's not the same company I joined, not even remotely.**

### The old order changes

**The Good Old Days are dead,  
Better get it through your head  
As you hearken to the clang of the Yankee Reaper.**

**Van Dyke Parks** wrote these words presciently in **The Clang of the Yankee Reaper** in 1975. How did the record companies lose control – was it solely a case of new technology revolutionising music output? Charlie Barrett argues:

**Initially, I think yes. The first technological change came in the methods of recording in 1986/7 ... Getting techie about it, drum machines came to dominate, along with the Fairlight and Synklavier. Next followed digital processing with AMS delay, which enabled people to use pre samplers. And this**





all added up to cheaper studios being needed which was bad news for us [Terminal also owned a recording studio at the time].

Harvey Birrell was working as a sound engineer for (among others) **Alien Sex Fiend**, a band he joined in 1992, and he agrees:

**This new technology had both an immediate and a long-lasting impact. Basically, it facilitated what I call the rise of the faceless technoproducts. You didn't have to have a band any more – a DJ or bedroom boffin would suffice – and you didn't need to even see them.**

Such new recording methods were echoed by the **substitution of CDs for vinyl**, new gleaming products for a brave new world. It has also been argued (perhaps fancifully) that vinyl was predominant in an age when dope was the substance of choice and a large sleeve was needed for rolling joints, only to be replaced by CDs as the market became flooded with cocaine.

Simon White, **now a co-owner of Coalition Management** (Bloc Party and Phoenix are among his clients) thinks that the record companies were buttressed by the **sales of their back catalogues**:

**They sold the same music to the same people in a different format, did well for a while, got greedy and then became lazy. There were also, of course, cultural changes which meant that the perceived value of recorded music fell rapidly into decline.**

Nigel House, one of the co-founders of the Rough Trade Shop when it separated from the record company in 1981, is in little doubt about the main reason:

## ROUGH TRADE

Once CDs came in, they were definitely priced too high. As a result, sales of new music fell, causing most of the large chains and more and more of the smaller record stores to go out of business. Naturally, we'd like to think that, as one of the last men standing, we've proved our shop – and our larger offshoot, Rough Trade East – to be one of the fittest.

Chas de Whalley was a **staff writer** for *Sounds* magazine (now defunct, as is *Melody Maker* – the once powerful weekly music press has been a victim of the record industry's fall from grace) and then became **Features Editor** for *Music Week*, the insiders' paper. He concurs:

**Sure, there were many factors. New technology was obviously crucial. While many people still follow bands and artists enthusiastically, music on the whole became less central to everyone's lives. It was partly the companies' fault. They became obsessed with new acts as the 80s wore on, to the extent where there were rushes of signings every week. Naturally, most of them got nowhere.**



Former music business lawyer Nick Pedgrift saw many of the rushes to excess at first hand:

**It was a weekly feeding frenzy, with A&R men rushing around and falling over themselves to pick up the latest fad. Gaye Bykers On Acid, anyone? And then when people were signed, money was poured into them to make their records listenable often with little counting of the cost. For instance, The Cult laid down a whole album at the Manor Studios in Oxfordshire which was deemed unmarketable, so the label hauled in Rick Rubin. He said, possibly with some justification that they'd have to start all over again – so they did. Fortunately, the resulting album, *Electric*, was a stonking success. But that wasn't always the case.**

There had to be a backlash, and there was. Cornwell identifies **Black Wednesday (16 Sept 1992)** when John Major's Conservative government was forced to withdraw the pound from the ERM (Exchange Rate Mechanism), a potent symbol of the recession crisis of that era.

**Everyone tightened their belts: things went the other way. I'd just left The Stranglers after 15 years of hits and I found it ridiculously difficult to get signed.**

De Whalley expands upon his theme:

**Of course, these were just precursors to the cataclysmic impact that downloads have had upon the sales of recorded music. It's fair to say that the industry didn't really see it coming, although it's difficult to imagine what actions they could have taken to alleviate their distress.**

Without fail, all parties agree that **downloads** have had a game-changing effect on the industry, although there are many different opinions on what sort of state they've left it in.

And, finally, there's also a human element. Vernon adds:

**Don't forget John Peel. He had an enormous impact on the record business, colossal for one man. As soon as he died, there was a vacuum at the heart of music in the UK.**

Mike Hobbs is a freelance journalist and writer.

See Part 2 of this article in *MediaMagazine* 35 for views on the music industry's present and future. And if you're a web subscriber, read Michael Parkes' article on downloading, in our online Change supplement.

# HAVE YOUR SAY



## How is Internet Commenting Changing the News Media?

Fresh from working on 'Comment is Free', the *Guardian's* online editorial forum, Priscilla McClay raises some tricky questions about the democratic and political potential of online news forums.

Until recently, newspaper readers were a passive audience. Although they doubtless formed opinions about what they read, their only public means of expressing those opinions was by writing a letter. This took time, consideration and effort; only a small proportion of the letters could be printed, appearing some time after the story to which they were responding.

However, in these days of online news, anyone can sign up to post comments quickly and easily, directly underneath the article. Even broadcast news often urges viewers to visit the website and post their opinions, which may then be read out on air. In many ways this is **a great democratising force**; it allows ordinary people an unprecedented forum to make their voices heard and actively to engage with the news media. It is a triumph for freedom of speech.

Or is it? On the other hand, anyone who has scrolled down through reams of badly-spelled, ill-informed angry rants might have reservations about whether this development is an entirely positive thing. A **Mitchell and Webb** sketch satirised the media's sudden eagerness to embrace user opinion in these terms:

**You may not know anything about the issue, but I bet you reckon something. So why not tell us what you reckon. Let us enjoy the full majesty of your uninformed, ad hoc 'reckon' by going to [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk), clicking on 'what I reckon' and then simply beating on the keyboard with your fists or head.**

So is all this 'having your say' making a positive contribution to public discourse? What might be the long-term effects on the way that the news is produced and consumed?

### Moderation versus free speech

Even with a powerful commitment to free speech, no news website can allow users to comment completely free of restrictions. At the very least, it must be **moderated** to comply with the law – a site can be held legally responsible if it allows **libellous comments**, or comments that **incite violence against a particular group**. Although few sites operate a pre-moderation policy (where all comments are checked by moderators before they are displayed), moderators still have to keep a close watch on the comments being posted, and delete where necessary.

Beyond the bare legal minimum of moderation, each site must decide on its own commenting policy – and this can mean making some tricky decisions about what is

and is not deemed acceptable. Most news sites have a policy of **deleting personal abuse and offensive comments**. This might seem like a curtailment of free speech, but, quite apart from any moral issues, it can be necessary **to preserve the quality of the debate** – hurling abuse and trading insults is likely to drag the thread off-topic quickly. **The Guardian** website's comment guidelines say:

**We welcome debate and dissent, but personal attacks, [...] persistent trolling and mindless abuse will not be tolerated. The key to maintaining guardian.co.uk as an inviting space is to focus on intelligent discussion of topics.**

*N.B. A troll is someone who posts deliberately offensive or provocative statements in order to cause the thread to descend into an argument.*

### A democratic forum?

Though moderation tactics vary from site to site, it is generally true that only a small proportion of comments get deleted. This means that comment threads allow any reader to







engage with the story in an unprecedented way. The debate has been opened up to voices that did not previously have a forum to be heard. This might reflect an important shift in values – where previously the media was in a powerful position, with the potential to impose a **hegemony of opinion on a passive audience**, that audience is now able to become more actively involved. A **plurality of opinions** is available, thus making public discourse richer and more varied. At least, that's the idealised way of looking at it. But are the comments posted under a story really a valued part of public discourse?

## Whose opinion is valued?

As the **Mitchell and Webb** sketch points out, many commenters are **poorly informed or prejudiced**. Of course, this doesn't mean that they don't have the right to freedom of speech. The real issue is: **how much does society value their comments, and how much prominence should they be given?**

One point of view is that, as the sketch suggests, the media has gone too far in courting public opinion – it is acting as though every opinion is equally valid, be it from a journalist, an expert, or just someone weighing in with an ill-considered gut reaction.

On the other hand, the news media still **sets the agenda** by choosing which stories to publish – readers can only respond to the facts they are given. In general, we assume that the journalist knows more about the story than most of the people commenting. We value a journalist's contributions more, and give them more authority. Many people who read a news story online will not even bother to look at the comments.

## Reporting public reaction in the mainstream media: Baby P

Nevertheless, there are signs that **public reaction is becoming seen as a more legitimate part of a news story**. One example of this can be seen in the coverage of the death of **Baby P**, as he was then known, at the hands of his mother, her boyfriend, and the boyfriend's brother. The case received a lot of media attention when it became clear that social services had repeatedly missed signs that he was being abused.

**The Sun** ran a campaign called 'Justice for Baby P', which encouraged readers to sign a postal and

online petition calling for the sacking of the five child protection professionals it held responsible for the child's death. It then ran stories about how many signatures it had gathered. It frequently quoted members of the public who had no personal involvement with the case, not only in stories about the petition but also in its more general coverage of the case. These quotes could be drawn from the petition itself, from 'vox pop' interviews, or, frequently, from comment threads on the paper's website. 'Have your say' had crossed over and become news itself.

However, before we hail this as a great victory for public opinion, we should bear in mind that **The Sun** still had the power to **select which comments it used** in its news coverage. I performed a detailed breakdown of all the quotes from people *not* involved in the story, as well as all the readers' letters, emails and text messages that **The Sun** printed on the subject between 12th November and 30th November 2008. I found that **the paper had not represented a single user who disagreed with their campaign**, or even suggested that other wider measures than the sacking of the five named individuals might be required to improve child protection. Instead the paper emphasised the popularity of its campaign. One news article on 24th November said:

**Huge sacks bursting with signed petitions continue to arrive every day demanding action against social workers and doctors responsible for letting the tragic toddler die. Carol Puttick, 62, of Maidstone, Kent, said: 'There were so many visits but no one prevented his death. They have blood on their hands.'**

*The Sun 24th November 2008*

The phrase '**blood on their hands**' is exactly the same as a headline that appeared in **The Sun** on 12th November when the story first broke. **The paper selected a quote that reflects not only its own editorial position, but even the language it had used.** The opinions quoted are genuine, but the overall impression becomes less about the significance of the Baby P case and more about praising **The Sun**. The petition and the online discussion forums, despite being touted as giving a voice to ordinary people, are actually being used by the newspaper for reasons of **political economy – to promote itself and to sell more copies**. By promoting a false sense of consensus, it actually shuts down the possibilities for genuine debate.

## A two-way process

So are there any positive ways for the media to engage with its commenters? An interesting model is the **Comment is Free** section of **the Guardian website**. This is a comment and debate site that, apart from reproducing the opinion columns from the paper, features mainly online-only material. It commissions comment pieces, not only from **Guardian** staff and freelance journalists, but also from people in other fields – perhaps those personally affected by a news story, or experts who can give a professional opinion. It prides itself on **giving a voice to conflicting opinions and offering fresh perspectives** on topics in the news.

However, it is also notable for the way it tries to break down barriers between **above the line** (the journalists and their articles) and **below the line** (the commenters). Writing on **Comment is Free's** fourth birthday, the site's creator, **the Guardian's** then executive comment editor Georgina Henry said:



**It took a while for the penny to drop – that there was little point in opening up Guardian journalism to feedback if the journalists showed no sign of reading it, engaging with it or learning from it. It's this mindset change – for editors and for writers – that has been the single most difficult shift of the past four years.**

Thus, **Comment is Free** encourages all its writers to get involved with the 'below the line' discussion, reading the comments and questions in the thread and posting their own responses. The site also features a regular '**You Tell Us**' thread, where users can post ideas for articles or writers they would like to see. A selection of these suggestions are taken up, and later appear on **Comment is Free**. A few commenters have even got the chance to move above the line and write articles of their own (although they have to sacrifice their anonymity and write under their real names).

So, perhaps it is possible to strike a balance between respecting the professional role of the journalist and opening up the debate to new voices. Some people will always want to rant, or to express their own prejudices, and not everyone can be equally well-informed. However, by providing a well-managed space for public discussion, where commenters feel that they are listened to, there is the opportunity to see high-quality debate and to move away from a media hegemony of opinion.

Former publishing intern at EMC, Priscilla McClay is now web editor for British Waterways. In spring 2010 she worked for **Comment is Free** on a temporary basis.





# It's TV, but not as we know it

the Rise and Rise of HBO and American Quality Television

Nothing good on TV? Carly Sandy argues we're not looking at the right programmes, and explains how brilliant drama series from HBO and other US subscription channels are changing the quality of British programmes for the better.

Flick through any EPG (electronic programme guide) or TV listings page and you cannot fail to notice the huge influx of US television programmes that have invaded our screens over the last decade from *Sex and the City*, *The Sopranos* and *The Wire* to, more recently, *Mad Men* and *The Pacific*. These programmes have revolutionised the way we perceive and engage with TV drama: they are glamorous, expensive, challenging, sometimes controversial, and offer the kind of experience more closely aligned with cinema. Many of the most successful come from one US cable network: HBO.

## It's not TV, it's HBO

**Home Box Office** (HBO) is the 'premium' (i.e. expensive) US cable channel credited with the **reinvention of US drama and the development of 'box-set' DVD culture**. From the outset, the broadcaster sets out a statement of intent, with its name clearly referencing cinema and its slogan '**It's Not TV, It's HBO**' attempting to differentiate itself from television culture more widely. Indeed, critics have pointed to HBO as bridging a gap between the cultural prestige of cinema and the often derisory attitude towards television as being second-rate fodder for the masses. Much of HBO's success is attributed to the fact that, unlike most US channels, **it does not feature adverts**, and is **entirely subscription-based**, with subscribers tending to be young, well-educated professionals. Freedom from chasing advertising revenue and then producing programmes under pressure to deliver high ratings to advertisers

week on week (take *The X-Factor*, for example) means that HBO has more freedom to take risks in terms of **characterisation** i.e. *The Wire's* morally ambiguous Stringer Bell; **language** (check out some of the *Curb Your Enthusiasm* clips on YouTube) or address **taboo narrative themes** such as death (*Six Feet Under*).

According to Richard Pepler, Co-President of HBO:

**For us, we're not judging the success of a show necessarily by how high the rating is, we are judging a successful show by whether or not its level of quality and excellence meets our standard of quality and excellence and serves a part of our 30 million subscriber base**

Clearly the **freedom from advertising constraints impacts upon narrative structure and subject matter**; unlike most commercial broadcasters, HBO programmes are not under the same kinds of pressure to deliver cliffhanger endings or to resolve major narrative disruption in a single episode. Instead, characters and narrative arcs are given time to unfold and develop over a number of episodes and, just like real-life, not everything is always resolved in the final episode. HBO programmes are not only **experimental** in terms of traditional TV narrative patterns but they also have a distinctly **cinematic aesthetic**, their high production values (*The Pacific* had a budget of **\$200 million**) affording them special effects, complex set design and highly experienced writers, producers and directors (*The Pacific* was produced by **Tom**

True Blood from [www.image.net](http://www.image.net)

The Pacific from [www.image.net](http://www.image.net)

CSI from [www.image.net](http://www.image.net)







Hanks and Steven Spielberg). From the writing room to the edit room, HBO programmes play by their own rules and refuse to conform to the generic output (police/medical/legal drama) offered by major US networks such as CBS or Fox.

## American quality television

HBO has, in recent years, flown the flag for US television in the global marketplace, but despite their cultural recognition as being a broadcaster for a tele-literate audience, they are not alone in their invasion of UK broadcasting and their pursuit of quality and innovation. **American Quality Television (AQT)** is a term gaining much currency as a useful tool for analysing many US imports, among them Five's flagship programme, **CSI: Crime Scene Investigation** (produced by CBS), Sky One's **24** (Fox Television) and BBC2's **The Wire** (HBO). The term 'American Quality Television' was originally used as a term of reference in Robert J. Thompson's book **Television's Second Golden Age: From Hill Street Blues to ER**, in which a set of criteria is put forward to enable us to profile and differentiate 'quality TV' from 'regular TV' (although, of course, this is a highly subjective debate).

Essentially the following key points from

Thompson (1996) form a useful way of identifying and analysing AQT programme (examples my own):

- **'It is not regular TV...quality TV breaks rules...it may do this by taking a traditional genre and transforming it'**. Consider the way **CSI** has successfully combined conventions from crime and medical drama or the unconventional lack of narrative closure at the end of **Lost**.
- **'Quality TV usually has a quality pedigree'**. Examine the casting of **'stars'** in many AQT dramas i.e. **Kiefer Sutherland**, **Sarah Jessica Parker** and **Gary Sinise**; similarly the involvement of respected Hollywood directors and producers such as **Jerry Bruckheimer** and **Steven Spielberg**.
- **'Quality TV attracts an audience with a blue-chip demographic. The upscale, well-educated, urban-dwelling, young viewers advertisers desire to reach'**. Look at the adverts/programme sponsorship deals that surround AQT programmes, consider their scheduling and the fact that many have appeared on Channel 4, which attracts a core audience of 16-34 year old ABC1s.
- **'Quality TV tends to have a large ensemble**

**cast'**. An ensemble or group of characters allows for a multi-strand narrative which can be more demanding and engaging for audiences; it can also lead to broader audience identification.

- **'Quality TV is literary and writer-based'**. The success of a show does not hinge solely on casting; HBO, for example invest heavily in their writers, many of whom are established Hollywood scriptwriters. Writing is considered integral to the authenticity and integrity of the show.
- **'The subject matter of quality TV tends towards the controversial'**. AQT takes risks and is unafraid to hold a mirror up to some of the more unsavoury aspects of our society i.e. terrorism, crime and corruption; similarly it is unafraid to use its dramatic licence to shock or offend in its portrayal of sex, violence and language.
- **'Quality TV aspires towards realism'**. Look at any battlefield sequence from **The Pacific** and consider the lengths the set designers have gone to in order to produce an authentic portrayal of the rainforests of Cape Gloucester or the bloody sands of Iwo Jima – the cinematography and effects are comparable to any Hollywood blockbuster.

## AQT, genre and audience?

What becomes clear from analysing Thompson's list is that AQT drama appears to **cross generic boundaries** (crime, medical drama, science fiction, historical and legal drama with many displaying evidence of hybridisation). This aside, AQT could also be seen to constitute a genre all by itself, which makes it a slippery term to get to grips with and use in any meaningful way.

In Media Studies-land we are often very constrained by identifying and discussing genre conventions and how they contribute to audience understanding of a text. However, I would suggest that, as well as identifying traditional genre conventions, the criteria of AQT presents us with another tool for our analysis and interrogation of television programmes. Contemporary studies of genre offer us a number of challenges with many series taking established conventions to their broadest parameters and **reinventing traditional genres in a more postmodern, self-reflexive way** (take ABC's **The Modern Family**, for example). It is important to recognise that television is changing on not just a technological level (the impact of digital TV, timeshifting, HD, 3D, On Demand TV) but also in terms of output. It is easy to dismiss the contemporary television landscape as one of reality TV, soaps and spin-offs, but when you look a little harder you will find that there are far more programmes that are pushing the boundaries of television in terms of genre, narrative, and representation. And they are not all American.

## Looking at Luther

Consider the recent BBC crime drama **Luther** (2010), starring Idris Elba, a glossy 6-part series which explored the complex life and career of the eponymous John Luther. Whilst the show trod familiar territory in terms of crime drama conventions such as the collision of the private







and professional life of its maverick protagonist, or his willingness to tear up the rule book in order to 'get a collar', the whole look and pace of *Luther* felt different and clearly drew inspiration from many US 'quality' dramas. According to the show's producer, **Katie Swindon**, *Luther* was all about: **achieving the pace and intrigue of a grown-up, sexy thriller on a television budget**

Swindon also attributes much of the success of the show to its creator and writer, **Neil Cross**, himself a Booker-nominated crime novelist whose TV pedigree includes *Spooks*, adding: **a *Luther* script reads like a film – multiple locations and continuous movement.**

Although the production values of BBC prime-time fall some way short of the **\$4 million** lavished on the pilot episode of **24**, *Luther* still managed to light up our screens in its Tuesday 9pm slot, attracting 5.6m viewers/24% audience share for its first episode. Alongside its commercial success, it also managed to achieve the rare feat of achieving critical acclaim (let's see how it performs at the BAFTA's and the NTA's). But far more significantly it was praised for its **long-overdue casting of a black male protagonist**; another nod to US dramas which tend to fare better in terms of the representation of diversity; a view echoed by Elba:

**In America, it's nothing to see a cast that's multi-racial. It's drummed into the viewers that this is the world you're going to see. You're going to see a black family with more than just 'black' issues**

In reality, the narrative does not focus on Luther's ethnicity; it is not foregrounded as 'an issue' or pursued on any dramatic level, unlike many dramas which feature ethnic minority characters. And this is not the only area in which the series offers us more **pluralistic representations**. Consider, for example, Luther's female boss, DSU Rose Teller; his wife Zoe, a

successful lawyer; and his nemesis, Alice Morgan, an Oxford-educated astrophysicist who also happens to have murdered her parents. What *Luther* offers is **a more diverse array of female characters** than many crime dramas, which tend to perpetuate narrow cultural stereotypes representing women as victims or androgynous career-minded professionals.

### The AQT question

In his review for the first episode of *Luther*, *The Guardian's* TV Editor, Richard Vine asked: **...why British drama can't be as ambitious and compelling as *The Sopranos*, *Six Feet Under*, *Deadwood*, *In Treatment* or *True Blood* ... It's an argument that touches on everything from funding, to talent, to ambition...**

Perhaps Vine is right in the sense that imported drama, much of which we would define as **'AQT'**, has **raised audience expectations of prime-time**, particularly as 92% of households now have digital TV (Freeview/Sky/Virgin etc) where these programmes have made a stronger scheduling impact. However, what we also need to recognise is just how significantly the rise of American Quality Television has impacted upon our indigenous programme making, in terms of both visual style and narrative strategies. Consider programmes such as *ITV 1's Identity* and how closely it borrows from American investigation dramas in terms of its ensemble cast, reliance on technology, character dynamics and focus on identity theft. Or the way in which the BBC chose to re-package a classic Victorian detective, *Sherlock Holmes*, for the modern age, complete with the on-screen display of text messages or the wipe dissolves used to convey Sherlock's erratic thought processes. These distinguishing hallmarks not only make the drama appear both edgy and innovative but also borrow from US

shows such as *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* in terms of having **a defining aesthetic feature** (*CSI* uses the 'wound cam' shot). What has become clear is that **US television drama has raised the bar** in terms of the kind of programming we now expect from British broadcasters. Scratch the surface and there is much original drama that is both ambitious and compelling. So, for those who say they can never find anything decent on TV, it's probably time to change channel.

Carly Sandy teaches Media at Palmers' College, Essex.

### Follow it up

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# THE MONARCHY, TELEVISION & BRITISH IDENTITY



A REIGN OF CHANGE

Irrelevant, out-dated, overpaid, underwhelming – whatever your views of our Royal Family, its role in constructing notions of collective identity is long-established. Nicholas Hobbs explores the changing ways in which the monarchy has represented itself through its relationship with television – and with audiences.



Many of you studying **Media and Collective Identity** as part of the OCR A2 Media Studies specification will be focusing on the concept of **British identity** and how it has been portrayed and influenced by different media such as film and television. No doubt you have discovered the incredibly fluid nature of our national identity and explored how 'Britishness' is a relatively

recent concept; and perhaps you have identified some common and reoccurring themes such as **community, class, multiculturalism**, or the idea of '**British values**'.

Your study of British identity may have brought you to consider a range of social, economic, political and historical concepts alongside the individual media texts you have looked at. You





will have gained a real awareness of the massive changes our nation has been through just in its recent history. Political and popular culture figures have been and gone, massive shifts have occurred in our social make-up, and our economy has gone from bust to boom and back again. Yet despite all these changes there is one institution and one figure that has remained: **the monarchy and Queen Elizabeth II**.

The monarchy's role in defining our sense of national identity is long-established and one of its most important functions. It deals in **nostalgia, heritage and tradition**, providing a link to the past whilst also (through Prince Charles and Prince William) providing a link to the future. It offers **stability** (consider that in the last 60 years we have had 12 Prime Ministers but only one Queen) and would like to be held up as a **representative of a range of traditional British 'values'**, however undefined these 'values' may actually be. You may see themes emerging here in common with some of the media texts you have studied, such as heritage film or soap opera – and you'd be right. Perhaps you could even stretch to seeing comparisons between **the matriarchal structure of the Royal Family** and the families in soap-land presided over by such formidable females as **Peggy Mitchell** and **Zainab Masood!**

Given that our present Queen has been on the throne for almost 60 years you would be forgiven for thinking that the monarchy as an institution has remained unchanged during this time. But in the same way that other areas of British society have evolved, the monarchy under Elizabeth II has also been through tremendous changes both in terms of its own function and in the way it defines a sense of British identity. At the heart of many of these changes has been television.



## The Queen on the box

The Queen was at the centre of one of the most important landmarks in British television history: **the Coronation in 1953**. This was the **first major piece of live broadcast** undertaken by the BBC, and marked the evolution of television from a niche medium to a mass medium: for the first time ever, **TV audiences exceeded radio audiences and the event was responsible for a huge rise in ownership of television sets**. If your grandparents are old enough to remember the Coronation, chances are the event will have been the first time they watched television, often packed into a neighbour's front room along with other residents of their street!

The broadcast was an important factor in creating a real sense of **national identity**, allowing the majority of the country to experience the Coronation live. The broadcast made it **the first truly national royal event**. The television pictures were also sent around the world: beamed live to France and Germany (another technological breakthrough) and rushed by jet plane to the USA and Canada for broadcast on the same day. This act was also important in terms of **communicating a message about Britain's identity to an international audience**. Following the struggles of World War II and the economic hardships of the post-war period, the huge pageantry of the Coronation was a clear statement about Britain's heritage and its future prospects: a 'new Elizabethan age' was heralded, and a reassertion of Britain's claim to be a world power was made.

One important development that arose out of broadcasting the Coronation on television was that it started the monarchy's interest in embracing and developing media technology as a way to appear up-to-date, modern and progressive, and to communicate directly with the British public.

## The Queen's Christmas speech

Not long after the successful television broadcast of the Coronation came the **first televised Christmas broadcast in 1957**. The first message to be delivered directly by the Queen

to TV cameras communicated some distinct messages:

**It is inevitable that I should seem rather a remote figure to many of you [...] Someone whose face may be familiar in newspapers or films but who never really touches your personal lives [...] I very much hope that this new medium [television] will make my Christmas message more personal and direct.**

Indeed, audiences were witnessing the start of the monarchy using television to its full potential as a way to speak directly to the British people and try to engage with them in a new way. The televised Christmas messages attempted to further enhance **the idea of the monarchy as a 'family'**, and in the 1957 broadcast the Queen tried to draw parallels between her family and families across the country:

**My own family often gather round to watch television, as they are at this moment, and that is how I imagine you now.**

## Keeping up to date

The monarchy continued to use televised Christmas broadcasts as a way to present itself as up-to-date with new developments in modern technology. For example, in 1960, the broadcast was **pre-recorded** for the first time, allowing it to be sent in advance around the Commonwealth; 1967 saw the **first broadcast in colour** (in the very year that colour TV launched in the UK); in 1979 **Ceefax** was used to provide subtitles for the hard of hearing; in 2006 the broadcast was



made available as a **podcast** on the internet; by 2007 the Queen had her own **YouTube channel** on which to post her message; and 2008 saw the Christmas message available in **high-definition**. With the recent launch of **3D televisions**, it is no doubt only a matter of time until you have the option of seeing a multi-dimensional Queen on Christmas Day!

## Social comment

Technology isn't the only way the broadcasts have been used to project an image of modernity and relevance, though. The message itself has also changed over time, as the Queen has often acknowledged and commented upon **important**

**social and political changes.** For example, in 1960 she spoke favourably about the increasingly prominent role of women in society, and in 1999 the Queen welcomed the devolution of Scotland and Wales, whilst reminding her audience of the benefits of a united kingdom. In 2004, in the light of increasing racial tensions in the UK following the invasion of Iraq, the Queen spoke of the positive aspects of an increasingly multicultural society and appealed for greater religious tolerance.

## From Christmas broadcast to reality documentary

As we have seen, the new medium of television was fully embraced by the monarchy in the early days as the Queen happily used it as a way to communicate more directly with the British people. In 1969 this enthusiasm led rather naturally to a landmark event: the decision by the Queen and Prince Phillip to take part in an 'access all areas' documentary called *Royal Family*. What at the time appeared to be a groundbreaking and forward-thinking initiative on the part of the Queen actually marked a major turning point in the public's attitude towards the monarchy, quite possibly in ways it had not foreseen.

At first the documentary appeared to have been a success: it received **over 30 million viewers** (to this day it remains **the third most-watched TV event in UK television history**) and initially provided a huge boost to the popularity of the Royal Family. However, the access the documentary provided to both the media and the public and the way it presented the royals as a 'family' proved problematic in the long run.

## Representing Royalty

The British monarchy has been fashioned as a 'Royal Family' since the reign of Queen Victoria. The present Queen's grandfather, George V, in particular embraced this concept, creating a Royal Family that was **more upper middle class than aristocratic**, and placing it firmly at the centre of British society to provide **a symbol of family values**. However, a regal 'mystique' had always remained. The monarchy may have been a *family*, but it was *royal* nonetheless. The problem with *Royal Family* (the documentary) was that it showed them as a 'normal' family who did 'normal' things. They were shown sat around the breakfast table, for example, with the Queen and Prince Phillip chatting to a young Prince Charles about his homework, whilst Princess Anne casually read a book, and there are intimate scenes of a family barbeque at Balmoral where the Queen dishes up food. Whilst the public enjoyed these candid insights, it '**normalised**' the family and took away the mystique. Ultimately it started to raise questions of 'if they are just like us, what makes them special?' Most significantly, the documentary sent a signal to the media that members of the Royal Family were **acceptable targets for speculation and intrusion beyond their official duties** and into their private and personal lives. The royal 'soap opera' had begun.

*Royal Family* also arrived at a time when television was becoming more relaxed, and so did its coverage of the monarchy. The media in

general had always conducted a system of **self-censorship** around royal matters. The events leading up to **the abdication crisis of 1936** (when the Queen's uncle, Edward VIII gave up the throne in order to marry American divorcee Wallis Simpson) were subject to a **self-imposed news blackout** in the UK. Similar self-restraint was shown in the 1950s over the Queen's sister, Princess Margaret, when she indicated her intentions to marry a divorcee 16 years her senior. On television, nothing flippant, and certainly nothing derogatory, would be said about the Royal Family, and they would be portrayed in a respectful and dignified way. However, *Royal Family* came at the end of the 1960s, a decade



which saw the emergence of satire on British TV in the form of *That Was The Week That Was*, a topical show which future Conservative premiere Ted Heath blamed for '**the death of deference**'. The show was famed for its sharp-witted review of the week's news, sparing no-one – including, controversially, the Royals. Combined with the massive social changes that occurred in the 1960s, as the country started its move towards a more egalitarian society, it is easy to see how television coverage of the monarchy in that decade sowed the seeds for today's **celebrity-gossip style coverage** of the royals in the tabloids and the hard-edged humour of TV shows such as *Mock the Week*. And you can be certain that when the monarchy began its relationship with television, it didn't foresee the Queen's puppet on *Spitting Image*!

## A troubled relationship

And so, despite all its promise, the monarchy has seen its relationship with television become rather tense and difficult. The BBC continues dutifully to broadcast a myriad of royal events, ranging from annual pageants such as trooping the colour to one-off spectacles, for instance Royal Weddings or the Queen's Golden Jubilee celebrations and, on the whole, these still receive huge audiences. But there have continued to be less positive engagements between monarchy and television. In 1987, the involvement of the junior members of the Royal Family in a one-off TV special of game show *It's a Royal Knockout!* (think *Wipeout* meets *Supermarket Sweep*) provoked genuine derision and was seen as rather undignified, whilst events such as Princess Diana's 1995 'warts and all' interview to the BBC threatened to destroy the monarchy altogether. Indeed, such was the Queen's dismay at the BBC's role in events that production of that year's Christmas broadcast was handed to ITV for the first time ever.

## TV as social leveller

So has television been of benefit to the monarchy? It has certainly changed the way the British people relate to the Queen and, importantly, the way we relate to her successors. Prince Charles and Prince William have developed into **confident media performers** in a way Her Majesty could never have envisaged for herself. Thanks to television, the monarch and the Royal Family are regular visitors in our living rooms. And therein lies one of the biggest issues: television itself has changed over the last 50 years. Whereas once this magical box was something special and unique, it now forms a mere background distraction in our everyday lives which are filled by all sorts of different media.

**Television is a social leveller** however, and we have moved from being a society where people would stand when hearing the national anthem played at the start of all cinema screenings to one which barely even looks up from the Nintendo DS if the Queen appears on the news. Once you've been sitting in your pants fiddling with your games console in the televisual presence of Her Majesty, there's really no going back!

Nicholas Hobbs is Head of Media Studies at Gunnersbury Catholic School in West London, and admits he has a bit of a soft spot for the Queen.

## Follow it up

Mark 29th April in your diary for what could be a fascinating representational case study on the Royal Wedding.





# PRIMAL FEAR

## The Cinematic Scare in Transition

Horror is a myth formed on the foundations of darkness, but today sees classic horror losing its brutal edge as the slasher trend struggles for the first time in decades amidst a breed of reinventions. Matt Freeman sat down with horror legend John Carpenter to discuss horror's new nightmare, questioning whether it is something we should all fear...

Horror films have never been particularly complicated. Their aim is simple: to provoke a physical response from the audience. To make them scream, shriek, shudder, wince, or even cry with terror. There's a visceral quality at the centre of horror, an instinctive emotional response that remains an ode to our dark hearts. But the once-simple genre has suddenly become a lot more complicated. Gory slashers are dying out, no longer the box office draw they once were.



MM

**Bolt Your Doors.  
Lock Your Windows.  
There's Something  
in The Fog!**

JOHN CARPENTER'S

# THE FOG

JOHN CARPENTER, who startled the world with "Halloween,"  
now brings you the ultimate experience in terror.

JOHN CARPENTER'S "THE FOG" A DEBRA HILL PRODUCTION  
Starring ADRIENNE BARBEAU, JAMIE LEE CURTIS, JOHN HOUSEMAN and **JANET LEIGH as Kathy Williams**  
and starring HAL HOLBROOK as Father Malone  
Produced by DEBRA HILL. Written by JOHN CARPENTER and DEBRA HILL. Directed by JOHN CARPENTER  
Executive Producer CHARLES B. BLOCH an ENTERTAINMENT DISCOVERIES, INC. PRESENTATION  
Read the BANTAM Book **AVCO EMBASSY PICTURES** Release

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Film-makers are now utilizing the cornerstones of horror to tell sobering tales that seek to do much more than frighten people. Then, of course, there's *Twilight* – a phenomenon that's injected old-fashioned Gothic romanticism into the heart of horror. Who's to know if the genre will ever be the same again?

Screen terror is almost as old as cinema itself, and it seems apt that **change**, a theme in and of itself, is intrinsic to horror. As **P.J. Worsfold** asserts, 'the horror film hinges upon a cause-and-effect relationship between change and fear, two facets of life that we all experience.' For Worsfold, **this is not to say that we are afraid of change, there is much more to it than that. Change and fear stick with us from cradle to grave, working with the rest of life's experiences to shape who we are. Although fear need not always follow change, when it does, the results range from a startled jump to paranoia, suspicion, anxiety, panic, and rage – everything a good horror film should be about.**

In any case, horror is about instinct, not words; thrills, not narrative.

In 1960, **Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*** was unveiled to audiences: the film that gave birth to modern horror. It single-handedly anticipated the arrival of Hollywood's notoriously brutal **slasher trend**. And it was king of the slasher **John Carpenter** who cemented this trend with the arrival of ***Halloween*** in 1978, a film that used the beautiful brutality of mixing artful Hitchcock suspense with frequent scare tactics to lay the groundwork for the subsequent evolution of horror. So when **MediaMagazine** sat down with the man behind one of the scariest horror movies of all time to discuss the changing face of modern horror, the results were predictably fascinating...

## Talking to John

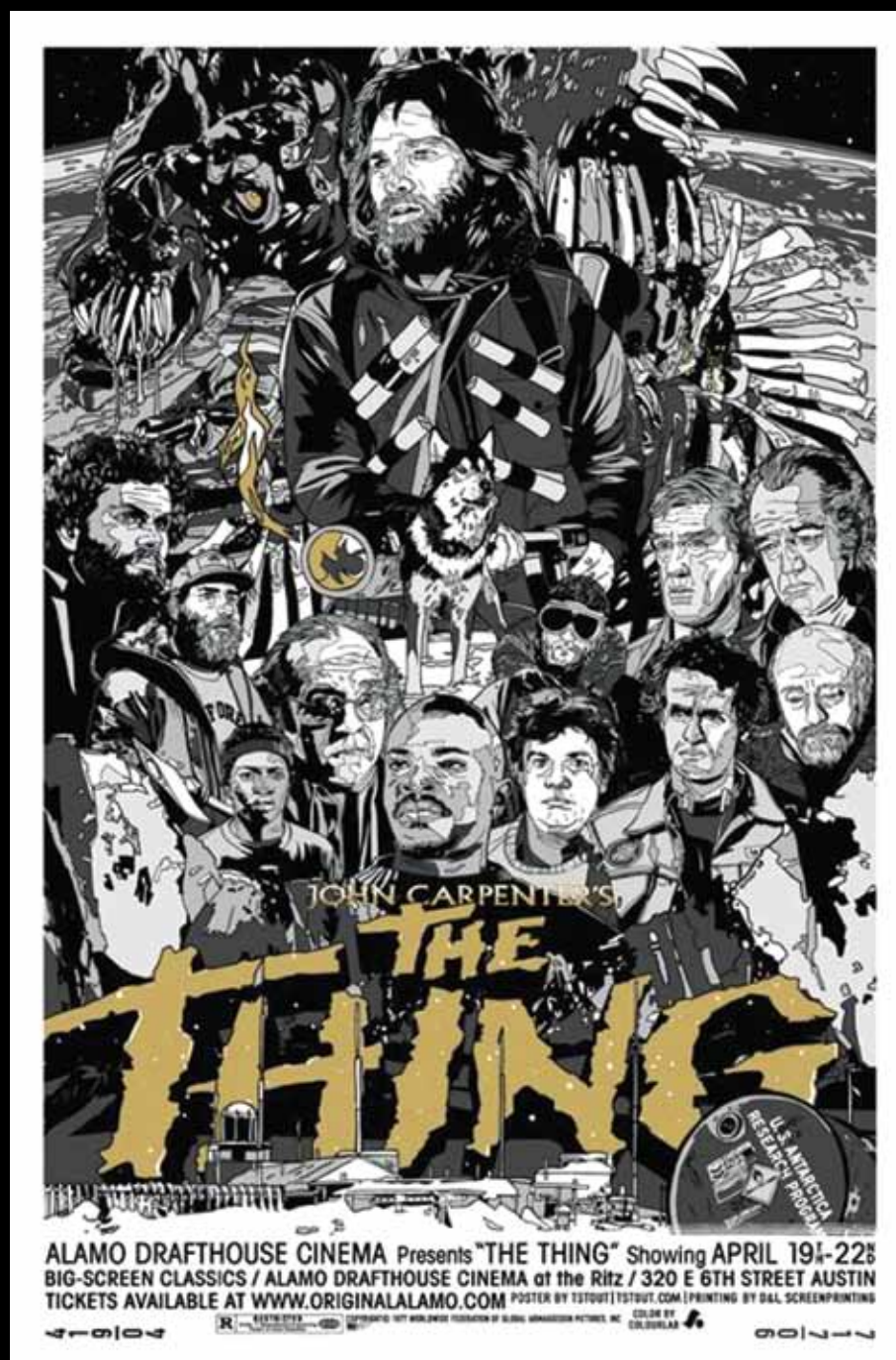
'*Halloween* was a scream machine,' John Carpenter insists with a sly stillness.

**It was a very effective movie for audiences – they just weren't used to anything like it.**

Looking back, let's not forget that Carpenter is a classicist, a film-maker who relishes the fundamental, visceral quality of horror. For Carpenter, it is the dark side in all of us that explains the reason for why we are drawn to horror, for subconsciously the human soul craves terror:

**There are so many fears and we share them – that's the thing about horror. It is universal. It is not like culture. In other words, comedy is sometimes different in America than it is in other parts of the world. But fear – we're all afraid of death. We're afraid of the unknown; we're afraid of a loss of a loved one; a loss of identity. And so in that sense horror films can be very memorable because they deal in human traits, human feelings.**

Carpenter is also keen to stress the true heart of horror, pointing out that such films are **moral fables – they tell us things without dialogue; they tell us things in behaviour. They tell us truths couched in rubber masks and big noises. They're about things that roll along on a subconscious level.**



Yet for some time now the slasher movement that Carpenter helped create with ***Halloween*** has been stuck in something of a rut, relying almost entirely on the remake machine to pump life into the once thriving genre – an indictment, Carpenter suggests, of a marketing-inspired era: **I don't know if the movies that they're remaking have relevance, other than the fact that every movie wants to make money ... But you have to understand that the modern audience believes that *Halloween* is a movie made by Rob Zombie. So the audience is not really familiar, probably, with the titles or the movies that they come from. But they're packaged in a way that makes them want to see it.**

Yet what Carpenter fails to disclose is that even with such marketing, films such as the ***Halloween Friday the 13th*** and ***Nightmare on Elm Street*** remakes struggled to attract mass audiences. Many film critics continue to comment that cinema needs to breed a new style of screen horror during a time of such burnt creativity, but

few have observed that this new breed is already upon us.

Indeed, Carpenter's earlier use of the past tense to discuss this particular trend is appropriate, for horror has unleashed a quiet renaissance, changing into something softer and more romantic. Classic scare tactics are now carving themselves between the blades of romance and drama to unleash a softer breed of screen horror. Consider **the *Twilight* saga**, itself representative of a new vampire-romance style of horror that subverts the genre's primal impulses, and targets young women as the appropriate audience. But do the ***Twilight*** films really belong in the same category as ***Dracula***, ***Psycho*** and ***Halloween*** – are they necessarily horror?

## Tender terror

Vampires have long existed in cinema as symbols of lust, just like ***Twilight's* Edward Cullen**, but they were previously vicious adversaries rather than tender boyfriends. Vampires were monsters that sparked fear in our



hearts; they were unpredictably deadly fiends without the compassion of moral reasoning. Today, however, vampires are sexy; they epitomise the bad boy image and convey an aura of absolute power. The *Twilight* films are certainly not afraid to explore dark themes such as death, but the death is rarely presented as frightening. Instead, it is seen as a consequence of love. Many have noted that this new vampire image – now more defensive than aggressive – almost entirely eradicates the blood-letting that so often defined the horror genre.

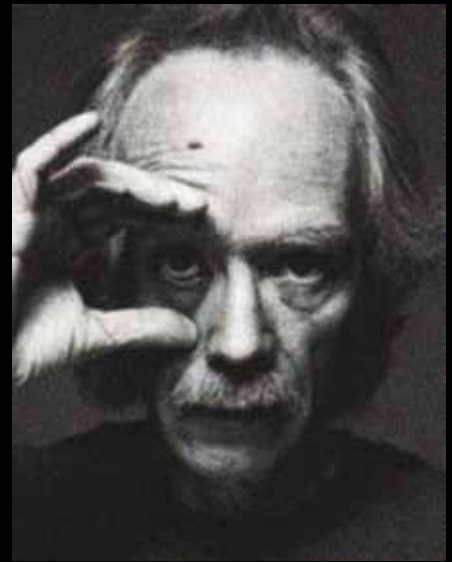
Even when horror turns art-house – as in **Lars Von Trier's *Antichrist*** or **Fabrice du Welz's *Vinyan*** just last year – the genre's iconography is typically used **metaphorically**. For example, both these films used horror conventions to tell poetic tales about the hell a parent faces when living with the death of their child. Von Trier's *Antichrist* undoubtedly caused a social stir – even a mild moral panic – with its explicit depiction of

**misogynistic violence and self-mutilation that represents the characters' severe sense of guilt.** Yet *Antichrist*, a horror that moves away from teenage angst and taps into far deeper and more disturbing themes, is altogether out to shock, not to scare, and therein lies a crucial change.

Many of Carpenter's films were deemed failures, despite going on to achieve worldwide cult recognition. He explains this as 'wrong place, wrong time':

**Just in terms of *The Thing* I just wasn't smart enough to know that at that particular time – when I believe we were in a recession – that the country really wanted to up-cry. So they went for *E.T.* They didn't want this dark, mean movie that ended uncertainly. But I didn't know anything – I'm just a kid who grew up in Kentucky.**

This notion of horror at its darkest and meanest rejected by an audience during a time



of great uncertainty and economic crisis may be more relevant today than ever before. After all, cinema is **an escapist medium** – audiences long to be swept away from personal issues amidst the spectacle of a new world. Why pay money to be reminded of darkness and uncertainty in a cinema? There's enough of that already.

Carpenter's own critical stance on horror today is clear:

**It's an interesting period in Hollywood's history. We still have very unique horror films coming out. That's something that continues. That makes me very happy.**

Yet he believes some things about movie horror will never change – the stories you can tell:

**In general you have two stories in horror, only two. The stories have to do with where the evil comes from, because most horror movies are about evil of some sort. A destructive force, a thing, a killer – whatever you want to call it. And it goes back to our beginnings as creatures when we start telling each other stories ... Imagine yourself around a campfire, for instance. You're listening to a medicine man or a witch doctor or a priest or whoever is the storyteller, and he tells you where evil is. Evil is out there in the dark. It's beyond the river. It's the other tribe. It's the other. It's the outside force that's going to come in and destroy us or kill us. That's one form of horror. Then the second is that you imagine the same scene – we're gathered around a camp fire and we're listening to the storyteller – and he tells us evil is in here, and he points to his heart. He says evil is in every person. That's a harder story to tell. That's a story that is more challenging to the audience; it's a lot easier to tell a story about the other. But when the evil is us, then we're all capable of evil – and that's tricky. That's an alarming thing for audiences.**

Matt Freeman is a freelance film journalist who has written for *Film Journal International*, *GoreZone* and *Total Film*.





# Fac(ebook)ing the changes

## how social networking might change the world

Tina Dixon offers a cautiously optimistic overview of the impact of Facebook and the critical debates surrounding it.

For me, one of the big changes in the media is the impact **social networking** has had on our daily lives. It's a case of blink, and there it is, all-pervasive, all-consuming, all-knowing, and I didn't see it coming. Though there are several of these sites – Bebo, MySpace, Twitter, and MSN and so on, I am going to focus on **Facebook**.

As a Media teacher, Facebook is the site that the majority of my students have an account with and use, as do I. And this is borne out by the fact that Facebook is the most used social networking site globally. And though one might assume that it is a wholly young person's phenomenon, this is not necessarily the case. It is fair to say that Facebook is a huge social phenomenon.

### The origins of Facebook

So, where did it come from? It was founded by **Mark Zuckerberg** and three of his fellow Harvard University students and launched in February 2004, initially as **thefacebook.com**. Within 24 hours 1,500 students had signed up. Within months, it was open to other universities, then high schools, then employees of Microsoft and Apple. From September 2006 it allowed anyone over the age of 13 to become a member. Today Mark Zuckerberg remains the CEO with a

24% share. This is something, then, that is just **six years old** – hard to believe isn't it? As with mobile phones, we wonder what we did before it.

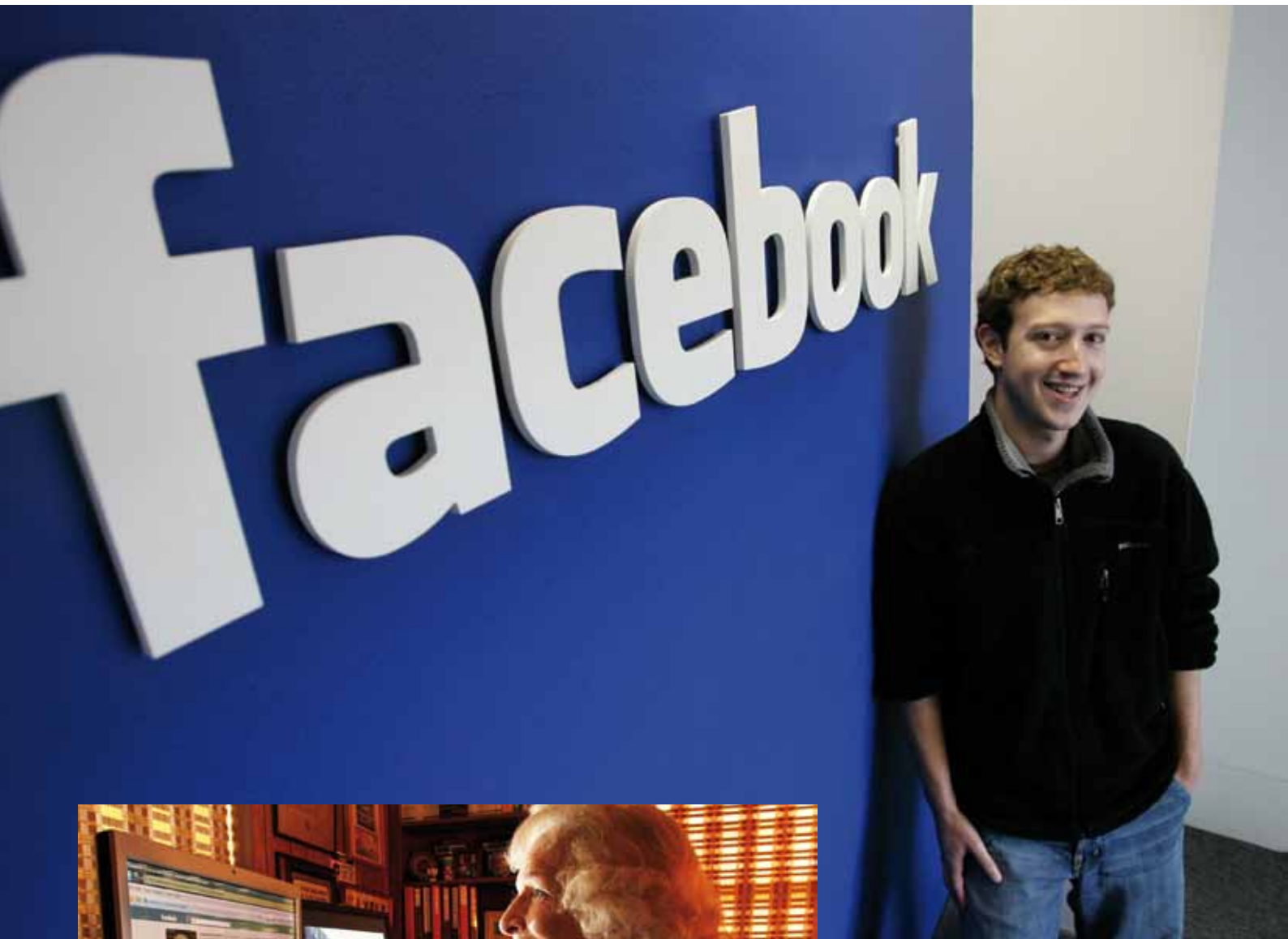
Zuckerberg stresses that Facebook is an **'open community'**. How I interpret this is in a similar way to the Open University, meaning open to everyone, therefore truly democratic. This is a noble ideal, to be 'open' to everyone in a world full of prejudices and hierarchies, a world where good looks open doors and fake breasts earn you a great deal of money if you are prepared to have them photographed regularly. A world where inequalities of wealth are global, yet where, after Hurricane Katrina, the colour of your skin was a factor in your survival and future. A world where the wealthy First World nations can feel good about themselves when they send money and aid to flood-devastated Pakistan.

### The Facebook feelgood factor

So, we should feel good about Facebook; we should applaud its democratic approach towards its 500,000,000 worldwide users (as at July 2010), a number growing daily. Certainly, on the surface, it is brilliant. I have been able to make contact with large numbers of past students, who are doing really well in a varied range of







media professions – camera operators on films and television drama, journalists and editors of local and national newspapers and magazines, producers, screenwriters, researchers etc. I can keep regular contact with family and friends. I even know who went out and got drunk last night, how they feel this morning, what they wore to a special event, who they are dating or married to, where they went at the weekend, what their pet dog looks like, what they ate for breakfast, how tough their latest university assignment is, what a complete shower of s\*\*\* the England football squad is, and what they thought of *The Expendables*. I now know so much about so many people that I didn't know about them before. (I also know a great deal that I do not wish to know!)

Everyone who has an account on Facebook can represent themselves, can profile themselves, choose their own photographs, decide who they allow to be their friends, log on when they want to and not when they don't. The fact that **ordinary people are able to self-represent** is huge. This is a massive turnaround. The traditional media are full of constructed representations and stereotypes, with all of the negative connotations that go with that (remember that in 1922, Walter Lippman, in his book *Public Opinion* coined the term **stereotype** as 'the little pictures we carry around our heads'; this led to the notion that stereotypes are widely-held beliefs about characteristics of members of social groups, quite often negative beliefs). The lack of control over those representations has long been a cause for

concern, and a well-worn debate within Media Studies. But now we have a situation where ordinary people can represent themselves. There is a great deal to celebrate here it would appear. Facebook has enriched all of our lives.

### But...

But is this huge change in our lives all positive? Let's have a look a bit more deeply.

As is the case for all things new, for all of the positive arguments there are negative counter-arguments, and Facebook is no exception. If we take the notion of **self-representation** into account first, which, as I said earlier, is indeed a positive thing, it has to be balanced against **privacy**.

### Privacy

This has become a contentious issue with regard to Facebook and, according to a *Daily Mail* article by Steve Brogan (21/05/10), Facebook's standing has plummeted because of its shifting policies on privacy. When Facebook first started, only friends were allowed to see your information, but by December 2009 the privacy policy read:

**Certain categories of information such as your name, profile photo, list of friends, pages you are a fan of, gender, geographic region and networks you belong to are**



considered publicly available to everyone... and therefore do not have privacy settings. You can, however, limit the ability of others finding this information through using your search privacy settings.

Interestingly, the settings which allow you to have information visible to your friends, friends of friends or everyone used to be **private by default**. But latterly they have become **public by default**. And it is more difficult to change them; people do not always notice that default settings allow more of their information to be visible.

It is also worth noting that, earlier this summer, Facebook announced link-ups with other websites, which, when visited by Facebook members, would personalise their visit based on their information on Facebook. Many people don't mind this happening; but some feel it is taking control out of their hands as to who has information on them. Of course it is a very naïve person who does not realise that Facebook makes its money from advertising. This is a business, no different from any other capitalist venture, where profit and making money is its *raison d'être*. And this is quite skilful advertising, as it draws on specific information on all of us members. So, we are literally handed over to the advertisers. Whilst on the subject of money: **in October 2007 Microsoft bought a 1.6% share of Facebook for \$240 million. And in June 2010 Facebook's estimated value was \$11.5 billion.**

Under these circumstances it is hard not to be a little sceptical and, though we can think of Facebook as a wonderfully open and democratic phenomenon, it can also be seen as **a tool of capitalism**. It works in a truly **hegemonic** way: we may believe that we are in control when we are using Facebook, but when big business is involved, it could be argued that it is we who are being used. And **with over 500,000,000 users (8% of the world's population)**, there is something to think about here.

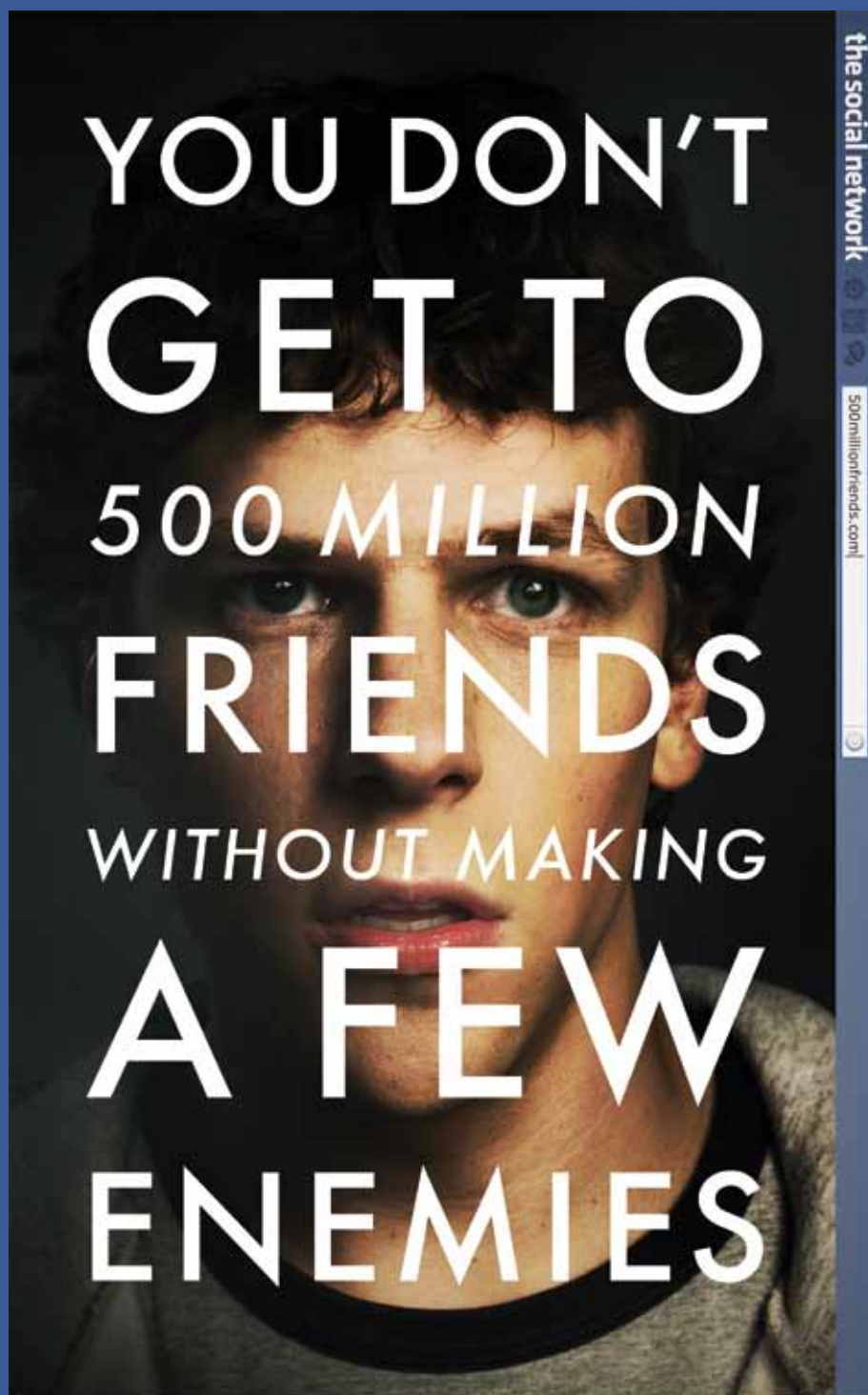
### Facebook and globalisation

Given the global reach of Facebook, and the percentage of the population using it, one could argue that it is a contributing element of globalisation. If, as postmodern theorists argue, the boundaries between cultures are becoming blurred, and globalisation is the process whereby what happens in one society is increasingly interconnected with events in other parts of the world, then Facebook is **both a postmodern phenomenon and a facilitator of globalisation**.

Globalisation means that Western cultures and media exert a disproportionate influence on the cultures of other societies, with the implication that cultures can no longer be seen as separate from one another, potentially leading to **cultural imperialism**. From the perspective of a political economy this **homogenisation of culture** leads to shared values and ideologies. America dominates world media with **85% of the global film market and 68% of the global television market**, and Facebook is an American company. American values and ideologies are therefore imposed on the rest of the world.

### Some final perspectives

In the 1960's **Marshall McLuhan**, a Canadian cultural theorist, argued that the world was



becoming a '**global village**'. He wrote this from a point of view of optimism about the world, not pessimism. Facebook surely supports McLuhan's argument for us living in a global village. My daughter lives in Canada, and I can message her daily on Facebook, and of course, I see this as a positive thing.

And finally, **theories of cultural imperialism** assume that all of the power lies with the producer. However, perhaps we should question this: there is no doubt that audiences are assuming more and more power. Audiences select, and thus to some extent can influence producers. Interestingly, a group of New York college students referring to themselves as 'Team Diaspora' shot a video in a classroom outlining their vision of social networking whereby all users remain in control of all their own data. They only aimed to raise \$10,000 to complete this project, but actually raised \$200,000 – including

a donation from Mark Zuckerberg himself. It remains to be seen whether they complete the project successfully, but it does at least show to some extent that the audience is listened to by producers.

And, of course, audiences create a range of meanings to suit themselves, and, I would argue that there is more negativity shown towards Facebook by people who do not use it than those of us who do.

Tina Dixon teaches Media Studies and is an Examiner for AQA.

Stills from The Social Network courtesy of image.net

# celebrity tweet



## Twitter and the Changing Face of Stardom

John Branney investigates the Twitter effect on the nature of celebrity culture.

It might seem surprising that after only four years since its launch, Twitter has become such a significant social networking tool. With an array of other networking tools available and mobile phone users being offered bundles of free texts, it seems unusual that a need exists for such a product. Yet with more than one hundred million users worldwide sending fifty million 'tweets' a day, it clearly offers something. One element where Twitter differs from other networking applications, such as Facebook and MySpace is in the relationship it creates between stars and their fans.

### Tweets, fame and Fry

Twitter offers users the opportunity to 'follow' other users and they connect with one another by posting short 140-character messages or 'tweets'. Where an application such as Facebook requires the user to agree to a friend request, Twitter automatically connects you with another user, although you can choose to block them. You are then able to read their short 'tweets', including those from your favourite celebrities. It was the unofficial godfather of Twitter, **Stephen Fry**, who increased the level of awareness of the social networking tool when, in February 2009, he became stuck in a lift.

One possible reason for the attraction of such an event was the fact that we were able to follow the plight of a celebrity, a figure who we would not normally associate with being victim to such an occurrence, being stuck in such an ordinary everyday situation. The public sympathised with Fry and, as a result, his 'followers' increased rapidly, as did the popularity of Twitter.

Twitter also allows you to send responses to the celebrities. On Halloween 2009, Stephen Fry stated:

**Think I may have to give up on Twitter. Too much aggression and unkindness around. Pity. Well, it's been fun.**

This was in response to a message a 'follower' had sent him earlier in the evening. Although the two reconciled their differences the next morning this represented a shift in the dynamic between the fan and the star. Where the star would normally be seen as unobtainable, Twitter increases the level of intimacy that exists between the two; it creates an impression that celebrities are attainable, and could be said to heighten the fan's engagement with the star and vice versa.

### Another side of celebrity culture

Twitter has certainly provided a number of interesting insights into celebrity culture, such as **Ashton Kutcher's** infamous picture of his wife Demi Moore bending over in a bikini. He then posted the Tweet, 'Shhh don't tell wifey'. What is arguably more interesting was that in the picture Moore was allegedly steaming her husband's suit – a service you might think would be performed by a team of dedicated staff. The bourgeois ideology associated with stardom thus begins to break down and the sense of ordinariness increases.





However, when we begin to associate stars with the everyday, they can seem mundane, and the glamorous and enigmatic qualities of stardom begin to suffer. One such example is the actor **Nick Frost**, who frequently informs his followers of what he is preparing for dinner, supported by proud images of his accomplishments.

What is interesting here is the comparison between the stars that use Twitter and those who don't – and indeed how this can affect their image. It seems fitting for Frost to post images of himself cooking because the parts that he tends to play require **a sense of authenticity and 'everydayness'**. Twitter seems to support his ideological position, and it is down to Frost to support this image through what he posts. Another British celebrity, **Jonathon Ross**, also provides interesting insights into his home life, again supported with self-taken photographs. The images used to represent the 'real' star are no longer photographed and managed by a team of PR consultants, but constructed by the stars themselves. Twitter images thus seem raw and unmediated, offering an interesting comparison to the 'airbrushed' artificial presentations we see in magazines and newspapers.

The dynamic that has long existed between fan and star is paradoxical. The paradox that existed between the extraordinary image of the star as unobtainable and the accessible and everyday image of the star has become complicated. Nowadays, the focus tends to be on the latter. Rather than accessing stars primarily through their work, we can now have an everyday encounter through their tweets. The instant relationships between fans and their favourite celebrities enabled by Twitter appears to 'humanise' stars in way that we have not really seen in a study of 'stardom' before. Our interest in stardom is intensified by their sense of ordinariness, and we communicate with stars as friends we know. This intensifies the level of stardom. They enter our lives at a more natural and human level, and inhabit the same world that we do.

It could be argued that Twitter allows audiences more access to the 'real' star. It allows stars to 'self-manage' their image; but giving celebrities the power to control their own representation does not always work out positively. Last year, **Hugh Jackman** was forced to admit that he did not manage his own Twitter account when one of his messages mistakenly referred to the Sydney Opera House as the 'Opera Center'. This provides a very different view of Jackman as a star. His image retains the bourgeois ideology that was once necessary for the creation of star image and he continues to be seen as unobtainable by his fans.

Twitter can both support and complicate star images. On one level it is merely another tool to be used in promoting the star persona; and Twitter is certainly rife with self-promotion and sycophantic commentaries from fans. Nevertheless, it appears that with Twitter the

star persona is becoming more complicated because the role of the 'real' star is becoming more prominent. It is possible to interact with a star yet have almost no interaction with their 'reel' persona, the roles that they play on-screen. The level of interaction with stars within their roles, and the charisma that is necessary to create their star persona seems to be less important in the age of Twitter. This seems fitting in our 21st-century celebrity culture, where anyone can be a star simply by posting a video on YouTube or appearing on a reality television show. The enigma of the star and the glamour that goes with it are beginning to break down.

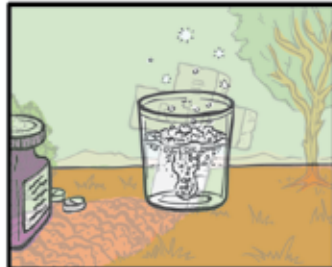
John Branney is a lecturer in Film and Media Studies at Stratford-upon-Avon College. Follow him at [www.twitter.com/johnbranney](http://www.twitter.com/johnbranney).



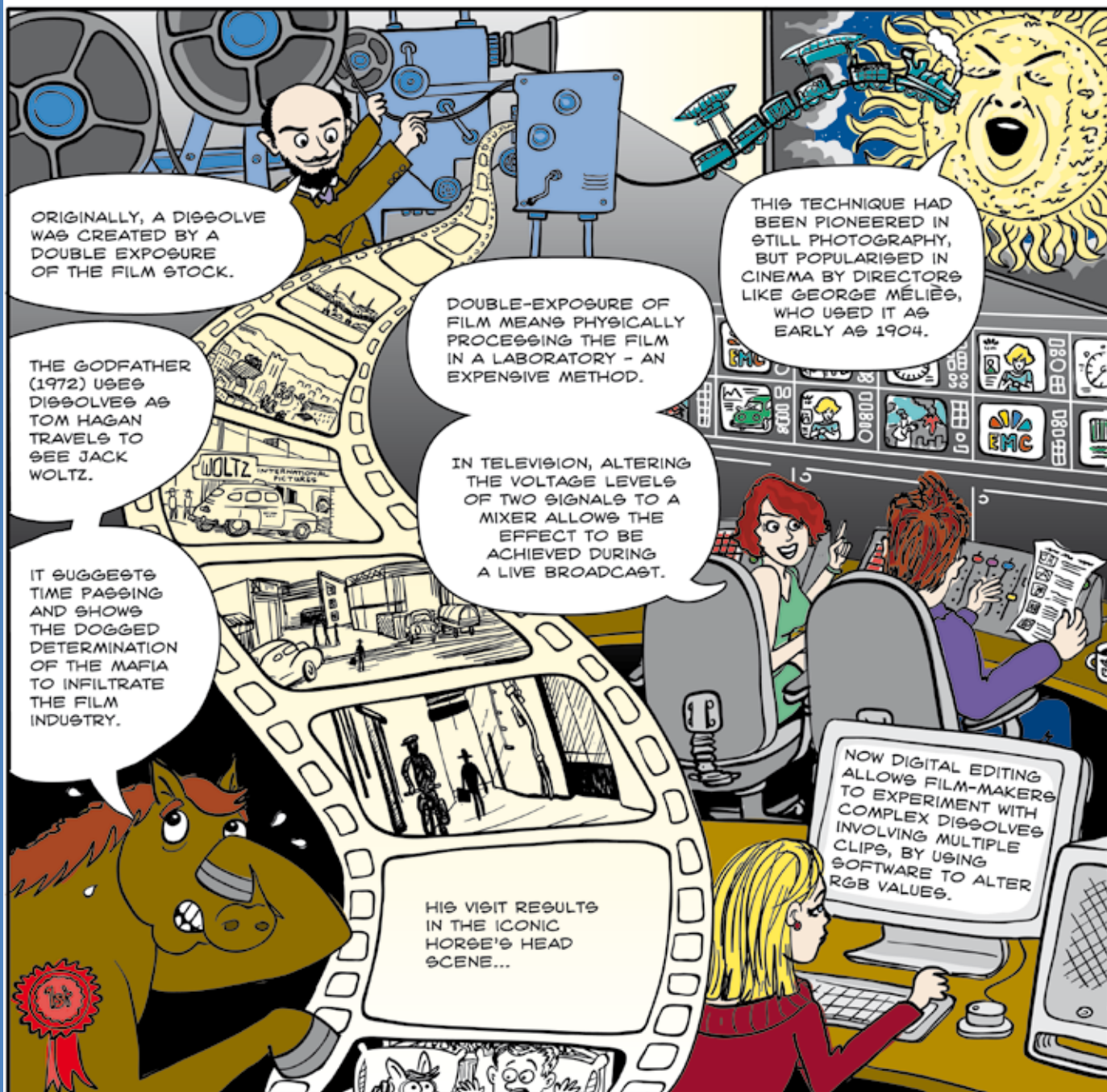


## THE DISSOLVE

SOMETIMES CALLED A MIX OR A 'CROSS-DISSOLVE', THIS IS ONE OF THE MOST BASIC SHOT TRANSITIONS USED IN FILM.



THIS INVOLVES THE FADING OUT OF ONE SHOT WHILST ANOTHER SHOT (SUPERIMPOSED OVER IT) FADES IN. IN HOLLYWOOD FILMS A DISSOLVE IS OFTEN USED TO SHOW TIME PASSING OR THE MOVEMENT TO ANOTHER SCENE OR CHARACTER WITH AN EMOTIONAL CONNECTION.





# Context

# AND THE CITY

Changing Representations of New York



Steph Hendry explores changing versions of the iconographic city and their relationship to the social and political events that have shaped its history.

Most people in the UK 'know' New York. Of all the cities in the world, it is one of the most frequently represented places and many of its locations and features have become iconic. Some are now so familiar that one shot of the Empire State Building, the Statue of Liberty, a yellow cab or the Brooklyn Bridge provides enough narrative information to allow audiences to recognise the location. These locations provide more than a simple indication of 'where we are'.

Many New York locations have become **symbols of ideas and values** that can be used by film-makers, photographers and television producers to create instant layers of meaning within media representations. However, as with other representations, the representation of the city and the use of these symbols can be seen to have changed to reflect **contextual issues at the time of a text's production**.

## The 1990s: confidence and shopping

The opening credits for *Sex and the City* (HBO: 1998-2004) features a shot of the Chrysler Building. *S&TC* reflects ideas of New York that link to ideas created by the image of the building itself. The television programme began at a time of **economic boom and consumer confidence**

in the 1990s. *S&TC* represents a **utopian** New York (or, more specifically, Manhattan) which is populated by successful, beautiful people who live hedonistic lives centred on socialising, sex and shopping.

The Chrysler Building itself represents another glamorous time in New York. Built in 1929, before the Great Depression, it is a **monument to the consumer boom of the 1920s**. As with most skyscrapers of the time, it was built as a celebration of the achievements of an industrialist, in this case Walter P. Chrysler, who commissioned the building which was used as the headquarters for The Chrysler Corporation. The architectural style is Art Deco – a style that looked positively to the future – and the building celebrated Mr Chrysler's enormous wealth, as well as that of the city itself. Its use as

a momentary symbol in *S&TC* is intended to add to a particular idea of New York which is updated in the TV programme. This New York is a city of **success and sophistication** and filled with all the pleasures that (a lot of) money can buy. This is not, however, the only New York that has been reflected in media representations.

## The 1970s: economic and social decline

Whilst New York in the 1920s and 1990s was associated with **pleasure, financial success and style**, the New York of the 1970s would be unrecognisable to us today. The city was renowned for its social problems and was rife with **crime and vice**. Now a tourist hot-spot filled with shops and restaurants, Times Square was the city's red light district populated by drug dealers and prostitutes, with pornography being the entertainment most often (and visibly) on offer. Drug crime, vandalism and violence were spiralling and the city epitomised the economic problems of the time. In 1975, the city itself came close to filing for bankruptcy and essential services such as waste collection and policing could not be paid for. Central Park was a 'no go area' for most people as it was a location filled with vagrancy, drug addiction and mugging. This seedy, dangerous side of the city was represented in 1976's *Taxi Driver* (Scorcese). The film focuses on a depressed and dispossessed character (Travis Bickle) who struggles to deal with the degradation he sees around him every day; and yet his idea of a first date is to take the woman he has idealised to a seedy porn cinema in Times Square. His dislocation increases when he sees an underage prostitute on the street and this culminates in a violent attack on the city itself, through an assassination attempt on a politician, and finally a shoot-out with the prostitute's pimp.

*Taxi Driver's* Travis represents a **response to the loss of the values of the previous decades**. The 1950s saw the idea of the American Dream consolidated into a notion of **family values and suburban living** whilst the 1960s idealised utopian ideas of **free-love and anti-authoritarianism**. However, these values had led to an individualistic culture characterised by the



**selfishness and hedonism of the 1970s** that Bickle saw playing itself out in the New York he drove through each night. *Taxi Driver* represents a New York where the American Dream has gone horribly wrong. This **dystopian** view of New York was replicated in many media texts of the time. In *Escape from New York* (1981: Carpenter) Manhattan had become a high security prison where the criminals were restricted to the island but were allowed to construct their own criminally violent culture. *Mean Streets* (1973: Scorcese) focused on organised crime, *Serpico* (1973: Lumet) on corruption in the NYPD, and *Warriors* (1979: Hill) dealt with street gang culture.

## The 1990s (again): utopian visions and new family structures

As the economic situation improved through the 1980s, New York was 'cleaned up'. Tougher policing and a 'zero tolerance' policy

towards criminal behaviour altered the city and businesses were encouraged back to Manhattan, Central Park was cleaned up and Times Square was rebranded as a shopping and entertainment paradise. Tourism increased and the city became wealthier and was able to market itself as a place that provided fun, entertainment and opportunity. *Sex and the City* reflected this new, 'improved' New York as did the most successful of all sitcoms, *Friends* (NBC: 1994-2004). Although these texts represented different ideas of the city they both depicted close-knit social groups whose lives were focussed on the social rather than the professional. Unlike conventional sitcoms, these texts depicted **friendship groups rather than family groups** perhaps reflecting recent changes in family structures and social expectations. Both texts also reflect the 1990s prioritising of **lifestyle, leisure and youth culture** which the city itself came to characterise. The crime of the past was practically non-existent in this New York – both Carrie and Phoebe were



mugged but the outcomes were comical rather than frightening. Manhattan provided everything these young glamorous people needed, whether it was the vaguely bohemian lives of *Friends*, or the hedonistic sophistication of *S&TC*. New York had become a fantasy city which epitomised the dream of a fun and pleasurable existence; work was a minor inconvenience for the characters in both programmes and whilst Phoebe, Joey and Rachel were sometimes identified as being less financially successful than their friends, their poverty did not in any way hamper their lifestyles or their ability to have fun whilst living in New York.

## The Noughties: trauma and fear

**September 11th 2001** was a world-changing day and most particularly for New York. The events of the day caused changes in the way the city was represented. The attack on the World Trade Centre destroyed two of the city's most visible and recognisable landmarks and, combined with the attacks on the Pentagon and the White House, were part of **an assault on the very heart of American culture and values**. The targets for the attacks represented three aspects of US power – **financial (NY)** **political (the Whitehouse)** and **military (Pentagon)**. Given the idea of New York that had been generated in texts such as *S&TC* and *Friends*, the collapse of the Twin Towers moved the world into a new era where the ideological, cultural and religious divides between the (middle) East and West meant that the individualistic hedonism of the city became less valid. The *joie de vivre* of the 1990s made way for a more fearful Noughties where **terrorism, war and the politics of oil impacted on people's daily lives**. The images of the towers collapsing and the devastation and panic on the streets were familiar; we had seen these sights before in Hollywood productions just a few years before. The shockingly spectacular images of the aftermath of the attack on New York echoed the spectacle provided by 1990s disaster movies such as *Deep Impact* (1998: Leder) and *Godzilla* (1998: Emmerich). The difference was that these images were real rather than escapist fictions. The attack created a loss of confidence, and texts that followed can be seen to be reflecting the new serious mood and as attempts at rebuilding confidence. In *S&TC*, the rampant pleasure-seeking began to have consequences and story-lines became more serious. Samantha's sexual activities were halted as she battled breast cancer; Miranda had to deal with the responsibilities of motherhood whilst Charlotte dealt with infertility in her attempt to have a 'perfect family'.

If the wild hedonism of the past was not a valid way to celebrate New York then one post-9/11 response was to look to its **history**. *Gangs of New York* (2002: Scorsese) represented a city built on a **tough and violent past**. Set in the 1860s it shows a **racially divided city** and depicts the conflicts and struggles for power that were present on the streets of the city as 'natives' (US-born citizens) vie for power against the immigrant Irish. Despite the negative representation of this moment in the city's history, the film's ending makes a

direct reference to the way the modern city had developed and, in its last moments, depicts the idea of New York being rebuilt from this violent past. *The Day after Tomorrow* (2004: Emmerich) has a similar resolution in its narrative depicting a city which endured a natural disaster and yet managed to survive. Like *Gangs of New York*, the film suggests a stronger city could rise phoenix-like from violence and destruction and the Statue of Liberty is used to symbolise hope and resilience.

Neither *Friends* nor *Sex and the City* dealt explicitly with the attack or its aftermath (aside from positive messages written on Joey's chalk board); it was several years before visual images of New York began to reflect the events of 2001. In 2006, literal representations were provided in two films – *World Trade Center* (Stone) and *United 93* (Greengrass). Both films were criticised; some commentators felt it was too soon after the event to create filmic representations of the events. *United 93* used a documentary style to show the events of the plane hi-jack as realistically as possible, whilst *World Trade Center* used more traditional Hollywood narrative techniques to tell the story of a heroic port authority worker who was trapped when one of the towers collapsed. More dystopian representations of the city followed, most explicitly in *I am Legend* (2007: Lawrence) and *Cloverfield* (2008: Reeves). *Cloverfield* used the Statue of Liberty as a symbol of New York's destruction by a Godzilla-like monster. The loss of liberty and freedom was prefigured when the monster decapitated the statue and propelled its head through the city's streets. *I am Legend* depicts the city as a wasteland that is taken over by the natural world after a viral outbreak. Nature

encroaches on the man-made environment, with wild animals wandering through Times Square and the lone human survivor becoming a hunter in this literal jungle. *I am Legend* also uses an iconic landmark to indicate the destruction of the city with the Brooklyn Bridge being partially destroyed and standing as a permanent reminder of mankind's fragility.

## And now?

Some recent representations of New York have attempted to revisit the 1990s. *Confessions of a Shopaholic* (2009: Hogan) and *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006: Frankel) have channelled *Sex and the City*'s vision of the city; but these texts, along with the film versions of the TV series (2008 and 2010: King) have provided **an implied criticism of the consumerist focus of the pre-9/11 world** in their narratives. On TV *CSI: New York* (CBS: 2004-) offers a dystopian crime-filled city that is 'saved' by the expertise and professionalism of the city's police and forensic departments. *Gossip Girl* (CW: 2007-), *Dirty Sexy Money* (ABC: 2007-9), *Mad Men* (AMC: 2007-), *Damages* (FX: 2007-) and *Nurse Jackie* (Showtime: 2009-) all use New York as a backdrop and with such diverse settings such as the privilege of the Upper East Side and 5th Avenue, Madison Avenue in the mid-1960s, Wall Street-focussed corporate law, and blue-collar life in a New York hospital perhaps reflecting a complex relationship with the city that holds both **dystopian and utopian meanings for a contemporary western audience**.

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# CHICK FLICK OR GUY COM?

the Changing Ideologies of Romantic Comedy

In this comparative case study of two rom-coms made 17 years apart, Rebecca Ellis considers the evolution of the genre over time, and its changing representations of gender.

## Introduction

The **romantic comedy** provides an engaging illustration of how genres can evolve and change over time. Recent developments within the **rom-com** suggest that the fairy-tale is over, the knight in shining armour is a thing of the past and the 'damsel' is no longer distressed. Contemporary **romantic comedy** merges recognisable genre codes and clichés with new emerging representations, narratives and themes, providing a fascinating area of study for both Media and Film Studies students.

*Pretty Woman* (1990: Garry Marshall) and *Knocked Up* (2007: Judd Apatow) illustrate the evolution of the **romantic comedy** from the traditional **chick flick** to the contemporary **guy-com**, offering many interesting points of comparative analysis for students studying all aspects of genre.

## Happily ever after? Genre and narrative in the romantic comedy

The **rom-com** can be defined as 'a comedy whose central plot is focused on a romantic relationship' (Mernit: 2000) or where 'Love is the catalyst for action...Love's effect on the central character is what drives the story' (Krutnik: 1999). Both *Pretty Woman* and *Knocked Up* follow this traditional narrative pattern, both centred on a romantic relationship or a tale of 'Boy Meets Girl'.

## Narrative structures

*Pretty Woman* centres on the relationship between Edward (Richard Gere), a business executive and Vivian (Julia Roberts), a prostitute/escort whom he hires to accompany him to a number of business engagements. The film uses a combination of traditional narrative clichés. Vivian is transformed into a sophisticated, unrecognisable beauty after she is made over, in a classic 'Ugly Duckling to Swan Moment' – a common narrative staple in most chick flicks, in this case used to make Edward question whether his relationship with Vivian is more than just a business deal.

When the narrative is 'disrupted', the film uses a '**Lonely Montage**' – a clip which uses parallel editing to depict both characters, Edward and Vivian, alone having decided (momentarily) to go their separate ways. The clip plays out to the generic non-diegetic love anthem of Roxette's 'It Must Have Been Love'. The re-equilibrium of the film sees Edward in the much repeated '**Last Minute Sprint**' cliché, in which the (usually) male protagonist has a frantic dash to declare his feelings for the female love interest before she leaves for good.

The narrative of *Pretty Woman* shares many similarities with the '**Cinderella**' story – a story that sees a woman of low social status rescued through the love of a man in a higher social position resulting in a '**Happily Ever After**' ending. Vivian plays the part of a contemporary Cinders – a prostitute with little money and





few prospects until she is rescued by her Prince Charming. In the final sequence of the film, Edward arrives at Vivian's apartment to declare his undying love in a white stretch limousine, perhaps a reference to the character of the knight in shining armour, the limousine his white horse.

*Knocked Up* also focuses on a romantic relationship, but with two very different protagonists in Alison, a feisty, career-minded TV producer (Katherine Heigl) and her drunken one-night stand, the unemployed Ben (Seth Rogen).

*Knocked Up* is a **guy-com**; a **romantic comedy** made for contemporary, primarily male audiences. **Director and producer Judd Apatow** has pioneered the **guy-com** in contemporary cinema with other comedies including *The 40 Year Old Virgin* (2005) and *Forgetting Sarah Marshall* (2008). The **guy-com** follows a different narrative from the traditional **chick flick**, spurning the romantic idealism seen in *Pretty Woman* and depicting a more realistic idea of romance, complete with the pitfalls of the contemporary relationship.

The **guy-com** features a male protagonist

who is established from the start as a 'loser' or 'ManBoy' – a man unwilling to grow up, free of adult responsibilities. Within *Knocked Up*, Ben fulfils all the conventions of this character type, established as an unemployed, irresponsible slacker male from the outset.

The **disruption** to the narrative, as in most **guy-coms**, occurs when loser male Ben meets the judgemental, antagonistic female love interest, Alison, providing obstacles for the male. The key **obstacle** in *Knocked Up* occurs when Alison gets pregnant after a drunken one-night stand with Ben – a realistic issue, which contrasts with the fairy-tale romance of *Pretty Woman*. The **re-equilibrium** of the **guy-com** generally sees the loser emerge victorious in a clichéd, albeit less sugary, 'happy ending' where Ben 'gets the girl' and comes to terms with impending fatherhood.

## Making 'em laugh

A convention within all comedy films, including the **rom-com** sub-genre, is the generation of comedy through a combination of

**visual and verbal gags or comedic situations and misunderstandings.** Both *Pretty Woman* and *Knocked Up* generate humour in different ways, illustrating their contextual differences.

*Pretty Woman* relies on visual and verbal gags that centre on Vivian's inability to adapt to the sophisticated world of business inhabited by Edward and the class differences between the two characters. After a night at the Opera, Vivian tells a deaf old lady 'That was so good I almost peed my pants'; before Edward covers up for her 'She says it was better than Pirates of Penzance'. In comparison, *Knocked Up* uses Ben's inadequacy and his lack of traditional male qualities to generate humour. For example, during the sex sequence between Alison and Ben, he proudly declares:

**Good thing I'm drunk... I just doubled my record time!**

The film has elements of 'gross out' comedy and contemporary slapstick, with an emphasis on **bodily functions, sex and strong language** reflecting a change in current audiences for comedy.

Both films reference other media texts, known as **intertextuality**, but where *Pretty Woman* references other romantic fairy-tales such as Cinderella, *Knocked Up* references contemporary culture, quoting films such as *The Shining*, and with *American Idol* host Ryan Seacrest making a cameo appearance.

## Representation: from hero to zero?

Both texts offer a rich comparative study of **gender representation**, which illustrate the surrounding social contexts from which each text emerged.

The conventional romantic leading male displays traditionally masculine traits. He is heroic, competitive, idealised and muscular.





Rom-com images sourced from Image.net and Google images

These qualities are embodied in actors with star personas closely linked to the romance genre such as [George Clooney](#), [Hugh Grant](#) and, of course, [Richard Gere](#). In *Pretty Woman*, the character of Edward adheres to the conventions of the traditional 'romantic' male. Edward is the hero, a hunk who sweeps Vivian off her feet. Throughout the film Edward remains emotionally cold – a stereotypical male trait.

*Pretty Woman* is set within a **patriarchal context** in which men have power and wealth within society. Edward is first introduced at a glamorous dinner party. The diegetic sounds of a pianist play in the background suggesting sophistication and wealth. A high-angle shot of Edward looking down on his guests from a balcony shows us his power and elevated position within society. The camera pans behind Edward, creating an element of mystery to his character, a puzzle that needs to be solved. He is dressed in a suit, which further adds to the representation of Edward as a successful businessman.

This is juxtaposed against the audience's introduction to Vivian. We first meet her through a series of fragmented voyeuristic close-ups of her body parts as she gets ready. The representation strongly adheres to [Laura Mulvey's Male Gaze theory](#) which identifies that female characters on screen are sexually objectified as a source of visual pleasure for the male spectator. The lighting is low key and the soundtrack 'Real Wild One' accompanies the sequence, establishing Vivian as a creature of the night who is later tamed by Edward. Her lively, spontaneous nature is also reflected in her wild mane of red hair. Vivian's character displays many stereotypically 'female' traits. She is sweet-natured, caring, emotional and dependent on male rescue. Vivian awakens dormant emotions within Edward's cool façade. Her lack of education, wealth and sophistication can be linked to the lower social status of women within the confines of patriarchy.

In contrast, *Knocked Up* reflects a shift in the role of modern man and emerging female representations. Seth Rogen, who plays Ben, differs greatly from the conventional romantic male personas of Clooney and Gere, lacking the

traditional qualities associated with the romantic male. The character of Ben is an 'Average Joe': he is not attractive, physically fit and neither wealthy nor successful. His lack of heroism is reflected in his status as a 'loser'; he is depicted as immature and infantile with no responsibilities, someone who is both financially and emotionally insecure. In terms of appearance, Ben is chubby, pale and unkempt – his physique does not adhere to that of the traditional **rom-com** 'hunk'. This is in contrast to Edward who displays a muscular, idealised physique, offering female viewers an opportunity to 'gaze' at the objectified male.

Our introduction to Ben is in stark contrast to that of Edward. The opening montage sequence gives the viewer an insight into Ben's 'slacker' lifestyle. He sits around with friends engaging in juvenile behaviour in a sequence which shares many similarities with the male-orientated *Jackass* programme, as Ben performs pointless, idiotic stunts just for something to do. The traditional cinematic male is parodied as Ben is seen fighting in boxing gloves (*Rocky*) that he has set on fire. Ben beats his chest in a similar way to *King Kong* and also plays *Gladiators* but wearing a helmet as he is afraid of injury. The sequence is accompanied by a non-diegetic teenage hip hop track, adding to the sense of Ben's carefree nature. As the sequence is set during the daytime, it is quickly established that Ben has no job and no adult responsibilities.

### From damsel to dynamite: the post-Feminist context

In comparison, Alison is established as a competent and ambitious career woman. We meet her rising sprightly to her alarm clock at 6am. The use of high-key lighting and a light melody portrays her as successful, content and organised. This provides an interesting contrast to the 'wild child' character of Vivian. Alison, like Edward, wears business attire and is hard working, unlike Ben. She is equal in wit to her male counterparts, successfully 'holding her own' in Ben's male world unlike Vivian whose incompetence is a source of humour for audiences.

These new gender representations can be attributed to **the context of Post-Feminism**.

Feminism identified two gendered 'spheres' of activity – the male sphere of work, power and money, known as the **public sphere** and the female sphere of home, family and all things domestic, known as the **private sphere**. Post-Feminism sees women occupying both spheres of activity, or 'having it all', resulting in female characters like Alison, who reject traditional female goals in favour of a career-orientated alternative. It also sees a less passive, more sexually assertive female, such as Alison who instructs Ben during their sexual encounters. This rise in more powerful female protagonists could be to blame for the feelings of male inadequacy seen in the **guy-com** leading men. As men are no longer required to fulfil the traditional 'breadwinner' role, the resulting representations are of 'men in crisis' and other contemporary depictions of the unemployed 'slacker generation' of goal-less males such as Ben.

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### Follow it up

Recent romantic comedies such as the innovative *500 Days of Summer* (Dir. Marc Webb: 2009), have much to offer in terms of textual analysis and studies of Genre and Representation.

Classic archetypal chick flicks such as *He's Just Not That Into You* (Dir. Ken Kwapis: 2009) and *Going the Distance* (Dir. Nanette Burnstein: 2010) still exist and display many of the genre codes and character types discussed.

The '**loser male**' character has evolved into other genres now, including the action genre, subverting the codes of the traditional male hero in films like *Kick-Ass* (Dir. Matthew Vaughn: 2010) Meanwhile *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World* (Dir. Edgar Wright: 2010) stars Michael Cera, whose star persona is fast becoming synonymous with that of the loser male in other films such as *Juno* (Dir. Jason Reitman: 2007), *Nick & Norah's Infinite Playlist* (Dir. Peter Sollett: 2007) and *Superbad* (Dir. Greg Mottola: 2007).





Emma Webb explores how the magazine industry provides the perfect way into study of text, industry and audience for WJEC's Med4 exam paper.

There is no doubt about it: the magazine industry is going through a tough patch. Consumption of old style media is down; readers now want their content **fast, free** and, it seems, **virtual**. The release of the iPad earlier this year was accompanied by a string of news articles predicting (again) the death of traditional print

media; after all, who wants to dirty their hands with ink when they can whip out a slim, shiny digital tablet? In a recession, is anyone really prepared to shell out a couple of quid in WH Smiths for information they could get online for free? On both the sample and the **WJEC Summer 2010 MED4 (Text, Industry, Audience)** papers there were, predictably, questions about how the digital age is affecting media industries, so a thorough understanding of this topic area could be the key to exam success.

### Grazia: vive le difference!

We live in fast times. Sometimes it's difficult to keep up. News stories can gallop fast, YouTube sensations emerge in a matter of

minutes, and fashion trends now spring from the street as much as the catwalk

Taken from [www.graziadaily.com](http://www.graziadaily.com)

**Grazia** is one of the unmitigated magazine success stories of the recession. This weekly fashion and celebrity gossip title launched its UK edition in 2005 and its circulation figures have been rising ever since. **93% of its readers** believe that:

**Grazia is different to any other magazine on the market**

*InMag survey, April 2009*

and they are right. It has a distinct edge on the traditional women's glossy monthlies as it can get stories to its audience more quickly – after all, who wants to wait a whole three weeks to hear about Jen's latest love interest or Lily's pregnancy?

**Grazia's** recent **3D, augmented reality** issue encapsulated what I personally love about this light-hearted title – it is not afraid to take risks. Hold your iPhone or webcam up against the front cover and you are treated to a 3D virtual performance by suitably quirky fashionista Florence Welch from indie sensation **Florence and the Machine**. Dress her up in the latest high street outfit and blow (yes, blow!) into your iPhone to twirl her around and see every angle. Your trusty iPhone still in your hand, you delve deeper into the print issue, take a photo of the Banana Republic logo and watch a live fashion



show appear before your eyes. Opportunities to interact with this innovative magazine are endless and the popular [Graziadaily.com](http://Graziadaily.com) website is visited by women who use it *alongside* the print magazine rather than *instead* of it.

Interestingly, considering all these invitations to 'play', the *Grazia* reader is not the teenager that one might expect. She is instead **an ABC1, 33-year-old woman, with a high street shopping habit and a moderate to high amount of disposable income**. Mobile phones are both a professional necessity and a social accessory, and being able to use them in conjunction with one's favourite glossy mag, in the company of office girlfriends whilst on coffee break, makes for an interesting diversion. Indeed, the publicity material on the *Grazia* website, which includes a video showing magazine staff using the 3D issue, encourages an '**all girls together**' approach to using what is, for many members of the target audience, unfamiliar, 'fresh-out-of-the-box' technology.

**Subscription** is required to receive the daily bulletin from [Graziadaily.com](http://Graziadaily.com). This allows audiences to receive even more up to the minute gossip and fashion tips, whilst also allowing *Grazia* to target subscribers with advertisements for products that will appeal to them, based on the information submitted during subscription. This creates further revenue for the magazine, enabling them to keep cover prices down and profits high.

*Grazia* is embracing the digital revolution and challenging its audience to experiment with new media ways of consuming an old media format. Women's weekly magazines had died a death sometime in the '90s; *Bauer*, the media conglomerate which owns *Grazia*, took a big risk when it launched the UK edition five years ago, and has continued to allow the title to take risks. It can afford to – it is **the largest privately owned publisher in Europe**, with various well-known titles such as *Kerrang!*, *Empire* and *Heat* in its stable. If one issue fails to sell, it is only one week's profits that are down.

## Men's Health: playing it safe in the recession

**We give men the tools they need to make their lives better.**

**UK Men's Health editor, Morgan Rees**

Most men's monthlies are currently dying a slow death, but this is a title which is succeeding in the recession by adopting **very different tactics from those of *Grazia***. Where the '90s *FHM/Loaded/Nuts* 'lad's mags' are struggling to reach their target readership of late-teens and twenty-something men, many of whom now lack the disposable income to indulge in their weekly fix, the average *Men's Health* reader is in his 30's, moderately successful, married, and only buys three copies of the magazine a year (coinciding with his thrice-yearly 'health kicks'). The appealing formula of buff aspirational cover model and fast-fix ways to achieve a six-pack seems to be reaching its audience. The *Men's Health* forums are well used, and whilst the online forum is in itself hardly a cutting-edge, recent invention, it's nevertheless a big ask to persuade men to use it to chat about topics as diverse as diet, childbirth,



**the magazine  
industry in the  
digital age**



fitness plans and relationships. However, a basic online presence is as far as **MM** is prepared to go in the digital revolution; it still relies mainly on its printed international magazine sales for its income.

The American publishing company behind **Men's Health** is called **Rodale**, and this magazine is their big earner. It boasts no fewer than 26 international versions, and Rodale has tried to replicate its success with various similar titles such as **Women's Health**, **Running Times** and **Runner's World**. It is a specialist publisher, focusing in on **fitness and lifestyle magazines** and, as such, cannot take the same risks as a larger company like Bauer. For **Men's Health** to depart from its successful formula would mean placing the entire success of Rodale on the line. However, it may be that the expanding digital market will eventually force titles like this to be more experimental, depending on the tastes of the target audience.

## Some hints and tips for your MED4 exam (text, industry, audience)

Should you choose to study the magazine industry you will need to refer to **at least three different case studies** in your answer. **Men's Health** and **Grazia** provide an ideal juxtaposition, as they appeal to **audiences of a similar age and income** (albeit of different genders) **but in very different ways**. In order to show the examiner that you are capable of 'critical autonomy' (i.e. thinking for yourself) I would recommend choosing a third magazine case study and conducting your own research. Although there is a great deal of information online, much of it is useless, so here are some pointers to help you find relevant information.

### Text

At this stage in your A2 studies you should be confident with **textual analysis**. Focus on key concepts such as **representation** (who is being

represented? why are they being represented in this way?) and **genre** (what are the generic signifiers? how do we 'know' this is a women's magazine?).

### Industry

Researching the magazine industry can prove difficult, but go to websites such as **mediaguardian.co.uk**, where there are often interviews with magazine editors and articles on the success, or failure, of various magazines. Why not pick out **key quotes** from these articles and use them to build up a picture of where the title sits in the industry? Which magazine publisher owns it? What other titles do they own? Is the publisher part of a larger media conglomerate? How is the title financed and marketed?

### Audience

This can also be a difficult area and some practical legwork is required. '**Press packs**' are the information magazines or online PDFs for potential advertisers which give them detailed information about the **target audience** – everything from their median age to how many times a month they shop. This can be very useful for Media students.

In researching this article, I contacted **Grazia** directly after finding out through their website from whom I could obtain a press pack. They are occasionally available openly online as well – the packs of **Tatler** and **Men's Health** can be found through a simple Google search. As many magazines have various international editions, be sure to check which country your press pack is designed for.

Emma Webb is Head of Media at Aiglon College, Switzerland.

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Cover of **Grazia** 3D courtesy of **Grazia** magazines

Additional covers of **Grazia** and **Men's Health** sourced from Google images

# glee

## a postmodern approach

It's been the runaway success of the year – but how has *Glee* transformed the conventions of the high school musical genre in a peculiarly post-modern way? Alan Payne explores.

A few months ago, a friend of mine returned from a visit to Los Angeles positively aflame with his experience at a night at the *Glee* live show at the Universal Theatre.

As I write (August 2010), news comes that **Paul McCartney** has approached Ryan Murphy, one of the show's producers, politely requesting that his music be featured in the next series of the programme. **Susan Boyle** – yes that one – is rumoured to be appearing in a future show as a cafeteria assistant. **Olivia Newton John** and **Josh Groban** have already featured in Series 1.

*Glee* is very big business indeed.

Fox's series about an American high school show choir, described by Sue Sylvester, its greatest enemy, as 'an island of misfit toys', is fresh, popular, apparently responsible for an upsurge in choral singing in UK schools (*The Guardian*, 19th June) and strangely, wonderfully addictive. It follows the trail created 30 years ago by *Fame*, the Alan Parker film and subsequent television programmes, and continued through the *High School Musical*s. But then it moves up a whole level. *Glee* has the unique selling point of never taking itself too seriously.

If you're an A2 Media student looking at **postmodernism** and **collective identity** you can feast on a programme that knows all the rules, mixes them up, breaks them and invites us to laugh at it laughing at itself. *Glee* is a highly-constructed, highly-mediated world which sells

itself so well because the music, the references, the whole basis for the show are real, yet the episodes follow such a clearly-defined formula so that the audience can expect and look forward to a serious production number to close each show.

**Theoretical perspectives** on postmodernism from writers such as **Baudrillard** with his assertions on **hyperreality** – the idea that the actual and mediated world become blurred and, strangely, perhaps, that what is unreal can become more important than that which is real – may help us to begin to understand how *Glee* works on so many levels. It is **a simulation of reality** in which we happily leave the everyday, yet are reminded of it so frequently that it is never far behind. The programme follows high school singing group New Directions along the road to competitions and through cleverly-constructed arc plots which, despite the snappy catch-ups which start each programme ('Here's what you missed...') rely on the audience to make many different connections for themselves. The characters are **consciously and readily-created stereotypes with a difference**.

Where *Fame* and *High School Musical* use purpose-written musical scores, *Glee* features real numbers, both as stylish set performances but also to drive the plot. **The Madonna episode** (Series 1, ep. 15) sets the demonic Sue Sylvester in a brilliant pastiche of 'Vogue' and later (Series 1 ep. 17) builds an entire episode around her newly-discovered performance of Olivia Newton John's 'Physical'. (*Glee* isn't afraid to use YouTube.) Characters are allowed voiceover narrations and personal flashbacks, Will, the choir's director, frequently builds the fiction by encouraging the members to find their own feelings through real music – music which sells in the real world and becomes familiar over again.



**Signposting through the narrative** is fierce. *Glee* Club members of the Cheerios cheerleading squad – and this arrangement is fluid throughout Series 1 – wear their uniforms at all times except when performing with the show choir. Interestingly, we are very rarely allowed to see Sue in action training her squad; but she is constantly tracksuited (the Adidas logo strangely disappears in later episodes of Series 1), constantly taunting Will.





Images from Glee from [www.image.net](http://www.image.net)



**Representational codes** enabling us to make sense of the world within a world are constructed openly and with style. Kurt has a new outfit for every day, indeed almost for every scene. Terri, Will's wife, falsely represents her pregnancy and even becomes the school's nurse (with zero medical training) simply by sitting behind the right desk. Rachel, the pushy would-be lead with two fathers is every inch the diva until she discovers her own apparent mother coaching the choir's arch-rival Vocal Adrenaline. In episode 20 she closes the show with a duet with her – a Lady Gaga song. She summons Brad the pianist from the shadows, breaking the representational illusion with the comment that he's always nearby. Indeed he is; Brad and the supporting, non-speaking musicians always know all the parts to all the songs in the right order. It's just another part of the **hyperreality** and competing claims of the truth.

It's playful and it shamelessly shows us just how deliberately built the programme actually is, with many different truths competing for our attention from the beginning. Episode 12 (intriguingly called 'Mattress') includes the brilliant Van Halen 'Jump' sequence in which New Directions film a commercial within the programme. The school Year Book creates plot and other problems of representation as the choir members have to fight for their inclusion. **The media world** – including the whole point of the programme, musical performance – **is at the centre of the narratives**, exposed, questioned and self-referenced in postmodern style.

In episode 19, Will auditions for a production of *Les Misérables* – fiction within the fiction again – and Artie, another choir member, is allowed to step out of his wheelchair and lead a **flashmob**

in the mall in 'Safety Dance'. The episode is called 'Dream On'. This special type of reality, used by T-Mobile in its recent 'Life's for Sharing' station advertisement, blurs all the boundaries between the world of the shoppers, the dream Artie has of dancing, the real shoes he buys that he knows he will never use, and the fiction of the episode itself.

Episode 4 ('Preggers') is laden with narrative and self-conscious media devices including a black and white sequence and a flashback. Quinn admits her pregnancy and explains that it is apparently Finn's baby. Terri tells of her imagined baby – clearly to great interest – and Kurt admits his sexuality to his father, having become a star football player. The Beyoncé sequence on the football field is surreal, a competing truth in Baudrillard's terms, as Kurt leads the team in a full uniformed dance routine before winning the match with a magnificent kick. Uniforms are important in *Glee*. They provide real references and distinguish the characters.

*Glee* has its fair share of caricatures too, characters whose reality is simply playful and who come and go, leaving the audience to make the right connections. Sandy Ryerson, larger-than-life stalker of Josh Groban, performer and director of a rival production of *Cabaret*, even shares his name (and the same actor) with Ned Ryerson in *Groundhog Day* – media intertextuality for a certain generation.

In the final episode of Series 1 the birth of Quinn's baby is set against the rival show choir's performance of Queen's 'Bohemian Rhapsody' – competing media. New Directions lose the contest for which they have worked so hard, despite Sue's well-concealed and highly-unexpected vote (about which only she and the

television audience know), and Rachel's newly-found mother adopts the child – the narrative is blown wide open once more. The episode draws to a close with a direct reference to – no a copy of – the end of James Clavell's 1967 film *To Sir With Love* as the *Glee* students sing the title song.

**Gleeeks**, the true fans, can look forward to the second series with much more of the same. The dramatic ironies, masterful self-referencing and intertextualities, the playful, self-aware approach to stereotyping, the multi-layered narratives, heroes, cheerleaders and villains – a programme which is 'built' on every level but which constantly surprises and uncovers new plot.

There's plenty for everyone and for many the new series cannot come quickly enough!

Alan Payne teaches Media Studies at Astor College for the Arts in Dover and examines for a major Awarding Body.

# The Skillset

## Solution

**skillset**  
Media Academy

If you're one of the 50,000 young people looking for a career in the creative media industries, the prospects can seem a little confusing. But help is at hand via Skillset, the government-licensed agency set up to provide industry standard training and skills for work in the creative and media disciplines. Nick Sheridan outlines some of the ways you could benefit from Skillset's initiatives.

Noel Clarke is a man of many passions. Film, family and fitness are all things that are important to the multi-talented actor, writer and director who made his name as a film-maker with British hits *Kidulthood*, *Adulthood* and the recent action-packed *4.3.2.1*.

Another thing that Noel Clarke is passionate about is **the future of the British Creative Media Industries**. With more than 13,000 courses serving an estimated 50,000 students looking to enter the sector, it is small wonder that many people struggle to find a direct and reliable pathway into employment. This is why Clarke has joined a new campaign to promote the **Skillset Tick**:

**I think we need new, young, fresh people in the industry to really make sure it remains the powerhouse that it is.**

**The Skillset Tick** is awarded to courses and institutions that have been rigorously assessed by industry experts as providing the highest standard of education in Creative Media disciplines. These courses and institutions are vocationally relevant, have tutors with relevant professional experience, use up-to-date industry standard equipment, have strong links with industry and a strong track record of past students entering employment.

**Skillset is the Sector Skills Council for the Creative Media Industries.** This means it is licensed by the government to work with industry and education to ensure that people training for, and working in, the UK Creative Media Industries get the skills they need to help our industries remain a world leader.

According to Clarke:

**Working in this industry is not all glitz and glamour. I think that young people need to realise that there are many jobs that need doing, and by picking the Tick, they can learn a lot more about these.**

So far, almost 30 individual courses from



Skillset images provided by the author



around the UK have been awarded the Tick in **animation, computer games, film production and screenwriting**. These courses have been assessed as performing at the very highest level in their fields; and their number is likely to grow considerably as we assess courses from a range of new subject areas – including **visual effects, postgraduate computer games design, undergraduate film production and computer programming** – over the coming academic year.

## A network of academies

Skillset has also accredited the UK-wide network of **Skillset Media and Film Academies**. These 25 Academies are creative education partnerships between colleges and universities across the UK, with at least one in each nation or region. The Skillset Academy Network makes sure that the UK has the most talented workforce in the world for film, television and interactive media, both now and in the future.

Clarke has teamed up with veteran director **Steve Barron**, whose credits include the hit TV series *Merlin* and the films *Coneheads* and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, as well as cinematographer **Mike Eley**, who most recently worked on *Nanny McPhee and the Big Bang*. Together they have produced a short film urging students and employers to 'Pick the Tick'. It is now available on YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q4IUIbMS64>).

Steve Barron said he was drawn to the Tick campaign because he knows what it is like to make your own way into the Creative Media Industries. When he started out there were no formal ways to get a job. In fact, there was hardly any help at all: **When I started in the film industry, there was no real training, you only learned what you asked. I think this is real progress, to know there's a stamp that you can rely on.**

As Clarke says in the film:

**The Tick is an indication of quality – of the best further and higher education in media... If you want a job in media, Pick the Tick.**

All of the Ticked courses and institutions are included in Skillset's extensive course database, which lists the details of more than 8000 Creative Media Courses on offer throughout the UK. To find out more details about Ticked courses and institutions, go to [courses.skillset.org](http://courses.skillset.org), and click on Pick the Tick.

## Apprenticeships

While the Tick will help guide you to the best higher and further education on offer, a degree is, of course, not the only way to get a job in the Creative Media Industries. There is a high proportion of graduates working in the Creative Media Industries, but many jobs do not require a degree. Skillset has also been working to develop **apprenticeship frameworks** that allow entrants to learn skills directly through employers and develop valuable networks within the industry.

The most recent of these frameworks is the **Advanced Apprenticeship in Creative and Digital Media** that was rolled out earlier this year. The BBC is one of the first companies to take on apprentices through the framework, and Skillset is developing more partnerships throughout England as more employers come forward.

We have also developed apprenticeship

frameworks in film (craft and technical grades), photo imaging, games and fashion and textiles that are operating throughout the UK. More information about these can be found at: <http://skillset.org/qualifications/apprenticeships>

## Case studies

### Name: Catherine Martin, age 24

Production Secretary Catherine Martin is proud to say that she hasn't stopped working since graduating from her BA (Hons) TV Production course at Middlesex University in 2007. Thanks to the Middlesex Media Academy's long-standing connections with the industry, Cat's first placement led to her first paid work, which escalated from there and she's not looked back since.

Middlesex University, as well as being an SAE Institute and Top TV Academy, has held Skillset



Media Academy status since 2007. Cat was delighted when Middlesex gained its Skillset accreditation while in her final year:

**With so many media courses out there, the Skillset status helps Middlesex to stand out, and gives it additional industry backing. This in turn helps alumni to stand out when applying for industry jobs.**

Cat would have no hesitation in recommending Skillset Academies to other students, as she believes their training and facilities sets them apart:

**The tutors at the Academy are very good at providing you with individual feedback and tutorial time, which enables you as a student to get advice on your career path. They can then point you in the right direction in terms of work experience, research and the skills needed for these areas.**

Directly after graduating in 2007, Cat got her first paid job through contacts at the Academy. This was to be the start of a so far fruitful and uninterrupted freelance career:

**A Middlesex alumnus was looking for a recent graduate, gave me a couple of days running, then a friend of hers asked me to do more work, she sent my CV on to key contacts and I got a job. Pretty much every job I've had has flowed from that. I've literally not stopped working since!**

Cat puts her success down not only to being very organised and 'good at making things happen', but to the skills she learnt at the Academy.

**The way coursework projects are set up in teams, so that you work as you would in the industry, prepares you for exactly how it is. It gives you an understanding of all the roles involved. I now know what everyone else is doing so I can help them from a logistical point of view to do their job, while understanding the pressures they are under.**

### Name: Helena O'Nions, age 22

Set designer Helena O'Nions chose to study Theatre Design at Nottingham Trent University from 2006 to 2009, as:

**it was a subject that involved everything I love; art, theatre, music and being creative**

Studying an industry-recognised course at the Nottingham Media Academy has been such a positive experience for Helena that she would recommend Skillset Academies to others.

**It has opened my eyes to a creative and exciting industry, teaching many of the skills required to pursue a career in this field.**

Throughout the course Helena was introduced to many professionals, particularly during her final year when she had the opportunity to discuss her portfolio and exhibition work, with directors and designers from across the UK.

**All our tutors are practicing professionals and were a continuous support and source of knowledge with regards to the industry.**

During her final year, Helena undertook a design prize project, which involved working collaboratively with Andrew Breakwell and the Nottingham Playhouse, to create a design for *Nathan the Wise*. In her second year she worked with the Dragon Breath Company as part of the research and development team for the creation of *Cosmos* and did a work placement at the Nottingham Playhouse with the scenic arts department, working on a production of *Breaking the Silence*.

Currently working as trainee designer at the **Royal Shakespeare Company** based in London and Stratford-upon-Avon, Helena assists the associate designer and any freelance designers who are working with the company doing model



making, technical drawing, prop buying, fabric sampling, research and basic administration, as well as attending production meetings alongside the designer and taking notes during ongoing rehearsals.

**Nottingham Media Academy enabled and fuelled my development creatively and technically, giving me a lot of opportunities to gain experience with, and master, the skills required to successfully do this job. The tutors were very supportive throughout the course, a continual confidence boost, both concerning my design work and my ability to communicate with other professionals within the industry.**

Nick Sheridan is Press and PR Officer at Skillset, the Sector Skills Council for Creative Media.



# MEDIA INVESTIGATION AND PRODUCTION

## Getting Started with WJEC A2 Coursework

WJEC examiner Jonathan Nunns takes you through the essential steps to success.

**Fifty percent.** That's how much this piece of work contributes to your A Level grade. Now, I can't claim that this will be the funkiest, most fun article you will ever read, but should you happen to be an A2 Media student looking down the business end of this particular task, then I'm hoping that it might give you a bit of help.

To start with, here's some context. The task has three parts,

1. **An investigative research essay** – 1400-1800 words.
2. **A production piece** – up to four minutes of AV or a minimum of three pages for a magazine or website.
3. **The inevitable evaluation** – 500-750 words.

For you to do well, you will need to do lots of work and preparation before you even start. You will need to develop skills you may not currently have and, above all, you will need to be **well-organised**. It's best not to be complacent with this one. Near enough probably isn't good enough and lack of organization will show in a ropey end product and a lousy grade.

### So, how to start?

First make sure you know what your Media department has available by way of practical kit. Will you be doing filming and editing, or will it be print media or website design? It's important for the investigation and the production to lead on developmentally, one from the other, so **picking an essay topic that doesn't fit with your product isn't a good move**. A natural fit, for instance, could be an investigation into a film genre followed up by the production of a trailer for a film of the same genre. It wouldn't be such a great idea to investigate a radio station then find that you only had kit to make a film about it. Find out early on if you will be **working in a team or alone**; that will help you choose your topic. Remember that whatever product you made in the AS, you will need to do **something different at A2** (for example, if you made a radio show then, maybe now you can make a magazine). Once you know those basics, you can set about the investigation.

### Doing the investigative essay

In choosing the subject for this, keep one eye on the production to come out of it. Ask yourself, will this lead into a good practical piece? Do I have to tie into the interests of a group/team or am I on my own? It's worth remembering

that the Awarding Body requires each essay to have **a clear focus on one theory** from a shortlist comprising **Narrative, Genre and Representation**. That focus is so important that it should feature in your actual essay title itself; for example:

**A study of the narrative issues stemming from the TV series *Lost***

Then that theory should be your key focus for the rest of the essay.

Obviously the first thing to do is to **be sure that you fully understand the theory** before you start. An internet search on **narrative theory** for instance, should give you enough to get started. These are ideas that you will have come across in the AS, so you won't be starting from scratch. Go back to your set textbook (if you have one), look at your class notes, check out the Media pages of your school or college's VLE, scan round the LRC. Once you've done that, **the theory should be the connecting thread** which gets you through the work.

Otherwise, having considered these issues, you should choose a media topic you are **genuinely interested in** and happy to research. You will be working on the topic for a long time. It's also worth trying to find a topic that has plenty published on it. Doing something too obscure may make life difficult when you look for sources,





so do a bit of preliminary legwork before settling on a topic. Your teacher could probably help you with finalising the title but the idea should be your own.

### What do they want from you?

Now you have a title, what is the Awarding Body looking for? Well, they want you to have included a **wide range of sources**, meaning yes, the internet, but also books, magazines, articles etc. **Web sources alone are not enough.**

They also want you to split the information down into **primary and secondary sources**. A **primary source** could be the actual magazines or films you are studying – best to have two or three key examples around which to build the essay. A piece on the horror genre, for example, which tried to skate over the massive range of films available is going to be unmanageable. **Secondary sources** are anything produced about your primary texts, be they films, mags, websites, reviews, articles, interviews, DVD extras etc. It's worth remembering that you really will have to seek out information; a quick Google won't do it. Look for at least 10 to 15 relevant sources. This is very much a university-style research task and probably different from anything you will have done so far.

**Do drafts.** Hand as many versions of this essay to your teacher as they are willing to mark or look at and get their advice on how to make it better. Listen to that advice. Act on it.

### Some last points about the investigative essay

- It should include a **range of ideas and arguments**, based on the evidence from your research.
- It should also have a **clear structure**, which introduces your topic, **builds a case** through your points, makes **extensive reference** to your primary and secondary sources as evidence (including some textual analysis of the primary sources themselves) and ends with a set of concluding points, providing a **summary** of what you have found out.
- All your sources must be **referenced in a bibliography**. Get your teacher's advice on the specifics of doing this because it is genuinely important. Information borrowed from sources and not referenced is known as **plagiarism** and is effectively cheating by passing off someone else's work as your own. It could get your essay disqualified.
- Don't forget to use spell check and grammar check. **Quality of language** is included in the grade.

### Doing the practical work

Hard to be specific here, because there is a huge range of production work that can be done from TV to film, from websites to magazines, from newspapers to adverts. The options all share a few things in common though.

- They must **feature what you learnt in the investigative essay**. So if you studied

representation of gender in music videos, and intend to make a video of your own, or some promotional posters/CD covers, then **representational issues should be vividly highlighted in the work**. Do you want to challenge conventional stereotypes and provide an alternative take on the issues? This kind of **subversion** isn't as hard as it sounds and gives a clear theme to the work. It also means you can clearly demonstrate how your essay informed the production.

- If working in a team, you must take on a **clear production role** (director, editor, camera, sound etc). You need to find out what that role involves, learn about it and put it into practice. You should be your group's resident expert on that skill. Expect to be graded on the effectiveness (or otherwise) of **your own contribution**, not the whole finished piece.
- The key to the practical is **preparation**. Whatever you're making, you must understand the genre and produce scripts and storyboards or design mock-ups and plan your photo shoot based on that. If you don't do that, then it just won't work. Some things can be done on the hoof. **This isn't one of them**. If you think that means your creative inspiration will have its style cramped, then fear not. You can still fly on the wings of inspiration and genius but it must be based on the solid planning that went before.
- If you are given deadlines for this task, **plan**. Break down the time, by setting mini





# MEDIA INVESTIGATION AND PRODUCTION

deadlines for yourself, to complete particular stages by. Have clear goals and work out what you need to do to achieve them. You should aim to produce something that looks and sounds as close to the original professional examples as it can. A website for a band, for example, should look as close as possible to the real thing. **Try your product out on friends.** If they can't recognise what you're doing, then think again. Better still; try out your original designs/storyboards with them **before** you do the work, it may save you time and effort later. Check out as much as possible in advance to avoid disasters at a later stage. This approach to research reflects **a professional approach** and will reap huge rewards in the finished product.

## Doing the evaluation

OK, by now you've been working on this coursework for weeks and months; you may be loving it – or losing the will to live. Whichever, don't flake out on the last bit. What to include? Whichever theory you focused on for the investigative essay, you now need to discuss how you used it in your production. How did that theory influence what you made?

## So how to start this?

Give a brief **outline** of what you aimed to make, what your **audience** and **genre** were and what your **product** was intended to be. Then, brutal honesty here, **evaluate truthfully** your own work, breaking down its **technical qualities** and **ideologies** as though it were a clip of TV or an advert being deconstructed in class. Be objective. Don't delude yourself, raving about how fab it is, if you know deep down that it had faults. **Show** that you can see what

is wrong; it will gain you credit. Try to **avoid** blaming kit, teachers, friends, crashed computers or lost memory sticks etc for weaknesses in the production. Tempting as it may be, it won't gain any marks and will waste your word limit. Make clear the links to your investigative essay. Show how it enabled you to make what you made in terms of genre, narrative structure or representation. Refer to the **primary** and **secondary sources** you used. Conclude with a sentence on the level of success achieved by your product.

Well, that's about it. It doesn't answer everything but it's a start and with luck, you'll have more idea about how to do this than you had ten minutes ago.

## One final point

To a large extent, your success or failure with the task will be determined by **the attitude with which you begin it**. If you approach it as though it were a huge drag and an imposition, you won't enjoy it very much and it's a bad starting point. If you treat it as a bit of an adventure and are open to the experience, then it really could be a challenge and a blast. Best of luck!

Jonathan Nunns is Head of Media Studies at Collyer's College, Horsham and moderates for the WJEC.

## Glossary

**Primary sources:** the key texts on which your essay is based, such as films, TV shows, adverts, magazines, websites, newspapers, radio programmes.

**Secondary sources:** anything produced about your key text, reviews, newspaper/magazine articles, fan websites, documentaries, DVD extras etc.

**Bibliography:** alphabetical listing by author surname of all sources, including the title, where it was published, dates, publisher and page number where relevant. Include full URLs for all websites used.

**Plagiarism:** basing part, or all of your project on someone else's work. This could be by cutting and pasting or by putting their work into your words without acknowledging the original source of the ideas.

**Subverting:** to challenge or undermine the way a type of media text has traditionally been produced.





# Engendering change

what's happened to representations of women?

How far have media representations of women changed over the last 40 years? Nick Lacey explores the traditional view of active men and passive women, and finds that Feminism still has a fight on its hands.

In the early 1970s the cultural critic John Berger summarised the way in which gender was represented in the media through visual images:

**Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at.**

**Berger 1972**

His analysis linked classic nude European oil paintings (see overleaf) to contemporary advertising and pornography. He concluded that the '**men active: women passive**' convention existed in all three forms.

In a hugely influential essay, first published in 1975, **Laura Mulvey** cast her eye on Hollywood movies and concluded:

**In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female.**

**Mulvey 1985: 306**

## Some social and historical context

To what extent do you think Berger's and Mulvey's statements from nearly 40 years ago hold true today? At the time they were writing, women were undoubtedly second-class citizens. Germaine Greer's classic book on female exploitation, *The Female Eunuch* (1969), spoke for a generation of women who wanted to rebel against male dominance. The book was part

of the 'second wave' of Feminism when it was realised that the Suffragettes' gains of the early 20th Century (including being able to vote) had not led to genuine equality, either domestically or in the workplace. In 1968 women sewing machinists went on strike at a Ford motorcar factory, as dramatised in the recent film *Made in Dagenham* (UK, 2010), because men were being paid 15% more for the same work. The strike, and the debates it generated, led to the Equal Pay Act 1970, steered through Parliament by Barbara Castle, which became law in 1975.

During the 1970s girls in the vast majority of secondary schools were expected to take subjects such as Home Economics (aka cooking) and typing courses, while the boys did technical drawing and woodwork. Boys got the best results at 'O' level (the equivalent of GCSE), A Level and at university. The cover of the 1968 *Girls' World* annual features the creative, if sedentary, activity of painting; in contrast, the 1977 *Schoolboy* annual shows sports and motorcycle racing activities.

In cinema, the 1960s saw the **Bond franchise** establish itself as one of the most popular series of films and featured the 'Bond Girl', the 'love interest' of the hero. The first appearance of a 'girl', in *Dr No* (UK, 1962), when Ursula Andress emerged from the ocean in a bikini, emphasised that these women were sex objects. Even their names were sometimes sexual puns – for example, Pussy Galore and Honey Ryder. The roles these 'girls' (they are actually women) played were, in Propp's terms, narrative princesses that had to be rescued by the hero, Bond.

However it's too simplistic to assume that this era had no strong female characters in the media. For example: Emma Peel featured in *The Avengers* from 1965 to 1967 and brought a radical and powerful combination of female sexuality, intelligence and lethal combat skills to the small screen. (Jones 2002)

Nevertheless, despite her dynamism, she still deferred to her (male) boss, Steed. On the whole, women were represented as passive and less important than men, and the emphasis was upon their sex appeal, epitomised by *The Sun's* 'Page 3'

topless girl, which first appeared in 1970.

To what extent has all that changed now?

## All change ... or more of the same?

Consider the option subjects that girls today are likely to take in schools, compared to boys' choices. To what extent are these still gendered? Are cooking and textiles classes still predominantly female; is 'resistant materials' more likely to be taken by males? What's the gender breakdown in your Media Studies class, given that the subject, and particularly its practical



[uk/news/gender-equality-57-years-away](#)

Fifty years on, the 'Bond Girl' still exists – and she remains 'eye candy'. However, in the recent 'reboot' of the franchise, *Casino Royale* (US-UK, 2008), it is Bond himself, in the shape of Daniel Craig, who emerges from the sea, fit in his tight swimming gear. In addition the 'girl', though still in need of saving by the 'hero', has become a narrative 'helper' and not the entirely passive 'princess'. Things have changed – but Bond himself remains male.

Female action heroes have been a feature of Hollywood for the last three decades. Ripley, of



element, has traditionally been seen as 'boy-friendly'? In terms of educational achievement, females outstrip males at GCSE and A Level, and are more likely to go on to study at university. You might expect that would mean that women might even earn more than men; however, women are actually still lagging behind: there is a **national pay gap of around 17%**. A report published in August 2010 concluded that, at the current rate of progress, **women won't get paid the same as men until 2067** – 92 years after the Equal Pay Act became law! ([www.managers.org](http://www.managers.org)).

the *Alien* series (1979-97), and Sarah Connor in the first two *Terminator* films (1984, 1991) are amongst the most famous. This year featured Angelina Jolie as the eponymous hero of *Salt* (US, 2010), a role apparently originally written for Tom Cruise. However, the vast majority of action heroes – the most active of all protagonists – remain male.

## Evaluating equality: the Bechdel Test

Maybe a more potent way of measuring whether a film is treating women as the equal of men is the Bechdel test. This originated in Alison Bechdel's comic strip *Dykes to Watch Out For* and consists of what appears to be a very simple test. Does a film:

1. have at least two named women who...
2. talk to one another
3. ... about something other than men?

I started blogging about this last summer (<http://laceysfilms.wordpress.com>) and of the 21 films I've seen since then, only five have passed the test. Even *Salt* fails; the female protagonist only talks to one other female, who is a child; she asks her to look after her dog. The test has its own website and invites contributions (<http://bechdeltest.com>); as I write, of 78 films 'reviewed' that have been released this year, only 32 passed the test (41%).

This suggests that although women may be constructed as more dynamic characters on film than in the 1960s, they are only represented as being independent of men a minority of the time. I suspect an equivalent test (shall we call it the







Images from Casino Royale, Alien and Made in Dagenham from image.net

Lacey test?) that asked if a film included named men talking to one another about something other than women would have a pass rate of over 95%.

Although there has been change in the way women are represented, since the 1960s, it appears that the difference may be merely cosmetic. This suspicion is not new:

**In 1990, many women sense that women's progress has stalled; there is a dispiriting climate of confusion, division, cynicism and, above all, exhaustion. Older women are burnt out; younger women are showing little interest in seizing the torch. (Wolf 1990:1)**

## The return of Feminism?

20 years on, Feminism seems to be experiencing a come back with an increasing online presence and in the 15th August issue *the Observer* magazine profiled 'The New Feminists' (see [www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/aug/15/meet-the-new-feminists](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/aug/15/meet-the-new-feminists)). In addition, during the last year a number of books have been published that argue women should be fighting for equality once again. One of these, Nina Power's book *One Dimensional Woman*, begins thus:

**Where have all the interesting women gone? If the contemporary portrayal of womankind were to be believed, contemporary female achievement would culminate in the ownership of expensive handbags, a vibrator, a job, a flat and a man – probably in that order.**

**Power 2009: 1**

And the fact that women are still not being treated equally is emphasised by the fact that **David Cameron's first cabinet includes only four women out of 29**. Research published in November 2009 found that, despite making up

half of the population, **only 12.2% of FTSE 100 board members were women** (Clark, 2010).

Meanwhile the establishment of sites such as [www.becomeawag.com](http://www.becomeawag.com), launched August 2010, arguably suggests that some women are harking back to times when their only ambition was to get married and have children.

Inevitably the representation of gender has changed in the last 40 years and this reflects the fact that young women are now often far more ambitious than they were and believe they are competing with men on a level playing field.

**Carol Ann Duffy** is the first female poet laureate and her collection *The World's Wife* (1999) is infused with a Feminist perspective.

But the statistics quoted above suggest the battle for equality is far from won. Occasionally the media does represent women as powerful and independent characters, and yet they still almost invariably require a man to tell them what to do. The ideologies of male dominance and patriarchal values have not diminished; and the belief that they have offers a classic example of **'hegemony': a state where the oppressed consent to, and accept, their situation because they are not conscious of being exploited**. We, both female and male, are socialised into a world where the **relationships of power between the sexes appear 'natural'**, and so few question the inequality. Youth culture, despite its radicalism in the '60s and '70s, is now politically conservative; and so radical messages do not circulate in the mainstream, further obscuring the fact that in 2010 women have not yet attained equal opportunities with men.

**This has to change.**

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## Follow it up

[www.thefword.org.uk](http://www.thefword.org.uk)

[www.object.org.uk](http://www.object.org.uk)

[www.guardian.co.uk/world/Feminism](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/Feminism)

## Further reading

John Berger (1972) *Ways of Seeing* (BBC and Penguin: London)

Nick Clark (2010) 'Women still missing out on top jobs at world's largest companies' [www.independent.co.uk/news/business/news/women-still-missing-out-on-top-jobs-at-worlds-largest-companies-1918433](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/news/women-still-missing-out-on-top-jobs-at-worlds-largest-companies-1918433), accessed 09.2010

Sarah Gwenllian Jones (2002) 'Gender and British Television' in ed. Miller (2002), ed. Toby Miller (2002) *Television Studies* (British Film Institute: London)

Laura Mulvey (1985) 'Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema' in ed. Nichols (1985)

ed. Bill Nichols (1985) *Movies and Methods volume 2*, (University of California Press: Berkeley, CA and Los Angeles)

Nina Power (2009) *One Dimensional Woman* (O Books: Winchester and Washington)

Naomi Wolf (1990) *The Beauty Myth* (Chatto & Windus: London)