MMediaMagazine

производство
ВОСТОККИНО

Sci Fi, SF
– what's the difference?

Girls on Film

THE FEMALE GAZE REVISITED

Media Language

MICRO-ANALYSIS – APOCALYPSE NOW

Crowdfunding for students

The Wire vs Treme

MM

MediaMag website – exciting changes ahead!
LAUNCHING EARLY 2015

As part of the redevelopment of the English and Media Centre's website, the *MediaMagazine* site is also getting a new look – and some exciting new features, including:

- improved search of archived articles
- access to the complete archive as downloadable PDFs
- the facility to select your own username and password.

The site will go live early in 2015.

Teachers!
IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR WEB SUBSCRIBERS

Before you can access the new *MediaMagazine* website, you will need to register your school on the site and choose a magazine username and password to pass on to your students.

Once the site has launched, you will no longer be able to access the site using IP access or your 2014-15 username and password.

Look out for the email **'*MediaMagazine* website – your unique voucher code'**. This email will include instructions on how to set your username and password and access the site.

KEEN TO FIND OUT WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW?
OR
ANY QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS?
Email
lucy@englishandmedia.co.uk

Seasonal greetings from *MediaMagazine*!

This issue should provide you with plenty of stimulus, whatever your interests. All AS Media students should read Steph Hendry's overview of Media Language, especially paired with Mark Ramey's masterly micro-analysis of the *Apocalypse Now* opening sequence The latter is a gift for Film students, as is Nick Lacey's case study of Lionsgate – perfectly timed to coincide with the launch of *Mockingjay Part 1*. A2 Media students can explore our update on the issues confronting the BBC, and current debates about representations of place, gender, and the (Fe)Male Gaze; and if you're doing documentary in A2 Film Studies, there's an excellent contextual case study of the iconic *Night Mail*. On the production side, three student-written pieces should demonstrate the range of possibilities for those hoping to enter the media industries, and the pros and cons of internships, screenwriting and crowd-funding production projects. The issue is topped and tailed with articles on Science Fiction: Roy Stafford's speculation about the hybridity and diversity of the genre, and Steve Connolly's use of social media to influence the programming of the SyFy Channel.

We have not one but two Christmas presents accompanying this issue! Firstly, a free online Science Fiction supplement, in collaboration with BFI's Sci-Fi Days of Fear and Wonder season. 10 articles over 46 pages, thanks to the generosity of BFI Education.

And secondly, we're not only re-running our lovely *MediaMag* Production competition, one of the highlights of our year, but also launching a brand new competition for those of you with an interest in writing for, in, or about the media. We'll be publishing the outcomes online, and the winning entries will be featured in future issues of the magazine – useful additions to portfolios or CVs. The details are on page 5, and entry forms will appear online in January. Go for it!

Happy New Year from *MediaMag*!

Jenny Grahame

contents

The Front Page

Days of Fear and Wonder: Science Fiction at the British Film Institute

The British Film Institute's spectacular Science Fiction season is well under way, but there's plenty still to see and watch out for.

The Season covers three broad strands from the BFI Collection.

Altered States Mad scientists, mutants, man-machines and mind-bending trips - these films connect with the biology of our guts and the chemistry of our brains.

Contact! The infinitely vast reaches of outer space evoke fear and wonder in equally boundless measure. It's not just about the thrill of boldly going – these are films which play on our fears of invasion, extinction and annihilation!

Tomorrow's World From the seemingly far-flung dystopias where ultraviolent gangs roam post-apocalyptic wastelands, to more immediately recognisable futures in which our megacities grow out of control.

The Highlights

Here are just some of the must-see highlights you can still catch:

The big screen re-release of Kubrick's masterpiece *2001: A Space Odyssey*, frequently cited as one of the greatest films of all time, screening nationwide from 28th November: **http://www.bfi.org.uk/whats-on/bfi-film-releases/2001-space-odyssey**

The national re-release of Ridley Scott's SF Noir *Blade Runner: The Final Cut*, launching in April 2015.

A host of classics available through BFI Player, including: *The Man Who Fell to Earth, E.T., Fahrenheit 451, Serenity, The Day The Earth Caught Fire, Under The Skin*, and *Flash Gordon*.

For Film students, accessible critical books on some iconic classics, including *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind, War of the Worlds, Quatermass and the Pit, Solaris, Alien, Dr Strangelove, Blade Runner, Things to Come*, and the *Cinema of Stanley Kubrick*

http://shop.bfi.org.uk/sci-fi/sci-fi-books.html

The Science of Sci Fi: The Midwich Experiment

Can you use your powers of deduction to uncover the scientific truth behind the strange goings on in the sleepy village of Midwich? Working with professional neuroscientists, you'll enter the world of a British sci-fi classic and explore the external environment and the internal human factors as they seek to discover what has happened to the unconscious inhabitants of Midwich. The day includes several real experiments, including using an EEG machine to study a human's brainwave patterns, LIVE, and examining an MRI scan to look for anomalous results in the inhabitants of Midwich. And having explored the science behind the strange circumstances in Midwich, you can watch this terrifying British classic. It seems as though something like this has happened before, many years ago… These free events take place in January and February in Canterbury, Stroud and the Rhonda Valley. Book by

emailing Mark Reid, Head of Education at the BFI at **Mark.Reid@bfi.org.uk**

And more...

BFI's website includes links to a cornucopia of further explorations, from the best 21st-century sci-fi to the best in 80s sci-fi posters, end-of-the-world-movies, greatest sci-fi characters of all time, and much more. Not to mention *Star Wars* Day on 13th December . . .

Into Film

The 2014 **Into Film Festival** includes a BFI Sci Fi strand, featuring 10 films chosen for their appeal to young audiences, from *Attack the Block* to Aardman Animations, supported by classroom resources available here: **http://www.intofilm.org/festival/programme/bfi-sci-fi#resources-in-strand**

And not forgetting...

MediaMag's own special 46-page Science Fiction supplement, covering many of the films mentioned here, and more. The supplement, created in partnership with BFI, is free online from the *MediaMag* home page – go to **www.englishandmedia.co.uk** then click the *MediaMag* tab.
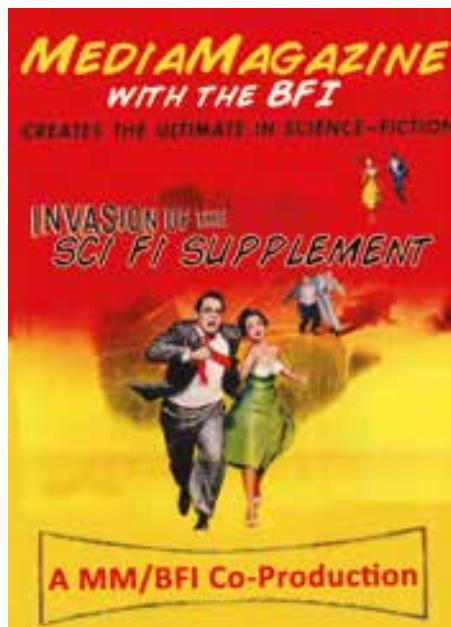
The Front Page was compiled by Jenny Grahame.

BOGOF? Two for One?

This year, MediaMag offers not one but TWO competitions!

Are you a writer as well as a producer? Are you passionate about journalism, blogging, review writing, news and opinion, or the world of print media? Are you a creative writer, or a Journalism or English Language student keen to extend your portfolio with a wider range of forms and genres? If so, we want your writing!

The 2015 MediaMag Media Writing Competition

In response to popular demand, we are introducing a new competition for students interested in writing about and for the media. Your writing could be in any of the following areas:

- An editorial piece of journalism about some aspect of the media landscape – the choice is yours.

- An interview with a professional media practitioner in a medium of your choice, from music, through photography, advertising, newsgathering, gaming, TV or film.

- A textual analysis of a media text – again, of your choice, and in any medium.

If your article is shortlisted, we'll publish it in an online supplement. The final winning entries will appear in print in a future edition of *MediaMag*. All shortlisted contributors will be invited, with family and teachers, to our Awards Ceremony at BFI Southbank on Wednesday 8th July, where the winners will be announced.

The rules

Your piece should be around 1000 words. We can be flexible either way, but, as in the real world, space is at a premium, so don't stray too far from the limit.

It must be your own, unaided work

It should be sent to us as a Word document, double-spaced, and without embedded pictures or special formatting. If you wish to suggest illustrations, add a page of links or references at the end of your article.

You must download and complete the competition entry form in full, and send it with your article by **Friday 20th March 2015**.

Watch out for further details on the *MediaMag* home page in January.

The 2015 MediaMag Production Competition

This competition has gone from strength to strength, and student productions just get better and better! The brilliant 2014 entries can still be seen online via the *MediaMagazine* home page and we hope you'll be challenged by them to enter yourselves.

This year we are offering a special BFI award for productions in a genre of your choice on Britain and Britishness.

Full details of the categories, formats and rules will be available from the *MediaMag* home page in January. The deadline for entries is **Friday 20th March 2015**, and the shortlist will appear online on **Friday 1st May**.

So you've entered – what happens next?

The details of the shortlists for both competitions will be posted online on Friday 1st May 2015, and entrants will shortly afterwards receive an invitation to the Awards Ceremony.

The winners of both competitions will be announced and presented by celebrity judges at the Awards Ceremony in NFT1, BFI Southbank, on Wednesday 8th July 2015.

'Sci-fi', SF and science fiction

– what's the difference?
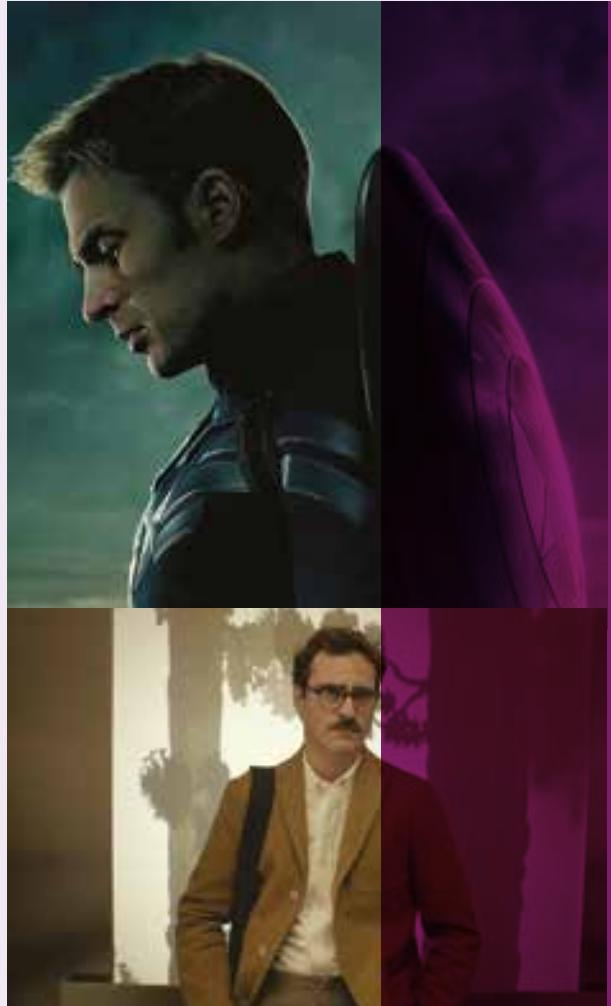
In tribute to the British Film Institute's current Science Fiction season (and *MediaMag's* free online Science Fiction supplement!) Roy Stafford introduces four recent films starring Scarlett Johansson to raise some of the big questions about the history, range and diversity of the science fiction genre.
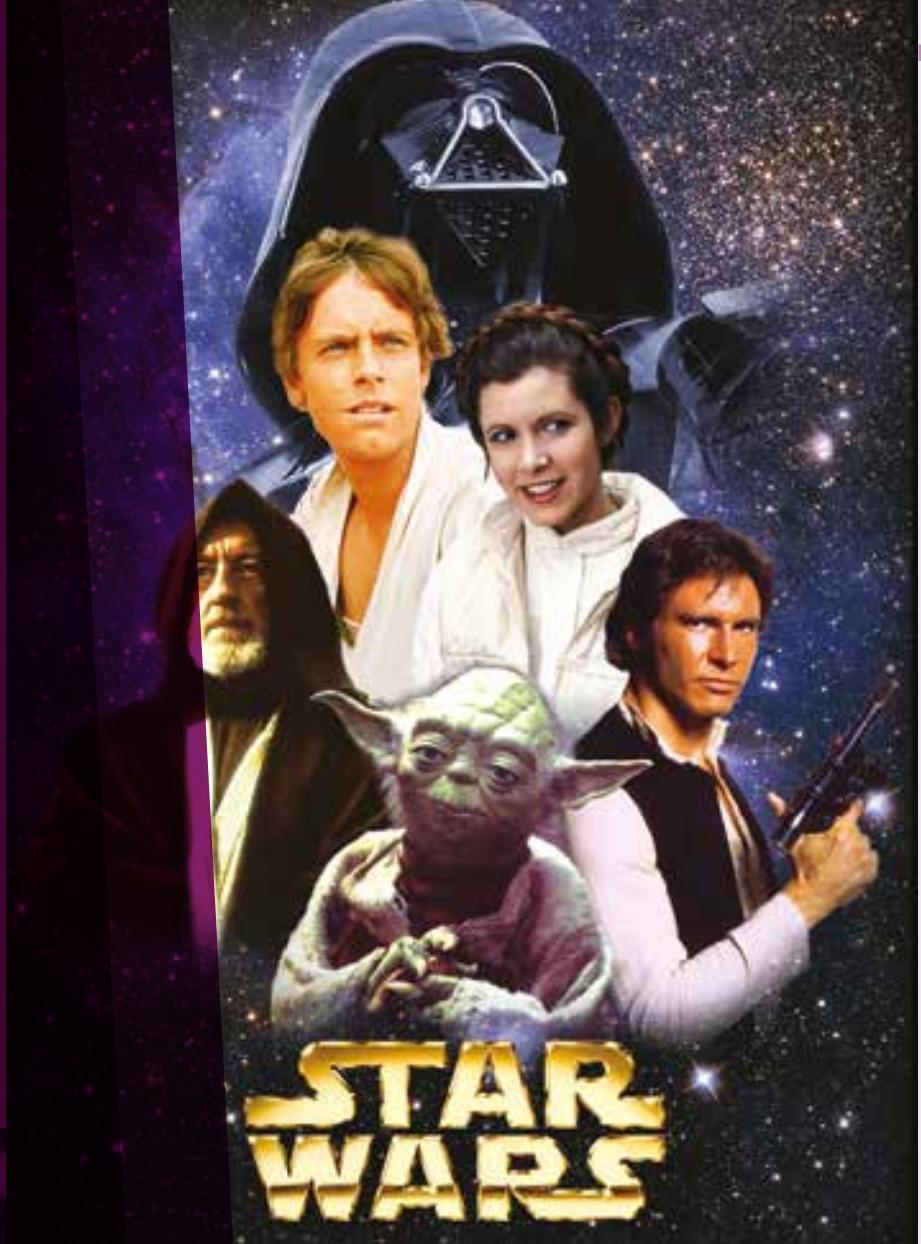
The British Film Institute announced 'Sci-fi: Days of Wonder' as a celebration of 'film and TV's original blockbuster genre'. It's a catchy title for a season of films, but it raises several problems for Film and Media Studies students hoping to gain knowledge and understanding about film and television culture. Not least of these problems are the assumptions underpinning the use of the terms 'sci-fi', 'blockbuster' and 'genre' – all terms indiscriminately used in popular discourse, but all contentious and in need of explication.

In the last twelve months UK cinema audiences have been offered four different films featuring the Hollywood star Scarlett Johansson. Each of the four has been tagged 'sci-fi' or 'science fiction' by at least one source, and together they form an interesting case study.
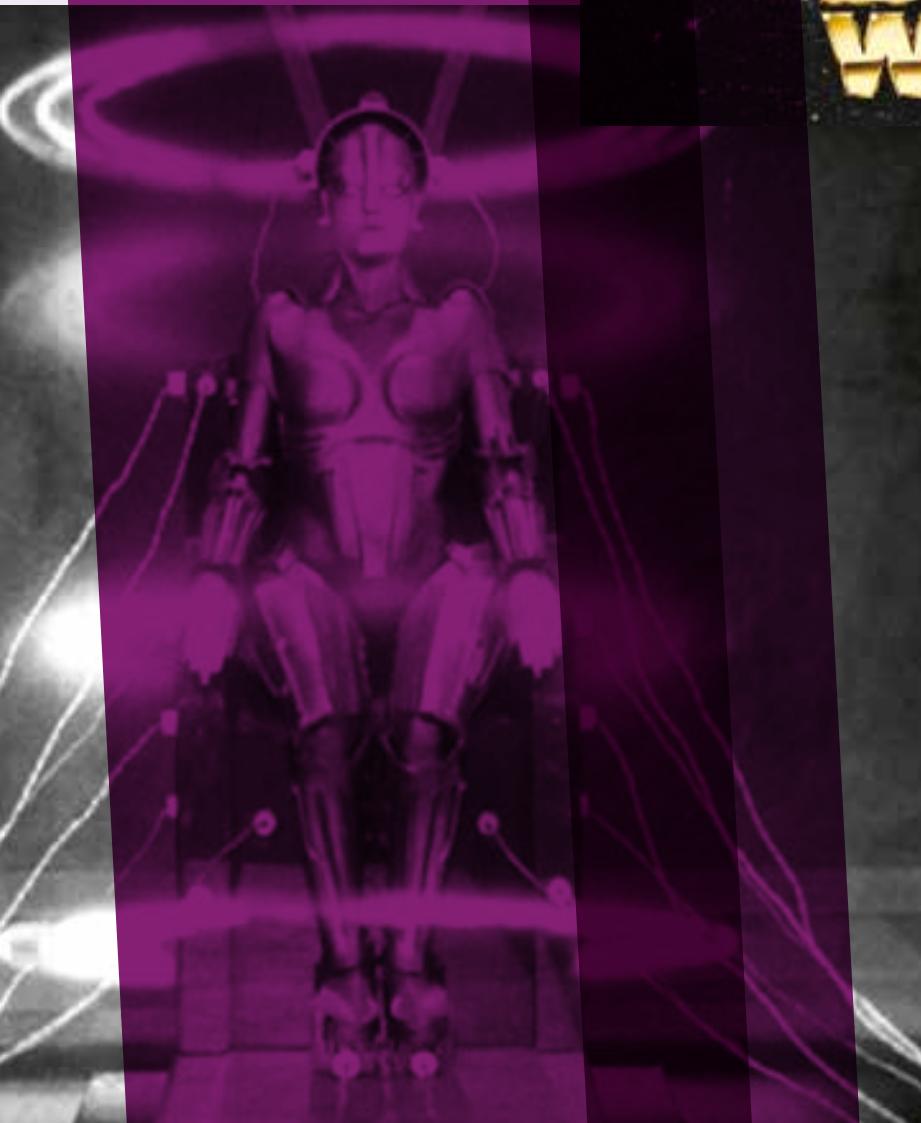
The case study films are *Captain America: Winter Soldier* (US, 2014), *Her* (US, 2013), *Under the Skin* (UK, 2013) and *Lucy* (France, 2014). Although all four have been described as science-fiction, there are major differences between them, and certainly disputes about how they should be classified. Let's begin with the 'blockbuster' tag.

The Power of the Blockbuster

It's been claimed that the term 'blockbuster' derives from descriptions of the largest Second World War bombs, which could literally destroy whole 'blocks' of housing or offices – hence its application to 'killer movies' which effectively destroy their competition. Arguably the concept dates from the 1975 release of *Jaws* in North America, which attracted huge audiences through innovative distribution and exhibition strategies, including simultaneous screenings North America-wide during the summer vacation – a new strategy at the time. *Jaws* is a 'monster movie', a 'creature feature', which under some definitions *might* be categorised as science fiction. Perhaps the BFI marketing team was referring to the *Star Wars* films (1977, onwards) as key 'sci-fi' blockbuster films. Yet the trailer

produced for the BFI season includes several films that were released before 1975, and several later films that were not given a blockbuster release.

You can watch the trailer here: **http://www.bfi.org.uk/sci-fi-days-fear-wonder**

The term 'blockbuster' describes a highly successful or popular production. It refers to the size and scale of productions, budgets, forms of audience appeal and distribution patterns. Blockbuster films are generally released to at least 3,000 screens in North America. They must therefore appeal to as many different audiences as possible – to the 'four quadrants' of young and old, male and female. And to draw in these audiences, they must usually encompass more than one genre – for example, action, romance, adventure, comedy – and appeal to fans of specific stars, CGI and effects, and so on. It is highly unusual for a blockbuster movie to relate to a single 'pure' genre.

According to this definition, only one of our case study films, *Captain America*, is actually a blockbuster. The 'Marvel Cinematic Universe' has been described as a 'mega-franchise' of film titles based on Marvel's comic book characters. These are made independently by

Marvel Studios, and then distributed by one of the Hollywood studio majors (Paramount in the case of *Captain America*).

Lucy represents a different challenge to the Hollywood 'majors', the six studios which comprise the membership of the MPAA (the Motion Pictures Association of America). Produced by Luc Besson's EuropaCorp (in English) in France, *Lucy* was distributed in North America and the UK by Universal. It had a blockbuster-style release with success that was to some extent unexpected, but it has not been seen as a potential franchise with sequels/prequels etc.

Neither *Her* nor *Under the Skin* were marketed as blockbusters. *Her* received a 'wide' release on over 1,000 screens in North America, but not the 3,000+ required for a blockbuster; and *Under the Skin* opened on only a handful of screens in the US, and in the UK was mainly screened in arthouse cinemas.

So What Exactly is this Science Fiction Genre?

If we turn now to questions of 'genre', it's worth remembering that film genres are defined by film scholars in order to be useful as tools for critical analysis. As suggested above, audiences are attracted by different aspects of a film's appeal, which might include references to its genre – but not always using the terms or definitions used by scholars. Film reviewers and film journalists in the popular press may define it differently again. Film industry professionals use only the broadest definitions of genre; in fact 'science fiction' or 'sci-fi' is a term that the industry itself is reluctant to use, because it implies a narrow audience appeal. If you check the promotional materials for the four films in our case study, you will see a wide range of genres mentioned. To take just one example: the website Box Office Mojo

(used as a reference source here for North American distribution) refers to *Captain America* as 'Action/Adventure', *Under the Skin* as 'Sci-fi', *Lucy* as 'Sci-fi Action' and *Her* as 'Comedy/Drama'. So what exactly might 'sci-fi' mean – and is it the same as 'science fiction'? And perhaps we also ought to reconsider whether these concepts are actually useful critical tools for film scholarship.

Some Sci-fi History

The earliest film title in the BFI's marketing of 'sci-fi' is *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang Germany 1927). In his 1947 book on German cinema, critic Siegfried Kracauer refers to the three films made by Lang for the German studio Ufa between 1927 and 1929 as dealing with 'thrilling adventures and technical fantasies' – the other two were *Spies* (1928) and *The Girl in the Moon* (1929). He doesn't mention the term 'science fiction'.

Some scholars have argued that recognisable elements of what we now know as science fiction can be found in literature thousands of years ago; but the first generally agreed science fiction novel is usually taken to be Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* from 1818. When *Frankenstein* was successfully adapted for the cinema in 1931, it was perceived as part of a cycle of Gothic horror films produced by Universal in Hollywood (following *Dracula* and preceding *The Mummy*). From Kracauer's description of 'adventures' and 'fantasies', the range of imaginative narratives featuring, for example, scientists able to build a robot (*Metropolis*) or to 're-animate' humans (*Frankenstein*), were increasingly associated with the 'horror' genre.

Steve Neale is one of the best-known theorists of film genre. He suggests that the term 'science fiction' to describe stories using scientific advances wasn't really established until the late 1920s, when it was associated with American pulp magazines such as *Amazing Stories*

and *Science Wonder Stories*. But he also notes that by that time, films featuring trick photography and set designs to represent future or alien worlds, for example the films of George Méliès such as *A Trip to the Moon* (1902) had made a link between science and cinema as spectacle. So up to the early 1930s, science fiction was not a film genre as such, but a type of narrative that lent itself to adventure, fantasy, horror or spectacle. These popular literary genres had little cultural status; and this was also true of science fiction in print form, which was usually circulated as cheap novels or short stories. However, books written by a 'serious author' such as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) or George Orwell's *Nineteen-Eighty Four (*1948), were rarely described as science fiction; they were 'literary' rather than 'genre' novels.

Sci-fi

'Sci-fi' is a shortened version of 'science fiction', first used in the 1950s. Why was it shortened? Possibly to make the writing – and the films – sound more 'modern', much as 'hi-fi' was used during the same period to describe 'high fidelity' music. A few years later, in the 1960s, a New Wave of science fiction writing began to appear in the UK and US, with authors such as Robert Heinlen, Kurt Vonnegut, Philip K. Dick, Arthur C. Clarke, and

But when it was re-released in 1993 in a re-edited form, the film became a cult success. Now associated with postmodernism, and with the growing reputation of Philip K. Dick, author of the original SF classic novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, the film is acknowledged as a masterpiece for its 'neo-noir' visuals and profoundly dystopian vision.

Blade Runner focuses on the question 'What does it mean to be human?' This arises from a classic 'What if?' scenario: what if replica humans could be constructed which could not be distinguished from 'real people'? It is the force and complexity of these 'what if?' scenarios that defines an SF film; 'SF' might also stand for 'speculative fiction', perhaps a larger generic category that includes forms of fantasy writing, and stories without scientific or 'futuristic' elements. It could be argued that a sci-fi film is likely to put spectacle (special effects) and action/adventure ahead of this kind of speculation, whereas for genre purists, science fiction is defined by that 'what if?' question. The inference is always that whatever fictional world is shown ('alternative' or future), the narrative speculates about what we can learn about our world today.

Scarlett's Four Case Study Films

Let's return to our four case study films, to see where they stand generically. *Captain America* is a superhero action film. Its 'alternative universe' scenario hints at SF, but its emphasis on action, special effects and the spectacular suggests that sci-fi is its main focus, even though Johansson's role as an 'action woman' raises questions about gender roles in contemporary society.

Lucy is in some ways very similar, and the titular central character played by Johansson also develops 'superpowers'. But these are associated with some form of scientific research recognisable from our perspective (even if it is exaggerated, distorted and perhaps fantastic) that becomes the central point of the narrative – there is a 'what if?' idea about human brain power that is as important as the resolution of the action genre narrative. Writer-director

Thomas Pynchon. Some of these new writers – and their readers – favoured writing which was more experimental in imagining what would happen if science changed society through new technologies, or if social and political changes were made to contemporary society. They wanted to keep the full term 'science fiction', or to abbreviate it to 'SF'. But most of all, they wanted to distinguish themselves from 'sci-fi', and to promote SF as a 'proper' literary genre. When their new stories were adapted for the cinema, they were marketed as SF, not sci-fi. One of the first big successes of the new science fiction cinema was Stanley Kubrick's *2001: a Space Odyssey* (UK/US 1968) – an iconic movie, based on an Arthur C. Clarke story, still regarded as one of the greatest films ever made, and re-released this winter.

Star Wars – Soap in Space?

During the 1960s and 1970s SF cinema flourished. But then, in 1977, a film drawing on a Western (*The Searchers*, 1956) a Japanese historical film (*The Hidden Fortress*, 1958) and various Second World War films about aerial combat, swept all before it as a genuine 'sci-fi blockbuster'. That film was of course *Star Wars*. George Lucas and Steven Spielberg (with the *Indiana Jones* films) set out to re-create the adventure serials shown in cinemas in the 1930s-1950s, among them *Flash Gordon* (1936). The early serials had been called 'space operas', and the same term was applied to *Star Wars*. This was a pejorative term, like 'soap opera', implying that these films were merely the same old dramas, but this time set in space. Despite this implied criticism, the overwhelming success of *Star Wars* then brought sci-fi back into the mainstream, with Lucas's continuing epic as its most popular incarnation.

The Story of Blade Runner

The shifting cultural attitudes towards different forms of science fiction can perhaps best be seen in what happened to *Blade Runner*. When first released in 1982 as a sci-fi blockbuster following *Star Wars*, *Blade Runner* disappointed at the box office, apparently because it lacked a clear enough narrative or sufficient action.

relationship with his OS – something which can be compared to, and can perhaps have an impact on, his 'real' relationships with other people. Here is a familiar SF scenario which is containable within other classifications – romance, drama, comedy as well as 'independent cinema', 'Hollywood art cinema' and others which refer to specific audience segments.

Thus Scarlett Johansson, one of the most adventurous of Hollywood stars, has appeared in four very diverse films from four different categories of cinema, linked only by their connections to ideas about 'science fiction'. Those links are useful in reading the films – but they don't in any simple way refer to conventional ideas about genre. There is no clear distinction between 'SF' and 'sci-fi', both of which derive from 'science fiction'; but there is a dynamic relationship between the shifting definitions of all three – definitions contested by different audience groups – and understanding this is essential for participation in debates about contemporary cinema.

Roy Stafford is a freelance film lecturer and writer and the author *The Media Studies Book* and *The Global Film Book*. He also edits *The Case for Global Film* blog at http://itpworld.wordpress.com

Follow it Up

Kracauer, Siegfried. 1974. *From Caligari to Hitler: a Psychological History of German Film*.

Neale, Steve. 2000. *Genre and Hollywood*.

www.boxofficemojo.com

MoreMediaMag
from the archive

Besson makes this explicit by referring directly to *2001: a Space Odyssey* and by naming his character 'Lucy', which was the name given to the earliest human discovered by archaeologists. Clearly sci-fi in terms of action and spectacle, *Lucy* may also be genuine SF.

Under the Skin is based on an SF novel (Michel Faber, 2000) and presents an (almost) social-realist account of a woman who seduces men she finds on the streets. There is no 'spectacle' as such, but instead a series of seduction scenes using music and simple effects to represent how these men are 'used' by an alien. *Under the Skin* is defiantly SF in its questions about humans and aliens, and defiantly avant-garde in its presentation (see the SF supplement on the *MediaMagazine* website).

Finally, in *Her*, Johansson appears only as the disembodied voice of a computer operating system. The fictional world is set only marginally in the future – where a lonely man finds that he can buy an Operating System (OS) for his digital devices which acts as if it works only for him. In other words he can have a

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Media Language

Following on from last issue's overview of the broad principles on which Media Studies is based, Steph Hendry focuses in depth on the vocabulary and skills you'll need to become a fluent reader, writer and user of media language across a range of texts.

Every media product is constructed from a combination of possible production choices, and media language is the collective term used for the multitude of possible elements that could be selected. Choices in the way a camera is positioned, the wording of a headline or the cropping of a photograph all combine to communicate ideas to the audience. Media language choices are the creative building blocks used by all media producers, and understanding how they work, and why a specific choice might be made is the first stage of analysis.

As a Media student, you need to be able to analyse the work of others; but you also need to create your own media products, which will require demonstrating your understanding of
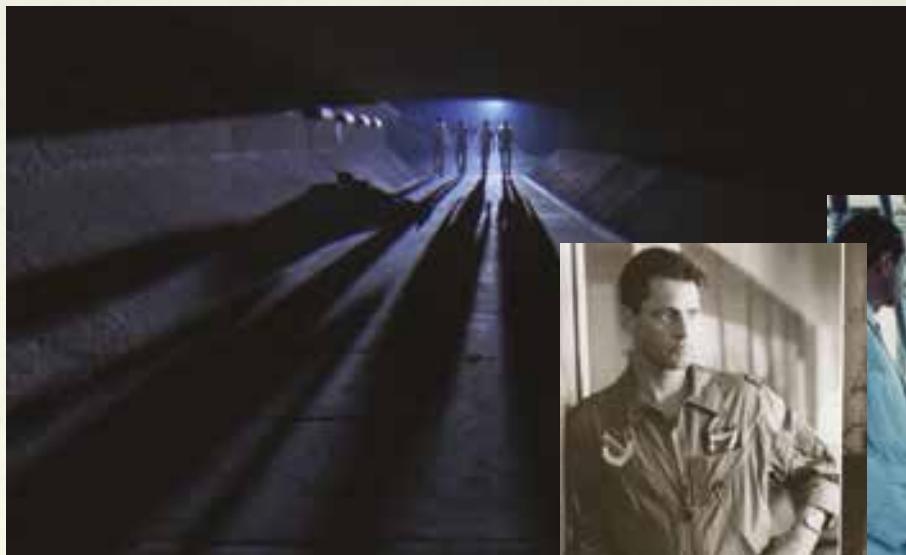
Basic Conventions Based on Type/Platform

Moving Image	Audio	Print	E-Media
Camera placement and movement Sound Lighting Editing Mise-en-scène (all that is seen on screen) Special effects	Sound effects/ambient sound/silence/ signposting.	Page design – use of columns, size of text, proportions in terms of words and images etc. Readability is crucial.	Site and page design and appearance. Readability must be considered.
	Interview/presentation style.	Lexis (word and grammar choices) in body text, headlines, captions etc.	Lexis in body text, headings, captions etc.
	Studio/Location elements.	Photos and illustrations – cropping, placement etc.	Photos and illustrations.
	General tone of address.		Multi-media (video, audio, animation etc.).
	Music.	Accepted position of different elements of the text.	Audience engagement and participation.
	Sound beds.		Navigation.

how to use media language. And just as when learning Spanish or German, the best way to become good at 'reading', 'writing' and 'using the language' is to practise as often as possible.

In order to be able to analyse effectively, there are some basic principles to consider.

1. Media language choices are thought through.

2. Media language choices are not infinite.

3. Audiences interpret media language choices.

4. Institutions try to fix meaning with media language choices.

1. Media Language Choices are Thought Through

Media producers take great care in their media language choices. The choices they make will all be deliberate and, as such, contain meaning. The selection of one media language option rejects all alternatives; and whilst there may be practical reasons for many of the choices, it is important to recognise that every choice communicates something to the audience. Of course, the audience may not always accept the meanings intended by the producer, but media language choices are the producer's way to attempt to communicate a specific message.

For example:

*   Some newspapers take a political position on certain issues and the editor will make sure the tone and slant of the stories and images published meet this agenda.

*   Film directors will decide on a style and tone for the film and all lighting, sound, special effects decisions etc. will need to reinforce this decision.

2. Media Language Choices are not Infinite

A media producer cannot always do exactly what s/he wants in terms of media language choices: the type, form or genre of the production may

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limit the choices that can be made. Media platforms, forms and genres all have their own conventions. These conventions in themselves create a framework that media producers need to be aware of, even though they may choose to ignore, challenge or subvert them.

Conventions based on product type/distribution platform

There are (very basically) four types of media product: moving image, audio, print and e-media, a very broad term that includes the internet, social networking and gaming, amongst other electronic media forms.

Each type of media product has its own specific range of media language choices available. For example, moving image and audio texts can use a musical soundtrack specifically selected to lead the audience's emotional response; print media cannot do this. On the other hand, print can capture a specific moment in a photograph and ensure the audience is aware that they need to focus on it; audio media cannot do this. E-media can bring together moving image, sound and the written word to communicate in a way neither moving image nor print can do separately.

Conventions based on form

Within each platform or type of media there are many different forms or genres.

Moving-image forms include documentaries, feature films, news bulletins, drama, variety shows etc. A news broadcast on the BBC may look very similar to a news broadcast on ITV. The style of presentation, the mise-en-scène choices and even the language are part of the conventions of the form.

Print forms include newspapers, magazines, posters, flyers, display advertising etc. You will know the difference between a newspaper and a magazine; both are print products and as such share print conventions – but magazine design and newspaper layout are quite different. The newspaper form uses a set of design principles that are very specific and different to the ones used by magazines.

Conventions based on genre

Genre conventions, once again, require media language choices. Media producers often need to create products that are familiar to the audience in terms of their genre, since audiences frequently use their experiences and preferences of different genres to select what to watch, read or listen to. Genre conventions enable producers to set up audience expectations; at the same time, such conventions also limit the media language choices available.

If a producer wants to appeal to fans of film noir or crime drama, the use of lots of low key lighting, a soft jazz soundtrack, an urban mise-en-scène and a retro-style wardrobe allows the audience to quickly recognise the genre and, therefore, what to expect from the film or television programme.

3. Audiences Interpret Media Language Choices

The act of interpreting media language choices can often be an active process, but, like our understanding of our own first spoken language, it is often subconscious. Some media language choices are so conventional that we don't need to interpret them consciously; we automatically know what they mean.

For example, if a film director introduces a character in half-light, smoking a cigarette, we may read the character as a villain of some sort. A character presented via a low camera angle will appear intimidating, whereas a backlit image of a woman could create an angelic, otherworldly appearance. If an idea of an isolated and troubled hero is required, he could be shot from above whilst looking out over a city presented in long shot.

The reason we are often unaware that we are interpreting media language choices is that we have a huge body of experience in the act of 'reading' media texts; and so it has become second nature. Like reading a collection of L-E-T-T-E-R-S, we cannot help but organise what we see into something meaningful.

Denotation and Connotation

Another part of the interpretative process is the way certain media language choices create connotation, or a second level of meaning. The first level of meaning in an image is its

denotation: the literal meaning of the word or simply what is being presented in an image. The connotations are the additional meanings that are associated with a word or image – sometimes based on history or ideologies that may be lost on the audience member.

In this image four aliens and one human are shown to be walking. In the trailer for the film *Guardians of the Galaxy* they are walking forward in slow motion. The body language and placement of the characters connotes the idea that they are (if a little ramshackle) a heroic group.

Some audience members may know that the image is deliberately referencing a shot from the 1969 film *The Wild Bunch* – a shot that has been used again and again in films such as *A Clockwork Orange*, *The Right Stuff*, *Armageddon*, *Monsters Inc.* and more recently *The World's End*.
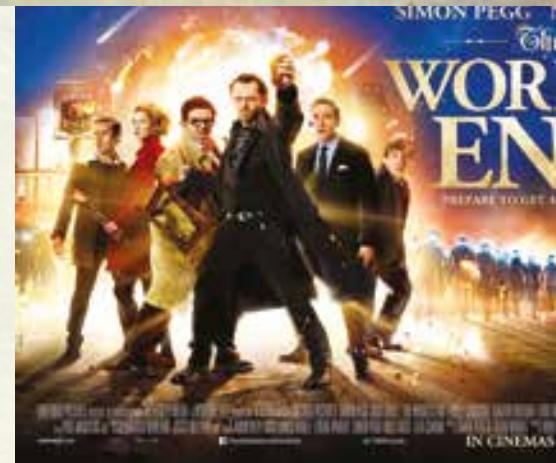
The Wild Bunch and *The Right Stuff* use the framing of the characters to reinforce their heroic stature, and this meaning becomes associated with the image. The repetition of the shot in similar contexts allows the 'meaning' of the shot to be absorbed by audiences. The newer versions of this shot are relying on the audience's understanding of the connotations within the image to create humour. The image is used in *Monsters Inc.*, *The World's End* and *Guardians of the Galaxy* to reinforce the idea that the characters

Media Language – The Starting Point for Analysis

Analysing a media product begins with the observation and recognition of media language choices.

Once the media language choices have been identified, the next step is to consider why those choices have been made:

- What was the producer trying to achieve?

- What information is communicated by the choices made?

- Do the media language choices provide narrative information?

- Were the media language choices influenced by form or genre codes?

- Does the meaning depend on the way multiple media language choices have been put together?

- What meaning is the audience most likely to take from the product?

Finding answers to these questions gets you well on the way to creating an analysis of the product.

Steph Hendry is a lecturer in Media at Runshaw College and a freelance writer. Follow her on Twitter @albionmill

are a long way from being traditionally heroic. The image is used ironically.

4. Institutions Try to Fix Meaning with Media Language Choices

The selection of media language elements and the way they are arranged can have artistic meaning or be part of a structured communication between producer and audience. Sometimes the choices aim to create a very specific meaning and attempt to structure the audience's interpretation.

Imagine you are a news editor and you are running a front page story about Barack Obama visiting the UK and you will be using the picture above.

You have to decide on the caption that will appear below the image in both the print and online versions of the story.

Without a caption the image is open to a number of potential interpretations.

A caption will help the audience understand what is going on. The phrasing of the caption will help shape the reader's interpretation and may influence their views on the event. This is called **anchorage** – where multiple media language elements work together to help fix the meaning and close down alternative interpretations.

Headline 1: Obama outlines the current threats to international peace.

Headline 2: Obama criticises Cameron's economic policy.

Headline 3: Obama said the fish he caught yesterday was 'this big'.

The audience's interpretation of Obama's hand gesture and Cameron's facial expression depends on the anchorage of the surrounding news story. In itself the picture is ambiguous. There is not enough information for the reader to know what is going on so additional information needs to be provided.

Media Language Observation	What was the *producer* trying to achieve? How might the audience interpret the media language choice?
The main image has a limited colour palette – it is largely green and black with brick red acting as a contrast.	The urban scene created here is one that is harsh, cold and unwelcoming. The out of focus background forces the focus on the wall and the woman even though she is relatively small within the image. The colours are muted but the red cuts through. Rather than creating vibrancy though, the rough finish of the wall adds to the generally murky tone of the setting. The depiction of the urban landscape here sets the tone for the crime drama. The audience can tell it is based in a city, but instead of constructing a modern, glamorous and civilised place, this city is slightly run-down, old fashioned and impersonal. The audience may assume that the programme will be cold and stark in tone and be harshly realistic.
The foregrounded mise-en-scène is a brick and metal urban location.	
The background to the mise-en-scène is an out-of-focus overview of a city.	
The actress is framed off-centre and is in long shot. She is posing alone with her arms crossed and her head is lowered. He coat is tightly buttoned up.	The body language in the pose communicates a closed-off personality, sadness and loneliness. This interpretation of the actress's pose is supported by the mise-en-scène. Her size and positioning creates a sense of vulnerability, and so we can assume she is the subject of the tag-line. She was a hunter but becomes the hunted. Her isolation and introspection identifies her as potential prey.
The tag-line uses word play 'when the hunter becomes the hunted'.	
The images in the lower third echo the colour scheme of black, green and brick red.	The use of colour creates the idea that the man in the lower part of the image is predatory. A focus on his eyes makes his gaze an active one. This is juxtaposed with the passive image of the woman, whose gaze is turned downwards. This reinforces her position as a potential victim, and the male as the villain of the narrative. The red band across his eyes creates a sense of his evil, and links back to the Biblical connotations of the title – 'The Fall' from Grace.
The man's eyes are highlighted by the brick red.	
The poster names the programme and the star at the top.	If audiences are to watch the programme, they need to know its name! The star in this case is one that will be recognised by many audience members. Gillian Anderson's most well-known role was as an FBI agent in *The X Files*. This may lead us to assume that (as the hunter) she plays a detective. This anchors the audience's genre expectations.
The poster identifies other crime dramas created by the writer and producer of *The Fall*.	Audience expectations will be made through the associations created by referencing previous crime dramas.

Sample Analysis:
A Poster for The Fall (BBC2)

A poster is created as a promotional tool. This poster needs to raise awareness of the TV programme and create a desire in the audience to watch it. The media language choices used to create the poster are intended to meet these basic functions.
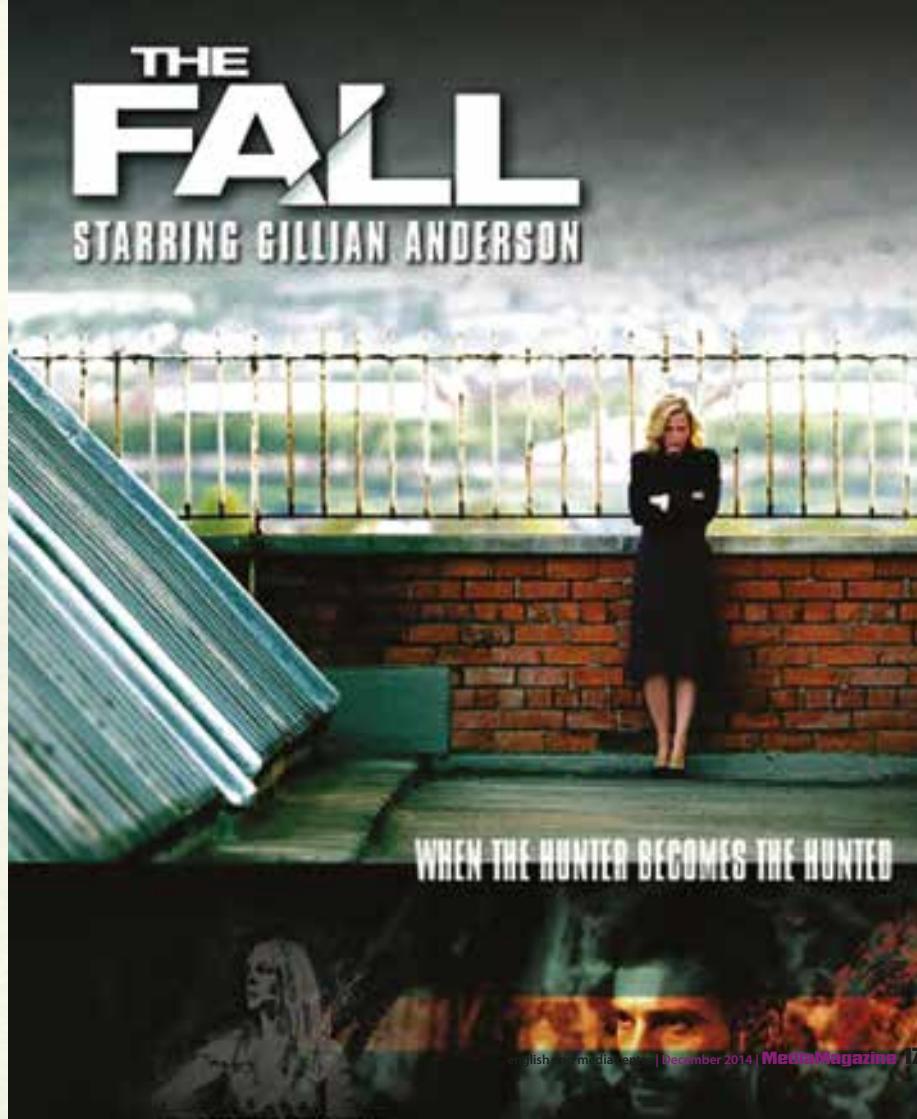
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FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH

THE BBC

PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

The BBC has a unique status as one of the world's most loved and respected broadcasters. But in the UK, public attitudes are complex, confusing and frequently contradictory – and the Beeb stands on the brink of profound and unavoidable change. Why should this matter to us as audiences? Jonathan Nunns explores the issues underpinning the role of the BBC in Britain.

The Birth of Public Service Broadcasting

The British Broadcasting Corporation is viewed by many as one of the great triumphs of British cultural power, a hugely influential institution over ninety years old which has consistently reflected the vision of John Reith, its founder and first Director General. Reith was far-sighted enough to understand the potential power of the infant broadcaster, and instilled from the start its core values and mission statement: to 'inform, educate and entertain'. It was not without reason that Reith put the words in that order, with 'entertainment' intentionally well down the pecking order. The BBC has sought to implement that vision ever since, remaining in-depth enough to inform, academic enough to educate, and entertaining enough to reach out to mass audiences. And these audiences have remained essential to the BBC's existence, since from its inception it has been uniquely funded, not by subscription or advertising, but by a licence fee, in effect a kind of tax on its users.

Establishing Independence

Back in 1922, Reith's pioneering mission statement was deliberately framed to promote information and education above entertainment, with good reason. The idea was that the BBC should remain free of advertising or subscription funding, to allow it to make and distribute programming that would inform and educate, free of the commercial pressures that could otherwise cause it to fixate on providing populist entertainment to

capture the mass audiences demanded by advertisers.

The licence fee was also intended to ensure that the BBC remained free of government interference. Had it become a directly tax-funded branch of the state, it would be vulnerable to direct political pressure to become a mouthpiece for government propaganda. Thus the licence fee allowed the BBC the financial freedom to fulfil its remit, whilst remaining ideologically free from both governmental and commercial pressure. Licence fee funding would be collected directly by the BBC itself, enabling the organisation to fulfil its mission. From this inspiration sprouted the radio broadcaster of 1922 that would gradually grow to become the global provider of television, film and web content that we know today. The broadcaster rapidly came to dominance in the UK; but in more recent years it has become acknowledged as a global

BBC

symbol of British culture, watched, listened to and logged on to the world over. Politicians talk about soft power, in which national arts and culture convey ideology, ethics and outlook. In many places, including those where Britain itself was loved, loathed or viewed with indifference, the BBC was, and still is, valued and trusted for the quality, objectivity and honesty of its coverage.

'Hideously White'

That positive narrative is, however, not the only interpretation of this complex story. The history of the BBC can be viewed in less positive terms. Detractors have criticised the institution as a monolithic force dominating the centre-ground of broadcasting, reflecting the elitist philosophies and prejudices typical of the restricted and self-replicating range of people it recruits. It has been accused of excluding, intentionally or otherwise, those without elite educations, women, and other 'minorities' at all levels. Every Director General (DG) has, after all, been a white, middle class, middle-aged man. Acknowledging this, Greg Dyke, DG in the early 2000s, described his own organisation as 'hideously white'.

Other sections of the media have accused the BBC of parroting the ideological line of the current government, and losing the independence the licence fee was intended to guarantee; whilst governments do not collect the licence fee, they do control the level – a flaw which provides the opportunity to financially influence the BBC after all.

Attacks have also been made on the sums paid (from the public purse) by the BBC to its own senior staff, such as the ex-Deputy DG Mark Byford, whose exit package amounted to nearly a million pounds, and the five year contract given to the presenter Jonathan Ross, worth approximately eighteen million pounds. Perhaps the most damaging claims appeared in competing media, arguing that ignorance and incompetence had led the BBC to nurture the celebrity of serial abusers such as Jimmy Savile, Rolf Harris and Stuart Hall. The BBC was attacked for its long-term failure to identify and remove these men, and to confront its own failings.

Other areas of the media have also frequently included criticism that the BBC promotes liberal leftist values, despite allegations that the BBC simply features propaganda for whichever political party is in power. Further critiques paint the BBC as a complacent giant that lines the pockets of its executives.

The Ambitions of the BBC are 'Chilling' (James Murdoch, 2009)

Much of the rest of the British mass media, particularly those which operate in the cut-and-thrust commercial world, see the BBC as an unfair, anti-competitive institution which uses public money to damage their own commercial interests. Newspapers, for instance, whose physical sales are in headlong decline, have had little success in attempting to charge for web content, due in large part to the success of BBC News Online, which is free at the point of use. Independent TV production companies have faced massive additional competition in the form of the BBC's most popular in-house content such as *Strictly Come Dancing* (BBC, 2007-present), *EastEnders* (BBC, 1985-present) and *Dr Who* (BBC, 1963-present). Subscription platforms such as Sky loathe the publicly-funded competition and, as they see it, the built-in advantages granted to the BBC. All of these groups would like to see the BBC much reduced in the scope and scale of its activities, or stripped of its funding, broken up and sold off, leaving perhaps only a rump of low-cost services at the periphery of

B B C

mainstream programming, as with The Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) in the USA.

All of these negative critiques share the belief that the BBC as it is now is unsustainable. This is not due to commercial competition or scandal. The threat to the BBC is the mechanism that has most sustained it: the TV licence fee.

Analogue Funding for a Digital Age

Two issues are clear. Firstly, the TV licence fee was set up to cover all the BBC's services. That was fine whilst people got their BBC via TV and radio; however, in the online age, increasing numbers of people access their content via smart phones and tablets. The BBC's own catch-up service the iPlayer makes it possible to access BBC TV, radio and online content on demand after initial transmission, without needing to pay for a TV licence. And as increasing numbers access content online, the argument for a TV licence fee which is universally paid in order to provide a universal service is seriously undermined, both in theory and in practice.

The second problem inherent in the structure of the BBC is the scope for political pressure to be applied. Current and previous governments were closely allied to Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation – until the deep embarrassment of *The News of the World* phone hacking scandal in 2011. Governments unsympathetic to the BBC may not be directly able to intervene in its content, but their indirect power is enormous. The government sets the level of the licence fee, which has been frozen since 2010, meaning that the BBC has already suffered a long-term decline in income as inflation reduces the value of the licence fee year on year. The BBC's charter is due for renewal in 2016, and there is every likelihood that the current situation will become wholly unsustainable in the near future. The BBC must either follow the government's wishes, or be starved of funds and be forced, inch by inch, into a narrower role and a cultural backwater.

So What of the Future?

One of the great quotes about the BBC was that it made 'the good popular and the popular good' (Sir Huw Wheldon). Popular hits, such as *Strictly Come Dancing* and *Doctor Who* have been matched by cultural successes such as *Walking with Dinosaurs* (BBC 1999) *Horizon* (BBC, 1964-present) and *Imagine*, (BBC, 2003-present) – expensive, culturally significant gambles unlikely to be made under a directly commercial funding regime. Without the need to pay more than the yearly licence, both popular culture and 'high' culture have been made accessible to people without the funds for a visit to The Royal Opera House, West End Theatre, the World Cup or the

Olympics. That may be about to end.

It is probably inevitable that the BBC's services, as they are increasingly accessed online, will have to be encrypted and put behind a pay-wall, directly available only to licence fee payers/subscribers. This may in turn result in the end of the universal BBC, free to make the good as well as the popular, creating a funding model closer to that of Virgin and Sky. Here subscribers would buy into the elements of the BBC that they wanted, whilst not buying services they feel they do not need. The end of a universal service could mean the end of the 'public service' ethos which has defined the BBC. Exposing the BBC fully to the commercial market could produce a broadcasting environment more like that of the USA, where commercial pressure has led to the predominance of cheaply-made populist content at the expense of riskier and more expensive cultural

content which can (with notable exceptions such as HBO products) less reliably be expected to make back its investment. Hence the renowned documentaries of the BBC Natural History Unit, the BBC's global news services and its arts content could be the unintended victims of the profound upheaval likely to come within the next few years. The question is this: can the BBC's guiding principles be preserved?

The loss of 'fat-cat' salaries and financial waste would help the BBC to win back public trust after the self-inflicted wounds of recent scandals. What is at risk is what the BBC has done well. Nations that have a broadcast environment without a public service tradition have typically offered advertising-funded populism to the masses, with quality content safely locked behind pay-walls for those who can afford it (see HBO and *Game of Thrones* et al) or, in some countries, simply not made at all. The challenge for the BBC, as a key provider and ambassador for British culture, is to maintain its unique strengths, whilst evolving to meet the irresistible technological and financial challenges of the future. A tough

and perhaps impossible challenge in anybody's language, even the Received Pronunciation of the BBC.

Postscript: Top Post or Poisoned Chalice?

At the time of writing, Rona Fairhead, ex of the *Financial Times*, has just been named as the first female Chair of the BBC Trust (the body that oversees the BBC). That this senior post had to be offered, over a period of months, to several highly influential people (including the Olympics 2012 supremo Sebastian Coe), all of whom turned it down, speaks volumes about the challenges the BBC is about to face.

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

Follow it up.

Higgins, Charlotte The BBC Report, *The Guardian* http://www. theguardian.com/media/series/the-bbc-report (8/9/14)

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DOING MICRO-ANALYSIS: THE USE OF CINEMATOGRAPHY, SOUND AND EDITING IN APOCALYPSE NOW

Mark Ramey talks you through an eloquent analysis of one of the most powerful film openings of all time, and provides a complete master class in how to structure the Film Studies AS micro-analysis coursework task.

The 1500-word micro-analysis is probably the first piece of written coursework you will undertake as a WJEC AS Film student, and therefore may present you with your first stumbling block. However, there should be nothing to fear, especially if you're an engaged film fan, as the focus is on the technical use of cinematic devices and their impact on the spectator. In other words, how does the performance, cinematography, editing and sound in a film make me scream or laugh or cheer the protagonist on?

Before starting the micro-analysis you need to do a minimum of three things:

1. **Know your techniques well** – and know why they are used in films. For example, low-key, high-contrast lighting is a generic feature of many horror films because it creates a feeling of mystery and uncertainty for the spectator.

2. **Focus on one or two micro-features.**

3. **Choose an appropriate and manageable scene** (generally 5 minutes long) rich with complex micro-features.

What follows then is an attempt to explore the opening of the classic

Vietnam War film *Apocalypse Now* (Coppola, USA, 1979), focusing on an admittedly ambitious three micro-features – cinematography, sound and editing.

The Context of the Film – Production and Reception

Apocalypse Now is a Hollywood film set during the Vietnam War. It is shot from the perspective of an American marine, Captain Willard (Martin Sheen) and concerns his secret mission to execute a rogue American Colonel, Kurtz (Marlon Brando), who has formed his own army deep in the jungle of neighbouring Cambodia. It was directed by Francis Ford Coppola, one of the great directors of contemporary American cinema, and represents one of his finest achievements: winning the Palme d'Or at Cannes, and two Oscars – one for sound and the other for cinematography.

The Micro-features to be Analysed

'Cinematography' is one of the basic elements of film language, consisting of

framing, lighting, camera movement and focus. 'Sound' represents the recording, remixing and editing of both diegetic and non-diegetic sound. 'Editing' concerns the organisation and ordering of shots.

The Opening Sequence in Context

The scene I will analyse is the film's opening sequence, lasting 7 minutes and 30 seconds. In this scene we witness Willard's mental collapse as he awaits his next mission in a hotel room in Saigon. By the end of the sequence we are aware that Willard is depressed, battle-weary and haunted by images of jungle warfare.

Sound Design

The following three paragraphs analyse sound design, and it is here – with analysis – that the marks are found for a really strong response. A cohesive feature of the sound design in this sequence is the creation of a dream-like soundscape by merging diegetic and non-diegetic sounds that reflect the haunted mind of Willard. Walter Murch and his Oscar-wining sound team have merged fantasy with reality by recreating the hypnotic sound effects of helicopter engines and blades on synthesisers. In his hotel bedroom, Willard's mind is never free from the helicopters buzzing over Saigon and the whirring ceiling-fan.

Another effect in this opening sequence is the use of a non-diegetic musical soundtrack. The music is by the famous counter-culture 60s American rock group, The Doors. The music has a dream-like quality which perfectly matches the film's visuals. Crisp reverberating cymbals, rhythmic drums and a sultry vocal delivery by front-man Jim Morrison create a sense of nightmare. The lyrics also perfectly express key visual elements in the sequence as in the opening

extreme long shot (ELS) of the jungle, which erupts into explosive fire at exactly the same time as the lyric, 'This is the end!'

One final sound treatment is that of Willard's non-diegetic voiceover which gives us an exclusive insight into his thinking, and complements the subjective cinematography. Sheen is deadpan. His subsequent mental collapse is not hinted at in the voiceover in terms of either tone or pacing, but rather in his cold emotionless delivery:

At home I never said a word to my wife other than 'Yes' to a divorce.

Editing

The editing in this sequence has a gentle pace using slow cross-dissolves between only a few master shots. There are a series of cuts towards the end of the sequence when Willard is drunkenly moving about his hotel room; but the transitions between the opening fade from black and the final fade to black that ends the sequence are largely slow cross-dissolves. An effect of this is that images overlap and share screen-time, thus creating links in terms of narrative and character. Once again, as with the sound design, there is a merging between the real and the imagined. The editing manoeuvres us into the dream-filled world of Willard's nightmares, as we will see in the section on cinematography that follows.

Cinematography

The cinematography in this sequence perfectly matches the editing style and sound design. As the intention throughout this sequence is to create a dreamy conflation between reality and fantasy, there is little obvious camera movement and a tendency to hold the shot in a variety of long takes.

The opening shot is an Extreme Long Shot (ELS) of a pristine jungle. The camera is static and the take long. The result of this is that we have the opportunity to study a tropical paradise of western fantasy – palm trees under a hot sun. The eerie diegetic sound of the helicopters and then the dream-like opening bars of the music suggest a possible disruption to this scene. Unfocused helicopters in the foreground move across the frame, dust swirls over the scene and then the jungle surprisingly explodes into flame. The camera now pans gently from left to right to illustrate the space that has been disrupted by this cataclysmic event, and opens up the cinematic frame, adding to our perception of the realism of the scene.

There follows a meaning-rich slow dissolve with Willard shot in an upside-down big close-up (BCU) in the left hand portion of the frame. Using asymmetrical framing in this way allows for the gradual emergence into the right-hand side of the frame of a variety of images: the hotel fan lying above the dreaming Willard in a point-of-view shot (POV); the helicopters apparently destroying the jungle; an upright BCU of a Buddhist statue depicting the serene face of the Buddha. Thus we see into Willard's mind; and so the cinematography in this section of the sequence can be said to be subjective.

This is a complex cross-dissolve that subtly conveys to the spectator the haunting madness and brutalising destruction of war through its cinematography and editing.

At one point the entire frame is symmetrical in that an upside-down, haunted Willard in BCU is balanced across a war filled jungle by the right-way-up serene Buddha. The implication is clear here: war is an abomination, and the soldier's world is literally the wrong-way round. The peace-loving enlightened religion of the Far East can show us war-mongering Westerners the way.

The lighting and use of colour here is significant. The BCU of Willard is lit using a strong key-light from one side, but no fill-light from the other side, thus creating an enigmatic effect: one side lit, one side in darkness. The same light design is used on the mysterious Buddha statue reflecting the stereotypically alien and inscrutable East.

As the music reaches a drum-filled pounding crescendo the faces disappear and we are back in the ELS of the now destroyed jungle, grey smoke dominating the frame as two out-of-focus helicopters move symmetrically from left to right and right to left across the frame. This is 'hell', and the camera once more slowly and unflinchingly pans left to right to show us the full horrors of war.

We then have another slow dissolve into a high-angle close-up (CU) of

Willard lying on a bed with crisp white sheets; the camera circular pans above him, reflecting his powerlessness and foreshadowing the rotation of the fan blades. Cross-dissolving one shot on another (a composite) we see the helicopters moving across the frame from left to right; this on-screen movement is then matched into a left to right pan as the scene cross-dissolves into an extreme close-up (ECU) of a number of artefacts resting on Willard's bedside table and eventually revealing in CU a sinister service revolver tucked under a white pillow. Clearly Willard finds it hard to relax even while on R-and-R. The lyrics of the accompanying music emphasise Willard's collapse: 'Lost in a romance, wilderness of pain.'

The next significant shot occurs when Willard's eyes open (in the previous bed scene they were shut) and we have our first cut to a POV shot of the fan above Willard's bed. The lighting is low-key and the fan blades are ominous and shadowy like the helicopter blades he remembers from the war-zone.

The POV shot continues, tilting down as Willard wakes from his nightmares and looks across his hotel room to a blind-encased window through which bright natural sunlight is pouring. Willard leaves his bed and goes to look outside. It is at this point that the helicopter sounds of his dreams become a reality as overhead a real helicopter can be heard disappearing into the distance.

At the CU of the blinds we see Willard's fingers part the slats and peer outside into a deep-focus, harshly illuminated, ELS of the busy streets of Saigon, capital city of South Vietnam. Diegetic street-sounds fade-up gently to emphasise the emerging reality of the scene and a cut now shows us a BCU side-profile of Willard looking though the slats. Here the film's opening dialogue is delivered as a subjective thought: 'Saigon – shit! I'm still only in Saigon!' Clearly Willard has become confused: is he in the jungle or is the jungle in him? As he says, 'Every time I think I am going to wake up back in the jungle.' This man is disjointed – out of time and space.

The film then cuts back to an eye-level, low-key CU of Willard staring vacantly. We now witness a series of shots depicting Willard's despair and mental collapse. Through his dead-pan voiceover we learn that he has agreed to divorce his wife and has been on at least one tour of duty. In one shocking MCU we see Willard coolly burn a hole in his wife's photo with a cigarette.

Subsequent scenes are edited with more pace, using cuts as well as slow cross-

dissolves. We see Willard drinking alcohol carelessly in MCU, topless, unshaven and sweaty. As the music rises to a manic crescendo of bestial shouts and grunts, Willard becomes violently drunk and deranged.

The scene ends with Willard in long shot (LS) punching a full-length dress-mirror and cutting his hand. We then cut to Willard falling over the bedclothes leaving a trail of blood on the white sheets. He collapses into a low-level LS positioned centrally in the frame so we can witness his distress as he smears the blood from his hand onto his face and weeps uncontrollably: a compelling performance by method actor Sheen. The music fades out and the spectator, along with Willard, slips into unconsciousness by fading to black.

Conclusion

This micro-analysis has shown that *Apocalypse Now* is a rich cinematic text that impacts powerfully on the spectator through its use of cinematography, sound and editing. We witness objectively the beautifully filmed horrors of warfare, and the subjectively filmed personal traumas of a battle-weary soldier. Thus we are perfectly set-up to follow Willard on his surreal search for both Kurtz and his own peace of mind through a war-torn Vietnam.

Mark Ramey teaches Film and Media at Richard Collyer's College, Horsham, West Sussex.

Lionsgate – can Katniss Everdeen save it?

How can the producers of one of the biggest and most lucrative film franchises this century be at risk of financial meltdown? Nick Lacey investigates the complex economics of the film industry with a case study on Lionsgate.

In 2013 the biggest grossing movie in North America (which includes Canada) was *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire*, which took $425m at the box office. It was a typical Hollywood product, featuring a star, Jennifer Lawrence,

a conventional narrative, impressive special effects and an eye-catching production design.

All that is true, except for one thing: it wasn't strictly a Hollywood film. It was produced by the 'mini-major' Lionsgate, a Canadian-American company that's

trying to break Hollywood's domination of blockbuster movies.

In 2012 Lionsgate was the 5th top distributor (based on box office gross) in North America, putting it ahead of Hollywood major studios 20th Century Fox and Paramount Pictures. The following year it slipped one place, but was still ahead of Paramount. Does this mean we have a seventh major studio to consider? At the end of the 2014 summer I can write confidently that the next instalment of Lionsgate's science

The Walt Disney Studios	Parks and Resorts	Disney Consumer Products	Media Networks	Disney Interactive
• Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures • Disney Music Group • Marvel Studios • Touchstone Pictures • Disney nature • Walt Disney Animation Studios • Pixar • Disney Theatrical Group	• Disneylands in Florida, California, Paris, Hong Kong and Shanghai • Cruise club • Vacation club • Alani resort • Adventures • Imagineering	• Disney Consumer Products • Disney Publishing Worldwide • Disney Stores	• Disney ABC Television Group • ESPN • ABC Entertainment Group • ABC News • ABC Owned Television Stations • ABC Family • Disney Channels Worldwide	Disney Interactive focusing on the internet, mobile content, social media and video games.

fiction franchise, *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay Part 1*, will be a 'smash hit'. So why do Lionsgate investors have something to worry about?

The Lionsgate Story

Lionsgate began in 1997 as a Canadian distribution company based in Vancouver and, according to the-numbers.com, has distributed 261 films since. Only 10 of these have exceeded $100m at the North American box office, the cut-off point for a film having 'blockbuster' status. Like the major studios, Lionsgate doesn't actually produce many films as most of its 'slate' (the films it distributes) are 'pick ups' (films made by other companies).

Unlike the major studios, Lionsgate isn't part of a large media conglomerate.

For example The Walt Disney Company has five divisions that include a record label, television stations, videogames as well as theme parks.

The Walt Disney Company

Because Disney owns companies in different media it can obviously benefit from synergy. For example, it can release the film soundtrack to, and a novelisation of, its summer
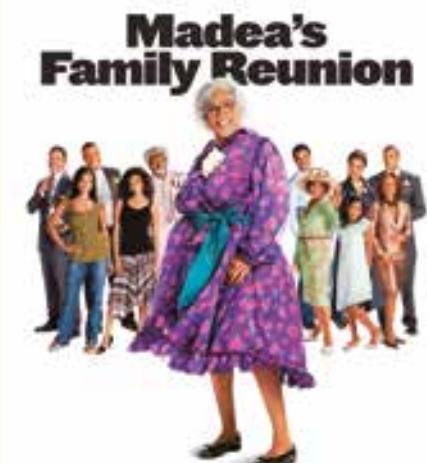
hit *Maleficent* on Walt Disney Records and Disney Press respectively. Synergy allows the company to cross-promote its products, and exploit its properties in different media.

Although Lionsgate has four divisions, which include both the television and music industries, and even though it produces television programmes, such as *Orange is the New Black* for Netflix, and part-owns nine cable television channels, some of which do play the company's films and television programmes, it is nevertheless a small company. In terms of size it cannot compare with established Hollywood. For example Walt Disney's market capitalisation (at 25.08.14, calculated on number of shares x share price) was $155.33bn compared to Lionsgate's $4.49bn. Even Sony, which has been struggling for a number of years, had a capitalisation five times that. So though Lionsgate has been hugely successful with *The Hunger Games* franchise, it is embarking on a high-risk strategy in trying to compete with
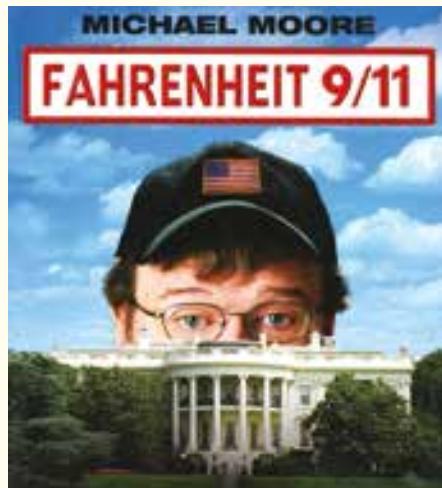
Hollywood head-on because it is *not* part of a major media conglomerate.

In early 2012 Lionsgate bought the independent producer Summit Entertainment, and so inherited the *Twilight* franchise. Until then it had only released one $100m-plus film, *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004), a documentary directed by Michael Moore that (unsuccessfully) attempted to prevent George W. Bush being re-elected to the Presidency that year. That film had a budget of about $6m*. This amount is typical for Lionsgate because, as an independent, it can't afford the risk of making big budget movies – one flop could spell disaster. To take one example: Warner Bros. spent around $100m producing *The Adventures of Pluto Nash* (2002), which only took just over $7m worldwide at the box office. If Warners' film division hadn't been part of AOL Time Warner that sort of return on investment could have spelt bankruptcy.

Before buying Summit, Lionsgate appeared to be content to distribute low-budget films that, if popular, became

extremely profitable, such as the *Saw* franchise (2002-), the first of which cost a mere $1.2m to produce. It also distributes the highly successful Tyler Perry films such as *Madea's Family Reunion* (2006), which took $63m in North America from a $10m production budget (but only $51,000 internationally!). Tyler Perry's films are popular with African-Americans, hence their particular success in North America.

Despite this success with low-budget films, Lionsgate had not made a profit for five years when the first of *The Hunger Games* films was released. Its response to this lack of profitability has been to compete with the major studios; indeed, Lionsgate is often referred to as 'a mini major'. As Anita Elberse (2013) has pointed out, the blockbuster strategy is the only one that is economically viable in the film industry at the moment; it originated when Alan Horn, at Warner Bros.:

chose to single out four or five so-called tent-pole or event films—those thought to have the broadest appeal—among its annual output of around twenty-five movies, and support those picks with a disproportionately large chunk of its total production and marketing budget.

Elberse, 2013

These 'tent-pole' films are invariably either franchises, remakes or adaptations (possibly all three) such as *Maleficent*, based on *Sleeping Beauty* (1959). In the last three years (up to the end of August 2014) only seven films in the Top Tens were original properties. Unless you're Disney and own Marvel Studios, one of the most difficult aspects of this tent-pole strategy is kickstarting a franchise; so Lionsgate took a massive risk with *The Hunger Games*:

Fewer than 500,000 copies of the first *The Hunger Games* book had sold in 2009 when Lionsgate reportedly paid author Suzanne Collins $200,000 for the rights to the trilogy. By the time Jennifer

Lawrence was being fitted for her costume, nearly 10 million copies of the series were in print. Lionsgate increased *The Hunger Games'* budget to $80 million, pruning an already slim budget for other films and looking for sellable assets. The company was burdened by debt… But by the end of 2011, Lionsgate had transformed from a hit-or-miss indie studio to the undervalued owner of Hollywood's next blockbuster franchise.

Lee, 2012

That risk paid off; but other films of this 'blockbuster strategy' have floundered. The attempt to launch an *Ender's Game* (2013) franchise looks to have failed, as the first film took only $89m worldwide on a production budget of $110m. It's highly likely that *The Legend of Hercules* (2014) would have produced sequels if the $70m-budgeted film had grossed more than a measly $60m worldwide.

However, the *Divergent* (2014) franchise might be able to fill the gap, at least in part, that will be left when *The Hunger Games* series comes to an end next year. It took $228m worldwide from an $85m budget, and the next in the series, *Insurgent*, is due in 2015. Lionsgate has stated it wants to increase the amount of money it makes from television programmes; but, at the time of writing, the amount of revenue that television brings in is only a small proportion of the total, and it remains reliant on its film division.

There are reports that *The Hunger Games* will feature in a theme park (unlike Disney and Universal, Lionsgate doesn't yet own one) and a range of jewellery based on the film is available. However the soundtrack is distributed on Island/Universal (owned by a large media conglomerate) and though Lionsgate will get some of the revenue, it has to share it with what are in effect its competitors.

At the moment Lionsgate is 'punching above its weight'. But there's a possibility that the commercial size of its Hollywood competitors will crush it sooner rather than later. Even Katniss Everdeen herself may not be able to save it.

Nick Lacey teaches Film and Media Studies, is the author of several Media and Film Studies textbooks, and is a freelance writer.

*Note on budgets and box office:
The source of the budgets are imdb.com and the-numbers.com. However, they are invariably 'estimated' budgets, as film companies reserve the right to be creatively accountable, and don't publish film costs. In addition, the budgets only estimate production costs; prints + advertising add, on average, another 50% to the total. The box office figure refers only to what is taken in cinemas. Before the producers see any of the takings, the exhibitor and distributor take their 'cut' (all the major studios distribute their own films in North America). After their run in cinemas, films can make money on a variety of other platforms, such as DVD and subscription television.

Follow it up

Elberse, A. 2013. *Blockbusters: Why Big Hits – and Big Risks – are the Future of the Entertainment Business*.

Lee, C. 2012. 'Lionsgate Has a Hit with '*Hunger Games*.' Can It Turn a Profit?', *Newsweek*, 2nd April, available at: http://www.newsweek.com/lionsgate-has-hit-hunger-games-can-it-turn-profit-63989, accessed August 2014.

REPRESENTING PLACE

Andrew McCallum compares the representation and role of the city in two groundbreaking TV drama series for HBO, both written by David Simon.

versions of the city in The Wire and Treme

The received wisdom about writer-producer David Simon's much-lauded TV drama shows, *The Wire* and *Treme*, is that both are as much about the cities in which they take place as about their characters. The former, set in Baltimore on the East Coast of the United States, just north of Washington D.C., explores the city's post-industrial decline against a back-drop of ongoing conflict between police and drug gangs. The latter, situated in New Orleans over the three years following Hurricane Katrina's devastation of the city in 2005, chronicles the city's reconstruction while following the lives of a diverse group of its inhabitants.

It is impossible to watch either without developing a strong sense of location. However, I would argue that only *Treme* is really about a specific city, while *The Wire* uses Baltimore as a back-drop for an exploration of civic decay and corruption in general. In other words, *Treme* could *only* be situated in New Orleans, while *The Wire* could be set just as effectively in several other American cities. This, I would like to suggest, is carefully established in the opening credits to both shows.

The Wire: a Cop Show Featuring An(y) American City in Decline

Each of *The Wire*'s five series focuses on one of Baltimore's key institutions:

the police force, the port, City Hall, education and the press. All are shown as corrupt and dysfunctional, so reflecting poorly on the Baltimore of the real world. David Simon acknowledges this when he writes by way of an apology that 'we put our town's shit in the street' in an act of 'premeditated trespass'. *The Wire*, however, while set in Baltimore and portraying problems faced by a city identifiable as Baltimore, is not a drama that is especially *about* the city. Simon also recognises this when explaining that the representation can effectively be extended to take in any number of cities:

By choosing a real city, we declare that the economic forces, the political dynamic, the class, cultural and racial boundaries are all that much more real, that they do exist in Baltimore and, therefore, they exist elsewhere in urban America.

Baltimore, it seems, has been selected not because it is more worthy of portrayal than other cities, but because of convenience (it is where Simon lived and worked as a journalist). It is a template for all such cities. This becomes apparent when considering how representation of location in the show's opening credits plays down the specifics of geography, instead giving the impression that viewers could be watching any number of places.

Over a 90-second sequence containing around 70 fast-cut edits, only two brief shots actually identify the city (something that holds for each series, even though the credits change each time). One is a long shot of the business district, which is not particularly distinctive and so would only be known to someone already familiar with the city, the other a close-up of a Baltimore police badge. The latter clearly does establish location, but it is perhaps more noteworthy as a signifier of the show's genre as of its setting. *The Wire*, for all its in-depth social commentary, is, at heart, a cop show. And cop shows are nearly always set in actual places. (Rather than compile a list for you, I defy you to think of one that isn't.) Consequently many of the shots switch between ones of cops and ones of drug-dealers. That we are watching a crime show is further established by the

use of grainy film stock and mocked-up CCTV footage. Extreme close-ups feature so often that perspective on a broad geographical location becomes lost. Baltimore is pushed to one side and the show becomes a personal look at the lives of those involved in a battle between the powerful and the powerless, a conflict vividly represented by a shot of a stone cracking the lens of a surveillance camera.

Treme: a Drama Putting a City Back Together

Treme could only be about New Orleans, given that it is a dramatised representation of events in the city in the years immediately following Hurricane Katrina. The opening credits quickly establish this by showing a satellite shot of a colossal weather system, which cuts to an interior shot of storm waters flooding a house, followed by a long shot of a residential district under water. The location is only

recognisable, however, because of the huge political and cultural significance of the hurricane itself: it received mass global media coverage, much of it focused on the lack of a coordinated response from the authorities, which was seen as indicative of their

general disregard for the poor, black communities that bore the brunt of the storm damage.

As in *The Wire*, there are no shots of easily identifiable public buildings. This need not have been the case. One building, the Superdome, home to the American football team New Orleans

Saints, is conspicuously absent from the credits, despite gaining global recognition as a key feature of news coverage after the storm, when it housed up to 40,000 displaced city residents.

In this instance, however, the lack of clearly identifiable landmarks is not an attempt to offer New Orleans as a representation of all US cities in decline. Instead, it suggests an attempt to tell particular stories about the city, without any pretensions to telling the whole story. Specifically, the series focuses on what Simon calls 'the role of culture in restoring and sustaining New Orleans'. This means that the characters chosen are ones 'heavily weighted to culture bearers, to those who supported, patronized or contended with culture bearers'.

This is made clear in the credits (see above left) by the use of real-life footage of various marching bands and dancers. These do tie the show firmly to place, as the style of music and dancing featured is most associated with New Orleans, and its annual Mardi Gras festival. Many of the shots are close-ups of original footage from before the storm, emphasised by the grainy film-stock. Intercut with shots of damage caused by the storm, they suggest that the show will draw on the city's heritage, using this to put it back together. Where *The Wire* was a critique of the collapse of institutions

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across the whole of the United States, this would appear to be about the possibility of piecing back together individual lives, and of culture bringing meaning to those lives even in the face of indifference from official bodies.

The most significant shots in the opening credits, however, are not of people, but of the mildewed walls of the city's destroyed housing stock. Displaying the names of the cast members against these walls suggests that the show is intent on reinserting the inhabitants of New Orleans back into the very fabric of the city. It also suggests that people are inseparable from these houses. This gives the drama a political angle, which is followed in several storylines portraying the difficulties people had in preventing the authorities tearing down their houses – even though they were easily reparable – in order to manipulate the social groups able to return to live in the city.

Representation: Delving Deep

The Wire has become inseparable in public consciousness from Baltimore. Many British viewers perhaps only know of the city through its representation in the award-winning

series. In studying representation in moving-image media, however, it is always worth questioning the literal, to see what alternative version of events might be offered by choices made by all those involved in a production. In this case, they suggest a desire not to draw too much attention to the city itself, so that it can stand for a bigger, national story. The opposite is the case with *Treme*. But here, too, it is not good enough to state simply that it offers a portrayal of the city of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. What kind of portrayal? And whose version of New Orleans? These are important questions to ask because their answers say lots about the potential impact of a drama on individual viewers and on an audience as a whole.

Andrew McCallum is Co-Director of the English and Media Centre.

Follow it up

'HBO's *Treme* creator David Simon explains it all for you' at http://www.nola.com/treme-hbo/index.ssf/2010/04/hbos_treme_creator_david_simon.html

'David Simon on what HBO's '*Treme*' meant to him and what he hopes it meant to New Orleanians' at http://www.nola.com/treme-hbo/index.ssf/2013/12/david_simon_on_what_hbos_treme.html

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Simon

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Creativity and Genre in TV Crime Drama, Nick Lacey, *MediaMag* 33

SILENCE IN COURT

JUDGE JUDY IS IN SESSION...

Harry Cunningham finds out why one of his favourite TV shows, *Judge Judy,* is the most successful daytime programme in America.

'I am a truth machine sir… I eat liars up for breakfast.'

'Do you know what my father used to say to me? Don't pee on my leg and tell me it's raining.'

'Don't try to teach a pig to sing, it doesn't work and it annoys the pig.'

This is just a taste of the sort of thing you will hear if you dare to enter the lion's den: the simulated reality courtroom of Judge Judith Sheindlin, which sits for one hour every day on ITV3. Whether it's a simple dispute about rent, or elaborate fraudsters defending the most shocking behaviour, Sheindlin hears it all on her extraordinary show. But in the UK, *Judge Judy* has made little impact: it is scheduled at 9.25am on ITV3, where it has to compete with homegrown reality shows like *The Jeremy Kyle Show* on ITV1 and Channel 5's flagship morning chat show *The Wright Stuff*.

Yet since its inception in 1996, *Judge Judy* has exceeded all expectations to become the number 1 US daytime show, even beating *The Oprah Winfrey Show* to the top spot. No other courtroom show comes close to beating it, and *Judge Judy* has outlived many of its direct rivals. So what is it about it that is so successful? Is it Sheindlin's personality and the sharp, witty and decisive way in which she delivers justice? Is it the sheer variety of guests that comes before her? Or is Sheindlin's show significantly less staged than similar formats, thus making it feel more real to the viewer?

Context

First let's get a bit of background on the show and how the American television industry works. In Britain the vast majority of channels are broadcast to the entire country and are almost always sold or commissioned from a production company to a channel on an exclusive basis. A show, therefore, becomes associated with a particular channel: it would be unthinkable for *EastEnders* to be broadcast anywhere else than BBC One, or for *The IT Crowd* to have been shown on ITV2 rather than on Channel 4. Only on very rare occasions, or years after the original broadcast, are the rights sold to a rival channel. For instance Pick TV on Freeview Channel 11 has recently starting showing old episodes of *The Bill* from the 1980s and 90s; but the show was decommissioned in 2010 and so it is not a true syndication as the show is not being shown simultaneously on more than one channel. Moreover, it seems unlikely that BSkyB, who own Pick TV, would be awarded the rights to show more recent episodes of *The Bill* in the middle of the day, given the cost of buying them.

The USA, however, has different channels for different states, and only a few networks broadcast to the entire nation. As a result a show must be sold to, and succeed on, many different TV channels for it to be deemed a success. *Judge Judy* first aired on local Californian channel KCAL-TV in September 1996, but has now grown to such an extent that CBS, which owns KCAL, recently commissioned a prime time (between 7pm and 10.30pm) one-hour special. This is completely unheard of for a courtroom show – or

indeed for any daytime show.

One of the reasons for this is *Judge Judy*'s consistently high ratings. Under the Neilson system – a complex method of rating viewing figures through monitoring audience reactions devised by marketing executive Arthur Neilson in the 1930s – a programme receives a ranking from 0.0 to 10.9. In its first season *Judge Judy* scored 1.5. Such a score was an average ranking for a programme in that slot. But by the end of its first season, that had increased to 2.1 and by the end of its second run in 1997-8 it had doubled again to 4.3. By the end of 2011, the show was regularly claiming ratings of 7.0, an unprecedented score. This translated as an average of 9.6 million daily viewers, (good in the UK, but unheard of in the more fragmented US schedules) – something that Sheindlin herself often refers to during the show:

'I'd like 10 million people to hear that you've done something stupid!'

she barks at one litigant.

How Real is Judge Judy?

Many people have argued that one of the reasons *Judge Judy* is so successful is because it comes across as a lot less staged than similar shows such as *The People's Court* and the now-axed *Judge Joe Brown*.

Certainly the cases last as long as they need to: there is no set format. Sometimes it takes half an hour (an entire show) for Sheindlin to rule; but other times justice is served in a matter of minutes. In one case involving a woman suing two men for stealing her wallet Sheindlin concluded her proceedings in less than thirty seconds. As she questioned the woman about what was in her wallet, the two men admitted to Sheindlin that 'there was no earpiece in [the woman's] wallet', leading her to erupt in a fit of giggles, branding them 'dumb and dumber' before ruling in favour of the woman.

But what of the court itself? Surely a mere TV company cannot set up its own court, as the voiceover in the opening titles proclaims? It is true that in a legal sense *Judge Judy* is not a real court but in many areas it still carries out all of the functions of a court in all but name. This is because all participants must sign a legally-binding contract which prevents them from having their case heard elsewhere once Sheindlin has ruled. It also ensures that both the plaintiff and the defendant agree to what Sheindlin says. If property is to be taken from a defendant and returned to the plaintiff, then it will be returned under the supervision of a police officer or marshal; if a person is awarded damages, then they will be compensated to the amount stipulated. Where one could argue the programme is slightly misleading,

however, is in Sheindlin's suggestion that she is able to recover money from a person. For purposes of convenience, it is the production company Big Ticket Entertainment that pays out (participants can be awarded up to $5,000) from the show's budget, and not the plaintiff or the defendant, even if Sheindlin says, as she often does, that 'you owe them the money'. Guests are also paid an appearance fee and expenses, so they have nothing, apart from their reputation, to lose; whilst a real civil court would require the litigant to pay for a solicitor.

What of Sheindlin herself then? Seeing just how televisual her unashamedly abrasive, witty and controversial style is, it would be easy to assume that *Judge Judy* is simply an actress with no legal background, playing up to the cameras on instructions from her producers. But this could not be further from the truth.

Sheindlin, a real family court judge in New York for 25 years, initially captured the attention of the producers when she was the subject of the documentary series *60 Minutes*. Here she can be seen ripping into lawyers and caseworkers who were holding up proceedings in a real court. Indeed in an interview with David Bauder in *The Huffington Post* she recalled how 'she dumped lengthy motions written by expensive lawyers in the trash' when she was still a judge in New York, 'and told them if they didn't reach a settlement, she would tell their clients the lawyers wanted to bleed them financially.' Even her bailiff, Petri Hawkins-Byrd, who has stood by her side for every single episode, solemnly calling the show to order, was brought over from New York. Having worked as Sheindlin's bailiff in her real court, she insisted on his appointment, rather than looking for an actor to fill the slot.

'This is *My* Play Pen!'

Given all of this then it is very clear that one, if not the greatest appeal, of *Judge Judy* is Sheindlin herself. In her own words she is an undiscriminating abuser: she will lay into anyone she thinks is obstructing the course of justice, and she is not afraid to say things as they are. It doesn't matter who comes before her: even when she was called to arbitrate a case involving celebrity rockstar John Lydon (aka Johnny Rotten of the Sex Pistols) she didn't hesitate to tick him

off for being disrespectful, or to tell him she thought he was part of a 'strange business where everyone dresses funny, does their hair funny...'

In her essay, "Take Responsibility for yourself' *Judge Judy* and the Neoliberal citizen', Laurie Ouellette describes how 'the courtroom subgenre of reality television exemplifies a 'Neo-Liberal' form of governance – a do-it-yourself culture.' In short, shows like *Judge Judy* appear to empower people: they seem to suggest that individuals have a duty to take control of their own lives and their actions, for if they don't, they will be held to account quickly and shrilly by Sheindlin, who once said of her courtroom, 'this is a monarchy not a democracy'. In other words, participants are encouraged to value the power of the TV executives behind the show over the legal power of the state.

Sheindlin is not without her own critics, and David Neubauer and Henry Fradella in '*Judge Judy*: Justice with attitude or just plain nonsense?' admit that

in taking her message – which is inconsistent with the normal behaviour of judges and the actual day-to-day operations of America's courts – she is doing more harm than good to the legitimacy of the judiciary.

Kimberlianne Poldas goes further. She says the show might actually reduce respect for the bench, and describes the format as 'sarcastic, accusatory and opinionated'.

But perhaps what Poldas criticises is actually what makes the show more successful in the States than in the UK. Sheindlin's contempt for bureaucracy and repetition means that litigants and viewers are offered a justice system completely at odds with the real life court system. Perhaps this desire for an instantaneous and reactionary justice system is less prevalent in Britain. The British court system is seen as the best in world: we Brits do not film our trials, and we accept that justice can and should take a painstaking long time – as we've seen recently with the phone hacking trial.

Conclusion: Variety + Opinion + Sheindlin = An Irresistible Combination

You only have to look at the different types of cases that are brought before *Judge Judy* to get a sense of why the show is so popular. Some are trivial: an elderly man suing a university student he met on the gay dating website *Grindr* for unpaid loans; a woman suing a dog breeder for selling her a dog that hadn't been bred properly. Others are more serious: men suing for damages after being beaten up; a woman suing someone who scammed her out of $400 over eBay – she had been sent pictures of a mobile phone instead of the phone itself – and occasionally the sad cases that would never make it to a real court but which ultimately deserve a hearing: the fifteen year old girl suing a boy who'd stood her up on prom night… (see end for links to these cases).

Sheindlin is the mistress of it all. If she thinks a case is trivial or someone is wasting her time she will say; if she has to dismiss a case but believes one of the litigants is morally wrong, even if they acted within the law, she will not hesitate to speak out. For Sheindlin clearly believes a dressing-down in her courtroom in front of 10 million people is worth just as much as a financial settlement. *Her* show then is ultimately a testament to the power of television.

Harry Cunningham is a freelance writer and an English student at Loughborough University. He has written for The Guardian, The Independent, The Huffington Post, The Leicester Mercury and Writers' Forum Magazine. Follow him on Twitter: @harrycunningham

See the cases for yourself on YouTube:

John Lydon [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K3L7xIJ3aDo]

Dog Breeding [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DANe4b6daxw] 10.17-23.00

Beaten up and stabbed [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DANe4b6daxw] 23.08-32.58.

The eBay scammer [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iNrwd8X3jeA]

Stood up on Prom Night [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DANe4b6daxw] From the beginning to 10.17

Further Reading

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Poldlas, Kimberlianne. 'Should We Blame *Judge Judy*? The Messages TV Courtrooms Send Viewers' in *Judicature* (American Judicature Society, 2002) Volume 86, Issue 1. pp.38-43.

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Jeremy Kyle – Analysing the Impact and Appeal, Sara Mills, *MediaMag* 22

Turning THE UNBEATABLES! into a Great Draw

An interview with Juan José Campanella

The Unbeatables is the first full-length animated movie to tell the story of a table football team (and its talented, well-meaning but diffident player), when their natural home is destroyed. It has been a box office smash in the director's native Argentina, as well as other Latin American and Spanish-speaking markets. Directed by Juan José Campanella, who won the 2010 Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film for *The Secret in Their Eyes*, this is his first animated feature. Mike Hobbs caught up with him to ask him about the movie, and his life as a director.

MM: What was it like growing up in the land of Alfredo di Stefano (legendary Argentine footballer who exiled himself to Spain and died during the recent World Cup), the mighty Diego Maradona and current superstar Lionel Messi?

JJC: It is perhaps strange but I was never particularly keen on football. There is no law that you must like it! Even here in the UK, where you invented the game, there must be many people who aren't especially

interested. It is the same in Argentina. Therefore, I had to do other things to gain attention: I became the class clown. Of course, I grew up surrounded by football. When I was still 18, we won the World Cup in our homeland, with other great players such as Mario Kempes and Ossie Ardiles. I was happy, but it still wasn't the centre of my life.

So, in that case, how did you come to make this film?

JJC: Well, I read the original story by Roberto Fontanarrosa in the mid 1980s – it was called *Memoirs of a Right Winger* (an obviously punning title) and was just a three-page monologue, but it stayed with me and germinated in my brain for almost 30 years. Strangely enough, Roberto was mainly a comicstrip writer, so in some sense we are paying homage to him by turning the story into an animated movie, even though we have expanded the plotline massively.

However the seeds of the story might well have remained in my head, had not Gaston Gorali approached me with the rights to the story. Gaston is an experienced screenwriter and his idea was that we put together a movie that was a combination of live action and animation. We started to develop the screenplay with Eduardo Sacheri and gradually our ideas crystallised.

That is how it came about but I think you are also asking me what I wanted to say in the movie. Essentially I wanted to address some themes – passion, betrayal, friendship – which I feel are universal. My aim was to approach them in a very immediate manner, so that we could quickly depict these for audiences. In real life, it would take years!

Was it easy to get funds together for the movie?

JJC: It wasn't that hard. We started with development funding of €50,000, which helped us to get the script written. After that, it became slightly more complicated. If you are making a film outside the United States, you have to get many organisations involved. We were able to get support from many subsidised national bodies – in fact I worry that audiences will fall asleep as we scroll through the seemingly endless list at the start! But the main body of the funding came from three separate production companies.

You did well – I gather the film was the most expensive ever produced in Argentina. What was the final cost?

JJC: It actually cost around $21 million. It's also the most expensive animation ever, from any Latin American country. However, I'm happy to say that the film has already taken over $25 million, so even before we opened in the UK and the US, we were in a very good position.

How did you pull in the animators? Did you know Sergio Pablos beforehand?

JJC: I didn't know Sergio personally but of course I knew his work (his is the guiding vision behind *Despicable Me*). I met him and I'm glad to say we saw eye to eye on most aspects of how we wanted the film to look. We wished to develop further this new style of intimate animated performances.

Once Sergio was on board, it became even easier to attract talented animators, but I don't think recruitment was ever going to be a bugbear. There's a pool of about 3000 top animators in the world – we got 400 of them. Most are under 30, don't have families, are great travellers and are quite happy to go where the interesting work is.

The making of the film was split between Spain and Argentina – did this cause you any problems?

JJC: Not really. About 20 minutes was shot in Spain under Sergio, and the rest in Argentina. Communication is so quick and reliable these days. I think I only travelled to Spain once during the filmmaking. In the future, I seriously believe that all animators will be able to work from home, so they can choose their working hours – many of them are night owls and might prefer not to be tied down to studio hours.

Can you tell us a little more about your use of the 3D process?

JJC: We always wanted the film to be shot in 3D, but I must qualify that by saying what I think 3D is best at doing. For me, 3D is far more effective when it is used to give added depth to intimate scenes, rather than hurling objects out of the screen in a bombastic manner. I feel it should be like sitting on stage in a theatre production [Campanella is also a noted theatre director]. I never wanted to use it to attack the audience.

Was it always the intention to attract a global audience? What challenges does that pose?

JJC: Naturally we hoped to interest people throughout the world because the language of football is universal, as is enthusiasm for the game. But we soon realised we'd have to adapt the screenplay for different nations as opposed to relying on straight translation.

How about the issues of cultural identity and representation that arise?

JJC: Well, to start with, I think that kids worldwide grow up watching the same programmes, and that tends to encourage a shared sense of identity. I can see that there may be differences, but I honestly feel that the ties that bind football lovers the world over are more significant than the barriers that divide them. Let me put it this way. I believe that the average person who goes to football matches in Germany has more in common with his/her counterpart in Argentina (to take the recent World Cup finalists) than either does with, say, lawyers or bankers in their own countries.

So, yes, I cannot deny that people in different countries do see things in

varying ways and, of course, language does not always bridge the gap. George Bernard Shaw said: 'England and America are two countries separated by the same language'; we naturally have the same misunderstandings in Spanish-speaking countries. That is one of the reasons why we have worked so hard, for instance, on the UK version. I have tweaked the screenplay with Michael and Richard Smith and producer Victor Glynn and co-producer David Burgess. These two have also ensured that we have brought in some fantastic actors (such as Rupert Grint and Rob Brydon) to voice the parts. Therefore, in terms of what you hear, everyone should feel they can relate to cultural issues and identities that arise.

Obviously, the look of the film is constant. With regard to representation, I feel that the characters who appear in the movie are archetypes who people everywhere can understand. For example, one of the table footballers is clearly modelled on the great Colombian player, Carlos Valderrama, who is echoed in appearance by David Luiz. Another one is reminiscent of the Dutch maestro Ruud Gullit. And, even though the actual people may appear more Latin American than, perhaps, Northern European, I do not believe that will cause representation problems.

Do you feel there is a political message to the movie?

JJC: As I've hinted, I feel the underlying message is that we often find that we have more in common with the people we're supposedly ranged against – in this case, the table footballers facing each other in different coloured shirts discover a shared bond. It's a political movie for kids!

I've counted at least five different titles (*The Unbeatables, The Underdogs, Metegol, Futbolin, Foosball*) – do you feel that is in any way confusing?

JJC: Not to me. It's still the same film. I can see it can be a bit of a headache for the marketing people. But, for instance, it makes sense that the film is called *The Underdogs* in the US because there is an American TV programme called *Showdown of the Unbeatables* – it is vitally important not to cause confusion in the main market.

You make quite a few TV programmes in the US. Does your TV work inform your film work (and vice versa)?

JJC: Definitely. It's not just a question of getting the money from TV to finance the filmmaking! What I find is that films often focus on character whereas episodes in TV series (where the characters are already developed) help me to concentrate on pacing and plot. But both are extremely helpful.

Originally, you were an engineering student. What made you turn to film studies?

JJC: The truth is that I always wanted to pursue film but lacked the confidence to devote myself to it full-time. I was actually studying film at night. It was seeing the great movie, *All That Jazz* directed by Bob Fosse, which gave me the final push I needed to dedicate myself. I gave up engineering at once, but I don't regret having studied it for a while, because I think it gave me an essential oddness, a different way of looking at things, a sort of trump card if you like.

Can you sum up the benefits of a film education? What do you think you need to succeed?

JJC: It's very hard to say what will be useful for other individuals. However, I do believe that no knowledge is ever useless. If you can learn a little bit about all the various facets you need to put a film together, it will serve you well.

As to how to achieve what you want in the business? Again, that depends very much on who you are. But I can say with absolute confidence that the one thing you will need is resilience. You must have the protective skin of a rhinoceros, because success almost invariably takes a long time. I started at the age of 19 and didn't feel I was successful in any way until I was 42 (in 2001, the year *The Son of the Bride* was

nominated for an Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film). I didn't feel I could relax until that point. I couldn't do normal things, such as buy somewhere to live or get married. Now, of course, I can see it was worth it!

And *MM's* verdict on *The Unbeatables?* Sports movies are notoriously difficult to get right and football films are the hardest of the lot, for obvious reasons: with very few exceptions, actors can't play football and footballers can't act. Sport, itself, is inherently dramatic in a way that scripted drama can rarely match. But, cleverly swerving around these problems in Maradona and Messi style, Campanella has crafted a convincing animated action movie.

Mike Hobbs is a freelance journalist and a regular contributor to *MediaMagazine*.

THE BEAUTIFUL GAMES:
FROM RIO TO GLASGOW

Third year Media undergraduate Charley Packham has had an unforgettable summer, not only working in production for the FIFA 2014 World Cup in Rio (poor thing!), but also covering the somewhat different Commonwealth Games in rainy Glasgow. This is her story.

'1970, winners and where?'

…

'1954. Go!'

I knew the offside rule as well as any younger sister: it was illustrated for me through the use of condiments on a pub table by my older brother. Still, much of my preparation for my interview consisted of my male friends throwing stadiums and dates at me as I helplessly responded with countries, teams and players (pronounced incorrectly of course – here's looking at you HAM-EZ). Think those self

improvement montages you see in Hollywood movies – well it was like that, but with probably more pizza and beer involved, not to mention the 100+ hours spent playing the FIFA World Cup test on an app on my phone (I eventually reached the title of 'World Cup Ambassador').

Having amassed a pub quiz-worthy knowledge of tournament trivia, and generally adopting the 'fake it till you make it' approach of just sounding like I knew what I was on about – 'Robbie Keane for Republic of Ireland and those last minute goals in 2002 – crazy huh?!' – I went into my interview feeling like a mighty fraud. Turns out I needn't have worried: my soon-to-be boss saw right through me when I got 1 out of 4 on a football knowledge test. I 'fessed up about my weaknesses immediately, and we all laughed. An icebreaker at least but potentially a deal breaker too – how could I claw this back?

In the run up to the tournament we had several training days in London, outlining our specific responsibilities and learning more about the 'Broadcast Information Platform' (BIP for short) on which we were working. We were contracted out by HBS – Host Broadcast Services – which dealt with all internal production, and we were based at the FIFA International Broadcast Centre in

that takes place the day before a match at the stadium), live match highlights and infotainment features (content that plays on the big screens at the stadiums), aerial compilations (any helicopter footage) as well as any ad hoc content that came through. The production office (almost entirely made of plywood) became centre stage for the next 6 weeks, a fetching uniform of Smurf-blue polo shirt and grey combat trousers my costume, as the world of football became less like learning lines, and more like genuine knowledge. Well, when in R(i)ome…

Work aside, Brazil was a wonderful host and many a night was spent drinking far too many caipirinhas and hopelessly failing to conceal our British two-left-footedness in samba bars across the city. I largely worked late shifts, meaning I had just about enough time to hit the beach and hotel pool and top up some semblance of a tan in the

When I received an email advertising for a team of online publishers for the new Broadcast Information Platform for the 2014 FIFA World Cup I fitted the bill for nearly every single requirement... except the point about 'football knowledge an advantage'. Attempting to discreetly gloss over this particular element of the candidate criteria, I played up the other qualities they were looking for – organised, sociable, hardworking and so on – and smiled my way through the rest of the interview. I listened attentively and asked questions throughout the task which simulated what we'd be doing out in Brazil, and managed a near perfect score. I got a call a month later – I'd got the job and was going to Rio. MADNESS!

the outskirts of Rio.

The BIP is a web-based information system, which keeps television broadcasters around the world up to speed with footage from the tournament. It was conceived in order to inform broadcasters who had bought the rights to screen the tournament of all footage that was scheduled to be filmed, or any that was available, as well as providing important production documentation such as running orders, music cue sheets and translations and transcripts of interviews and press conferences daily. Each team member was assigned particular production teams to liaise with and chase up about any information. I specifically monitored the Match Day – 1 content (any training

mornings. From visiting Christ 'the guy in the sky', cablecar-ing it up Sugar Loaf mountain, frolicking in the Fan Fest on Copacabana beach and street partying with the locals in Baixo Gávea, I aimed to make the most of every minute I spent in the City of God.

I thoroughly enjoyed my time in Brazil, meeting some incredible and lovely people, having several near misses with famous footballers and pundits (I was almost always in the loo when colleagues bumped into them), visiting breath-taking places and absorbing the amazing atmosphere. By the end of my stint (just after the quarter finals) I was sad to leave… But probably not as sad as Brazilians were a week later…

Still, my melancholy couldn't last long. Just over a week after getting

controls all the big screen content that gets displayed at each venue). This specifically included operating all visual, social media and interactive content for the Badminton events based at the Emirates Arena, curating playlists for each session, cutting between broadcast feeds, graphics and VT packages and roaming camera feeds and counting in and out of items to ensure all content ran to time.

Much to everyone's surprise, the first few days in Glasgow were some of the hottest ever on record, and a fierce rival to Brazil's sporadic winter sun. My friend and colleague who was working on the lawn bowls claimed that one of the camera men had to be sent home with sunstroke, and things got really bizarre when spectator services started supplying huge vats of sun cream next to the breakfast buffet. Although the unseasonably sunny weather did not hold up, nothing dampened the spirit of the Glaswegians. It was not hard to see why they are dubbed 'the friendly games' and this years event was touted as the 'best games ever'. Maybe I'm a little biased but I'd have to agree…

Having known very little about Badminton prior to working on the Games, I left a well-spring of Badders-knowledge and made some new pals in the process, even hitching a cab back to the athletes village with one of the players from Jersey's team post wrap party (thanks Alex!) I bid farewell to Glasgow but not before donning some tartan and making the most of the surroundings, sweating it out at a traditional Scottish Céilidh – gie it laldy we most certainly did!

back to London I was off to Glasgow to begin training on the hardware and software I'd be operating at the Commonwealth Games. My role here was entirely different to what I'd been doing in Brazil. Working as a vision playback and desk operator was a far tecchier role and one where the hands-on experience of a live multicam TV studio and gallery environment throughout my degree really came into its own. I was glad for the variety in roles to keep my brain working hard and strengthening my skills base whilst remaining in the fast paced environment of a live sporting event.

My role involved working directly for Great Big Events in the Sports presentation department (which

Working in sport production is at times I imagine somewhat like being an athlete; the hours are long, it can be physically and mentally demanding and endurance is essential. But being a part of something watched the world over is an incomparable feeling and I feel honoured to say I was part of the production of two of this year's hugest sporting events – whilst having a ton of fun in the process.

It's been a manic busy summer, but far from being run down (pun intended) I hopefully plan to continue working in the field. Initially I had never really considered sport a viable area to

go into; but my experiences this summer have made me reconsider entirely. Incorporating the areas I feel passionately about, live events – feeding off that atmosphere and excitement is second to none – travel and broadcasting makes it an ideal fit for someone keen to tour the world and explore new areas in both life and work.

Whatever your entry point, be it Arsenal aficionado or clueless and casual viewer, sport can be a brilliant field of production to work in. Those worried about a lack of creativity need only look to the moving short films produced by the story features teams, and the powerful montages that accompany any closing credits. After all, filmmaking is about telling stories, and sport is full of them.

I've been well and truly bitten by the bug (and Suarez aside, a few mozzies too for that matter) but before all that... my dissertation beckons. Oh and I'd

better renew that gym membership. Game of 5-a-side anyone?

Charley Packham is in her final year studying Television Production at Bournemouth University. She currently works freelance as a short film producer and television and film worker. Catch her on Twitter @cpacks

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Sport and Television: The Mexican Wave, Jason Mazzocchi, *MediaMag* 18

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Score! Football on Film, Mark Ramey, *MediaMag* 26

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In the 'Media Industries' section of the archive there are dozens of articles by practitioners, interns, students describing media placements and undergraduate courses, and other accounts of work experience by A Level students.

GIRLS ON FILM

LUKAS MOODYSSON'S WE ARE THE BEST

There's nothing like a low budget independent movie to give you a different perspective on familiar issues, particularly where representation is concerned – and better still if it gives you a bit of historical distance from the assumptions and stereotypes we take for granted about youth, gender and age. Kathy O'Borne analyses a Swedish film which would make an ideal case study for work on representation, media and identity, and collective identities.

We are the Best, by acclaimed film director Lukas Moodysson, tells the story of three teenage girls who form a punk band. In Stockholm. In 1982. In Swedish. Yes, it's foreign and set thirty years ago, but don't let that put you off. Away from the Hollywood blockbusters which dominate multiplex cinemas, independent filmmakers around the world are making fantastic movies which look at the world from a different angle. The freedom that comes with low budget independent production allows directors to create representations of the world that are diverse, challenging and creative. *We are the Best* presents teenage girlhood in a joyful and refreshing way. It's also a great film to look at in AS Media Studies.

Synopsis

Unhappy with their lives at home and school, 13-year-old punks Bobo (Mira Barkhammer) and Klara (Mira Grosin) want to form a band, but don't know how to play an instrument. They recruit Hedwig (Liv LeMoyne), an unpopular but talented Christian who plays classical guitar. Together the girls write their own teen anthem, 'Hate the Sport'. After several adventures together, including hooking up with a local punk band, drinking until they are sick

and begging for money for an electric guitar, the girls finally get to perform at a youth club Christmas concert. Despite the local crowd trying to attack them, the girls end the film triumphant, chanting 'We are the best'.

The Emotional Challenges of Youth

Like several of Moodysson's previous films, *We are the Best* explores the emotional challenges of being young. He explained the motivation behind the film as follows:

I felt I had to do something about survival and about coping with life and about how to deal with being neglected by your parents, feeling ugly… all those things most young people face. I just wanted to make a film about survivors, I think.

Lukas Moodysson, 30.05.14, thedissolve.com

Surviving the nightmare of high school is a common theme in teen films. I would argue that Moodysson's expressive, open style of filmmaking gives his female protagonists a distinctive voice, and by referring to key moments from the film we can explore how Moodysson represents adolescent femininity in a way that is often at odds with the Hollywood 'teen movie'.

Appearance and Image

As in many teen films, Klara and Bobo define themselves and are marked out as different through their clothes and hairstyle. Klara has a Mohawk, Bobo a D.I.Y. crop. At school, the girls are derided by their female peers for the way they look. Two blonde, pastel-clad disco fans (their conformity emphasised in a tight two-shot) offer their sympathy:

It's such a shame you look like that. You could be super-cute.

Later at a local youth club, its chaotic atmosphere emphasised by the camera whip-panning from side to side and slipping in and out of focus, Klara and Bobo seek refuge in a side room where they are building a model of a post-

apocalyptic city. A boy passing with his friends leans in and jokes:

The prettiest girls in town. I'm getting so horny.

The close-up reaction shot of Bobo suggests she is not completely immune to criticism. Over-the-shoulder shots repeatedly show us what Bobo sees in the mirror, sometimes with obvious dissatisfaction. But despite Bobo's teen insecurities, the girls stay resolutely punk. And, in a great subversion of a Hollywood 'ugly-duckling' make-over, Klara and Bobo cut Hedwig's long blonde hair asymmetric and short. Hedwig's mum might claim her daughter has been bullied, but in reality Hedwig loves her new look and is now a close-cropped member of the band. In the closing scenes of the film Hedwig takes to the stage in a suit, her strong, androgynous look a sharp contrast to the hyper-feminine disco dancers we see at the school concert. The girls refuse to be defined by gender stereotypes, adamantly denying that they are a 'girl band'. They understand, like all good Media students, that the word 'girl' is not just a biological term but can carry with it all sorts of negative connotations.

Music

The music you fall in love with as a teenager stays with you the rest of your life. In *We are the Best*, punk music bonds the girls and gives them a means of self-expression. The film is based on a graphic novel by the director's wife, Coco, who was herself a punk in 80s Stockholm. The rebellious spirit of punk allows the girls to avoid the self-conscious restraint of feminine conformity. Their own song, 'Hate the Sport', is written after they are humiliated by a PE teacher. Musical revenge sums up the spirit of punk; Moodysson describes it as 'reacting instinctively to something… and then turning it into music' (scene commentary, *Huffington Post*, 23.07.14)

By the end of the film the band's appearance at a small-town youth club provokes a mini riot. A shared love of punk can provoke love as well as anger; Hedwig's acoustic rendition of a favourite track is a revelation to Klara and Bobo, squashed together on a sofa in their rehearsal room. When Bobo lies in bed listening to music through headphones, the ironic lyrics: 'I'm such a lucky girl – I feel so honoured' – emphasise feelings of neglect. Moodysson uses the song to create a sound-bridge between Bobo's late night isolation and her journey to school the next morning, suggesting that things will be no better here. But unlike Hollywood, the film avoids using non-diegetic sound to manipulate the audience's emotional reactions. The music we do hear always comes from the world on screen. Moodysson has said this was a deliberate attempt to 'make the film seem clean'. Like the hand-held camera and improvised dialogue, this technique lends the film an authenticity which often seems lost beneath the high production values of Hollywood.

The Generation Gap

Since James Dean in *Rebel without a Cause*, teen films have explored the divide that emerges between young people and their parents. Many of Lukas Moodysson's films address this relationship, for example his debut film *Show me Love*. In *We are the Best* the parents are seen as different to

each other but united in their ability to misunderstand and embarrass their teenage daughters. The film opens at Bobo's mum Lena's 40th birthday party. The camera leaps from guest to guest before tilting downwards through the crowd to an isolated Bobo at the edge of the room. The framing of her face between a forest of bodies emphasises her sense of dislocation. She retreats to her room as her Mum and friends embark on a game of spin the bottle. A phone call to best friend Klara (cross-cut between bedrooms) reveals

problems there too – Klara holds up the phone to let Bobo listen in on a heated argument about laundry. Klara's parents are liberal and attentive in a way that Klara finds embarrassing, for example attempting to 'jam' with the girls as they rehearse. Lena, on the other hand, neglects Bobo in favour of a string of boyfriends, at one point assuming Bobo is asleep when in fact she has gone to Klara's house. As in the earlier Moodysson film *Together*, children are represented as equally, if not more, mature than their parents; in one scene Bobo offers to make hot chocolate for her just-dumped Mum.

Friendship

Female friendship is at the heart of this film. Bobo and Klara are inseparable,

marking their allegiance through clothes and music. In Hedwig, a Christian guitar player who each year is mocked at the school concert, they recognise both talent and a fellow outsider. The innocence of childhood friendships escapes into scenes which celebrate being silly: throwing leaves, making models, feasting on sweets and ice-cream. Moodysson has said that the film, although scripted, was about 60% improvised – a technique possible in small-scale productions. I think many of these scenes, which are highly expressive but do little to drive the narrative forward, would not have survived a Hollywood-style edit. For me, the looser narrative structure creates a deeper engagement with the characters.

The girls' relationship is tested by their meeting with a local punk band. When both girls decide they like Elis, the lead singer, jealousy follows, threatening Klara and Bobo's friendship until Hedwig steps in: 'Repeat after me – I like you'. What they have together is way more important than a stupid boy from the suburbs.

In Conclusion

Ultimately, the band don't do that well. The final scene of the film shows Bobo, Klara and Hedwig on the bus home from their final, badly-received, performance, determined to ignore the criticism of their youth club leaders. They have achieved little, and only Christian Hedwig seems to have changed, swearing happily with her friends, but they have succeeded on their own terms. 'I don't care what you say, WE ARE THE BEST' scream a Swedish punk band, the soundtrack

finally set free from the diegetic world. We see a montage of the girls creating havoc – turning up at their local take-away in a giant cardboard box and being removed by security, lighting a fire beneath a statue, dropping balls of wool from a first floor flat on to passers-by. Using a small cast, improvisation and a simple story, the film expresses the energy of girls who refuse to conform to a feminised ideal.

The trailer used to promote *We are the Best* outside Sweden proudly declares that the film is for everyone who is, will be or used to be 13. In reality, I'd imagine that the film found its largest audience amongst older independent cinema fans who admire Moodysson's work and might feel nostalgic for the 80s world that he so lovingly recreates.

The film only made £42,000 on the weekend it was released at 40 UK cinemas, so the wave of festival awards and great reviews didn't persuade that many people to buy a ticket to watch it. The challenge of independent distributors like Metrodome, the company that marketed this film, is they are up against not only Hollywood but the rise of internet downloads and the growing popularity of TV drama. It's a great shame that more young people (particularly girls) haven't seen this movie, particularly given that:

in a 2007 survey of 3,200 young women, more than half of 16- to 25-year-olds and a quarter of 10- to 15-year-olds said the media made them feel that being pretty and thin was the most important thing

Caroline Criado-Prez, 02.05.13, Guardian Professional

When Bobo, the most self-doubting member of the gang, asks Klara what's good in her life, she replies 'You're in the world's greatest band'. Despite its meticulous attention to punk detail, in the end this film celebrates what the girls do, not what they look like.

Kathy O'Borne is a Media Studies teacher and a freelance writer.

MoreMediaMag
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In a Class of its Own: The American Teen movie, Sara Flanagan, *MediaMag* 11

Milestone Movies in Youth Culture, Michael Ewins, *MediaMag* 33

CROWD-FUNDING FOR STUDENTS

Film and media production coursework usually involves a zero-budget, minimal mise-en-scene and much ingenuity. But if you want to move on to more polished, professional productions you'll need a real budget. Animator and filmmaker Nathan Wilkes shows you how crowd-funding can be the answer, with some useful tips for avoiding the pitfalls and maximising your income.
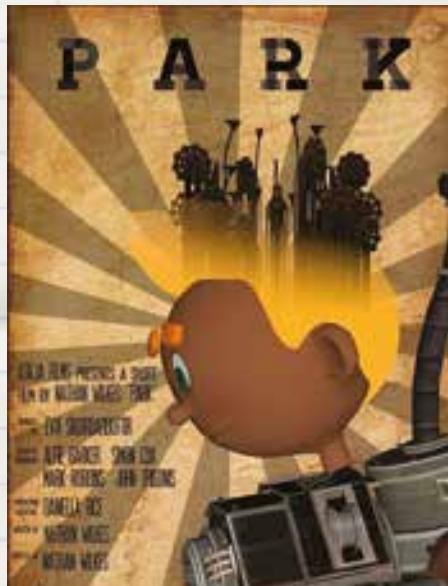
So you've decided to make a film, but you want to make this one better than your average Film Studies project. Good for you! But where's that money going to come from? Funding opportunities are becoming less and less common as grants and funds start to dwindle into non-existence, but one funding opportunity has become more popular than ever.

Crowd-funding!

Crowd-funding is when you ask online for large amounts of people to donate small numbers of money to your project. If you know crowd-funding, you probably know Kickstarter and you can think of lots of experienced, professional adults creating massive projects, but it's also completely possible for you, a student, to raise money for a short film.

I decided to do a crowd-funding project for my short film *PARK*. I was very nervous about starting but eventually I did it and I managed to raise over £1300 for my project which I can use to help make it so much better than if I had just tried to do it without any money. I was able to hire musicians, sound editors and other animators. Before we go any further, why not take a look at my Indiegogo campaign website, which will show you why I needed to raise the funding, and what I was able to do with it:

https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/park-a-new-and-exciting-animated-short-film

And now let's take a look at how you can do well crowdfunding as a student.

1. Do not aim your project at other students

Your friends and classmates would love to donate all the money they have to your project but they're just like you. They don't have any money. They're students. The general financial situation for most students is that they don't have enough money and so if you try to aim your project at other students, I'm sorry to say you'll be disappointed. If you know some students with some cash lying around, great. Go get them! But don't be disappointed if your whole class doesn't rally together to collect 100% of the budget.

2. Family is key

When I did my crowd-funding campaign, over 30% of the total came from my family. They're your family. Of course they want to support you. Whilst this may not be your primary source of income, it can have a major effect. Whether it's £10 or £100 you can usually rely on at least one member of your family to donate to your campaign. They almost feel like it is a compulsory commitment. Obviously do not pressure them into this, however; asking politely or pulling in a favour in return for some extra chores around the house always goes down well.

3. Spend 6 months preparing

Six MONTHS! Yes. Six months. Crowd-funding is hard and can either be a massive boost to your reputation or a massive epic fail for your reputation. So you want to make sure you do it right. Throughout these six months of preparation you should spend that time making as many contacts as possible. Whether it's in person or through social media, just make as many

contacts as you can. Find out about networking sessions, film events and film screenings in your area, and bring a pack of business cards. Also in this time, do as much research as possible. Watch as many pitch videos as you can, read as many articles as possible and understand what makes a good pitch video.

4. Remember the 30% rule

The 30% rule is the basic rule that in the first three days of your campaign you must make 30% of your target. Why? Because if you hit that much in your first three days, it will look good for potential donors. This rule is commonly applied to most campaigns: the most amount of money you'll make will be in the first and last days of the campaign, so make them count. Really push those first three days because they can make a massive difference to the rest of your campaign.

5. ALWAYS do a video

There's an idea that you can do a crowd-funding campaign without making a video. Whilst most websites give you the option not to make a video and instead just upload a picture, this is not a good idea. People do not want to read, especially if it's a film project. They want to watch, they want to meet you, hear you, get to know you. A video gives your audience the opportunity to see the confidence you have in your project that typed words could never properly do justice to.

6. Use IndieGoGo

No, we haven't been sponsored to say this. There are many reasons as to why IndieGoGo is better than any other crowd-funding website. Whilst Kickstarter is an incredibly popular website, that doesn't make any difference to the popularity of your campaign. Firstly, Kickstarter have had many campaign donations go 'missing' and campaigns not receiving any money, which is incredibly worrying for anyone considering a campaign. As well as this, Kickstarter has a business rating of B- compared to IndieGoGo's business rating of A+, which means

that if there is a problem with your campaign, you've got a better chance of getting it handled properly with IndieGoGo. As well as this, IndieGoGo offers an advice service for all campaigners so that their campaign can be reviewed and have feedback before they go live, and therefore have a better campaign. Finally, doing a crowd-funding campaign can be risky. If you use Kickstarter you must make your exact total, otherwise you cannot receive ANY funds! So that means that if you miss your target by a penny then you end up with nothing. On the other hand, with IndieGoGo you have the option to receive all your funds

regardless of whether you've reached your target or not. Using a more popular website does not mean more people will look at your project. That must come from you, and people will look at your project regardless of what website it's on.

7. Do not just rely on online donations

You do not have to rely on online donations alone to fund your campaign. Go out and do some fundraising. It's not hard – I made £30 just from asking random people to donate spare change. But you can go much further than that. You could organise some sort of fundraising day or a raffle, or you could try busking. Hey, it all helps.

8. Stay optimistic, work hard

Crowd-funding is hard. Like, really hard. You will get tired, you will get bored and you will hate yourself for constantly posting the same link over and over again. People will even criticise you, people will un-follow you, un-friend you, tell you to stop, but guess what? Your project is worth it. Out of all the terrible things I just listed, you will also get donations for you to make your dream project, contacts that want to get involved in your film, local newspapers that want to give you free publicity for your film and the great feeling that people support you and want your project to succeed.

So go out there, work hard and make the best crowdfunding campaign the world has ever seen!

Nathan Wilkes is an alumni of the BFI/NFTS Film Academy, and a freelance animator and director. Nathan has recently started working on his first feature film script, which is a British sci-fi adventure.

Follow it up:

http://www.voice-online.co.uk/article/nathan-wilkes-has-eyes-hollywood

See Nathan's IndieGoGo funding pitch here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FoLJIR34c94

Writing Dust: becoming a screenwriter

A Level Film student Abbie Loosemore's short film screenplay was selected for production on the 2014 BFI/NFTS Film Academy residential. So how did she get started, what was her inspiration, and what did she learn as her script was brought to life from page to screen?

Back in December 2013, I was asked to produce a script for a short film as part of my application to the BFI/NFTS Screenwriting course. I was a member of the Cambridgeshire BFI Academy, and we had just completed a short film that was screened at the BFI Future Film Festival. My role had been cinematography and I had worked closely with the director to translate the script onto the screen. Having this prior experience, I knew the process the crew had to go through in order to make the words on the page come to life and this knowledge really helped when I was writing *Dust*.

Before writing *Dust* I had very little experience in scriptwriting and had made only a few short films and music videos, where I relied on visuals to tell the story, rather than dialogue. I write and read poetry, so literature and stories have influenced my writing and the process of creating characters and narratives. Over the summer I had read *The Secret History* by Donna Tartt and this heavily influenced the story and characters in *Dust*. Her novel is about a group of friends who attend a college together in Vermont. They become obsessed with the Greek God Dionysus and experiment with Bacchanalian rituals, which lead to them to commit a murder. This idea of a cult, corrupted innocence, and desire leading to downfall was something that I wanted to write about and try and capture in a short film; I felt the concept of young people believing themselves to be gods was very interesting and enigmatic, and similar to Hitchcock's *Rope* and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

When I wrote the first draft of my script, I tried not to concern myself with the fine details of the characters and plot at first because I wanted to get an idea down on the page and then go back and improve it later. While I was at the NFTS we had a writing masterclass from screenwriter Tony Grisoni (*Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, *The Red Riding* series) and he said that 'in order to write, one has to write badly first'. Having gone through multiple drafts of a script, this is something that I feel is true!

Following the first draft, I attended a 'Writers' Weekend Retreat' at the NFTS in December where each of the six screenwriters was assigned a mentor who was a graduate of the NFTS screenwriting course. We had a read-through of each of our scripts and it was really interesting and useful to hear how my script sounded read aloud and then to be given feedback by experienced writers. Working with my mentor was one of the most helpful aspects of the scriptwriting process; her experience and knowledge of the elements of a short film really helped shape the script into a strong piece.

We spoke about the motifs of the characters, and I began to see the story from all their perspectives; to have that in mind from the beginning has proven really helpful. We also talked about the necessities of the script, and what we could cut, change or develop into a new idea. I found the suggestions from my mentor and fellow writers great for

creativity, as their ideas gave me a new insight into what I could do with the story, and where the story could go.

A script is, of course, a work in progress, and having other people's suggestions and input can be really helpful. But it is also important to stay true to your original ideas, and what made you write the piece in the first place. Our lead tutor for screenwriting, Brian Ward, told us that we are the 'guardians of the flame' and as writers it is our job to protect the essence of the story and make sure it doesn't get lost in the filming process – especially as a crew of young people from around the country were about to interpret the script in their own way. Brian also suggested that while being protective of your script is a good thing, it can also be restricting, and that as writers, especially screenwriters, we have to be willing to let go and compromise

with ideas. I found this one of the most challenging but exciting aspects of making the film: it allowed the process to become collaborative, which is essential.

On our 'Writers' Weekend Retreat' we also had the chance to meet and talk to working writers and directors, and ask them about their writing and film-making process. We spoke to Destiny Ekaragha and Bola Agbaje (*Gone Too Far,* 2013, *The Park,* 2011) and Jamie Stone (*Orbit Ever After,* 2013), and they gave us advice about working in the film industry and what it's like to have a script developed by a team of creative people. Hearing this from a professional point of view made me really appreciate the filmmaking process, and made me understand the importance

of not being too protective over the script, and letting others in.

After this, all six of us stayed in touch with our mentors and were given three deadlines for new drafts of the script. From December to March, my script changed in many ways, and definitely for the better. The characters and their motives were stronger, the plot was clearer and I had added more dialogue to develop the story. By the time the pre-residential weekend came around in March, where we were to meet our crew, the script had gone through around nine drafts (!) and I felt it was

in a strong enough place to share with the director. With each draft, new ideas started to develop and I sought advice from my mentors and teachers, especially when something new struck me.

One thing that I learnt most during this process is that it is okay to steal ideas from other people! I watched a few scenes from *The Master* (Anderson, 2012) as its plot is also based around the dynamics of a cult, and for the murder scene in my script, I was inspired by *Eyes Wide Shut* (Kubrick, 1999) and the image of a circle of masked followers standing gravely around a leader. As a writer you can gather inspiration from anywhere, and if you are stuck for ideas – or experiencing 'writers' block' (which I think all six of us experienced at some point during the process) – I personally found one of the best things to do is to walk, listen to music or to read in order to gather ideas, and to try and return to what inspired you to write the story. In our masterclass with Tony Grisoni we talked about this; he told us how he sets aside a certain time for writing, and that it's about dedicating yourself to the craft, like any art.

Into Production: the Crew

It was now time to meet the crew and of course, this was nerve-wracking; these were the people who I was entrusting with the story that I had been working on for months. But it was also exciting as they had been selected for their talent and experience, so I was looking forward to sharing the script with them. We did a read-through of the script and hearing it out loud was, for all of us, a really exciting and special moment. I could see the cinematographers and director taking notes and that was great, knowing that the script was already visual enough for them to see how they would shoot it. The crew then gave feedback on the script, and their reactions were positive. Everyone was energetic and excited about making it, and we also planned to develop some new ideas.

One of the issues that came up was the length of my script, so cutting it down was a necessity. This is perhaps one of the things I struggled with most,

as I had to do what is called 'killing your darlings'. But despite having to edit out some of my favourite parts, I learnt that although good action and good dialogue are important, they aren't everything; sometimes the same things can be conveyed through the facial expression of an actor, the editing and the mise-en-scène. So if you find yourself struggling with cutting parts of your script: don't underestimate the power of the micro-elements. When shooting *Dust* I found that the actors were able to bring a new

dimension to the script, and the scenes sometimes worked better where they conveyed the story with actions and body language rather than words. This was partly down to the vision of the director, but also to the strong visuals of the script. So when writing, consider how mood can be conveyed through other elements, and how a director would be able to show it.

When the crew reassembled in April for the two-week residential, we had already shared ideas and thoughts on the script, location and actors via a closed Facebook group. Communication during this period was essential and without it we would have been unprepared and the filming process wouldn't have gone as smoothly. *Dust* is set in a

large country house, which meant our Producers and Production Designer had to find a suitable location for the shoot. Each crew was given around £1500, which meant we had to budget effectively, make considered decisions about props, and identify what was a necessity within the script and what wasn't.

Working with the director and cinematographers was a very exciting process. Prior to the shoot we had a series of planning sessions where we would talk about the props and costumes we required, the lighting we needed and the music we wanted. We worked together on shot lists and storyboards, which meant a lot of late nights! We also had to pitch our film to our funders in what is called a 'Green Light Meeting', where we presented on the style of the film, the location, the story and the budget before getting the go-ahead.

We had two days to shoot, which meant planning was essential. Teamwork was vital on such a tight schedule, and our crew worked really well together as we were all on the same level, something that makes the whole process a lot easier. The writer is not usually on the set of the film, and only involved in the pre- and

occasionally post-production process. For me, the opportunity to be on set and to be involved with the shoot was great, but also sitting back and watching the crew turning the words on the page into moving images was a really interesting and exciting experience. Not only did I trust them all, especially the director who understood what the story meant and what I wanted to convey, I was amazed to see how things were created right there on set, particularly when certain things happened that were unscripted or unplanned but worked so much better! Having a good relationship with the director, and with the crew, is also very important and I was very lucky to have such a strong connection with mine. At first I was apprehensive about some of the decisions being made on set, but once we saw the rushes it was amazing to see what the crew had achieved and that my script was now a real live short film.

The post-production team were effectively writers and directors themselves, as they had the task of creating a clear narrative within the film so that it all made sense. One of the most exciting and rewarding moments of the residential for me was sitting down in the NFTS cinema about to watch the final cut of the film for the first time. Seeing what had been so clear in my head for so long, on the screen, with each member of the crew's input evident and the actors' interpretation of the lines spoken in surround-sound was incredible. I think one of the greatest things for a writer, and I'm sure other writers agree, is to see their work transformed onto the big screen in front of an audience, and knowing the amount of passion that went into the creation of it.

For those of you who are writers and looking to apply to the NFTS residential course, or just considering writing a short film, the best advice I can give is to stay true to your ideas, but also to compromise and work with others. Your characters are only whole when the words are read aloud and acted, so part of the process is the magic of being a writer and just sitting back and watching it all come to life.

Also, inspiration is all around so always

carry a notebook with you to jot down ideas or things you hear people say on the train or in cafes. This can really help with gathering ideas if you are stuck, and can also help everything become clear. Scripts are the beginning of any film and as Brian Ward said, 'You can make a bad film out of a good script, but you can't make a good film out of a bad one'.

Having the chance to experience the NFTS residential was one of my most rewarding experiences to date. It is such a great opportunity to meet other creative like-minded people, to work with professional actors and to meet people from the industry such as Mike Newell (*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*), Timothy Webber (*Gravity*) and David Morrissey (*The Walking Dead*), but it's also a catalyst for other opportunities and productions with the people you meet on the course. It's not only inspired me to watch more films, and get involved with projects, but to write more and share my ideas with others.

Abbie Loosemore is an alumni of the 2014 BFI/NFTS Film Academy. She is currently working as a learning support teacher at Long Road 6th Form College, and awaiting interview results.

MoreMediaMag
from the archive

You can read Abbie's account of creating a video essay for her AS Film analysis task in Reading Film through Writing with film, Barney Oram, *MediaMag* 45
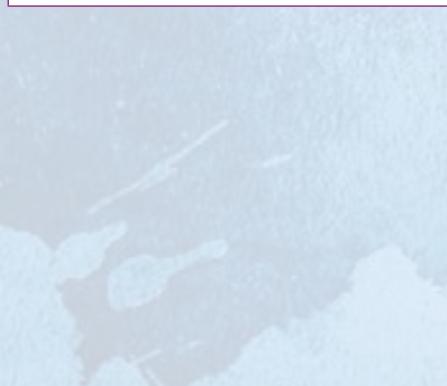
The female gaze

Rethinking Representation

A PERFECT 14

A FILM ABOUT WOMEN RESHAPING THE WORLD

Debates around gender representation in Media and Film Studies have traditionally been dominated by discussion of 'The Male Gaze'. But it could be argued that the most important gaze for many advertising texts is, in fact, a 'Female Gaze'. Sean Richardson explains.

If thou gaze long into an abyss, the abyss will also gaze into thee

Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil

Research suggests that advertising campaigns for a female audience are dominated by heterosexual Caucasian size 0 to 2 models. This is a fact, despite what we might think or want, in a multicultural, complex world. Increasingly, accusations have been made by the likes of Naomi Campbell and Dame Vivienne Westwood that representations of women in advertising are too white and nearly exclusively under size 6.

This 'sizeism' in the media today is totally at odds with the facts, as if we live in some kind of virtual 'size zero' universe; Western women, on average, are size 14 or above. Anxiety and issues with body image are on the rise for both men and women in relation to media imagery, but the power of 'the perfect body' shows no sign of diminishing.

The 'Plus Size' model is a term that has become popular as advertisers in the media have realized they can be very successful in embracing, or at least attempting to project, tolerance for what people actually look like. In 2007, the consumer goods giant Unilever/Dove 'banned' so-called size zero models for products including Lux shower gel, Sunsilk shampoo and even Slim-Fast diet drinks. Unilever unveiled this 'self-imposed ban' as part of a marketing ploy. The group released press claiming that its brand directors and advertising agencies across the world would be expected to use only models or actors with a body mass index (BMI) of between 18.5 and 25, 'in line with United Nations guidance on what level of BMI can be considered healthy.'

Fast forward to 2014 and the documentary *A Perfect 14* (directed by Giovanna Morales), tries to reflect the need for the media to reject size 0/2

models and represent the reality of women closer to the size 14 average in the West today.

A Perfect 14: Representing 'Real' Women

The documentary challenges the idea of beauty and what is beautiful or normal, with the rejection of the traditional concept of what a woman should look like.

A Perfect 14 documents the story of three plus-size models, Elly Mayday, Laura Wells and Kerosene Deluxe. The three women are followed over a six month period, trying to reshape the preconceptions of the world of fashion. *The Huffington Post* said that *A Perfect 14* is 'opening up a new conversation about the media's

culpability in perpetuating obsolete beauty standards'. The film combines the stories of the models with an exploration of 'weightism', a very powerful discrimination that dominates the catwalks of London, Paris and Milan. Interviewing experts in the field of body image, the film accuses the 'media machine' of creating destructive illusions and impossible body images that have massive negative impact on the self-confidence of women. The female image, as gazed upon by other females, is clearly a very controversial area of debate and academic discussion.

The Female Gaze

Women as spectators and as consumers of media images of other women have

often been overlooked in previous critical studies of representation. Yet, this female gaze is at the heart of the problems that *A Perfect 14* is trying to address. The representation of false and unattainable images of the idealised female body is clearly linked to the idea of the gaze and to spectatorship theory.

If the reality is that looking at false representations of our bodies causes anxiety and self-loathing then we need to learn to challenge and change those representations.

In analysing female representation, you will invariably encounter theorist Laura Mulvey and her pioneering 1970s work on 'The Male Gaze'. However her work has now been challenged, and you need to analyse *how women themselves* consume and decode images. Mulvey's theory is now seen as very limited in its approach; it assumes there is only one kind of spectator (male) and one kind of masculinity (heterosexual).

The apparent crisis in female body image that Dove/Unilever seized upon back in 2007 suggests that the female gaze is crucial for media and Film students. Mulvey's original thesis, groundbreaking in its day, neglected the pleasures of 'the look' afforded to female spectators, and the complex way that females look at, and are affected by looking at, other women. This is a very fruitful area of research for Media and Film students.

If we look at the poster artwork for the documentary film *A Perfect 14* we can further explore the idea of the female look. The variety of body shape and race in the image is immediately striking. The non-stereotypical imagery is anchored by the text, 'A Film About Women Reshaping the World'. The female 'look' does not have to assume a male perspective, as Mulvey argues, but can be neutral, engaged
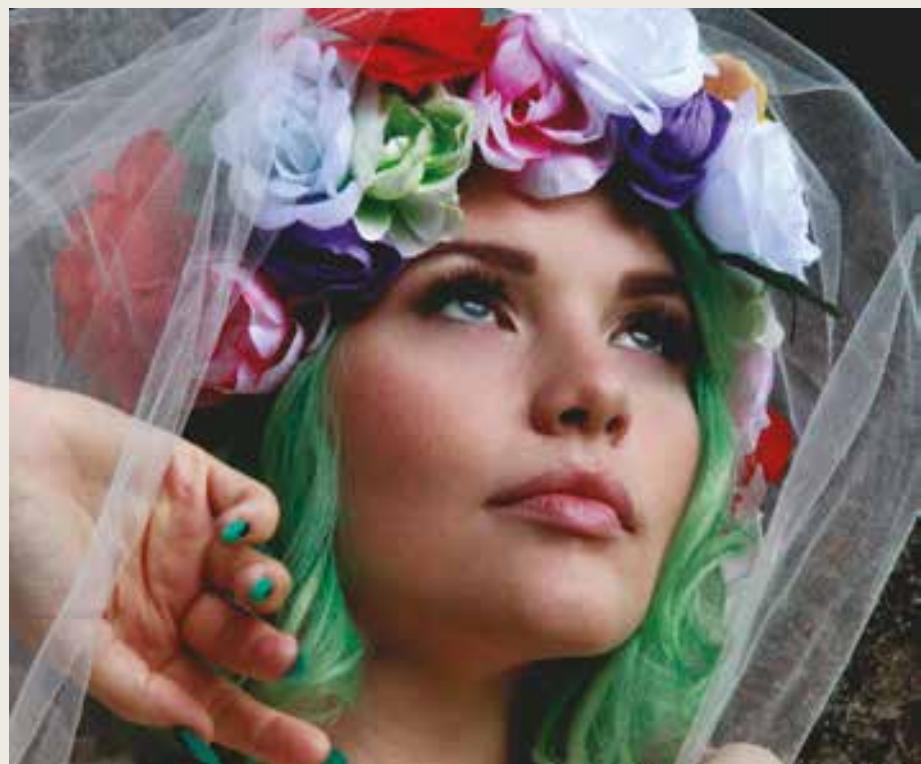
and not gender specific. This is very empowering as women can reject the notion of their 'to be looked at-ness' (Mulvey) and being objectified by the look. The iconography of the tape measure signifies the societal pressure and expectation to be a stereotypical size and weight. This, when juxtaposed with the anchor text, 'Perfect', creates an attack on dominant ideology, where size 14 is unseen.

Elly Mayday, the blonde haired model in the centre of the poster is the key subject of the documentary. Her diagnosis with cancer is at the emotional heart of the film, and her image illustrates how women can potentially reclaim 'the look'. Elly Mayday was a superstar on the Canadian modelling circuit, but aged 25, discovered she had an extremely rare form of ovarian cancer. She continues to model despite her rapid weight and hair loss. Her image, based on being 'plus size' and a more realistic role model for women, takes on a deeper meaning as she continues to model into her cancer treatment.

See **http://abcnews.go.com/ Health/model-elly-mayday-fights-cancer-female-stereotypes/ story?id=21597235**

The loss of the blonde hair, the key Proppian 'Princess' signifier in popular Western mythology and fairytale, is significant, with the lingerie company running an international advertising campaign centred on Mayday. The defiant posing, with the classical modelling gestures, allows a look that can be multi-gendered and empowering. Surgery scars and hair loss are signifiers that are not down-played or photo-shopped, but celebrated and made part of the campaign's message.

Potential Female Gazes

In this context we need to consider two potential female gazes: the look of the subject, In this case the look/gaze of Elly Mayday, and the look/gaze of the 'real' audience, the women consuming this image. The subject here gazes off-camera, indirectly yet almost defiantly averting her gaze from the more
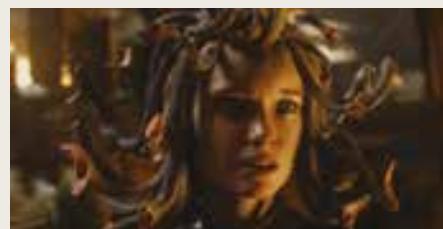
confrontational direct-to-camera look of the poster art for *A Perfect 14*.

In *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship*, feminist critic Jackie Stacey suggested that the female look works on different and multiple levels for 'fascination and aspiration'. This campaign and the marketing campaign for *A Perfect 14* aim to create engaging yet aspirational opportunities for the female gaze to flourish and be empowered.

The power of looking is unquestionable. Like the story of Medusa (in mythology, the monster with the face of a hideous woman with hair made from live venomous snakes, whose direct gaze would turn onlookers to stone), the gaze can provoke very negative reactions, yet we are transfixed. However, recent research on the Female Gaze and its effects is very revealing:

We found that overweight consumers demonstrated lower self-esteem – and therefore probably less enthusiasm about buying products – after exposure to any size models in ads (versus ads with no models). Also, normal-weight consumers experienced lower self-esteem after exposure to moderately heavy models, such as those in Dove soap's 'Real Women' campaign, than after exposure to moderately thin models.

Naomi Mandel, Marketing Associate professor, School of Business, Arizona State University

Crucially, Mandel, who is interested in nonconscious influences on consumer preference and consumption experiences, concludes:

We believe it is unlikely that many brands will gain market share by using heavy models in their ads.

The website for *A Perfect 14* concludes with the statement:

A Perfect 14 **shows the desperate need for diversity and a true reflection of today's society in the fashion industry, our media and role models. The subjects of the film are determined to eliminate the established perception in society that one size fits all.**

If Mandel's analysis is correct, it seems that the message of *A Perfect 14* should be required viewing for women – and especially Film and Media students.

Sean Richardson teaches Media Studies at Penistone Grammar School, Barnsley and moderates for a leading awarding body.

Follow it up:

Kaplan, Ann. 1983. *Is the Gaze Male? Women and Film – Both Sides of the Camera*.

Coward, Rosalind. 1985. *Female Desires: How they are Sought, Bought and Packaged*.

Ed. Gamman, Lorraine and Margaret Marshment. 1989. *The Female Gaze, Women as Viewers of Popular Culture*.

Stacey, Jackie. 1993. *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship*.

http://www.aperfect14.com/

+ MoreMediaMag
from the archive

A Beginner's Guide to Laura Mulvey, Lucy Scott-Galloway, *MediaMag* 21

Analysing Still-image Advertisements – Lynx Full Dry Control 2011, Mark Ramey, *MediaMag* 45

NIGHT MAIL

THE CREATIVE TREATMENT OF ACTUALITY

At AS Level, moving image study tends to focus on micro-analysis of the media language used to construct meaning. But by A2, you'll need to understand the contexts for, and debates around, texts and their production. Mark Ramey applies this process to an iconic documentary for Film Studies.

NIGHT MAIL · 1936
Directors Harry Watt and Basil Wright

Imagine the scene. One of the fastest land vehicles on the planet hurtling through the night – pistons pounding, whistle wailing, spitting sparks into the sky. Watch it race across moor and city, farmland and mountains. Marvel at the sophisticated organisation and heroic efforts of the men and women that help this monster of steel and steam power its way across a unified and grateful country – from London to the Scottish Highlands. And thrill with the thought of the letters it has collected en-route getting ever closer to their recipients, as in the words of the poem by W. H. Auden,

…none will hear the postman's knock
Without a quickening of the heart
For who can bear to feel himself forgotten?

The machine alluded to is of course the subject of the eponymous *Night Mail* documentary (Basil Wright & Harry Watt, 1936, UK) – the story of an overnight steam-train postal service run by the GPO (the General Post Office). Funded by the GPO, and filmed by its very own film unit under the guidance of master documentarist John Grierson (the man who coined the term 'documentary'), *Night Mail* remains to this day the British Documentary Film Movement's most celebrated product. The brief of Grierson's talented team was to present to the public and to postal workers a vision of the Post Office's advanced and efficient
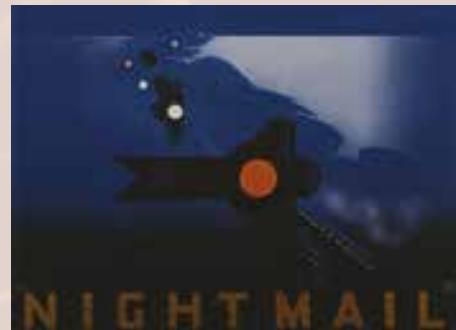
delivery of letters from one end of the country to the other in just one night. And thanks to the high quality of the cinematography, innovative sound design and dramatic use of original music by Benjamin Britten and poetry by W.H. Auden (both at that time unknown men of genius) the brief was achieved.

'I look at cinema as a pulpit'

The character of John Grierson underpins the work of the British Documentary Movement which reached its peak in the 1930s and 1940s under the auspices of various government bodies such as the EMB (Empire Marketing Board) and the CFU (Crown Film Unit), as well as the already mentioned GPO. This era is sometimes termed 'the age of propaganda' and it certainly showed an escalation in government-sponsored film production – perhaps most famously in Germany and Russia. In Germany the Nazis swiftly embraced documentary as a means of

depicting their ideology, and in such films as *Triumph of the Will* (Riefenstahl 1935: see *MM* 48) they perfected the cinematic celebration of dictatorship. In Russia the people and their machines were the star, as in Dziga Vertov's tribute to the mechanically-powered communist revolution, *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929: see *MM* 48).

The diverse political ideologies of the 1930s and 40s (remember this is an age before TV!) found documentary to be an effective means of mass communication and Grierson was no different. His interest was in confronting social issues such as housing problems and the hard lives of the working classes; and his work is therefore imbued with a strong social conscience. As he noted:

I look at cinema as a pulpit and use it as a propagandist.

Grierson, 'Propaganda' in *Sight and Sound*, Vol. II, 8

Grierson was also at the forefront of the nascent practice of Public Relations. Driving him was an almost evangelical desire to combat the extreme propaganda of the Nazis and communists with a more socially-conscious democratic and humanist style of documentary:

You can be totalitarian for evil and you can be

totalitarian for good. My position is that this is a time when we had better be totalitarian for good… and for the sake of humanity.

In terms of his brief at the GPO he also notes that:

The first terms of reference of the GPO Film unit were… to provide for the staff an understanding of their individual relations to the overall… GPO activities… [to give people] an understanding of their participation in the total activities of the state.

We take [the postman] for granted like the milkman, the engine driver, coal miner, the lot

of them… yet we are all dependent on them, just as we are all dependent on another. It has nothing to do with class or education. The simple fact is that we are in each other's debt. We must acknowledge it and pay it with respect and gratitude one to another…This is what documentary is all about.

And in *Night Mail* we see just that, with screen time devoted to clerks in the London, Midland & Scottish Railway (LMSR) scheduling offices, platform café tea ladies, track-layers, letter sorters, porters, signalmen, guards and so on. Only train drivers are relatively inconspicuous; but then Grierson's paymasters were the GPO not LMSR (although they were more than happy to take part) and any focus on the romance of train driving could have detracted from the more mundane task of the postal service. Indeed the very heart of the film is a celebration and dramatisation of the rather dull work of letter delivery – something in part elevated to high drama by focusing on the dangerous and skilful transfer of mail bags to and from a speeding train.

The workers we meet in the film are sometimes shot in heroic silhouette, or given dialogue that (despite now sounding stilted and unnatural to our modern ears) at least then allowed the working man a voice that was dignified and realistic. Exterior scenes of dialogue were all voiced after the shoot in post-production; but the screenplay written by Watt tried to use the actual language he had heard being used when filming. And of course Auden's poem – 'perhaps the most lyrical final sequence in the history of documentary film' (BFI 2007 DVD sleeve notes) – also serves to hammer home the message that the GPO delivers mail efficiently and democratically to a united nation:

Letters for the rich, letters for the poor,
The shop at the corner and the girl next door.

Auden

'The Creative Treatment of Actuality'

Grierson's problematic definition of documentary as 'the creative treatment of actuality' has taxed film academics for close to 90 years and shows no sign of diminishing its irritation. The definition also lies at the heart of many questions posed on documentary A2 Film examinations – in 2012 students were asked the following question:

Grierson defined documentary as 'the creative treatment of actuality'. What are some of the key issues raised by this definition for spectators of documentary?

WJEC

The essence of this debate is the complex idea of 'realism' or (more simplistically): how does one capture or construct the real? In this context Grierson's famous definition of documentary raises issues about how far a documentary filmmaker should engage in the creative manipulation of their subject matter. An immediate qualification of this idea of 'creative treatment' concerns the technological contexts underpinning documentary

filming: in other words it is all well and good demanding authentic realism – but only if the technology enables it.

Grierson's crew faced numerous technical problems: clockwork and very heavy cameras; poor portable lighting; no location sound equipment; no lens turret to facilitate the quick changeover of lenses; only two

minutes worth of film available in every magazine, limiting the length of long takes; upside-down viewfinders; black and white film; the problems of filming on a moving train, and so on. One particular hand-held shot of a rapidly approaching mail bag being swept aboard the train was extremely dangerous as the nets used to capture the mail-bags sometimes broke, and if that had happened the cameraman, Chick Fowle, could have died. More complex shots required

the construction of a fake train interior at the GPO's Blackheath (London) studio, and even the clickety-clack sound of the train moving was mimicked by a model train set in post-production. Clearly capturing (or constructing) reality was important to Grierson's team; but equally they were constrained by their technology and the practicality of their task.

The Soviet Connection

The GPO film unit also had to be guided by Grierson's social agenda and the GPO's publicity brief, but they still found room for some aesthetic creativity. Of the many cinematic influences on the group in their preparation for *Night Mail* the Soviet propaganda feature film *Turksib* (Victor Turin, 1929) is perhaps the most powerful. *Turksib* charts the building of the first Soviet railway from Turkestan to Siberia and was so enthusiastically greeted by Grierson that he arranged for Wright to script the English subtitles on its 1930 UK release. Indeed Grierson and Wright, like many of their peers, were enthused by a love of all things Soviet, and they even met as members of the London based socialist '1917 Club'.

It's also worth noting that Soviet cinema's most famous movie *Battleship Potemkin* (Eisenstein 1925, USSR) had its UK premiere as a double-bill with Grierson's very own *Drifters* (1929). As Scott Anthony notes:

*The two films [*Turksib* & *Night Mail*] share a love of big close-ups of wheels, pistons and general shots of machinery... [and] attempt to make maximum metaphorical capital from the image of the train... [which in *Night Mail*] is characterised as a medium for connecting physical and social spaces, linking an everyday postbox in Bletchley with the mines of Wigan... it is an industrial enabler and social integrator... its tracks marking out a new democratised space.*

That Soviet cinema inspired Grierson and his peers at the GPO Film unit and beyond did not however mean that its style was replicated wholesale. Indeed, *Night Mail* is inconsistent in its approach, in part due to the varying approaches to realism. As Anthony further notes:

*Wright's conception of *Night Mail* as a picture composed of Soviet-style montage and statistics, clashed with Watt's *Night Mail* of narrative – based realism.*

Alberto Cavalcanti (*Night Mail*'s inventive sound-designer) was equally happy to follow his own ideas, finding the harsh sounding term 'documentary' repellent whilst noting that its hard-edge was an enticement to the commercial partners Grierson had to work with. Cavalcanti preferred the term 'realist' or 'neo-realist' which neatly sidestepped the complex issues of truth and objectivity.

As Anthony comments, *Night Mail*'s 'weak jokes, digressions and delight in human twitterings' marks it out as un-Soviet and represents

the point where the British documentary began to throw off its early influences and develop its own distinctive character.

Whatever the motives of the film's producers, it is clear that the film's contemporary and current popularity rests neither just in its depiction of a bygone age of steam or in the laudable example of a socially-engaged middle-class elite mythologising the working classes, but also in the film's finely observed humanism. Auden's poetry is

of course the most famous instance of this; but it can equally be found in less elevated fare, as the renowned radio broadcaster Alistair Cooke noted in The Listener in 1936:

To anybody with an eye for patterns, to anybody who loves trains, to anybody who is excited by twilight, by human beings being sarcastic, by a filing system, by a cup of tea – this film is compulsory.

Mark Ramey teachces film and Media Studies at Richard Collyer's College, Horsham, West Sussex.

Follow it up: Further Reading and Viewing:

Anthony, Scott. 2007. *Night Mail* (BFI Film Classics)
The Soviet influence: From Turksib to Night Mail – Dual Format DVD/Blu-ray and booklet
Web: www.screenonline.org (search for Documentary/Grierson/*Night Mail*, etc.)
Britain Through a Lens: the Documentary Film Mob (BBC: Broadcast 2011)
Interactive web: BFI Archive Interactive: The GPO Film unit – hosted by Derek Jacobi http://www.btplc.com/bfi/jacobi/jacobi_250.html

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CONTINUUM, SCI-FI FANS AND THE POWER OF THE TWEET

OR 'HOW I TOOK ON THE SYFY CHANNEL AND LOST'

Self-confessed sci-fi geek Steve Connolly documents a Twitter campaign to save a much-loved TV series which illustrates how social media are changing the balance between fans, producers and media institutions.

I am a sci-fi fan. There. I've said it. Go ahead, you can judge me all you want to, but I have been completely obsessed with the genre (in its book, TV, comic and film forms) since I was about 7 years old. My house is stacked with sci-fi films, books, comics and memorabilia (yes, memorabilia – that's how sad I am) which celebrates this nerdiest and most derided of genres.

I was extremely interested then, by Jonathan Nunn's excellent article on the decline of the sci-fi genre film in *MediaMag* 47, which made me reflect upon how I view the state of the genre

as a whole. While I accept some of his arguments about Hollywood's failed attempts to make critically valuable sci-fi films, I would say that such an account does not include two quite significant points: firstly, that while Sci-Fi at the cinema has generally been quite poor (too much CGI in place of character development, too many explosions in place of ideas) in the last few years, for various reasons, sci-fi on TV has gone from strength to strength. Secondly, that sci-fi generally has flourished because of the power of audiences in using social media to create a commentary around their favourite sci-fi texts. Sci-

fi audiences are traditionally seen as articulate, intelligent and passionate (alright then, obsessive as well) and social media has allowed them to engage with, critique and even influence their favourite shows in a way which renders the 'official' discourse of critics – in newspapers, on TV and on the mainstream web – a bit irrelevant.

Why make these two points in this magazine? Well this article is, to some extent, about 'fan power' or fandom – in effect, the way that social media has given sci-fi fans a voice loud enough to influence the way that programmes

get made. However, it is also the story of how I became involved in an attempt to use Twitter to influence a media institution – something that has happened with more and more frequency recently – and so is at least partly about the relationship between audiences and institutions, or indeed industries, which might be particularly useful for you as Media students.

The Object of My Desire

Some years ago, before most of the people reading this article were in secondary school, I wrote an article for *MediaMag* about *Battlestar Galactica*, which was an utterly revolutionary reboot of a rather cheesy series I had watched as a kid in the 1980s. *Battlestar Galactica* virtually redefined science fiction on TV, with higher production values, complex characters and overarching themes that had not been seen on the small screen before. Indeed, *Battlestar Galactica* was part of a wider trend in TV, where TV shows were generally becoming better quality, more complex and increasingly intelligent, and taking over the kind of big intellectual themes which (as Jonathan Nunns pointed out in *MM*47) had previously been the province of Hollywood sci-fi.

Battlestar Galactica was so good because it broke new ground in the genre in a number of ways. The narrative was completely driven by the female characters; the programme wove reflections on the state of post-9/11 America into many episodes; and the frequently tense, documentary-style camera work gave an edge to the show that raised lots of questions about realism and authenticity – not ideas one would normally associate with sci-fi.

Since *Battlestar Galactica*, there have been a host of TV shows which have sought to push the boundaries of the genre in terms of representation and narrative. None more so than *Continuum*, a Canadian series about a time travelling law enforcement officer chasing terrorists from the future in present day Vancouver.

Continuum

Continuum follows the journey of Kiera Cameron (played, increasingly

enigmatically, by cult sci-fi/horror actress Rachel Nichols) a cop from 2077 who is transported to the present day by a time-travelling device which has been stolen by some terrorists. In the dystopic future that Cameron inhabits, the world is not run by governments, but by major corporations who restrict many people's movement and freedom of thought. As a police officer from the future, Cameron sees it as her role to stop the terrorists (who go by the collective name of Liber8) and so she is aligned with the corporations who employ her. But as the narrative continues, the lines between Kiera and Liber8, and indeed between good and bad, become very blurred. Like *Battlestar Galactica*, the show is driven by strong female characters and explores some interesting political ideas, such as the fine line between freedom fighting and terrorism, the increasing

power of corporations in our lives, and the tension between the role of the state and the rights of the individual. There are also some truly extraordinary and realistic fight scenes, which are performed entirely by the cast without the use of stunt doubles.

The show has been a resounding critical success in both Canada and America, receiving numerous awards – including a record 14 Leo Awards (the Canadian equivalent of the BAFTAs.) The three series were shown on the Showcase channel in Canada, and on the Syfy Channel in the US Here in the UK, the

first two series were shown on the UK Syfy Channel, with the show topping the channel's ratings chart on a number of occasions, with close to a quarter of a million viewers in some weeks – not bad for a Canadian show on a minority cable channel! In early 2014, fans of the show, including me, were waiting with bated breath for the announcement of the start of series 3 in the UK. And this is where events took a surprising turn.

The Campaign

I am, it has to be said, more of a Twitter follower than a Tweeter. I use the social media platform to pick up bits of news and information that are generally not distributed through mainstream media channels. As a consequence, a look at my profile would probably reveal some quite disparate interests. However, while watching the show I had followed the

official Twitter account for *Continuum* (@ContinuumSeries) as a means of picking up on some of the subtleties and plot points that had eluded me. So it was with some surprise, one morning in April 2014, that the official Twitter account – run by the people who run the show in Canada – had retweeted a comment

made by a British fan, Glenn O'Connell. O'Connell had emailed Syfy UK to find out when they planned to show Series 3.

The reply he got was obviously not positive. As can be seen in the screen shot, I responded to this, as did numerous other people. As I saw the number of Favourites, Replies and Re-Tweets grow, it occurred to me that there might be a way of harnessing this discontent to see if we (and by 'we' here, I mean the fans of the show in the UK) could get the SyFy channel to change their plans.

The key reason why Twitter has become such an important tool in marketing media texts is undoubtedly the power of the retweet. If you can get a Twitter-

I included the Twitter handle for the UK SyFy Channel (@syfyuk) so they could see that we had the support of the actors in the show

There were great responses to my tweets from the stars of the show including Rachel Nichols and Erik Knudsen, who plays Kiera's geekboy helper Alec Sadler. Rachel Nichols has nearly seventy thousand followers, and Erik Knudsen has another six and a half thousand. Numerous other people, including most of the cast, eventually retweeted or favourited the original tweets in which I asked them to show their support for showing the third season of the show in the UK. Along with this strategy, I thought we might

the programme on the air in Britain again as we were. For good commercial reasons, they clearly couldn't retweet our demands, but, rather obliquely they were showing that they were on our side.

This kind of tweeting and retweeting went on for a month or so, with little success, but during 'the campaign' I learnt a lot about the way that fans, and particularly sci-fi fans, use Twitter to form relationships with both the people who make shows and with each other.

Sci-fi and the Power of the Tweet

During the course of the campaign, I had come across Rich Piechowski (@

user with a lot of followers to retweet the details of your show or product, it is clearly going to be an excellent, low cost way of promoting it. With this in mind, I thought it might be interesting to see if we could get some important people to retweet our concerns, thereby trying to effect a change of heart on the part of the Syfy Channel. So, I spent some time finding the personal Twitter accounts of four actors in the show, following them and asking them if they could retweet our concerns, making sure that

engage the SyFy channel in a dialogue about why they made their decision, for example by highlighting the fact that the viewing figures for *Continuum* were relatively good.

Unfortunately, these kind of tweets had no effect. There was no reply from Syfy. Interestingly though, we were getting support from the people who actually made the show in Canada through the official *Continuum* Twitter account, suggesting, perhaps unsurprisingly, that they were as interested in getting

Piech42), sci-fi tweeter extraordinaire and *Continuum* super-fan. With several thousand followers, Piechowski is a very vocal user of Twitter, commenting on a range of Sci-Fi shows from around the world. A quick survey of the internet will reveal his role as the guiding mind behind petitioning Showcase (the Canadian broadcaster that makes *Continuum*) to make a fourth series of the programme. He retweeted and commented on a number of the tweets I made, including the novel, but

ultimately fruitless, idea that we should use Twitter to petition Channel 4 and see if they were interested in picking up the show. Piechowski is a veteran sci-fi fan and when asked, is really clear that sci-fi fans' articulacy and passion means that they have real power to influence producers.

I guess the most obvious example of fans fighting to save a show with some success is *Firefly* (Joss Whedon's sci-fi fantasy). In that case, they didn't manage to get any more of the TV show but they did manage to get a film – *Serenity*. It is widely acknowledged that much of the love for *Firefly* came after the show was released on DVD. The DVD was an absolute hit with the fans – who couldn't believe there were to be no more episodes of this wonderful show. Fan pressure for more led to *Serenity* being made – and it almost certainly wouldn't have been made if it wasn't for the fans.

Piechowski is also clear that Twitter has allowed these fans to strategise in the way that they attempt to influence

producers. Because it is a social network, and because they can connect with each other through the hashtag, Twitter facilitates this strategy in a way that was previously unimaginable:

Organisation also plays a big part. An organised and strategic fandom is far more likely to get some success than a bunch of individuals talking independently of one another. This is where 'tweetathons' (like the ones we are doing for *Continuum* Season 4) can be very useful – the fans' call for more is heard all at once and condensed together. It is very difficult not to hear this.

These observations suggest that the global nature of Twitter and the commitment of sci-fi fans is a perfect match, demonstrating that the power relationship between audiences and producers in this genre might be changing in favour of the fans.

However, it's not all Positive for the Sci-Fi Twitterati…

However, it's still unclear how influential all this is activity really is. At the time of writing, the SyFy Channel UK still has no plans to show series 3 of *Continuum* in the UK, and Showcase has yet to announce whether or not it will commission a fourth or subsequent series. Indeed some theorists have suggested that this kind of fan behaviour is exactly the kind of thing that producers want and need, because it promotes the show without the need for spending any money on expensive advertising. The media critic Soren Peterson has termed this situation 'loser generated content', effectively pointing out that the user does all the work, but the profit and the power remains with the industry.

From a Media Studies point of view, we should pay close attention to the way that Twitter foregrounds texts that more 'mainstream' media ignore. This could happen with 'cult' texts such as *Continuum*, which have small but devoted audiences, or it could be about news stories which mainstream news outlets, such as the BBC or Sky News, seem to ignore.

We should also be aware that social media is an integral means of distributing and promoting media texts, and it is clear that media institutions realise that fans can have a relationship with actors, directors and producers that they could not have in the past. It also means that some fans have the ability to become opinion formers, simply by force of the number of followers they have, and the number of times they tweet. In a genre like sci-fi, where fandom is uniquely obsessive, this is quite significant; while the super-fans who tweet may not be able to influence producers, they can become critically influential in a way that traditional print and broadcast journalists may not be able to. Indeed, these Tweeters, who have time and space to discuss and comment on the complexities of contemporary sci-fi on TV are taking advantage of the fact that shows like *Continuum* and *Battlestar Galactica* are dense and enigmatic; the fact that they are exploring that density in 140 characters may, paradoxically, lead

to an appreciation of narrative and representation that more traditional journalism cannot provide, precisely because it is facilitated by a social medium that relies on interaction with others. Fans are constantly discussing the shows, bouncing ideas off each other and hypothesising. This element of fan interaction, with viewers using Twitter to comment before, during and after shows, is one of the reasons for sci-fi's resurgence on TV.

In the case of my battle for *Continuum* series 3, institutional change has not

been achieved – but a number of fans have undoubtedly formed links and relationships with the text, actors, and makers of the show. This, in some small way, has changed the relationship between producers and audience for the better.

Dr Steve Connolly is a Media Studies teacher, examiner and freelance Media Studies consultant.

The full text of my interview with Rich Piechowski can be found at **http://mediaschool.blogspot.com**

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